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**Understanding teachers' attitudes towards students with  
immigrant backgrounds in Italy: identities, policies and  
pedagogies**

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Philosophy  
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### **Declaration of Authenticity and Author's Rights**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study analyses how teachers' and head teachers' identities shape their dispositions towards pupils with immigrant backgrounds in Italy, and how their understanding of Italian education policies inform their beliefs about pedagogical practices for pupils with immigrant backgrounds. In considering identity, this study takes an intersectional approach, focusing on social class, gender and ethnicity as aspects that interact and shape life experiences. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital, together with Butler's concept of performativity, help theorise how teachers and head teachers take up and understand classed, gendered, and ethnicised identities. Data collection is based on semi-structured interviews with 23 participants, 9 males and 14 females, with ages ranging from 36 to 65. The findings highlight a general lack of explicit reflection on class, gender and ethnicity by teachers and head teachers. An unequivocal link between their identity and how they position their students cannot be straightforwardly established. However, notions of (not)belonging circulate around and are attached to students with immigrant backgrounds. Such circulations coalesce around values and practices linked to gendered, ethnic majority middle class habitus norms, through which difference is positioned and opposed in hierarchical terms. The background neoliberal ideology is normalised and permeates the educational environment.

This study aims to analyse the relationship between teachers' identities and their attitudes and pedagogic dispositions towards students with immigrant backgrounds in the Italian context, showing how these contribute to their state of (non)belonging in the educational setting and indeed in the wider society. This investigation also

highlights the difficulties and subtleties of talking about ethnicity and cultural difference alongside professional identities. This research considers teachers' pedagogic dispositions and highlights some practical consequences and implications. Such considerations are extended to recommendations and suggestions for future research.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Aims of the Research**

This research aims to respond to how teachers' and head teachers' identity shape their dispositions towards pupils with immigrant backgrounds in Italy, and how teachers' and head teachers' understanding of Italian education policies inform their beliefs about their pedagogical practices for pupils with immigrant backgrounds.

As the presence of students with immigrant backgrounds in Italy is relatively recent compared to other countries with a more established immigration tradition, Italian studies on the subject are limited. Studies have been mainly concentrated in the North of Italy, where immigrants' presence is more relevant, while fewer have been conducted in Central and Southern Italy. In her review of the sociological studies carried out in Italy on integration in multi-ethnic schools, Santagati (2015) states that the school, as a field of the integration process, has been studied mainly in relation to academic achievement and interethnic relations in the classroom.

There is a need to enquire further into teachers' preparation regarding the themes and issues raised by the presence of pupils with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; on how they perceive and position themselves and their pupils in terms of cultural, racial, social and gender identity and belonging; and on how this shapes the relationship with the curriculum delivered to students with immigrant backgrounds.

Teachers cannot solve every problem on their own, but they can certainly make a substantial difference in class activity and in the educational life of their students. Teachers seem to be at the centre of a 'perfect storm': they are asked to be able to deal with cultural diversity, but it is questionable if they are provided with the knowledge to do that, either in the form of initial training or continuing professional development. They are requested to individualise their teaching, but then according to the neoliberal policies, with their accent on standardisation and performativity, they are accountable via pupils' performance to standardised tests. Students with immigrant backgrounds are themselves caught in this mix of individualisation and standardisation discourse.

Moreover, the individualisation discourse is worth investigating, as it is questionable if it is a necessity, an opportunity, or an ambiguous 'grey area' which allows the delivery of different curricula to students with immigrant backgrounds, which may take them towards a less academically qualified educational track. Jones et al. (2008) argue that the neoliberal personalisation of the curriculum does not resemble the child-centredness of a more democratic conception of education, but a differentiation which does not result in a reduction of inequalities. Individualisation involves a categorization and labelling which "affects disproportionately students from ethnic minorities and/or of lower social background. Labels apparently given to help disadvantaged people, in fact they end by damaging them, via self-fulfilling prophecies" (Apple, 1979, p. 139).

Another point of interest is to investigate if the quality of this individualised teaching and learning is influenced by how teachers and pupils position themselves in cultural, social and gender terms, and if this can reflect prejudices and low expectations

on the part of the teachers. This raises questions on a contradiction that may arise between personalisation of content and the request for standardised assessment.

This study is motivated by the cognisance that inclusion and equity need to be promoted at a deeper level, and that this can only arise from a real knowledge and awareness of what are the elements ‘on the field’ to deal with, both in terms of consciousness, educational responsibilities, and actions.

## **1.2 The Context**

In an increasingly globalised world, large numbers of people move from one country to another for a variety of reasons, either forced or voluntary: to escape poverty, oppressive governments or conflicts, or in general in search of better opportunities and conditions of life. Therefore, ethnic and cultural diversity is becoming common in a number of countries. This presents both opportunities and challenges to educational systems (OECD, 2010) and societies as a whole, and poses questions of equity and social justice for policy makers and educators (Castles, 2014).

Evidence shows that, despite often having positive attitudes towards learning, students from cultural and linguistic minorities generally have significantly lower outcomes than their peers who have at least one parent born in the country of assessment in PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) testing (OECD, 2006). This performance gap seems to depend on several factors, such as how the students perceive their school environment – which may influence their motivation, engagement and confidence – and if the institution where they learn has sustained their learning process with particular strategies, such as systematic language

support (ibid.). It is widely recognised that ethnicity, together with socioeconomic status and gender, are the driving features that mark educational experience and outcomes (Archer & Francis, 2006; Gillborn, 2008; Santagati, 2015).

While some European countries such as the United Kingdom and France, have had pupils with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds for many decades, in Italy this is quite a recent phenomenon. For nearly its first century as a country, Italy has been mostly a land of emigration; it was only towards the end of the 1970s that immigration flows began; they increased in particular in the years 1995-2010 and have declined since 2011 (Bettin & Cela, 2014).

In the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the immigrants were mostly young men without families, from areas such as Albania and Morocco, but also the Philippines, Romania and China (Wanner, 2002). After the beginning of the new century, the immigrant population has changed its composition, being made mostly of families, partly due to legislation which allowed family reunifications. Bettin and Cela (2014), based on statistical data gathered in 2011, observe that family reunifications and a tendency to stabilisation have mainly affected the Romanian, the Albanian and the Chinese communities. By contrast, some communities from Africa and Asia are made up of men, while immigrants from countries such as Ukraine, Poland, Moldova and Peru are mainly female. These family reunifications are reflected in the school population, where the number of pupils with immigrant backgrounds has considerably risen in the period 2001/2-2014/15 (MIUR, 2015).

### **1.3 Students with Immigrant Backgrounds in the Italian Education System**

According to statistics from the Ministry of Instruction, University and Research (MIUR), in 2015 there were 805,800 non-Italian citizen students in the Italian education system (MIUR, 2015). This constituted 9.2% of the total student population, 3,000 more compared to the previous year. These students are from about 200 different nationalities. The ten most common nationalities are Romanian, Albanian, Moroccan, Chinese, Pilipino, Moldovan, Indian, Ukrainian, Peruvian and Tunisian. Immigrant students are unevenly distributed across the country, reflecting job opportunities and immigration networks. The highest percentage is present in the metropolitan areas of the Northern and Central regions, while it is much lower in the South of Italy and in the Islands of Sicily and Sardinia, where the economic structure is traditionally considerably weaker. The children of foreign nationality who attend nursery to secondary schools, are 12.4% of the total in Northern Italy, 12.1% in Central Italy and 3.5% in Southern Italy with Sicily and Sardinia (my elaboration of data from MIUR, 2015).

In the last few years, within the school population with immigrant backgrounds, the students born in Italy have outnumbered (55.3%) those born abroad. At the same time, the last decade has seen diminishing numbers of pupils with immigrant backgrounds who have entered the school system in Italy for the first time. Their number has started to increase again in the school year 2012/13; in particular, they are concentrated in higher secondary schools, but also in the first year either of primary and lower secondary. The increasing number of newly enrolled students has also been due in recent years to the arrival of foreign unaccompanied children. In April



2016, 11,648 unaccompanied children were officially present in Italy, 95.1% males and 4.9% females. 83% of them were aged 16 or 17 years old, around 10% were 15, and the rest was mainly between 7 and 14 years old. The nationalities most represented were Egyptian, Albanian, and Gambian (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2016). There are no national statistics about how many of them attend schools, but surveys carried out locally show that in October-November 2015 only a small percentage of unaccompanied children went to school (Colussi & Ongini, 2016).

In a school system where traditionally the number of private institutions is limited and mainly restricted to schools with a (Catholic) religious orientation, in 2014/15 less than 9% of pupils with immigrant backgrounds attended private schools, compared to just over 12% of Italian nationals (MIUR, 2015). As to gender, in 2014/2015 the female presence among the pupils with non Italian citizenship was a similar percentage to that of the Italian group, 48% of all foreign pupils, while the Italian nationality females were 48.3% of all the Italian pupils (Colussi & Ongini, 2016). At national level, 12% of all pupils with a certified disability are non Italian citizens, while they represent 9.2% of the school population; this shows that they are more likely than the pupils with Italian nationality to be labelled as pupils with Additional Support Needs (MIUR, 2015b).

Observing the figures about school attainments, in general, the education outcomes for students with immigrant backgrounds are lower than those of their Italian peers. This is highlighted in particular by the results of INVALSI (*Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema dell'Istruzione* – National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System) national tests, which are standardised tests, administered in the second and fifth year of primary, in the third year of lower secondary and in the

second year of higher secondary (INVALSI, 2015). Data are not further disaggregated according to country of origin of the children with a foreign nationality or ethnicity.

A survey on the integration of students with immigrant backgrounds, carried out by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2016 on a sample of lower and higher secondary schools, shows that, on average, non Italian students get lower school marks than Italian students. The difference is bigger in lower secondary school, and tends to lessen in higher secondary school. While the evaluations in Italian are lower for all the ethnicities when compared to the Italians, in Maths, Chinese pupils equal the Italians in lower secondary school, and outdo them in higher secondary. Furthermore, the education for students with immigrant backgrounds can often be extended by one or more years; their risk of educational delay is, on average, three times higher than for their Italian peers. The Italian system allows on the one hand to place newly arrived foreign students in a lower class compared to their age peers (MIUR, 2006), and on the other hand, students who do not reach pre-determined learning objectives, are not allowed into the subsequent class, thus adding to the delay.

The same survey (ISTAT, 2016) highlights that 49% of students born outside of Italy started school in the same class as their age level, while 38.8% were enrolled in the previous class, and 12.2% in two classes lower. The situation varies remarkably according to the nationality: around 57% of the Albanians, Moroccans and Ecuadoreans were enrolled in their age level class, while Moldovan, Filipino and Chinese pupils were the most disadvantaged. In particular, only 21.4% Chinese pupils were enrolled in a class according to their age, while around 33% of them were placed in two or more classes lower. Over 43% of the Moldovan students have moved to Italy when they were eleven years old or later, while the majority of Chinese (59.3%) and

Filipino (55.4%) students were born in Italy. In addition to this initial delay in education, 27.3% of the students with a foreign nationality have repeated one or more school years, compared to 14.3 Italian students. The survey (ISTAT, 2016) shows that the disparity in educational outcomes is less consistent for the second generation students with immigrant backgrounds. Yet, they still tend to have a less successful educational history compared to the Italians.

In the Italian education system, pupils choose different school tracks normally at the age of 13. MIUR statistics (2015) show that most pupils with immigrant backgrounds continue their studies in vocational or technical higher secondary schools, rather than in the more generalist and academic lyceums. In general, pupils in Italy with a higher socio-economic status tend to go to lyceums, as they more easily go to higher education, while those with the lowest socio-economic status more often enrol at technical and vocational schools.

The tendency of students with immigrant backgrounds to go to technical-vocational schools is due not only to them generally belonging to a lower social class, but also to a lack of real 'school orientation' (Barabanti, 2016). Bonizzoni, Romito and Cavallo (2014) explain how in Italy teachers tend to orient students with immigrant backgrounds towards technical-vocational school paths. They argue that

teachers' representations of foreign children's capacities and social conditions, together with the level and kind of their families' participation in the orientation process, help determine why children of immigrants risk being less frequently encouraged to undertake highly

ambitious, university-oriented, school tracks (Bonizzoni et al., 2014, pp. 703-704).

The same authors argue that this may be due to a desire to protect the students from possible failure in schools, such as lyceums, which are considered to require a certain level of cultural and linguistic preparation, more easily attributed to the Italian student, as part of their national identity. On the other hand, a paternalistic attitude can also be found in the teachers' consideration that a vocational-technical educational track can be more respondent to the needs of socially and economically disadvantaged people, thus perpetuating educational inequality (ibid.). Moreover, similarly to other national contexts, the attrition rates between pupils with immigrant backgrounds and the ethnic majority are unequal, but Italy is one of the countries where the gap is wider. In 2014, in Italy, 34.4% of early school leavers were students with a foreign citizenship, compared to 13.6% of Italian nationals.

The educational segregation and delay continue also in further education, following the different paths taken in secondary school. Students of foreign origins, particularly the first generation, start later than the Italians, in smaller number and with lower admission marks from the secondary school final exam. In 2014, 3.7% of all the students who enrolled in universities were not Italian citizens. Similarly to the Italian nationals, they mostly came from a *liceo*, but a higher percentage came from technical or vocational instruction and were more likely to leave in the second year of University. Among foreign nationals going to university, the Eastern European nationalities were the most represented: Romania, Albania, Ukraine and Moldova making up around 60% of all foreign students at university. The gender gap, with a

majority of females enrolled in university, is present in both the Italian and foreign groups, with a prevalence in the latter (Bertozzi, 2016).

Data gathered through INVALSI standardised tests, show that there is a close connection between educational outcomes and socio-economic and cultural background. Taking into account the parents' instruction level, profession and some household material conditions, students with a foreign citizenship (no specifications about ethnicity is requested of the student) in Italian schools in the year 2014/15, had a lower socio-economic and cultural status compared to their Italian peers. This is evident particularly for the first generation of immigrant students. Through the observation of the connections between these data, it is possible to have the confirmation of the school segregation on a socio-economic, ethnic-cultural basis (Barabanti, 2016). Barabanti reports that a gap between Italian and non-Italian citizens is also present among Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEETs), that is 15-29-year-olds who leave school and are neither working, nor in formal training. While Italian NEETs in 2014 were about 25% of the Italian population of that age range, non-Italian NEETs were around 34%, with variations according to nationality and gender (see Barabanti, 2016, p. 106, Table 3.27).

This socio-economic disadvantage is not something that schools can overcome by themselves, and in many cases social class origin affects the individual's opportunities in spite of education (Apple, 2001; Paterson, 2014). Even if school on its own cannot solve the problem of an unequal society, education plays a positive role for individuals in getting to a "well-paid, secure, respected and fulfilling job" (Paterson, 2014, p. 404), thus contributing to fairer conditions of life.

Santagati (2015) points out that, on the one hand, the Italian education system has an inclusive character. Since the 1970s, legislation has guaranteed access to school for all migrant children, regardless of having or not a regular residence permit, with the tendency to include them in mainstream classes. Since the 1990s, Italian schools have officially adopted an intercultural approach, with the attention and acceptance of all diversities, seen as a source of ‘enrichment’ for everyone. On the other hand, school practices do not always reflect these educational principles, due often to lack of resources and an adequate professional preparation and awareness (ibid.).

Moreover, the Italian school system can be seen as segregational, because the separation happens on other levels, such as attainment, delays, and via different educational routes. A tiered school system like the Italian one, tends to create ‘a status hierarchy of schools’ (Jones et al., 2008), which can be associated with social class differences. In addition to this, within the same school there can be a differentiation in the delivery of curriculum, such as via class streaming, privileging some students while penalising others, in particular students from a working class background and ethnic minorities, while also operating gender discrimination (ibid.).

In conclusion, the problem of attainment can be considered central, but it is certainly important to set it within a broader frame of how pupils with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are positioned in Italian schools. Some scholars such as Picower (2009) and Gillborn (2002) maintain that lower education outcomes for minorities are not only due to socio-economic disadvantage, but that they can be seen also as the product of a systematic process of discrimination inside schools. This can further result in teachers’ low expectations, lack of positive attention and negative stereotyping (Jones et al., 2008). However, such actions are often due to a lack of

appropriate knowledge or awareness, rather than to bad intentions (Caneva, 2012; Santagati, 2015).

#### **1.4 Being Italian, Being a Foreigner**

Legislation about citizenship in Italy is quite restrictive. Citizenship is based on *ius sanguinis* (bloodline), and is reserved for members of the national community, even those of far descent. It is difficult to gain citizenship for immigrants and their children. According to Law 91 (5 February 1992), Italian citizenship may be conferred on an individual if at least one of the parents is an Italian citizen (regardless the place of birth). Alternatively, an individual born in Italy of foreign parents can gain citizenship when 18 years old, on the condition of having lived in Italy with a regular permit and without interruption until that age. On application, citizenship can also be given after 10 years of legal residency in the country.

After years of political debate, in 2012, a law was proposed through a campaign led by civil associations and trade unions, in favour of a revision of citizenship legislation, aimed to ease the awarding of the Italian citizenship to minors who were born in Italy from foreign parents. The law, who according to the promoting committee “L’Italia sono anch’io” (“I too am Italy”, my translation) would have marked a meaningful progress in the lives of around 800,000 children in Italy, with a future addition of around 50,000 each year, was approved in 2015 by the *Camera*, but has never been discussed by the *Senato*<sup>1</sup>, as it attracted criticism for opposite reasons. The

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<sup>1</sup> In the Italian bicameral Parliamentary system, a law needs to be approved by both *Camera* and *Senato* to be promulgated.

same promoting committee considered it insufficient and discriminatory in some of its aspects, as it does not simplify the naturalisation of adults, and establishes a link between the right to citizenship of the children born in Italy from foreign parents and their family's economic situation, as it required a minimum income (A.S.G.I., 2016).

Law n. 113 (4 October 2018), a text on immigration and security, has modified the law on citizenship towards the opposite direction, extending the bureaucratic procedure from the previous two years since the application, to four years. It also introduces the revocation of the Italian citizenship given to foreign citizens who have been condemned for acts of terrorism or eversion, and are considered a danger for national security. It restates the value of the *ius sanguinis*, guaranteeing the right to the citizenship to grandchildren of Italian citizens, regardless of where they live, while keeps excluding any possibility of making the acquisition of the citizenship easier for the children of parents with an immigrant background who were born and live in Italy.

Fangen, Johansson and Hammaren (2011) argue that being a citizen is not only a juridical condition, but it can also contribute to a sense of belonging to the society of the country of residence; "the nation-state in itself is built on the distinction between us who are inside and them who are outside" (ibid., p. 6). Not being considered a legitimate member of society can nurture a feeling of not belonging and can impact on the construction of identities. Not being recognised, or being mis-recognised, can affect the image of the self, as it is not uncommon for people who see themselves placed in a low status, to adopt this diminishing image of themselves, thus accepting and confirming the prejudice of which they are victim (ibid).

The ISTAT (2016) survey on the integration of second generations, shows that about 38% of those interviewed, state that they feel 'Italian'. The cohort does not



include only ‘second generation’ students, but also students who immigrated at a young age. The feeling of being Italian varies according to: the country of origin of the students; being born in Italy or not; and on the immigration age. Those who immigrated after the age of 11 express the highest percentage of feeling like a foreigner, while this sentiment is the lowest among those who were born in Italy. Around 29% of those interviewed are not sure of which nationality they feel they belong to.

### **1.5 Interculturalism as a European Policy**

The “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”, produced in 2008 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, sets a choice for intercultural education as the official policy in relation to educational contexts in Europe. This choice has then been restated by subsequent education policy documents, such as the resolution adopted by the European Parliament in 2016: “The role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values”. In the “White Paper” (Council of Europe, 2008, p.10) , intercultural dialogue is defined as “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect” Intercultural dialogue is used to increment inclusion, democracy, and to promote social cohesion – intended as “freedom of choice, freedom of expression, equality, tolerance and mutual respect for human dignity” (ibid., p. 17). The “White Paper” states the need to move on from both the assimilation and the multicultural perspective, as they are deemed ineffective in the

management of cultural diversity. The explanation for the failure is that they are both based on the concept of dividing the society between 'majority' and 'minority groups', with the difference that one was for the assimilation of minorities, and the other for separation and segregation. On the contrary, the intercultural approach acknowledges cultural diversity without becoming relativistic, as it insists on universal values, such as respect for human rights, respect of the law, and democracy. Diversity is conceptualised as an element that brings “cultural vitality”, and which can “enhance social and economic performance” (Council of Europe, 2008, p.13).

According to the “White Paper” (2008), intercultural dialogue must be based on the political valuing of cultural diversity. This “entails an education system which generates capacities for critical thinking and innovation” (ibid., p. 26). Governments must guarantee fundamental democratic rights such as the right to education, equality of opportunities, and implementation of limited, not too costly – in terms of organisational and financial resources – positive actions so as to allow the effective enjoyment of rights of culturally diverse minorities. Citizenship is deemed “key to intercultural dialogue, because it invites us to think of others not in a stereotypical way – as ‘the other’ – but as fellow citizens and equals. Facilitating access to citizenship is an educational as much as a regulatory and legal task” (ibid., p. 28).

Providers of education have a key responsibility in building intercultural competencies, as an “ability to understand each other across all types of cultural barriers” (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 5). Cultural competencies are considered “essential for democratic culture and social cohesion. Providing a quality education for all, aimed at inclusion, promotes active involvement and civic commitment and prevents educational disadvantage” (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 43). Intercultural

competencies must be based on the education to democratic citizenship through “civic, history, political and human-rights education, education on the global context of societies and on cultural heritage” (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 29). Education not only has the task to prepare people for the labour market, support their personal development and build knowledge; it must also contribute to the building of active citizens, who share the values underneath democratic life, and are animated by respect and openness to other cultures. Intercultural education makes use of a multidisciplinary approach and extends to all subjects. It cultivates skills and attitudes such as “the capacity for reflection and the self-critical disposition necessary for life in culturally diverse societies” (ibid., p. 29). Besides developing intercultural education, both within pre-service and in-service training, teacher training courses

need to teach educational strategies and working methods to prepare teachers to manage the new situations arising from diversity, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism and marginalisation and to resolve conflicts peacefully, as well as to foster a global approach to institutional life on the basis of democracy and human rights and create a community of students, taking account of individual unspoken assumptions, school atmosphere and informal aspects of education (ibid., p. 32).

The document recognises that there are structural obstacles to intercultural dialogue, apart from language. They relate to power and politics, and are “discrimination, poverty and exploitation” (ibid., p. 21). The concept of interculturalism and the effects of intercultural dialogue as expressed in the White Paper are rather vague and general

(Wieviorka, 2012). Moreover, the concepts of interculturalism and intercultural dialogue, and the assumption of their superiority to multiculturalism, have been criticised by many scholars, for various reasons.

Meer and Modood (2012) and Wieviorka (2012) among others, contest the view of multiculturalism as static, separatist, illiberal and relativistic, juxtaposed to interculturalism, seen as more apt to interaction and dialogue, to consider dynamic identities, with a stronger vocation to build social cohesion and more likely to lead to criticism of illiberal cultural practices through intercultural dialogue. They also highlight that multiculturalism, unlike interculturalism, is concerned in creating a formal, institutional framework which guarantees that each culture has a place in society, thus acknowledging a power issue and trying to give an answer to the unbalance of power.

The critique about the vagueness and the value of the concept of interculturalism as opposed to multiculturalism as expressed by the White Paper is shared by Kimlicka (2012). He sees this declaration of the failure of multiculturalism and the push towards interculturalism, also promoted by UNESCO at a world level with its “World Report on Cultural Diversity” (2008), as “a new narrative, or if you like, a new myth”, with the aim to “enable inclusive politics while disabling xenophobic politics” (ibid., p. 213). Its vague and rhetoric character allows policymakers from the one hand to use it as a label which covers the old multicultural policies; on the other hand, it can be used to cover both “assimilationist policies” and “anti-diversity views” (ibid., p. 214).

A similar view on the European intercultural approach is expressed by Tarrow (2012). He contrasts its “ideal abstraction”, “its repetitive rhetoric, and its

superficiality in enhancing folkloristic curiosity as a basis for cultural encounter” (ibid., p. 131), to the notion of urban education as used in the United States, with its stress on the interaction between cultural diversity and socio-economic disadvantage in education situations.

Interculturalism has also been criticised for concentrating mainly on cultural issues, while not really addressing social inequalities (Catarci, 2014), and for giving too little consideration to other structural factors such as social class and issues of racism. This aspect is highlighted by Gorski (2008), who identifies two different paths in intercultural education: one which does not question the issues of power and oppression, considered inevitable; the other one, which aims to “social reconstruction”, and so “leads to a space of personal and institutional vulnerability” (ibid., p. 519). The first type can lead, at its best, to raise awareness of diversity at an individual level. Intercultural education as “facilitation of intercultural dialogue, an appreciation for diversity, and cultural exchange” (ibid., p. 520) happens at an uneven level for majority and minority groups, so it reinforces domination, and is to the benefit of the dominators. The distribution of power is maintained, thus continuing a colonising relationship between the parts. His support goes, on the contrary, to an approach where practices are aimed at the decolonization of intercultural education. He highlights the dangers of the culture of pragmatism, which leads to be interested in practical strategies, while neglecting theoretical aspects. This results in a 'de-professionalisation of the teaching profession' (ibid., p.522), which drives it away from "a discourse of what 'could be' in education" (ibid.), limiting it to minor aspects. He maintains that a cultural awareness is not enough, that a critique of the socio-political structure and the pursuit of justice must precede peace and intercultural dialogue.

Gorski claims a political character for Intercultural education, as neutrality stands for the perpetuation of the actual situation, made of domination on one side, and marginalisation on the other.

## **1.6 Intercultural Education in Italy**

Intercultural education is interpreted differently in different countries, according to their history and traditions, their immigration flows and political orientation (Catarci, 2014). Since 1990, Italy's policy about education as to the governance of a diversity of students has been interculturalism. It has been introduced with the Ministerial Circulars “La Scuola dell’Obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L’educazione interculturale” (“Compulsory Education and Foreign Students. Intercultural Education”, my translation) (MIUR, 1990) and “Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l’impegno progettuale della scuola” (Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Society: the School Planning Commitment”, my translation) (MIUR, 1994). The intercultural policy has been implemented through an integrated model (Catarci, 2014), with immigrant children included in mainstream classes and following the common curriculum, with an individual support particularly as to language needs.

The Ministerial Circular “Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri” (“Guidelines for the welcoming and integration of the foreign students”, my translation) (MIUR 2006), gives reason of the theoretical choices and provides some practical indications. The framework is that of an intercultural dialogue within shared values and co-constructed rules, respectful of a democratic way of living. According to this document, the transmission of historical, social, juridical and

economical knowledge is essential to the construction of a civic education. It also affirms that intercultural education constitutes the background to specific educational actions aimed at foreign students, within the context of activities directed to all the students. Both the assimilation and the segregation of ethnic communities is refused, in favour of a reciprocal enrichment of a diversity of people who live in harmony (MIUR, 1990). Intercultural education is seen as the highest form of prevention and contrast to racism and intolerance.

As a practical consequence of this, MIUR (2006) states that a criterion to form classes is the heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity of origins and religion. The formation of homogeneous groups is only justified by temporary needs. Normally, foreign students should spend all the school time with the class they have been assigned to. The participation of families must be encouraged; the communication with families can be facilitated by language-cultural mediators. A personalised study plan can be drawn, according to the educational needs of the students, and there is a particular attention to the support that migrant students may need in order to obtain a lower secondary school diploma, which is compulsory in the Italian system and allows access to higher secondary education. An important target is the acquisition of the Italian language, both for communication and study purpose, of which all the teachers are to be considered in charge. The maintaining of the languages of origin is reckoned important for their cognitive and affective value. Both the pre-service and in-service formation of teachers is deemed important; it must be specifically directed to the acquisition of competences in the teaching of Italian as a second language. The teachers' support in the orientation of students as to higher secondary school choice is also considered of great relevance.

MIUR (2006) identifies evaluation as another problematic topic. The document suggests that the 'formative' value of evaluation must have the predominance on its 'certifying' value, that is to say, it must take into account the previous educational history and the character of the schools attended, the levels reached and the progress realised, the possible objectives, the motivation and the commitment, and the learning potential of the students with a migrant background. In particular, when it comes to deciding if to promote them to the following class, an estimation of the student's potential development must be done. In this context, a broad responsibility in the evaluation is given to schools and to teachers.

An important conceptual step, which echoes deficit views of students with immigrant backgrounds, is set by the Ministerial Directive “Strumenti d'intervento per alunni con bisogni educativi speciali e organizzazione territoriale per l'inclusione scolastica” (“Policy Instruments for pupils with Additional Support for Learning Needs and Territorial Organisation for Educational Inclusion”, my translation) (MIUR, 2012) and by the Ministerial Circular “Alunni con bisogni educativi speciali (Bes) e organizzazione territoriale per l'inclusione scolastica” (“Pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and Territorial Organisation for Educational Inclusion”, my translation) (MIUR, 2013). Both documents are about students with additional support needs (referred to as Bisogni Educativi Speciali – BES - in Italy), that include three categories of disadvantage: certified disabilities, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AHDH), and socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage. This last group may include students with an immigrant background, particularly the newly arrived. For them, it is possible to



conceive temporary individualised and personalised study plans, with compensative strategies and accommodations.

In 2014, new “Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri” (“Guidelines for the welcoming and integration of the foreign students”, my translation) (MIUR, 2014), reaffirm the universalistic right to instruction and the intercultural choice. Here, the refusal of both an assimilation theory and the separation of bounded ethnic communities is accompanied by the remark that Italian is the language of all those who were born and raised in Italy. Moreover, together with a need to reform the legislation in order to ease the acquisition of the Italian citizenship by the children born in Italy, it is stated that the study of the Italian Constitution represents a leading guide necessary to exercise the citizenship for those who have chosen to live in Italy. The theme of educational segregation is dealt with, and the reason for students with immigrant backgrounds attending technical or vocational schools is more considered as the result of their socio-economic belonging than of their abilities. In this context, the need for a more just and effective orientation is devised. The theme of evaluation is treated, and while reaffirming that it must follow the pedagogical principle common to all students, a special attention to the culture, history, and Italian language competence of the students with immigrant backgrounds must be paid, also in the final exams. In particular, these latest documents draw a limited and conventional picture of intercultural education, intermingled with more nationalistic concepts, like the centrality of the Italian language. The themes of the intercultural political correctness are maintained – such as importance of plurilingualism, possible unconscious bias by the teachers in the students' orientation – but at a minimal level.

The most recent ministerial document “Diversi da chi? Raccomandazioni per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'intercultura” (“Different from whom? Recommendations for the integration of foreign students and for intercultural education”, my translation, MIUR, 2015), offers a list of suggestions linked to the educational reform introduced by Law 107 in 2015 (see Section 1.8). The intercultural choice is once again remarked and intercultural education recommended, but with no specific explanation on its meaning. Multicultural classes are defined as a precious context for all to appreciate themselves and the others as 'equal' but 'different', and the presence of students with immigrant backgrounds as an opportunity to modernize and enrich the profile of Italian schools.

The theorisation of intercultural education in Italy, as expressed in official documents, is more about cultural dialogue and social relationships, than about schools preparing students with a migrant background to participate in the Italian society, without being relegated to the most marginal social positions. Love & Varghese (2012, p. 12) argue that intercultural education is more focused on “reconciling differences and removing the veil of the other in order to promote integration of immigrant students and decrease incidences of prejudice and stereotyping”, thus failing to acknowledge and address what they see as “issues of racism in Italian society and schooling system” (ibid.).

Gobbo (2011) highlights how the intercultural approach, focusing more on cultural diversity, than on diverse students and families, carries the risk of fixing groups into stereotypical behaviours and ways of thinking, ignoring cultural diversity within groups, with the risk of disseminating these stereotypes. Gobbo sees an answer to this risk in the use of ethnographic research, that can highlight how the pupils’

response is influenced by the teachers' and peers' expectations and relational strategies. Gobbo sees a danger in the distinctions and categorisations by education policies, as "historically they have often ended in legitimising marginalisation, exclusion and segregation" (Gobbo, 2011, p. 19). She also deems that culture is naturalised and unconsciously equated to race; "'race' and 'racial' theories can effectively and usefully mask the relations of power and dominance between social groups" (ibid., p. 20), that teachers should analyse and question.

An excess of stress on culture in Italian interculturalism is also seen by Mincu (2011) and Mincu, Allasia and Pia (2011). According to them, it fails to address "the issue of equity and equality of opportunity, which is more in line with a policy endorsing the right to education" (Mincu et al., 2011, p 89). The Italian intercultural paradigm leaves the socio-economic dimension of class in the background, thus retaining a rhetorical character and a difficulty in being implemented. The risk of interculturalism in the Italian society and education system seems to be that ethnic separation is substituted by a "non-egalitarian pluralism" (ibid., p. 90).

### **1.7 A Note on Use of Terminology**

As the analysis of official statistics and legislation in Italy reveals, unlike in other countries, the possession of legal citizenship is used to refer to people with immigrant backgrounds, regardless of other conditions, such as the place of birth or family origins. Therefore, students with an immigrant background are named either 'foreign citizens', 'non-Italian citizens' or 'Italian citizens' (in case they have acquired the Italian citizenship), regardless of their place of birth. Considering the difficulty in

the Italian system of obtaining the citizenship, this definition includes many students who were born in Italy.

Only recently (see ISTAT 2015), have statistics and other official documents made a distinction between first and second-generation foreign students. Foreign pupils are sometimes distinguished in communitarian (as belonging to the EU) and non-communitarian terms, with a further distinction, within these two broad categories, among nationalities. Statistics also take into consideration unaccompanied foreign minors, Romani and other Gipsy groups.

In his review of the normative framework in Italy from 1989 (when the first important document on the inclusion of foreign pupils in Italian compulsory school system was released) to 2015, Ongini (2016) remarks that in the document “*Diversi da chi? Raccomandazioni per l’Integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l’intercultura*” (“Different from whom? Recommendations for the integration of foreign students and for intercultural education”, my translation, MIUR, 2015) , for the first time in twenty five years the definition ‘foreign students’ has been substituted by other definitions deemed more adequate, such as ‘students - or pupils - with immigrant backgrounds’, ‘immigrants’ children’.

In this thesis, I mainly use terms such as ‘pupils – students – with immigrant backgrounds’. As the presence of cultural and linguistic diversity in Italy is mainly linked to the experience of recent immigration, either at personal or family level, these terms seem appropriate. I also make use of the expressions ‘culturally diverse’, ‘ethnic majority’ or “ethnic minorities” (see discussion in section 2.3). The terms ‘foreign’, ‘non-Italian’, ‘non-Italian citizen’ will be used when analysing and referring to official statistics and documents based on these categories.

## 1.8 Teacher Education in Italy

In many countries the status of teachers as professionals is being questioned (Apple, 1986; Duncan, 2010; Grady, Helbling, & Lubeck, 2008; Mayer, 2014). While asked to deliver more high-quality teaching, teachers are simultaneously subjected to closer analysis and made accountable to higher standards, based on students' achievement, often through standardised tests (Goldhaber, Liddle, & Theobald; Grady et al., 2008; Mayer, 2014). Grady et al. (2008) observe that, unlike other professionals, "teachers are not permitted to rely on their own intelligence and initiative" (ibid., p. 604), thus indicating that they are less trusted.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), that includes 34 market-economy based countries), report "*Gender Imbalances in the teaching profession*" (2017) shows that, all across OECD, the teaching profession has been historically marked out by a high level of feminisation. It also shows that the tendency has been increasing, growing from 61% in 2005, to 68% in 2014, considering all levels of education. The distribution of women is more consistent in the lower degrees of education, and tends to decrease in the highest levels (from 97% in pre-primary education, to 43% in further education). This gender gap is increasing, with the sole exception of tertiary education. All over the OECD, the feminisation of teaching is more evident in younger teachers and in the lower education levels, so indicating that the number is increasing. More detailed indicators (OECD, 2016) show that Italy is one of the countries where the gender imbalance is more consistent, with an overall 78% of women. In pre-primary education the women are 99%, 96% in

primary, 78% in lower secondary, 67% in upper secondary, and 37% in tertiary. If we look at the percentage of women head teachers in lower secondary schools, we see that in 2013 they were 55%, compared to 78% women teachers, thus confirming a gender imbalance in leadership positions, widespread in the OECD.

Cortina and San Roman (2006) underline that the high level of feminisation, particularly at non-managerial level, has often contributed to the low status of teaching, diminishing its professional value. They argue that this happens particularly in Catholic countries, where only professions compatible with motherhood have long been considered acceptable for women, and professional skills are substituted by maternal qualities in dealing with children. In addition, the consideration of teaching as a ‘vocation’, has allowed to keep salaries low. According to the results of the Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe (GOETE) Project, covering seven European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and the UK) (Walther, Parreiramaral, Cuconato, & Dale, 2016), in the years 2010-2012 in Italy the social prestige of in-service teachers is particularly low, compared to other university graduates and to the other research countries. The estimation, based on ratings of the research partners, also shows that teachers’ prestige in Italy has strongly decreased in the decade preceding the study.

The responsibility for students’ education outcomes is mainly attributed to their teachers, and teachers’ professionalism has been questioned. Higher standards has been demanded, to be reached through a reformed preparation to become teachers and stricter control (Grady et al., 2008; Mayer, 2014). Teachers’ professionalism is to be evaluated through the students’ results in standardised tests; a plurality of skills,

such as subject mastery, classroom management, ability to teach to diverse students is demanded of them (Duncan, 2010).

The Italian 'Idealistic' pedagogic tradition (see section 1.9), according to which subject knowledge automatically involves the ability to teach it, means that only recently in Italy has a process of teacher education started (Cajani, 2009). Up to 1996, the preparation of primary teachers relied on a four-year secondary school education. Only in that year, a compulsory University degree to become a primary or early years teacher was introduced. As for secondary education, a teaching qualification course started only in 1999. Before, to be qualified it was necessary to pass a national examination concerning the academic knowledge related to the subject to be taught. The system has undergone many changes up to the present, in a constant attempt to find a balance between the 'modernisation' pushes as dictated by international institutions and pressure groups (Cajani, 2009), and Italian tradition.

In this context, as the activities of the Ministry of Education over the last twenty-five years testify, the attempts to reform the teaching profession in Italy have been many. They have gone in the direction of trying to link pay and performance, to overcome the status of teachers as permanent state employees, to make their job more flexible as to the organisation, but also more accountable as to the results.

The national instruction system reform, introduced by Law 107 in 2015, has secured much in the sense of this modernisation, stating the paths to be followed to become a teacher. Other aspects have also been introduced, such as: compulsory in-service training; direct hiring of teachers by the head teacher on three year contracts, instead of permanent contracts based on more objective criteria such as career and academic titles; the accountability of teachers' work through the extension of

standardised tests for students. This undoubtedly marks a major cultural change, putting the stress on individualism over collaboration.

Law 107 (2015) does not contain any explicit reference to matters pertaining to cultural difference in teacher initial education. However, it seems to meet the request for an improvement in the teaching of the Italian language to pupils of immigrant origin; Italian as an additional language is considered a separate teaching subject, with specialised teachers. This seems to represent a technical progress compared to the previous situation, but it is to be seen if this technicalisation of the issue will help, or if it will draw all the attention to one problem (the language acquisition), in the domain of a certain figure (the specialist), leaving apart other questions, like: can this be a substitute and a justification for the lack of a specific education for all teachers that enable them to deal with cultural diversity? Can this take the place of a deep self-reflection on the part of all teachers, a building of awareness about their cultural, social and gender positioning, in regard to themselves and their students? And, as Cochran-Smith (2004) puts it, is the preparation of teachers only a learning problem, or is it also a political problem? While in other contexts with a longer tradition of a multi-ethnic and multicultural presence, such as the United States, the deep influence of teachers' beliefs and attitudes on their educational actions and on students outcomes has been highlighted by scholarship (see, for instance, Gay, 2013; Knopp, Skarbek, & Rushton, 2005), in the Italian context, this has not been investigated in depth.

If, as I believe, the educational system as a whole, and teachers as a meaningful component of it, must operate for a just and equitable society, it is of great importance that they are supported in their challenging task of giving all students high quality instruction, which allows them to fully develop as individuals and fully entitled



citizens. To do so, it is important that teachers value and know how to engage cultural diversity, in order to fill a gap which undeniably very often exists between the rhetoric of cultural diversity as an enriching resource and the reality of “a threat and a detriment to be denied, avoided, and eliminated” (Gay, 2010, p. 146). As Gay (2010, 2013) remarks, it is not only important to focus on teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, but also on how their principles translate into pedagogic practice.

## **1.9 Neoliberal Contexts**

In order to properly clarify the education context, it is necessary to refer to studies on neoliberal policies and their reflection on the education policies (Apple, 2001; Grimaldi, 2013; Hirtt, 2004; Jones et al., 2008; Lingard, 2009 among others). The neoliberal agenda has become a powerful shaping factor at an economic, social and political level since the late 1980s. It has brought to the internationalisation of the production systems, the free movement of capital and people across frontiers, the centrality of finance and the growth of privatisation, the increasing polarisation of wealth and poverty – often on a racial base – and a growing mobility and precariousness among large sections of the workforce.

Before describing further features of the neoliberal ideology, I wish to briefly discuss the term ideology. Like other key categories that emerge in this study, ideology does not have a univocal definition, but rather competing ones, ranging from the ideas of the ruling class, to the ideas of any other social class or group; it can also be a means by which the dominant classes legitimate their power (Bartolomé, 2008). When in this study I refer to ideologies, I draw on Bartolomé’s definition of ideology as “the

framework of thought constructed and held by members of a society to justify or rationalise an existing social order” (Bartolomé, 2008, p. XIII). I also assume her idea that “dominant ideologies are typically reflected in both the symbols and cultural practices of the dominant culture that shape people’s thinking such that they unconsciously accept the current way of doing things as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’”(ibid.). Bartolomé gives as examples of dominant discriminatory ideologies meritocracy, white supremacy, and deficit views of minority students.

Within the neoliberal ideology, the state has changed its role. It has at the same time undergone a contraction (demanding some powers to other institutions, by means of decentralisation), whilst exerting stronger powers. Its main role is to create and preserve an institutional framework to the market, extending it also to areas previously excluded from commodification such as health care, education and utilities. It highlights the role of the “deraced, declassed, and degendered” (Apple, 2000) individual, seen as a consumer who can choose what the market proposes, and who is responsible for their own success. The reshaping of education is central to this transformation of society, and it invests every aspect of it: financing, management, pedagogy (Jones et al., 2008).

In the last twenty five years globalisation has become a key word for education, with most educational policies influenced by “an increasingly integrated international economy that is subject to severe crises” (Apple, 2011, p. 223), where the reforms in one country affect the policies in the others, leading to a tendency towards the uniformation of education policies throughout various countries (Hirtt, 2004). Hirtt (2004) underlines that many education systems in the industrialised countries since the end of the 1980s, have been subjected to a constant flow of reforms, dominated by the

merchandisation of education. It invests the curricula, the organisation, the management and the pedagogic methods. It puts an emphasis on skills and life-long learning rather than on knowledge, and aims to deregulate the education systems, with a growing autonomy of schools and a decentralisation of functions, a polarization of the school, with a link between schools and industry, mass introduction of ICT, rapid development of private, for-profit education. Thus, the globalised economy is supplied with skilled and flexible labour force, consumers are educated and encouraged, particularly with respect to the ICT, and school becomes a profitable market itself.

In this context, according to the neoliberal 'New Public Management' precepts (based on the idea that the management principles valid in the private sector, are also good for the public), the state has decentralised the operational management of schools and has strengthened its central regulation as to expectations of schools outcomes, with standardised forms of assessment. This makes schools 'objectively comparable', thus introducing an element of competition and differentiation in the school system (Jones et al., 2008). The concept of competition is a key one in the neoliberal system, both between individuals and organisations. In the 'knowledge economy', competitiveness depends more and more on the acquisition of new competences, and they contribute to the building up of the 'human capital'. In this view, the education system is central to the development of economy. School is called to contribute to the construction of a new social subject, which must be flexible, adaptable and creative, to be employable in a market which cannot guarantee the job security (ibid.).

These trends in the educational policies started at a world level in the 1980s, with the Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Deng Xiaoping neoliberal revolution (Lingard, 2009). In Europe, they were officially set in 2000 with the Lisbon Treaty,

and have been promoted and pushed on by supranational organisations such as EU and OECD, and lobbying organisations like the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT). The discourse is that education systems have been a failure, and they need to be ‘fixed’ and modernised, with the aim of strengthening economies. The solution is in the neoliberal agenda, through a comprehensive transformation, involving curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, in the name of quality and innovation. The aim is the education of the elites through private schools or public schools of excellence, while the socially disadvantaged are subjected to the inculcation of the basic skills (numeracy, literacy), assessed by national and international tests; the individual has the responsibility to develop competencies which will allow them to be competitive in a challenging society. Results and comparisons among states, among schools, classes and individuals create a differentiation, and are also used to legitimate the policy itself to the eyes of the ‘public’, showing this way that there are rising levels of attainment (Jones et al., 2008). The key points of the curriculum, literacy and numeracy, are subjected to international testing, like PISA (Florin, 2006).

Even if the financial crisis which has impacted the world in 2007-2008 has made the negative consequences of a global market directed by neoliberal principles clear, still this imaginary seems to be prevailing in social policy (Lingard, 2009). Nevertheless, as each country has different political conditions and cultural traditions, these common features tend to manifest themselves at various degrees and in different ways in different contexts (Apple, 2001; Lingard, 2009).

In Italy, education has always had an elitist character in its structure. Based on a tiered school system, which imposes a choice at the age of 13, it tends to ratify the existing social difference among the students. In addition to this, the upper secondary

schooling system is strongly hierarchised and classed, with the highly academic *licei* enjoying the highest status, and preferred by middle class families, while technical education and vocational education have been traditionally considered less prestigious and mainly chosen by lower class students. The elitist character of the Italian school system is also evident in the ‘Idealistic’ Gentilian<sup>2</sup> tradition of education as transmission of culture, a culture not necessarily linked to a practical use. This tradition, where the real culture is for its own sake, has for a long time safeguarded the Italian school from the idea that knowledge must always be immediately useful, have an economic value and have employability as its main purpose.

In the 1970s, reforms aiming to democratise the management of schools, to increase the participation of the community (Jones et al., 2008) and to include students with different abilities were started, but this did not lead to a real renovation and democratisation of the school system (ibid.). Therefore, a sense of discontent about the schooling system has been widespread in Italy, both on the side of the conservatives and the progressives.

Since the 1990s<sup>3</sup>, a push towards the ‘modernisation’ of school has been constant, and schools have been subjected to continuous reforms, or attempts of reforms, under any government, of whatever political view, all in the sense of a bigger autonomy of the single school, with the introduction of a new idea of public management, possibly leading to competition. This has been accompanied by an attempt to introduce the idea of differentiating the teachers’ wage according to their ‘merit’, as most of the responsibility for the education system not working well was

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<sup>2</sup> Named after its ideator, the Italian neo-Hegelian Idealist philosopher and politician Giovanni Gentile, in 1923.

<sup>3</sup> With the ‘Berlinguer’ reform (from the name of the Minister of Education who promoted it) of the school system in 1997.

attributed to teachers and, at the same time, reinforcing the position of the private sector.

Grimaldi (2013) identifies three strands according to which education in Italy, following the European agenda, is going towards privatisation: the development of private schooling, the increasing mixing of private and public in the education policy making, through the importation of business related vocabulary, like ‘merit’, ‘improvement’, ‘performance’, ‘innovation’ and ‘evaluation’, and an increasing presence of private businesses in education, as providers of goods and services which also affect the educational processes.

The characters of a neoliberal vision of education may also be envisaged in the school reform regulated by Law 107 (2015), the so-called *La Buona Scuola* (‘The Good School’), by a centre-left government. The declared intent of the reform is to increase the instruction level and the competences of the students in the knowledge society, in order to guarantee equal opportunities of educational success and the access to a lifelong education to everybody. This is to be obtained through the flexibility, diversification, efficiency and efficacy and the autonomy of the school organisation, with the introduction of innovative technological instruments. Each school must draw up a 3 year-plan, where the priorities are the development of competences and the link with employability, the use of workshop methodologies, an opening towards the external world (families, local community, charities or private business), and an implementation of *alternanza scuola-lavoro* (internships) in the secondary school. The strong link with the job market is also affirmed with the creation of *Laboratori Territoriali per l’Occupabilità* (‘Territorial Workshops for Employability’), with the participation of schools, public and private enterprises and universities, with the

specific intent of orientating the didactic activities towards strategic sectors of the job market. With the same purpose of creating competencies which can be spent on the market, a *Piano Nazionale Scuola Digitale* ('National Plan for a Digital School') is set.

The recipe to contrasting cultural-social inequalities, is to focus on the individual, in the respect of their learning times and styles. It prescribes the ideation of paths and structures apt to value the pupils and students' merit, with a specific mention of the possibility to organise the school activities in level groups. The law also prescribes the publication of secondary school students' CVs on a dedicated portal, together with the teachers' CVs and other information regarding the school, with the aim to give information about the innovation of the school system. This, together with the implementation of a national and international system of assessment, is to reinforce the accountability of schools and teachers and their differentiation. For the first time, the evaluation of teachers is officially introduced, with a part of the wage linked to that, and the possibility to be chosen by the head teachers. Head teachers are empowered, but they are subjected to accountability, too. The competition among schools emerges, and more power is given to external agents, with the possibility for families and businesses to donate sums of money to schools of their choice.

As to cultural diversity (see also section 1.8), there is a hint to intercultural and peace education, respect of differences and dialogue among cultures, and to the alphabetization and proficiency of Italian as a second language. Special attention must be paid to 'students of foreign origins' in the passage from one order of schooling to the following one. Cultural diversity, therefore, is not given much space; however, the law acknowledges that, as already mentioned in section 1.3, the transition from lower

to higher secondary school is critical because it leads to a tracked pathway. After a description of the context of this study, in the following section I describe how the thesis is structured.

### **1.10 Structure of the Thesis**

In the present chapter, I described the context that has generated the motivations for this study, the general aims and the questions it aims to respond. In the thesis, I will explore an aspect that has not been analysed in the Italian context, that is the relation between teachers and head teachers' attitudes towards students with immigrant backgrounds, and their own identity and understanding of education policies. I proceed as follows:

In Chapter 2, I outline a literature review of the themes and of the theoretical ideas relevant to this research. I analyse teacher identity, considering aspects such as social class, belonging, gender, and ethnicity/culture, adopting an intersectional approach. For an understanding of these elements, I make use of the concepts of capital, habitus, and field. I also refer to the concept of performativity, and try to clarify agency issues. In this chapter, I also analyse studies about culturally responsive pedagogy.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodological framework, motivating my choice for designing my research as a qualitative study, based on interviews. I then discuss my position as a researcher in relation to the object of the study and, after describing the research sites and the participants, I explain how I analyse the data, and discuss ethical issues.



In Chapters 4 to 7, I analyse the themes emerging from my research. Chapter 4 is about social class: how teachers make sense of their own social class belonging, and how this affects their dispositions towards their pupils, in particular those with immigrant backgrounds. In Chapter 5, I analyse how teachers construct themselves as being gendered in their profession, and how this can reflect on how they exert their professionalism and construct their students with an immigrant background. In Chapter 6, I focus on culture/ethnicity and on how a sense of (non)belonging is constituted around these elements. In these chapters, I also stress the intersectionality of these and other elements, in shaping experiences and perceptions. Finally, in Chapter 7, I examine the influence of the wider context and its reflections on pedagogies.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework, and draw conclusions around the implications for teachers and teacher education. I then make recommendations for further investigations in the area, and end with some final reflections.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Extensive academic literature, both at an international and at an Italian national level, show that there is a relationship between pupils' background – in terms of social class, ethnicity, and gender – and their educational outcomes (Barabanti, 2016; Panichella & Triventi, 2014; Rumberger, 2010; Strand, 2014). This seems to be linked with different levels of economic, cultural and social capital (see section 2.5) possessed by the students and their families (Barabanti, 2016). Some scholars also highlight a bias on the part of teachers based on their students' identity and belonging, pointing out that those who benefit most from education are those who are white and middle class. Its identity, culture and values are considered the 'neutral' ones, those which are taken for granted, or the desirable ones (Archer & Francis, 2007; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Farioli, 2015; Picower, 2009; Thys & Van Houtte, 2016).

At international level, some scholars stress how teacher identity—in terms of ethnicity, social class and gender – can influence how they see their culturally and linguistically diverse students (Allard & Santoro, 2007; Santoro, 2007, 2015). In an Italian context, the relationship between teachers' identity and the way they perceive their students' identity, particularly those with immigrant backgrounds, and how this may affect their pedagogical dispositions, has not been analysed so far.

In this section, I discuss the concept of identity, in particular in relation to teachers, considering elements such as social class, gender, and culture-ethnicity. While reviewing the literature on these themes, I lay out some concepts that constitute the theoretical framework for my study, in particular Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital, and the elaborations on this by feminist scholarship, through the lens of intersectionality, that discards the idea of group homogeneity. I also consider Butler's idea of performativity and its role in the constitution of the subject.

## **2.2 Teacher Identity**

Identity has been conceptualised in many different ways, from a fixed, stable, inner element, to a more relativistic, fluid, fragmented one, according to postmodern and post-structural theorizations. Following these views, the identities individuals construct may vary according to the context; they are also the product of the interactions with the others. Furthermore, the same person may represent the same experience in different ways to different people and in different circumstances. Thus, the idea of objectivity gives way to a relativistic sense of reality, where identity has elements of consistency and continuity of the subject, but is also built on difference: "the notion of identity involves two criteria of comparison between persons or things: *similarity* and *difference*" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 18, italics in the original). Therefore, identity is not a static feature that simply 'is there'. On the contrary, it is used to classify people, and to associate oneself to other people or ideas. It is also in constant development. It is socially constructed through interaction, and is never settled forever, but rather always in the process of becoming: "one's identity – one's identities, indeed,

for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter” (ibid., italics in the original). Identity is the product of the interaction of belonging to different categories such as social class, gender, and ethnicity; “postmodern identities reject categories in favour of fluidity” (Elliott, 2011, p. 88).

In the definition of teacher identity, White (2009) identifies two key elements. The first one has an individualistic character. It is related to the image they have of themselves as teachers, and how they enact this idea. The second element is collective, because it extends to the interactions with others, especially within the institutions. In particular, White (2009, p. 861) underlines the importance of the “institutional context and constraints” on how teachers define themselves. Similarly, she identifies a double track in the conception of identities: on the one hand, identity is conceived as not static, but in constant construction, owing to new experiences. On the other hand, people need to feel that part of their identity is stable. Fluid and developing identities lead to a multiplicity of individualities, at times conflicting with each other, which manifest themselves in different contexts and situations. In White’s (2009) words,

This last characteristic of multiplicity is critical in understanding a teacher’s identity. Individuals enter a profession with prior experiences that influence current notions of self. In order to develop a professional identity one must draw on this existing substantive identity. Therefore, the personal and professional notions of self shift and interact together to form the teacher’s professional identity. In understanding a teacher’s professional identity, it is important to explore how both personal and

professional experiences interact and relate to each other (White, 2009, p. 861).

An aspect that White (2009) highlights about teacher identity, is religion. She argues that religion constitutes an important element of teacher identity, as it is part of personal experience which individuals use to “make meaning of their existence” and “as religion shapes how individuals and others construct personal identity, it follows that religion shapes how teachers construct their own identities” (White, 2009, p. 863). Moreover, “as religion influences the cultural and institutional contexts of personal experience, personal identities are also constructed through religious identity which help constructing personal identity” (ibid.).

Also Butler (2008) stresses the importance of religion in shaping identity and values. She argues that “religion is not simply a set of beliefs or a set of dogmatic views, but a matrix for subject formation whose final form is not determined in advance; a discursive matrix for the articulation and disputation of values, and a field of contestation” (Butler, 2008, p. 13). Therefore, there is no deterministic correspondence between religion and values; likewise, secularism cannot be seen as something monolithic, as it is often defined by a fracture with the religion inherited. In addition to this, “sometimes secularism achieves its definition through the disavowal of a religious tradition that inchoately and continuously informs and supports its own ostensibly post-religious claims” (ibid.).

As religious orientation, even a secular one, plays an important part in the construction of personal identity, which is strictly interconnected with the professional one, it is worth investigating also this side of teacher identity. The aim is not to judge

the consistency of their espoused beliefs about religion with other beliefs about students and practices expressed during the interviews, but rather to understand better how religious orientation shape their pedagogic dispositions. As Barrett (2015) observes, teachers not only possess beliefs connected to their work, like those related to the subject knowledge and to the students' characteristics; they also have "beliefs around the nature of the society in which they live and about their existential understanding of their place in it" (ib., p. 5). If what teachers enact depend, even if not in a straightforward, univocal way, on what they believe, it is important also to consider how they conceive religion.

Mockler (2011) refers to teacher professional identity as the way they see and understand themselves as teachers, both individually and as a category. Teacher professional identity is shaped by "the narratives and stories that form the 'fabric' of teachers' lives" (Mockler, p. 519), while "the process of 'storying' and 'restoring' has the effect of both claiming and producing professional identity" (ibid.). Mockler describes teachers' identity as made up of three domains: personal experience, professional context, and the external political environment. Teachers' personal experience include all those aspects of their personal lives which are outside the professional context, and which are influenced by factors such as class, race and gender. Schooling experience, interests, hobbies, positions held outside the work context, family circumstances are part of this realm. Teachers' professional context comprehends the experiences related to the educational context, such as career, professional education and qualifications, experiences and involvement in professional organisations or unions. Finally, she considers the external political environment, which

comprises the discourses, attitudes and understandings surrounding education that exist external to the profession, experienced by teachers largely through the media, but also through the development of government policy which relates to their work and the ways in which political ideology impacts upon their work as a result of government policy (ibid., p. 521).

These three dimensions interact and build up the individual in a unique way, constituting an always ‘ongoing, dynamic and shifting’ (ibid., p. 526) teacher identity. Mockler’s (2011) conceptualisation of identity is useful as it openly acknowledges the impact of discourses and ideologies in shaping the teachers’ identity, considering in particular the neoliberal one. In this context

a recurring model is that of teacher as technician, needing to acquire specific skills and knowledge often combined with the idea that teaching is simply about the transmission of knowledge. Often this model appears in policy and rhetoric and can influence public perception over the nature of practitioner professionalism and consequently, we would argue, disempower teachers and devalues practitioner research (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 122).

Neoliberalism as a background ideology and its relationship with education is dealt with in section 1.9; in the following section, I introduce intersectionality as a way of

understanding how different aspects of identity intersect, shaping and affecting each other.

### 2.3 Intersectionality

Feminist thinking in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to the development of the concept of identity (Crenshaw, 1989). Elliott (2011) argues that, taking up a non-essentialist post-structural, postmodern notion of identity, feminist scholars have questioned the idea of the universal Western white man, together with the idea of the universal Western white woman. Feminist scholars have also criticised the essentialism and the binary structure of the modern Western thought which contrasts man and woman, reason and emotion, culture and nature. They have maintained that there are “differences *among* women based on race, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and differences in the intersection of these and other social and personal differences” (Elliott, 2011, pp. 33, italics in the original). Feminist thinking (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1990) has introduced the idea that identities are at the intersection of a plurality of factors; they are always transient, multi-faceted, and even contradictory. The aim of an approach based on intersectionality is “to analyse how different forms of disadvantage intersect and thereby explain the specific experience of certain groups of women on the basis of gender, race and class simultaneously” (Bastia, Jacoby, & Kothari, 2014, pp. 238-239). Bastia et al. (2014) also stress that, while originally intersectional studies have focused on marginalised groups as a way to bring attention onto black women as at the intersection of different strands of oppression, then the object of study has been widened. The idea of considering



identities and life experiences as shaped by the intersection of race, class and gender “has become almost mainstreamed with increasing awareness beyond feminist scholarship and activism” (Byrne, 2015, 1.1).

Bastia et al. (2014) underline that intersectionality has been used widely also in migration studies, to highlight the gendered character of migration in contrast with a gender blind view of the phenomenon, with men considered the primary migrants, and women associated to them. They also notice that when scholars started to give attention to the experience of migrant women, they tended to focus on gender, without giving much consideration to class, ethnicity or race as concurrent factors. The application of intersectionality served to “demonstrate the importance of intra-group differences” (Bastia et al., 2014, p. 241).

The widening of the use of intersectionality in scholarship has been contested by some scholars, as a way to undermine it as a critical political and analytical tool (Byrne, 2015). Bastia et al. (2014) criticise its use as a tick boxing instrument to show awareness about the complexity of the factors which shape the phenomenon analysed. An increasing number of scholars have considered intersectionality as applicable to any category of people, advantaged or disadvantaged, to analyse how categories such as gender, social class, race and ethnicity are intertwined and constitutive of relations of power. Intersectionalism has been criticised also for oversimplifying and tending to neglect asymmetrical power relationships. Taylor, Hines and Casey (2011) argue that while intersectionality highlights the relationship among different aspects that construct the subject in the social relations, such as gender, class, race, and sexuality, it is not a good tool at explaining how hierarchical relations of power between subjects are produced. Taylor et al. (2011, p. 64) suggest that, for intersectionality to avoid

becoming only “a descriptive formula”, it needs to be rooted into “an anti-racist, postcolonial critical context”.

I consider the contribution of intersectionality useful to understand how teachers identities are shaped by a multiplicity of concurring factors, such as gender, social class, ethnicity, cultural and religious background, and to examine how the intersection of different elements also shape the perception of the Other, meant as gendered and classed students and families with immigrant backgrounds. Intersectionality, embedded in a critical perspective, seems a good tool to explain how different factors contribute to the creation and maintainance of positions of advantage and disadvantage. An example of a study in the educational context based on intersectionality (Loveday, 2016) will be given in section 2.5. Intersectional studies consider categories such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, culture, religion; for the purpose of my study. I mainly focus on gender, social class, and ethnicity.

The term ethnicity can be attributed multiple meanings: “‘ethnicity’ can be used as a marker of national belonging, of ‘culture’, of country of birth, or language spoken, as examples” (Allard & Santoro, 2006, p. 119). Research has shown that also regarding ethnicity, like for other aspects of identity, assumptions regarding the relationship between culture, skin colour, nationality and also social class are undiscussed (ibid.). Bentley (1987) builds on the concepts of Bourdieu’s habitus (see section 2.4) and extends it to ethnicity. For Bentley, ethnic identity “involves symbolic construal of sensations of likeness and difference, and these sensations must somehow be accounted for” (p. 27); Bourdieu’s theory of practice addresses this issue. Bentley hypothesizes that “consciousness of affinities of interest and experience embodies

subliminal awareness of objective commonalities in practice” (ibid.). Yelvington (1991) adds a social dimension to this explanation of ethnic identity as resulting from an unconscious awareness of similarity with other people having a similar habitus. Routinised behaviours become symbols, that evoke emotions, and that are social facts. This approach

has the advantage of explaining the emotions that attach to ethnicity and how individuals recognise commonality. In addition, we can now analyse how ethnicity is constructed in relation to other significant social identities. This suggests that when we think of specific individuals we also have to take into account their varying trajectories of habitus in relation to other social identities - that ethnicity is socially constructed with reference to class, gender, and other variables” (Yelvington, 1991, p. 167).

According to Lawler (2004, p. 112), habitus marks “the lines of division and distinction along which the social is organised. That is, class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on”. These distinctions are organised according to a hierarchy, as they do not have the same value: “Some are normalized, while others are pathological” (ibid). As shown by the data gathered in this study, the lines of distinction fluctuate and are sometimes built on contradictions, linked to the many ways they interact with each other. I deal with social class and gender in sections 2.7 and 2.8. In the next sections, I describe how identity is constituted in the social world, with particular reference to education.

## **2.4 Habitus and Performativity**

As stated in the previous section, in the exploration of how teachers' gender, social class, ethnicity and culture affect the way they make sense of their students with immigrant backgrounds's identities, I rely on a post-modern, constructionist approach to identity, where identity is fluid and dynamic, constructed and negotiated in social relationships, and subject to changes according to the context. I also believe that these constructions are exerted within boundaries given by external structures, that constitute the 'playground' where the subject can exert their agency. The French sociologist Bourdieu has contributed to "the reconciliation of the dualism(s) of structure vs. agency, structuralism vs. constructivism, determinism vs. freedom or macro vs. micro" (Walther, 2014, p. 7), constituting a 'third way' between the extreme subjectivism of some post-modern philosophical positions and more objective traditions in social sciences (Grenfell & James, 1988). In "Outline of a Theory of Practice" (1977), Bourdieu attempts to overcome the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity, building a theory that aims to generalise, while being able to explain the subject's practice. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice tries also to reconcile the opposition between a purely structuralist view, according to which the subjects' behaviour is rigidly determined by external structures, and a voluntarism perspective, where the individuals have a complete freedom of choice (Walther, 2014). I explain below the concepts of habitus, field and capital, that have been widely used in educational research, to give explanations about class, status, and relations of power in pedagogic situations.

In “Outline of a theory of Practice” (1977), Bourdieu describes his idea of what structure, habitus and practices are. In his words,

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures (...).(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72, italics in the original).

Habitus structures and generate practice and perceptions, without the subject being aware of obeying rules. Bourdieu (1977) see this as the product of a collective orchestration, without need for an orchestrator. Habitus is at the same time the product of a social inheritance and of “habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, and ‘disposition’” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 14). As Gill, Esson & Yuen (2016) clearly illustrate, the habitus is what explains how the interaction between individual and culture works. Habitus “comprises the habits, attitudes, and skills learnt from one’s environment which are themselves derivative of ethnicity, race, class, and gender” (Gill et al., 2016, p. 36) . They are shared by groups, and “taken on board uncritically by the individual group member, usually in the early years” (ibid.) The habitus as a mechanism explains how perceptions, attitudes, behaviours of a group are assumed and felt as natural and are reproduced, and how a sense of belonging to the group is developed. The habitus is not is not only shaped by the context where it is embedded, but it also shapes it.

Bourdieu sees the history of the individual as a specification of the history of a certain class, therefore personal style is a personal variation of the same habitus, due

to personal experiences and trajectories. In a certain class, certain type of experiences are statistically more likely than others:

the habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group and class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception... (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86).

This does not imply a sort of ‘biographical determinism’ (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 15); the habitus mechanism has an epistemological universality, but is actualised through individuals, in a given time and place. Bourdieu (1977) asserts that the habitus, produced by inculcation and appropriation, is the means through which collective structures, such as economy and language, reproduce themselves in the form of durable dispositions in the subject. Similar objective conditions of existence, that is social classes, produce similar class habitus, that Bourdieu (1977, p. 85) defines as “the system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures”.

What Bourdieu highlights is that, even if it is impossible for members of the same class to have had exactly the same life experiences, they are more likely to have been in similar situations than individuals from a different social class. “The objective structures which science apprehends in the form of statistical regularities”, such as type and rate of employment, income, opportunity of access to education, lifestyle, give shape to the social environment, “with its ‘closed doors’, ‘dead ends’, and limited ‘prospect’, that ‘art of assessing likelihoods’, as Leibniz put it, of anticipating the

objective future, in short, the sense of reality or realities which is perhaps the best-concealed principle of their efficacy” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86). Habitus also involves another important element, which is a moral judgment in relation to how things should be rightly done in a certain place and situation, according to unwritten rules.

In conjunction with the notion of habitus, the concept of performativity is useful to understand how the subject is produced and works. Butler takes up the concept from linguistic theory (Austin, 1975), to explain how the self is produced. Similarly to how some speech acts do not describe facts, and are neither true nor false, but produce them, such as in expressing an apology or a promise, Butler (1997, 1999) explains the subject as the effect of actions and of naming practices, that become what they are named; the subject is not a precondition of this performativity; rather, it is its result. Gender, race and other aspects of identity are not given as a precondition, something the individual is, but rather something that the individual does, or performs, often unintentionally, and that can vary according to the situation. Chadderton (2012, p. 50) highlights that

an understanding of race as performative helps theorize racial expression such as dress, accent, manner of walking or political stance – on the basis of which discrimination is frequent – as neither linked to phenotype, nor necessarily voluntary; however, it is paradoxically perceived as both.

For the purpose of this study, the concept of performativity is useful to underline the power of language and of naming; it is used in the analysis in dialogue with the concept of habitus, aware of their dialectic relationship (Kohli, 1999; Lovell, 2000).

## **2.5 Field and Forms of Capital**

The effect of habitus in the human practice is actualised in a field, a network of relations between individuals that cannot be reduced to interactions or ties, and of which individuals are often unconscious. In this system, the individuals occupy an objective position, determined by their situation in the distribution of power, in the form of the possession of different types of power, or capital, which provides “access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 39). Each field has its own specific logic and rules, that are not applicable to the other fields (i.e. the artistic and the economic field in relation to the idea of material profit).

In every field, there are various forces that confront each other and that struggle in order to preserve or transform the field configuration. Capital needs a field to be exerted, and “it confers a power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered in this field” (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, pp. 39,40).



In “The Forms of Capital” (1986), Bourdieu describes the social activity as a market, where products and actions have a value and represent a capital, used to buy other products. It is the structure and distribution of different types of capital in a given moment that shape the social world and accounts for its functioning. Bourdieu identifies three forms in which Capital can present itself in different fields: Economic, Social and Cultural Capital. Economic Capital is constituted by money and is acknowledged by property rights; Cultural Capital is related to educational qualifications and may be converted into Economic Capital; Social Capital is given by a network of social connections, and can be converted into Economic Capital, as well. According to Bourdieu, Cultural Capital can take three forms: linked to the body, such as learning, accent, and general disposition; connected to material objects such as books, works of art and instruments; and related to institutions, like academic qualifications.

Social capital is constituted by the network of durable relationships – that is to say, being part of a group where the members reciprocally acknowledge and back each other. These groups may be institutionalised, like family, a school, a party, or may not be formalised. Even if social capital does not coincide with cultural and economic capital, it is not even wholly independent of them, as the reciprocal acknowledgements are based on some homogeneity among the members, and also because the forms of capital reciprocally affect one another.

In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), Bourdieu describes how the conditions of existence depend on the volume and the composition of capital, and their change over time. He describes capital as the resources that are distributed through social classes, and fraction of social classes, and that are usable by

them. They can be ranked from those who possess more economic and cultural capital, to those who are deprived of both. Observing how the capital is distributed, it is possible to mark divisions and observe the effect of the different distribution of the different types of capital. While sometimes economic and cultural capital are symmetric, such as in the professions, where they are both high, other times the cultural capital is high, but the economic capital is not. An example of this are teachers, higher education and secondary school teachers, at a higher level, and primary teachers, at an intermediate level.

For Bourdieu, central is the consideration that all forms of capital lie on economic capital, and produce their effects only thanks to the fact that they are based on it. The conversion of one form of capital to another, that is the way capital works, needs to displace both the economistic idea that everything is only economic capital (thus ignoring the specificity of the other forms of capital), and the structuralist theories, which seem to reduce social life to communication, thus ignoring the fact that at the bottom line, there is the economic fact (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, Bourdieu considers symbolic capital, which is the form the other types of capital take when they are acknowledged as legitimate.

I also refer to feminist interpretations of Bourdieu (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Loveday, 2016; Reay, 2005, 2015), who underline the emotional aspects of social class belonging, and the role played by intersecting elements of identity, as I will show in the following sections. Here I mention in particular Loveday (2016)'s study carried out in England, with students and academic staff from working-class backgrounds. Loveday builds on feminist interpretations of Bourdieu to analyse how a particular sentiment, shame, is produced and lived as a social, classed and gendered phenomenon

in the context of higher education, represented as a field where the working class individuals who have the ability to participate can exert social mobility. Loveday highlights the use of the concepts of habitus, field, and of capital as productive tools to understand “the subjective experience of class (as opposed to objective ‘measures’ of social class locations) and the meaning actors attribute to their experiences” (Loveday, 2016, p. 1141).

Loveday underlines how “Bourdieu provides a dynamic and relational framework for thinking through how multiple forms of advantage are reproduced by some groups *at the expense of others*, that is, through practices of exclusion (...) (ibid., italics in the original), based on what appears as ‘natural’, and not as accumulated capital. This is also shown by the attachment of value, or lack of value, to groups, with the representation of working-class as lacking (Skeggs, 2011; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012). In her study, Loveday (2016) highlights how certain embodied facts (here, an accent perceived as working-class), can be considered inappropriate in the academic field, and cause a sense of shame on those who embody them. Loveday (2016) focuses in particular on shame as an emotion accompanying mainly women with working-class background when operating in a middle-class environment; shame has a ‘stickiness’, in the sense that it is enduring, because it has been “acquired through affective practice” (ibid., p. 1151). Shame validates and reinforces the perception of working-class cultures and identities as deficient, and may also shape the impression they have of themselves and how they relate to the others. Loveday observes that emotions, which commonly tend to be seen as part of the individual’s personality, are rather a product of social practice; shame in particular is the product of inequality, and as such should be interpreted.

## 2.6 Teachers' Agency and Beliefs

Agency relates to the degree of freedom individuals can exercise within the limits of certain structures. Bourdieu's theory of practice is often considered deterministic, as based on the concept of habitus, which represents the structure given by the social class and the capital possessed in different forms and amount. In Bourdieu's theory, another element that constitute a limit to freedom is the field. However, in "Outline of a theory of practice" (1977), Bourdieu contests the idea itself of an opposition between determinism and freedom. He refuses the idea of a mechanical determinism in the relationship between habitus, the structure that has produced it, and the practice that habitus governs; rather, he attributes to habitus an endless capacity to produce actions, thoughts and perceptions, situating a limit to this productive capacity only in the "historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (ibid., p. 95).

Therefore, while the rules according to which the individuals make choices are set and inscribed in their habitus, they can choose strategies and practices to pursue their relative position in the social field, exercising an agency in preserving or subverting the forms of capital (economic, cultural, social) they possess (Walther, 2014). More than expressing a belief in social determinism, Bourdieu investigates the multiple pressures exercised by social life on agency. Calhoun (2002) argues that Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction does not mean to be deterministic; rather, it aims to underline both the constraints and the need to fight them, in education and in the society, in favour of the marginalised.

In this thesis, I consider agency as related to identity in general and also in relation to teacher professional identity. In particular, I consider how predominant ideologies, such as neoliberalism with its request for accountability and its stress on easily measurable performance, are structures that represent constraints for teachers. Buchanan (2015) highlights “the symbolic role of policy within teacher identity and agency” (p. 712) inside the current dominant education policy discourse in the USA, focused on accountability for students, teachers, head teachers and schools. She argues that policy centred on accountability not only involves the adoption of certain practices, such as standardised testing, but also becomes common sense about what is to be done in education and structures teachers identities and their “capacity to act” (Buchanan, p. 712). They tend to enact practices that conform to the dominant discourse, and their consciousness is influenced by the practices. Teachers can align with or react to these requests in different degrees and choose between options given exerting an agency, according to how teachers construct their personal and professional identity (Buchanan, 2015; Mockler, 2011). However, Buchanan stresses that the relationship between teacher identity and teacher agency is not linear, as it is not only a matter of being the type of teacher one wants to be. She also highlights the structuring effect of practices performed on identity: “Actions teachers take feed back into their identity; if those actions are constrained by accountability policies, this has the potential to shift identities” (Buchanan, 2015, p. 714).

Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) highlight the role of belief in teachers’ agency. They see in the most recent developments of curriculum policy in the UK and in other contexts, such as the implementation of Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence, an acknowledgement of teachers’ agency, as an important element of teachers’

professional identity. They argue that this has happened after decades of policies aimed to de-professionalise teaching, with prescriptive curricula and strict testing and inspections that have taken agency away from teachers. For them, agency is informed by past personal and professional experiences, it is enacted in the present under the influence of cultural, structural and material resources, and it is projected in the future, as Figure 1 shows (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 627):

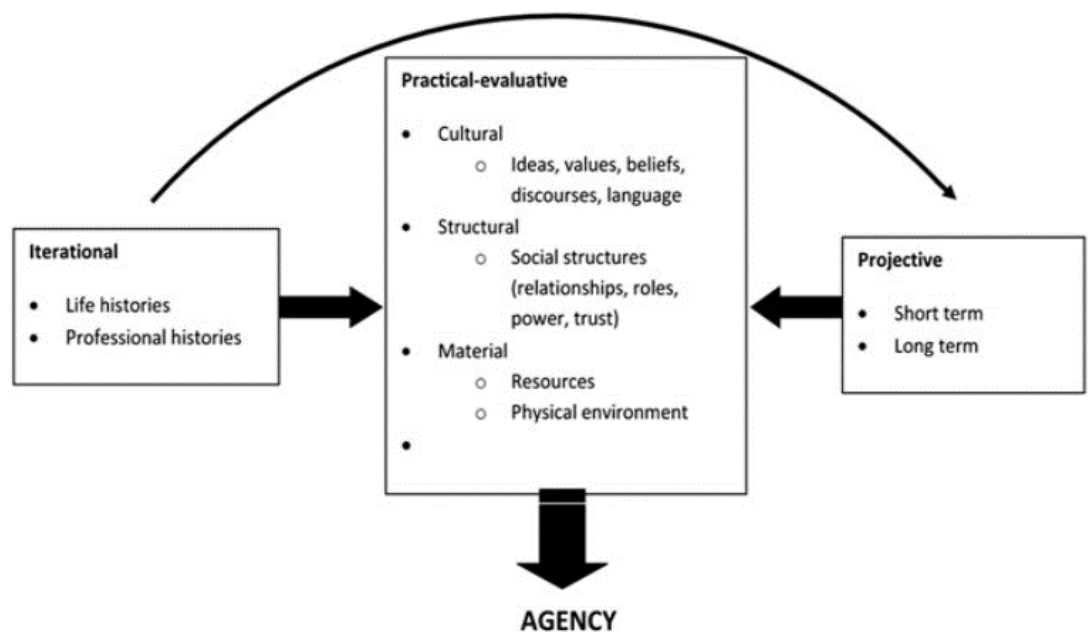


Figure 1- Teachers' agency

Figure 1 highlights the role of lived experience and of different aspects of culture in the achievement of agency. The authors focus in particular on the role of beliefs, on where they come from and how they motivate action. They highlight the presence of a positive orientation towards the students, but at the same time they note the presence of a deficit view of some of the pupils, seen as limiting the possibility of developing the curriculum. Pupils who are seen as having ‘poor’ abilities or not taking responsibility for their own learning, are blamed for that, and used as a justification by the teacher for giving up some professional responsibility towards them. In other occasions, teachers adopt strategies aimed to protect them from policies, such as excessive testing, that are considered damaging.

In conclusion, teachers bring in the profession, as part of their agency, “professional knowledge and skills”, but also “beliefs and values” (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 636). Thus, as White (2009) claims, teaching is not an individual, neutral act, but a political one, where teachers are influenced by the work context and institutions, but exert an agency in interpreting and enacting the guidelines. A factor that exerts a strong influence on values and beliefs is social class, as shown in the next section.

## **2.7 Social Class**

The concept of social class status is not simple to define. It can be given an eminently economic profile, or can include factors such as lifestyle, and even emotions. Its effective existence in the real world can also be denied. After reviewing the concepts of social class as mostly used in the international and in the Italian context, I describe Bourdieu’s approach to this category, as I see it as the most suitable

to comprehend a reality that is made up of external structures, but also of subjective responses to them.

The classic way of establishing the social class belonging is through the reference to one's occupation, such as in the EGP scheme devised by Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero in 1992. This method is widely employed in the analysis of social classes stratification also in Italy (Panichella & Triventi, 2014). However, a focus on occupation only seems to disregard both "the more complex ways that class operates symbolically and culturally, through forms of stigmatisation and marking of personhood and value" (Savage et al., 2013, p. 222), and the reality that the same category of work can have different implications in relation to autonomy, status and career prospects in different countries or also across one country.

The Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) has traditionally based its annual reports on the country's economic and social situation, allocating individuals and families in seven social classes, in a way similar to the above mentioned EGP scheme, according to the features of the family's main breadwinner's occupation. In 2017, for the first time ISTAT has adopted a different categorisation, considered more apt to capture a fragmented society. They argue that social classes do not exist any longer in the Italian society, and individuals do not feel anymore they belong to a certain social class anymore. As a consequence, they propose to allocate people into nine social groups, determined by factors that are not only economic (occupation and income), but also cultural (education level) and social (citizenship, family size, typology of residency council). The result is to add complexity to the study of social inequalities, with its consequences on social inclusion or exclusion (ISTAT, 2017).



This classification has raised critical remarks, such as those of Barbagli, Saraceno and Schizzerotto (2017) who highlight a methodological weakness in the groups categorisation, as it overturns the traditional cause-effect relationship between social class and inequalities. While social class has always been regarded as generating inequalities, with this new categorisation it seems that inequalities in income, education, risk of unemployment and poverty are not the result of a social class belonging but, on the contrary, are constitutive elements of the group belonging. They argue that it is still the class of belonging that determine the other characteristics, and not the opposite (Marzio. Barbagli, Saraceno, & Schizzerotto, 2017). However, a significant feature of the grouping proposed by ISTAT (2017) is the conception of two separate categories for low income families, according to their composition: if they are made up of only Italian members, or if they include at least one member who does not have the Italian citizenship. This second group is the most disadvantaged of all nine groups from an economic point of view (minus 40% compared to the average income), even if its education level is the third higher in the nine groups, only after managers and white-collar workers.

Savage et al. (2013, p. 222) suggest that “a more culturally sensitive mode of analysis”, such as that elaborated by Bourdieu in “Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste” (1984), is more useful to capture the complexities of the social positioning, acknowledging that social classes are not only constructed through the economic dimension, but have also a cultural profile and a tension towards social reproduction. Bourdieu's notions of habitus and capital, to which I mainly refer in the interpretation of data emerging from my research, and that I have described in previous sections (2.4 and 2.5), can give a more nuanced understanding of social classes

boundaries and belongings. In the following section, I will explore the literature about the relationship between gender and being a teacher.

## **2.8 Teachers and Gender**

Teaching is a profession highly characterised by the presence of women, especially in the lower degrees of education (see section 1.8). The literature has highlighted a few reasons for the prevalence of women teachers. Teaching, especially with younger children, has historically been considered a natural occupation for women, as it enables them to display qualities that have traditionally been considered part of the female essence, such as a natural caring disposition (Braun, 2012), an extension of their maternal role (Farioli, 2015). Farioli builds on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to explain how feminine identity is built. According to Bourdieu (1990), symbolic violence is the acceptance and internalisation by the subject, of ideas and structures that tend to make the subject subordinated. It is violence because it tends to the subordination of the subject; it is symbolic because it is exerted with the complicity of those who are subjected to it. This complicity "is neither a passive submission to an external constraint nor a free adherence to values" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 168), thus overcoming the dichotomy between free choice and constraint (*ibid.*). In Farioli's (2015) view, the symbolic violence exerted by the family is aimed to create a feminine identity built around psychological and cultural values that are socially constructed, but are felt as being naturally part of the feminine essence, such as obedience and being well versed in caring occupations.

Farioli (2015) observes that in Italy this stereotype, together with the low salaries, too low to be the main salary in a family, has helped keeping men away from the pre-primary and primary education, in addition to keep instruction expenses low for the State. Thus, low salaries have kept teaching feminized, while feminisation has kept salaries low, contributing to the erosion of the profession prestige. The almost exclusive prevalence of women at the first levels of education, while men increase their presence as far as the levels become higher, clearly shows the students that a higher and more specialised level of education necessitates man teachers, thus contributing to the depreciation of the role of women teachers.

The Church also contributes to this depreciation; with its view of woman as a subordinate and its idea of genders as complementary, it stresses the potential of the elementary teacher as “disciplinator of infantry consciences and a prosecution of the role of the good Christian mother” (Farioli, 2015, p. 43, my translation). In addition to this, women teachers also fulfil an ideological role, of “maintaining the middle class order” (Farioli, p. 45, my translation). As victim of a symbolic violence, living examples of the subordinate feminine, devoted to gratuitous caring work in the family and with little power in schools, swinging between repression and maternal care, gives credit to the masculine as neutral, universal, with the feminine docile to authority (Farioli, 2015).

In her analysis of the reasons for the feminisation of teaching in Italy, Farioli (2015) also asserts that a massive entry of women teachers in secondary education started in the 1960s and 1970s. At University level, women mainly opted for humanistic studies, traditionally considered more alike women sensitivity, and naturally leading to teaching. The ritual assertion that teaching is the ideal job for

women with a family, as it leaves all afternoon free, has now turned in the mantra of the civil servant as a loafer, who perceives a full wage for a part-time job. The work done outside the class hours is thus not considered real work, as it is flexible in quantity and can be spread over different moments of the afternoon, night or weekend, depending on the family needs. Describing the teaching profession in England, Braun (2012) writes that it is feminized in itself, regardless of the teacher being a woman or a man; moreover, as being part of anybody experience as pupils, teaching seems to lack the 'secret' knowledge of 'higher' professions, such as law or medicine; as such, its status is lower. Braun argues that teaching seems to be regarded as a semi-profession, together with other caring, feminized works, such as nursing and social working. Braun claims that its uncertain status also builds on its ambivalent social class roots; it is commonly seen as a middle class profession, with the presence of a number of working class members.

Morini (2010) sees the feminisation of work as a general feature of the capitalistic society. It is not only represented by a quantitative expansion of the active female population at a global level, but also by its qualitative features, regardless of the workers' gender. It displays the qualities traditionally attributed to women. Work in the contemporary world is adaptable, flexible, with a high connection between productive and reproductive role, with an overlapping of life and work time. The logics of maternal caring, with its limitless time and devotion, expands to the professional field.

According to De Conciliis (2012), the feminisation of teaching in the twentieth century in the Western societies, particularly considerable in Italy since the seventies, has had the political function of reproducing through their work in the education field

the social order of which women are victims, that is the domination of the masculine over the feminine. To explain this, De Conciliis recurs the concepts of symbolic violence and habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). As illustrated in section 2.4, habitus is something which is acquired mostly unwittingly; it is inculcated through family education first, and then school education, but the individual perceives it as a natural disposition, part of their own identity. This violence is symbolic because it is perpetrated through symbolic acts. External social structures become unconscious mental structures, subjective dispositions. Through the imposition of these perception categories about self and others, the dominants produce consensus over the dominated, and men over women. De Conciliis argues that feminine inferiority is inculcated through the transmission of symbolic habits such as a way of walking, of speaking, of moving etc. This constitutes a habitus that, as such, is extremely difficult to eradicate, especially when it leads to obedience. This explains why women often obey and sometimes are complicit to this symbolic violence. Becoming aware of one's positioning does not necessarily lead to emancipation, as the domination mechanisms are at the same time in the objectivity (ie body difference) and in mental structures, as habitus.

As a result, if in the Western society schools have become a place of emancipation for women, at the same time, they are the place where they reproduce the habitus of consensus, through pedagogic violence by teaching. Thus, they have transmitted culture – the national culture first of all. Pedagogic violence involves inculcating a knowledge which is specific of a culture, a class, a gender, as if they were universal. This “sweet and seductive violence” (De Conciliis, 2012, p. 42, my translation) is unrecognised by the recipients, and contributes to their subjugation.

Cultural transmission, especially the humanistic one, as mainly reserved to women, create a *habitus* of social superiority or inferiority. Italian women have used acculturation (the culture acquired in the school environment) as a means of social promotion first, and then, once they were teachers, they have reproduced social class differences “according to a double method of dissimulating violence: maternal (democratic) and disciplinary (selective)” (De Conciliis, p. 43, my translation). Thus, in its apparent neutrality, denying differences based on students families’ income, school reproduces these differences. De Conciliis concludes that

Therefore, the Italian State, favouring the feminisation first of teaching in primary schools, and then in the secondary ones since 1950s, has implicitly delegated the formation of school *habitus* to a dominated group, that used culture to deny the domination to which they were succumbing. (De Conciliis, p. 44, my translation, italics in the original).

The “woman-teacher-mother”, usually coming from the middle class, has been given the task to democratically integrate the lower classes, potentially subversive after 1968 protest movements, through the transmission of a “conformistic superficialisation of culture” (De Conciliis, p. 45). This consists of the acquisition of universalistic values, an “education to legality” (ibid.) apparently neutral, but reproducing the dominators-dominated power system, as such suitable to capitalism. Part of this system is the reproduction of the subordination of woman to man, where the masculine is the neutral, the universal (Farioli, 2015). The prevailing discourse is shaped according to masculine categories, of the big dominating the small, with the discourse of feminine

difference following masculine categories (De Conciliis, 2012). Farioli (2015) explains that the maternal, secretarial style that women bring to school reflect the qualities that masculine discourse attributes to women, so the different modalities do not question the fundamental subordination discourse about women. Female head teachers, on the contrary, often mould their role according to a masculine managerial role (Farioli, 2015), thus confirming the masculine discourse. Farioli adds that a very relevant consequence of feminisation among teachers is the de-politicization of school, to which women who, for many historical reasons, have often been less interested to political questions, have contributed. “The feminisation of teaching contributes to a depoliticisation of consciences that school, after putting down the pretence of ‘the formation of the aware citizen’, is appointed to realise” (Farioli, p. 46, my translation).

De Conciliis concludes her analysis observing that this delegation to the exertion of pedagogic symbolic violence, given to women by the State, “after the 1980s and 1990s turbo-capitalistic euphoria” (ibid., p. 54) has been symbolically revoked. The ‘cultural discourse’ is not dominant anymore in the larger society as producer of social dignity, as it has been replaced by a consume habitus, more centred on money and sexualised adolescent bodies as social rise drivers. The habitus women teachers contributed to reproduce sees its value reduced. Therefore, the woman teacher does not seem to be anymore the subject authorised to exercise the pedagogical violence; thus, her sexual and social inferiority re-emerge.

After analysing in this section the relationship between teaching and gender, and having presented interculturalism as a policy to deal with diversity in the Italian education (section 1.6), in the next section, I refer to culturally responsive pedagogies elaborated in contexts where immigration has a longer history than Italy. I do this with

the intent of having a view on an approach based on the recognition of difference and on the analysis of power differentials.

## **2.9 A Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The debate around what pedagogical models should be adopted in order to manage the education of students with a diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds in schools has been ongoing for many decades in countries of old immigration, such as the US, Canada, and Australia. With an increase of the global mobility and in the number of immigrant students, the debate has also extended to countries of more recent immigration. I review here some relevant concepts present in the international debate around pedagogy on how to address cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the classroom. I consider here Culturally Responsive Teaching, a pedagogy based on the acknowledgment of cultural difference. This theory was created in North America, and then taken up through the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Reid, 2017). However, it is relevant also in other contexts, such as the Italian one, where the history of immigration is structurally different and the cultural diversity in the classrooms is more recent, but where the development of a culturally responsive teaching is equally crucial.

Culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2013; Major, 2009; Santoro 2017, Sleeter, 2012; Edgeworth & Santoro, 2015) are based on the assumption that different ethnic groups have different cultures, expressed in different values, different communication and behavioural styles. Culturally responsive pedagogies claim that underachievement in ethnic minorities and low-income students needs to be



considered as the result of a conflict between cultures holding a different power, rather than the product of cultures seen as deficit (Ladson-Billings, 1995; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Gay, 2013; Santoro, 2017). What school must do, is to respect and value cultural differences. Diverse cultural heritage and competences must be given full citizenship in the classroom, and considered as legitimate knowledge. Rather than trying to alienate students from their culture of origin, teaching strategies must be used to build knowledge on the students' own cultural characteristics (Santoro, 2017), and through their previous experiences and cultural frames, in order to make learning meaningful to them Gay (2013).

Culturally responsive pedagogies seek to establish pedagogical connections between teachers who are predominantly middle class, female, and of European ancestry or, in the case of Europe, belonging to the mainstream ethnicity, and students who are increasingly diverse, as to language, ethnicity, race and culture, building on their knowledge. As Santoro (2017, p. 60) argues, developing culturally responsive pedagogies “means holding high expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students; respecting and understanding their cultural values, knowledge, practices and histories”. Furthermore, “a culturally responsive teacher promotes social justice through naming and critiquing discourses of inequality within, and beyond, the classroom” (ibid.). Santoro also highlights an ability of culturally responsive teachers to be reflective and reflexive: to reflect “upon their practice and its effectiveness”, and to reflect “upon their practice in relation to their beliefs and values about practice and how these beliefs and values are embedded within broader hegemonic discourses” (Santoro, 2017, p. 60). Being reflective and reflexive enable teachers to be “both flexible and responsive in regard to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse

students”, and “to address their needs through teaching strategies, curricula and assessment that are culturally relevant and meaningful”. Knowing the student, in terms of experience and home and community culture is central, in order to create a connection with them and build students’ learning from their cultural knowledge, “it is integral to developing good student-teacher relationships, designing meaningful and relevant curriculum, using effective assessment strategies and practices” (Santoro 2017, p. 61).

Equally critical for a culturally responsive teacher is to know their own ethnic and cultural self, in order to develop classroom practices and strategies that are culturally responsive (Santoro 2009, 2015). Santoro argues that to truly understand their students, teachers need to understand how their own beliefs and values are affected by their culture, and that they affect how they relate to their students, and what they deem to be good pedagogic practice (Santoro, 2017) Another aspect that Santoro (2017, p. 62) highlights, is the role of teachers as cultural ‘reproducers’: teachers transmit not only knowledge, but also “the values and practices a society deems good, valuable and worthy. They do this through what they do in their classrooms, including the curriculum they teach, the relationships they have with students and their engagement with broader education discourses”. This makes being aware of their own values, attitudes and beliefs, and the way these are rooted in social class, ethnicity and gender, is compelling.

In order to implement culturally responsive teaching, negative and deficit perceptions of communities marginalised by the mainstream society as always disadvantaged and powerless must be disproven and replaced with more positive ones (Gay 2013). Gay underlines the importance of teachers’ beliefs on various aspects of

the students' diversity, such as gender, social class, language, race, in shaping their teaching behaviours. While positive attitudes on the students' diversities generate positive expectations, with positive effects on the students learning commitment and outcomes, a negative attitude towards diversity generate negative teaching and learning results (Gay, 2010; 2013).

A second issue that Gay points out is that there is a widespread resistance to culturally responsive teaching. To be able to fight this resistance, it is important to acknowledge its reasons. For instance, it may sometimes be considered ineffective, and difficult to implement. This resistance can originate from the teachers themselves, but it can also be produced by the wider society and schools. The resistance may be nurtured by an attitude to deal with ethnic and cultural diversity as negative or non-existent. Many teachers who might not have a wide experience with diversity, prefer to concentrate on similarities rather than on difference, on harmony rather than on inequalities, conflicts, injustices, oppressions, often limiting their attention about difference only on ethnic customs, such as cuisines and celebrations (Gay, 2013). Research also show how teachers may lack confidence and knowledge on how to address culturally and linguistically diverse students, on how build up knowledge from their previous cultural knowledge and this with the official curriculum, on how to build second language learning from the students' first language (Santoro, 2017).

Thirdly, culture and difference in various aspects of the human condition, such as in culture, race, ethnicity, class, gender, are “essential ideologies and foundations of culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2013, p. 60); therefore, teachers cannot ignore these themes, if education is to be delivered to all the students. Culture, race and difference must be “unveiled” and treated as “potentially empowering factors” (ibid.,

p. 61), rather than ignored as difficult subjects to deal with. Culture, as it manifests itself in “attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors” (ibid., p. 62), is a central factor in people's life, therefore it is important that teachers acknowledge the relevance of cultural diversity in their teaching practices.

In culturally responsive pedagogies, the role of the teacher is central; teacher education plays an important role in their self-reflection and critical analysis about own beliefs and attitudes towards culturally and ethnically diverse students, and their causes. It is important to break the taboo that surrounds difference, especially when it is connected to race, to go beyond the concept that race does not matter, and that unintentional racism is no racism (Gay, 2010). She also makes it clear that examining one's beliefs and attitudes about cultural and ethnic diversity and being aware of one's own cultural heritage is not sufficient. A subsequent step is to be able to understand how beliefs about race, class, culture, affect the teaching practices and to put into practice instructional behaviours that are aimed to challenge institutional racism, inequities, marginalisation. In conclusion, “prospective teachers need to confront their attitudes and beliefs as well as develop content knowledge bases, pedagogical skills, and interactional abilities for teaching culturally diverse curriculum and students” (Gay, 2010, p. 150).

Matias (2016) criticises the concept of culturally responsive teaching, on the basis that it rarely engages race and racism. Matias argues that often a series of socially just terms, such as ‘culturally responsive’, ‘multicultural education’, and an interest in ‘closing the achievement gap’ are used to replace a real engagement in understanding why there is a gap and also a real commitment to address the problems of racism and Whiteness, that she identifies as the causes of inequalities. The symptom, which is the

racial achievement gap, cannot be healed without addressing its cause, that is to say, a “color blind racism” (Matias, 2016, p. 195). Teacher preparation programmes mostly maintain a system of white predominance, “through dispelling ideas of benevolent *saviority*, adopting false racially coded terminologies, and denying an understanding of the white self by deflecting focus only to ‘the Other’” (Matias, 2016, p. 196, italics in the original). She states the need for teacher education programmes to help teachers to be reflective on these concepts and identify their Whiteness, as it seems that the use of “socially just terminologies and abstract liberalism” (ibid.) is a protection against the exertion of colour-blind racism. However, the concept of whiteness has been developed by scholars from different backgrounds (Picower, 2009; Matias, 2016; Gillborn, 2005, 2008; Lander, 2011; Santoro, 2014, 2017), including those advocating a culturally responsive teaching. Santoro (2017, pp. 68-69) describes whiteness as “the inability to see how, as a member of the hegemonic ‘mainstream’, one is encultured and embedded in dominant discourses”.

Whiteness can be defined as a process of being and acting in the world; it is the subscription of ideologies that lead to, and maintain, either advertently or inadvertently, the domination of white people”. Lander (2011), building on Gillborn (2005; 2008), argues that “whiteness is socially constructed, reinforced and embedded within power structures” (Lander, 2011, p. 354), and that the hegemony built on whiteness is evident in all the institutions. In a study about how preservice teachers in the UK conceptualise race, Lander (2011) isolates some strategies used to maintain a power structure based on white privilege, or colour-blindness. Examples of these strategies are not to recognise the presence of ethnicity or race, and use this, even

without being aware, to justify inaction as a teacher, and see being white “as a colour-blind, neutral, liberal position” (Lander, 2011, p. 360).

The idea that despite good intentions on the teachers part, intercultural education can foster, rather than reduce, social injustice, if not associated with a high level of self-awareness and the willingness to pursue the dismantling of the present power relationships, has been expressed also by other scholars, such as Gorski (2008) and Sleeter (2012, 2014). Gorski (ibid.) maintains that the deficit theory of colonial origins, according to which the disadvantaged are to blame for their condition, has been adapted according to neoliberal policies. The blame for bad outcomes or interpersonal conflicts is now on a deficit of the proper skills and education, and the fixing of the achievement gap is to be obtained through assimilation.

Analysing the relationship between culturally responsive pedagogy and neoliberalism, Sleeter (2012) argues that since the 1990s, in the US neoliberalism, with its standardisation of student learning, both in curricula and pedagogy, has displaced an interest towards a culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is often used and understood in simplistic ways. It can be reduced to cultural celebration, disconnected from academic learning, or seen as a series of practices to follow, rather than a “paradigm for teaching and learning” (ibid., p. 569). Frequently there is a substitution of “cultural for political analysis of inequalities” (ibid., p.571), supported by a belief that “attending to culture alone will bring about equity” (ibid.). A need to bring light about the underlying conditions of achievement gaps, such as inequalities based on class and race, is often unrecognised. Nevertheless, Sleeter (2012) identifies an issue within multicultural education discourses which adopt a political analysis. They are not as successful as the 'culturalist' ones among educators,

who tend to position their practice within the dominant neoliberal ideology without questioning it, both because they are expected to do so, and because critical perspectives are often conceptually very dense, and not detailed with practical indications for the classroom. Sleeter argues that, in order to make this approach more widely accepted, it is necessary to document that culturally responsive pedagogy can produce high academic achievement on all students, and to give indications on classroom practices.

## **2.10 Research Questions**

As seen in chapter 1.1, studies on inclusion of pupils with immigrant backgrounds in Italian schools have been mainly carried out in Northern Italy, while both Central and Southern regions have not been much investigated. Moreover, the aspects which have been mainly considered in the Italian studies are academic achievement and interethnic relations in the classroom (Santagati, 2015).

International scholarship considers various aspects connected to the reproduction of social inequalities in the educational environment, linking them to the social class, gender and ethnicity of the students. A study on the relation between how teachers perceive and position themselves and their pupils in terms of social class, gender, and ethnicity, and how this informs teachers' and head teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards their students with immigrant backgrounds has more rarely been attempted, especially in Italian scholarship. Equally, the consequences of these perceptions on how teachers and head teachers understand policies and frame pedagogies, contributing to reinforce or dismantle class, gender and ethnic inequities,

has been underexplored at international level, and has not been the object of specific attention in the Italian context. Adopting an intersectional perspective, this study aims to give a contribution towards the investigation of possible links between the elements mentioned above, addressing in particular the following research questions:

- How do the teachers' and head teachers' social class, gender and ethnic identities shape their perceptions of students with immigrant backgrounds in Italy?
- How do the teachers' and head teachers' perceptions of students with immigrant backgrounds in Italy shape their pedagogical attitudes?
- How do their understanding of education policies inform their beliefs and pedagogical practices in classes with students with immigrant backgrounds?

## **2.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored literature and theoretical ideas about teachers' identity. I introduced theoretical concepts about the individual in relation to society, that are used to have an insight in on how the individual construct herself or himself, and the others, in particular in terms of social class, gender, and ethnicity. I have also introduced culturally responsive pedagogy, which offers concepts and ideas to education in multicultural environments, based on the aim to promote social justice in education and in the society. Finally, I highlighted a gap in knowledge and stated the research questions that this study aims to address. In the following chapter, I illustrate



my research approach and its motivations, including a reflection on my position as a researcher.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology and Design**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In investigating teachers' attitudes towards students with immigrant backgrounds in Italy, this study is set in the qualitative research tradition. In this chapter, after giving reasons for designing the research as a qualitative study, I consider my positionality as a researcher and discuss issues attached to it, such as reflexivity and power relations. Then, I describe the data collection process, by means of semi-structured, open-ended interviews, and the choice of the schools and participants. After describing my approach to data analysis, I finally present some ethical concerns and issues arisen during different phases of the research.

#### **3.2 A Qualitative Study**

Qualitative research can be used to explore subjectivities, identities, and to understand how things work in the situation studied. It is an instrument for an in-depth exploration and understanding of people's "beliefs, attitudes, opinions and practices" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 23). In a field like education, a qualitative approach is a tool useful to have a deeper and nuanced insight on the people and dynamics involved.

Within qualitative research, there are different ontological assumptions, ranging from objective to subjective ones. In a realistic (or naturalistic) perspective,

an objective reality is believed to exist independently from human perception; the aim is to observe and describe what happens in the real world. In this case, the participants are seen as sources of data, without any interpretative role. By contrast, when qualitative research assumes a constructivist viewpoint, it is based on the ontological assumption that “‘Reality’ [is] constructed within historical and social contexts by individuals. Multiple perspectives may lead to multiple meanings in data” (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 26, Table 2.2). In this perspective, the epistemological assumption is that knowledge is socially constructed according to personal perception and interpretation, and reality is knowable “through an examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants” (Bryman, 2016, p.375). The researcher’s focus is on how the participants make sense of their experience and of their own world (Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 2013). Researchers “do not find knowledge; rather, they construct it” (Merriam, 2010, p. 457) together with participants, and take a personal responsibility in making meaning out of that.

Another important feature of qualitative research is that it adopts an inductive approach in the creation of theories, which are generated through the data gathered, unlike the deductive approach used in quantitative approach, aimed to test theories. Bryman (2016) argues that qualitative research guarantees flexibility through the formulation of not too specific research questions, allowing people's worldviews to emerge without being constricted within a too tight predetermined structure. This also allows the researcher to have an open attitude towards the object of the study, and adjust the research questions as the investigation develops. Furthermore, the researcher can use information gathered through verbal and nonverbal interaction, through the observation of the context where the exchange takes place, can expand their

understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, can check interpretation and clarify (Merriam, 2010).

The constructionist concept of social phenomena as not given, but constantly produced and revised by its social actors, is close to the post-structural conception of individuality and social reality, in that it rejects an essentialist concept of the 'self', as a fixed, univocal entity. Meaning is unstable, as it is linked to context, which is in constant transformation. As a consequence, research does not aim to generalise, but rather to explore and understand local manifestations of phenomena (Bryman, 2016). In this study, I have sought to understand how the participants interpret what they experience, and they connect it with pedagogic attitudes, rather than looking for an explanation. In my choice for a constructivist viewpoint, I am aware that the account I illustrate in this thesis is partial and specific, not to be regarded as definitive (Bryman, 2016).

My work focuses on teachers and head teachers working in five lower secondary schools, distributed in Ancona province, Marche region, which stretches from the Adriatic Sea to the Appennine Ridge in Central Italy. I chose this area and these schools on the basis of my previous knowledge of the territory, both from a personal and a professional point of view, and of documents produced by the schools and published on school websites. The schools were chosen “for both heterogeneity (...) and homogeneity” (Bryman, 2016, p. 409). I also wanted to combine schools located in places that were familiar to me, to others unfamiliar. The data gathered through interviews, interaction and reflective notes have been enriched by my knowledge of the environment. I will describe the research sites and the participants in more detail in sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. My interest in studying this situation

originates from my experience as a class teacher in modern languages in lower secondary schools with a presence of students with immigrant backgrounds in Ancona province, from my personal and academic formation, from my beliefs in an education aimed at promoting equality and social justice. My interest developed as I was in charge for the welcoming activities of the students with immigrant backgrounds in the schools where I was working. This experience as a whole has given me an insight on how important personal views are when dealing with many aspect of schooling, in particular those connected to diversity and equality. I will come back to my positionality as a researcher in section 3.3.

In my study, besides describing what I had observed, I attempted an interpretation and developed hypothesis about connections among data, with the awareness that their possible relevance is limited to the particular contexts given, and not truths generalisable to other contexts or situations. I am conscious that many are the variables in the context studied and in the research process in general, and also that I have considered and attached meaning to certain aspects in spite of others, according to my subjective views. To address concerns about rigor, validity, reliability and generalisability (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014) in qualitative studies, I adopted systematic procedures.

*Validity*, or internal validity, as Merriam (1998) calls it, is about how findings actually capture and describe reality, to what extent they are ‘accurate or credible’ (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). The notion of validity is not universal; it has changed in different contexts and according to different theories, and it is related to the investigator's experience. As in qualitative research “what is being observed are people's constructions of reality, how they understand the world” (Merriam, 1988,

p.167), what the researcher is expected to do, is to represent these constructions adequately, in a way that reflect as honestly as possible how the participants perceive themselves and their experiences. It is therefore important “to understand the perspective of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (Merriam, 1988, p.168).

As to ensure validity, I adopted a few strategies suggested by the literature (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). Firstly, I provided a triangulation of data collection instruments and perspectives. My main source of evidence were individual interviews with teachers and with head teachers, but also field notes and reflective notes written after the interviews. In order to outline the context, I considered some school policy documents available. I also adopted another strategy to enhance validity, that is respondent validation. As suggested by Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier (2013), I did this both during the interviews, asking for confirmation of some important points, through summarising and then asking questions such as ‘did you mean...?’, and also by submitting the interview transcripts to the participants, in order to reinforce the trustworthiness of my research. I emailed the transcripts to the interviewees, explaining the criteria I had followed in the transcription, and asking them to make clear notations in case something did not reflect their thinking or they wanted to clarify something. To avoid a lengthy process, I asked to respond within four weeks, after which, I would have considered my transcription as accepted, unless they had required more time.

Asking for ‘member checking’ (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013) on the transcripts can have positive and negative sides. It can enhance the trust of the

interviewee in the interviewer, as it gives the former some control over the procedure; contemporarily, it gives the interviewer the certainty that their transcription is accurate and no misunderstandings have occurred. At the same time, there is a risk that the editing can result into a polished transcript, purged for instance of comments or opinions they regret having expressed during the interview. As I show in section 4.6, the reaction to the transcripts has been varied, and in some cases led to 'heavy' editing. This raised the question of the convenience of submitting the transcripts; nevertheless, it was something I had stated in the Information Sheet schools received during the recruitment and that, therefore, was expected.

*Reliability* is related to making sure that if another investigator wants to do the same study again, following the same procedures, they will come to similar findings and conclusions. This is quite problematic in qualitative research, which relies on the assumption that there can be many different interpretations of the phenomenon studied, that are mediated by the researcher's own individuality, with their beliefs and preconceptions. Leaving aside positivistic ideas of replicability, Merriam (1988) suggests that reliability can be seen as 'dependability', 'consistency', which happen when the results make sense. Ways of increasing reliability are illustrating the investigator's position, the theories behind the study, the context and how the participants are selected. Reliability is also enhanced if all the investigation procedures are outlined and documented carefully (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014).

*Generalisation*, or external validity according to Merriam (1988)'s definition, is another problem sometimes raised about qualitative studies. A concept of generalisation compatible with qualitative research may be that of research findings

not as conclusions, but as hypothesis. Then it is left to the reader to see if there is anything in the study that they can learn and extend to other situations.

In this study, I have tried to throw some light on aspects of a complex issue, such as how teachers personal features, experiences and understanding of national education policies can shape their beliefs and attitudes towards culturally diverse students. While not presuming to either finding a 'truth', or to generalise the findings to other people in the same or other contexts, this study aims to leave the reader the opportunity to find something that can be useful in other contexts. In the following section, I describe some issues related to the researcher's role in a qualitative study.

### **3.3 My Positionality as a Researcher**

The role of the researcher is central in qualitative research, as the findings and the interpretation of data depend on their positionality and background, the reflections and the elaborations they make. Positionality is where one stands in relation to the others. The traditional distinction made between outsider and insider investigator underlines the benefits and drawbacks of both positions. Being an insider is supposed to guarantee a more immediate access to the investigation, the ability to ask more relevant questions and a deeper understanding due to the sharing of a common background. Conversely, being an outsider is seen as an asset for asking less predictable questions and for eliciting more explanations from the interviewees on topics that an insider is supposed to already know. An outsider might have a more objective view on what they study, but also might lack deep understanding, especially



in relation to the link between the phenomenon studied and the context (Savvides, Al-Youssef, Colin, & Garrido, 2014).

However, discussions in line with a critical, poststructuralist concept of identity have highlighted a more complex understanding of being an insider/outsider. This view rests on the concept that cultures are not monolithic and static, and that identities depend on a plurality of factors, such as class, gender, culture, education, age. They are “complex and multifaceted, changeable and fluid” (Santoro & Smyth, 2010, p. 496); the individual's position is dynamic, and can shift according to the situation, the circumstances and over time. The researcher's position is therefore fluid, and can shift between the two ends – insider/outsider - during the research, according to the circumstances in the research field (Merriam et al., 2001; Savvides et al., 2014). In the investigation process, “identity and belonging emerge not from static conceptual categories, but from fluid engagement between researchers and participants” (Savvides et al., p. 413). Researchers and respondents can be insiders and outsiders at the same time, depending on the multiple ways different factors such as gender, social class, culture, ethnicity, intersect with each other.

Qualitative research methodology acknowledges the subjective character of research, in that the whole research procedure is entrenched in the researcher's individuality: what they want to investigate, the questions they ask, what they observe and deem relevant, how they analyze and interpret data, according to their classed, gendered, and ethnic identities (Santoro & Smyth, 2010). This “intersection of subjectivities and research practices” (ibid., p. 495), with its acknowledgement that the research is not an unbiased, neutral process, and the growing recognition in qualitative research of the potential influence on the various stages of the research of

personal characteristics, experiences, beliefs, theoretical, political and ideological orientation, emotional response during the research process (Berger, 2015), make it important, for the researcher, to be reflective around the factors which can influence the research. The researcher's personality impacts the research from the recruitment, to the collection of data through interviewing, the analysis of data and the conclusions (Berger, 2015).

Reflexivity and transparency on the part of the investigator are seen in qualitative research as methods to enhance the validity of the study and the findings, and to ensure it is an ethical procedure. Reflexivity makes the methodological issues the researcher faces, including their positionality in relation to the people studied, explicit. The researcher must openly acknowledge that their own identities and theoretical perspectives affect the way they produce knowledge (Berger, 2015), that is, how they conduct the research, including how the recruiting took place, the location for the interviewing, power relations within the field and with the interviewer (Santoro & Smyth, 2010), and the conclusions they draw. For this reason, they need to be transparent on who they are, on how they have conducted the research and come to conclusion (Savvides et al., 2014). On the other hand, as Taylor (2004) argues, self-reflexivity has subjective and structural limitations. In fact, it is impossible to be completely aware of all of our motivations; in addition to this, talking openly about one's own positioning does not dissolve problems of power imbalance and perspective. Adkins (2004) as well affirms that there are aspects of identity that are unconscious and entrenched in classed and gendered positions that escape reflexivity.

Aware of the limitations about declarations on reflexivity towards the researched, I express here aspects of my positioning as I understand them. I have been

a teacher in secondary schools in the geographical area where I did the investigation for about 15 years. That is also the area where I have lived most of my life. As such, I have a good knowledge of the general context, of general educational policies and educational contexts and dynamics. This positions me as an insider as a researcher. On the other hand, in the last three years, I have been away pursuing a PhD in Scotland. In this period, there have been dramatic changes in education policies, in terms of pressure on teachers, increased accountability towards standards, a twist towards privatised and managerial forms of work, education as employability, merit discourse, which I have not directly lived in its most recent developments. In this, I am an outsider. I share with the teachers I interviewed the educational background, the present social class belonging, being part of the ethnic majority and culture, and mostly gender. With some of the participants, I share a working class background. While this to some extent qualifies me as an insider, I still was an outsider in the schools where I gathered data, and in two of the areas where the schools are situated. The teachers interviewed saw me as a colleague, but also as someone coming from outside to investigate and potentially judge them. Doing research for University, and furthermore for a foreign University, put me in an outsider position. Also being a teacher who is doing ‘something else’, something related to university, in a profession that in Italy does not give career perspectives, may translate into an imbalance of power which I have tried to overcome presenting myself for what I was, a person who had been working as a teacher, but currently was a student researcher.

In any research, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is based on power, linked to factors such as gender, age, hierarchical position, education, and how they intersect with each other; therefore, the power balance varies according

to the different positionalities of the parts in the interview context. This is something researchers need to 'not only be aware of, but to negotiate in the research process' (Merriam et al., 2001, p.413). This aspect has been highlighted in particular by feminist scholars, who stress a need for an equal relationship researcher-researched, where the two parts are considered co-constructors of knowledge. They suggest the relationship be based on a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship, which gives space to the interviewee's voice and perspective (Merriam et al., 2001; Bryman, 2016). To mitigate this power imbalance, and try and build a relationship based on respect and mutual trust (Santoro & Smyth, 2010), I used strategies such as member checking (as described in par. 3.2) reminding them that they would have a final say in the interview, and tried not to be or appear judgmental.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered “the primary instrument for data collection”, a “human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive” (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). Being in the field, gave me the opportunity to gather information not only through the interviews, but also from informal observation of the context and of the interaction, adapting and modifying data gathering strategies according to the situation. In this section, after describing the research sites, I describe the participants, and then conclude motivating and describing the choice for semi-structured interviews. While for some of the schools quite detailed information regarding the students and the teachers were accessible through school documents, for other schools these information could only be reconstructed through the participants’

words. Sometimes the information is referred to different years, but the situation is unlikely to change dramatically in one year or two. Therefore I consider their disomogeneity acceptable, in relation to validity. To highlight differences and commonalities, I have attached tables with the information available to each description.

### **3.4.1 Research Sites**

My choice of schools has been led by the aim to provide the research with a variety of contexts and experiences. The schools taken into consideration are spread in Ancona Province, Marche Region, Central Italy. They have diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic compositions as to pupils. The choice was based both on my previous personal and professional knowledge of the characteristics of the territory and on indirect knowledge of some of its schools, and on information gathered through reading their on-line 2016-2019 PTOFs (*Piano Triennale dell'Offerta Formativa* – Educational Offering Three-Year Plan) and their current RAVs (*Rapporto di Autovalutazione* - Self-Assessment Report). These are documents that each school must produce and make available to the public; both contain a socio-economic-cultural analysis of the school and its organisation. The PTOF also contains a planning of activities for the subsequent three-years for the students, the teaching and administrative staff. It is elaborated by the teaching body of the school, following the head teacher guidelines, and is finally approved by a school board made up of the head teacher, representatives of the parents, and of teaching and non-teaching staff. I refer to these documents here to describe the schools context, but I do not quote them

directly, as this would make the schools recognisable, as they are available on the schools websites. Even if both documents were produced in the same period (between 2015 and 2016), the self-portraits emerging from the two descriptions are at times partially contradictory, with one of the portraits presenting a more ‘problematic’ situation than the other. An explanatory hypothesis might be that the PTOF is conceived as a sort of ‘identity card’ of the school, outlining the cultural identity and the mission of the school, together with the curricular, extracurricular, educational and organisational set-up of the school (Law 107, 2015), and is aimed to the public. Conversely, the RAV, even if accessible to the public, is a more technical document, primarily aimed at school (self)-assessment.

The schools are all State lower secondary schools; they belong to wider comprehensive institutions (*Istituti Comprensivi*), which also include infantry and elementary schools. I chose State schools because they are by far the prevalent typology in the Italian schooling system, where private schools constitute a minority. In particular, in Marche Region, only 3% of lower secondary schools are private (*scuole paritarie*), with around 3.4% of the students in this segment attending them (MIUR, 2016). Investigating lower secondary schools is relevant as they represent a critical segment in the Italian school system, in which they mark the end of the comprehensive segment prior to the streamed higher secondary school. In this, they have a relevant role in increasing social inequalities by backing up existing stratifications (Mincu, 2015). In this section, after presenting an overview table about pupils nationality and participants recruited in each school, I describe specific school contexts in more detail.

**Table 1 – Percentage of Italian/non Italian pupils and list of participants**

<b>School</b>	<b>Italian pupils</b>	<b>Non Italian pupils</b>	<b>Participants</b>
1	53%	47%	Antonella, F, 60, Maths & Science Daniela, F, 53, Modern Languages Filippo, M, 39, Humanities Fiorella, F, 41, Humanities Laura, F, 40, Humanities Nadia, F, 46, Humanities
2	93%	7%	Alberto, M, 65, Head teacher
3	70%	30%	Beatrice, F, 45, Maths & Science Danilo, M, 54, Music Leonardo, M, 49, Art Pietro, M, 37, Music Valentina, F, 36, Technology
4	89%	11%	Gabriella, F, 64, Modern Languages Nicola, M, 42, Humanities Orlando, M, 56, Head teacher Patrizia, F, 61, Art Roberta, F, 49, Humanities Simone, M, 53, Maths & Science
5	82%	18%	Carla, F, 56, Humanities Guido, M, 51, PE Marzia, F, 45, Humanities Orlando, M, 56, Head teacher Sonia, F, 54, Modern Languages Tiziana, F, 46, Humanities

**Table 2 - School 1**

Area	Social class	Total pupils 290		Total teachers 30
City on the coast (same as School 2)  Urban area, well serviced	Mainly working class	Italian	Non Italian	Gender: 38 F - 2 M  Average age: 40  All ethnic majority
		53% (about 2% Romani)	47% (78% of whom born in Italy) Albania, Romania, Bangladesh the most common; then Ukraine, Ghana, Tunisia, Dominican Republic, South America, China, Morocco (percentages not available)	

Referred to October 2015 (information provided by Daniela, responsible for welcoming foreign students)

School 1 is situated in a city where the economy is mainly based on the tertiary sector, with commerce, craft and services, public offices and health services. The presence of manufactures, which previously occupied a few thousands people, has remarkably reduced after the global 2007-2008 financial crisis, while unemployment and job insecurity have increased dramatically, leading to the marginalisation of social sectors and some tensions with the immigrant population (Lucantoni, 2009). The school is located in a well-connected, well-serviced urban area, where the population is progressively ageing. The active population is mainly employed in the service sector, although entrepreneurs and professionals are present. Generally, both parents of this school pupils are employed. The area where this *Istituto Comprensivo* stands, offers services such as schools from nursery to upper secondary, sports facilities, health services, charities and cultural centres, with the main centres of aggregation being the local parishes and civic centre. Nevertheless, their services do not cover the youth



needs, therefore the school is committed in supplying further formative activities, such as remedial, enrichment and guidance work. In the aforementioned school documents (PTOF and RAV) families are described as interested and available towards the school, even if at times the tendency to delegate education and formation to school becomes evident.

In October 2015, in the whole *Istituto Comprensivo* there were over 1.100 pupils. 47% of them were of foreign nationality, 78% of whom were born in Italy. 1% of the total were Romani, usually with Italian citizenship. As to the pupils with a foreign nationality, the school documents assert that their families are fully part of the socio-economic-cultural fabric of the city. On the other hand, they also state that the families' schooling level is low, especially in foreign families, where illiteracy is common. There are high levels of unemployment or occasional employment. Those employed, mainly work in the tertiary sector, with only a few in clerical or professional occupations. In order to provide the different ethnicities with what they need, the school makes educational, organisational, management choices aimed to reach the formative targets and school success for all the pupils. A feature to consider is the high level of mobility of the foreign pupils during the school year, due to new arrivals throughout the whole school year either from the Southern Italy or from other European or extra-European countries. As they have often had an irregular education, personalised interventions as to the acquisition of the Italian language, welcoming activities and the acquisition/reinforcement of the basic skills are enacted. Their use of the language of origin in the family is described as a fact hindering the acquisition of the Italian language. Frequent are the situations of economic disadvantage and family

fragmentation also between the Italian students population, with the occurrence of some petty crime episodes. However, there are no early school leavers.

**Table 3 - School 2**

Area	Social class	Total pupils 288		Total teachers 25
		Italian	Non Italian	
City on the coast (same as School 1)  Peripheral residential area, well serviced Sports facilities, but no cultural initiatives	Mainly middle class, with some cases of economic and cultural deprivation, especially among families with a foreign background and fairground travellers	93% (including a few fairground travellers)	7% (all second generation) Mainly Northern Africa and Romania	Gender: 23 F - 2 M  Average age: 50-55  All ethnic majority

Referred to June 2016 (information provided by Alberto, head teacher)

School 2 is located in the outskirts of the same city as School 1. In the school area there are sports facilities and playgrounds, but cultural initiatives are lacking. In this context, according to the school policy document PTOFT 2016/2019, the school acts as an important centre for social aggregation and formation. A collaboration with public institutions is implemented; the City Council contributes with educational interventions, such as the integration of non Italian students. The population is mainly middle class; nevertheless, some families, especially those with immigrant backgrounds, are in a situation of economic hardship and cultural deprivation.

According to the school RAV (June 2016), the presence of foreign students is scarce and only second generation, but figures about the students population are not given. A consequence of this, is that human and economic resources can be employed for other aims, such as to cultivate other forms of integration or excellence. Unemployment does not have a particular incidence in the area; nevertheless, the number of those who cannot afford buying the text books required is increasing. In addition to this, there are pupils in the *Istituto Comprensivo*, who belong to travelling families, whose school attendance is very irregular, to the point of early school leaving.

**Table 4.- School 3**

Area	Social class	Total pupils 265		Total teachers 33
		Italian	Non Italian	Gender: 27 F - 6 M  Average age: 45  All ethnic majority
Industrial town in the hinterland  Peripheral residential area, well serviced	Working class, high unemployment	Around 70% (including a consistent, but not given, number of Romani and fairground travellers, and pupils from sociomedical structures)	Around 30% Bangladesh Nigeria Romania Marocco Albania Tunisia India Santo Domingo Algeria Others 90% born in Italy	

Referred to January 2016 (information from the school documents, website, and from participants).

School 3 is situated in a peripheral working class area of an industrial town in Ancona province hinterland. Especially after 2009, the immigration process (see table 4 for nationalities) has added to a population with a low socio-economic and cultural level.

The catchment area is defined as particularly critical, with a high rate of unemployment and a presence of around 30% of non-Italian students. The school also caters all the Romani and fairground travellers pupils in town, who attend the school for a few months according to the family mobility, and pupils coming from sociomedical structures in the territory. The difficult situation guarantees some extra public funding, and the high rate of non-Italian pupils favours the opportunity for a didactic framed in an intercultural perspective. This entails the need for an innovation of teaching methodology, after an accurate formation of the teachers. The high stability of the teaching staff in this *Istituto Comprensivo* guarantees a deep knowledge of the context and educational continuity, which could lead to an improvement in the educational outcomes of the pupils, if the teachers were adequately motivated and guided. The continuous succession of head teachers in the last few years has led to inconsistency of leadership and lack of medium-long termed educational-managerial planning.

**Table 5 -School 4**

Area	Social class	Total pupils 194		Total teachers 30
		Italian	Non Italian	
Small town in an inner area. Caters small urban centres and scarcely populated remote villages. Transport issues.	Mainly working class, with some upper middle class.	89%	11% (predominantly second generation). Nationalities mainly present: Macedonia, Albania, Tunisia and Romania, but others are present)	Gender: 23 F - 7 M  Average age: 45-50  All ethnic majority

Referred to December 2015. Data provided by Nicola (deputy head teacher).

School 4 is in an inner area, far from major urban centres and the main communication routes. In the lower secondary school, in December 2015 the students were almost 200, 11% of whom non-Italian citizens. The territory has culturally interesting sites, but with transportation issues, which makes the use of these resources for didactic purposes difficult. The school caters pupils from the two main urban centres, and from small villages, mainly from mountain areas, that are scarcely or at all populated. Some pupils have to travel for almost one hour to reach the school.

The socio-economic and cultural context are described in the school documents as average-low and not integrated. In the document, it is reported that a few groups of competent and collaborative pupils, coming from upper middle class environments, support their disadvantaged school mates. Apparently easily approachable from a human point of view, the situation is hardly manageable from a social one. This is attributed to a series of factors, ranging from a widespread economic crisis, which

involve the manufactures in the area and causes an increasing unemployment, and the presence of small farms. Furthermore, there is a presence of foreign families with social, cultural and language issues, not well integrated in the local society, and of semi-literate families moved from disadvantaged areas in Italy. Moreover, family separations and desertions are considered the origin of a widespread distress for the children. The school collaboration with a number of external institutions, such as sports and cultural associations, has not resulted in the creation of an educational network. The school documents highlight that financial resources are not adequate to the essential needs: remedial and enrichment work, school more extensively open, and further training for the teachers.

While the teaching staff are generally ‘young’, skilled and competent, due to high level of permanent formation, part of it is still resistant to change and tend to reproduce the old didactic practices they are familiar with. Another restraint is that, due to the inconvenient location of the school, teachers tend to move to other schools, thus making it difficult to create a real school identity, with shared aims and practices. Personalised didactic interventions are aimed to non-native Italian speakers, to improve language skills. The parents elected as representatives in parents’ councils are proactive, but they failed to build a dialogue and involve many of the families, especially those whose children are more in need. Many parents are described as in poverty, both economic and cultural, and lacking the cultural and educational instruments to take care of their children at home. The consequence of this is a widespread disadvantage, also from a school point of view, which keeps building up and that school alone cannot solve.

**Table 6- School 5**

Area	Social class	Total pupils 260		Total teachers 29
Small town in the inner area, with many industries until 2008, now in economic crisis.	Working class, with many immigrant families. Less arrivals and leavings due to economic crisis.	Italian	Non Italian	Gender: 22 F - 7 M  Average age: 50  All ethnic majority
		82% (no Romani)	18% (33% of which second generation) Main nationalities: Albania, Macedonia, Morocco, but 19 nationalities are present, most of them with one or two presences)	

Referred to September 2017. Data provided by Orlando, head teacher. It is the only school with accurate information about the ethnic composition of pupils.

School 5 is located in a small town in the Pre-Appennines, in a working-class area. As a consequence of the deep 2007-8 global financial crisis, its industrial economy, which in the past had attracted immigration from different areas, is in recession, causing social problems to the pupils' families. As a consequence, the school, characterised by a strong ethnic diversity, has seen their presence drop in the last few years, from 25% in 2007, to around 18% ten years later. Moreover, one third of them were born in Italy. In the school policy documents, the school is presented as an actor of change, committed in the inclusion of diverse students, in terms of culture and abilities. Ethnic variety is presented as a resource, a training to active citizenship based on tolerance and peaceful cohabitation.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of homogeneity of the data is due to the schools not always recording all of the information, that tends to be more punctual in the schools where the current head teacher has been there for some time. In the following section, I provide information about the participants.

### **3.4.2 Participants**

The investigation involved teachers employed in State schools, of a range of ages, genders, social backgrounds, experiences and professional formation, and the head teachers of the schools selected. Overall, I interviewed 23 participants, 9 males (including the two head teachers) and 14 females, with age ranging from 36 to 65, and an average of 47. All of them belong to the ethnic majority. The reason for involving also the head teachers was to allow the viewpoints of a diversity of actors operating in the school environment to emerge, and generate different accounts from people covering different positions in the same environment. Even if teachers are those who concretely engage in a day-to-day relationship with the students, and make everyday decisions in their classes, the identity and point of view of the head teachers is worth investigating too. International research acknowledges the significance of school leaders in the school success and on students outcome (Bezzina, Paletta, & Alimehmeti, 2017), and appreciates the increased importance of school leadership in the last two decades (Bush & Glover, 2014). In Italy, this may be dated back to the promulgation of Law 59 (1997), and subsequent Decrees and Acts which introduced the autonomy of schools, devolving to them some decisional powers for over one century reserved to the central state (Paletta & Bezzina, 2016). As my research does



not aim to enquire the role and type of leadership, I do not engage in theoretical discussions about school leadership, and enquire their influence in terms of general attitude and school climate.

The head teachers were recruited by letter directly sent to them. They were then contacted by phone, to make sure they had received my correspondence. The teachers were recruited through the head teachers who, in this respect, acted as gatekeepers. The recruitment was initiated by a letter explaining the nature and the aims of the research and asking the teachers to volunteer by contacting me personally. I was rather doubtful about the teachers' availability at first, because the recruitment started in the last part of the school year, when schools are extremely busy with end of term tasks, before a long summer pause. Classes normally finish in the first decade of June, to start again in mid-September. For teachers, school activities normally end on 30<sup>th</sup> of June (for those who are committed in exam boards), and start again on 1<sup>st</sup> September, with staff and department meetings and other preparatory activities. To 'earn time', I decided to start the contacts with schools before the summer pause, and try to make arrangements for the beginning of September. To my surprise, the response was generally very positive.

When I contacted the head teachers with follow-up telephone calls, two of them were positive about the participation of their schools, but wanted to consult their collaborators first. In School 1, the decision was submitted to the teachers' board and approved. The teacher in charge for the activities aimed to the students with a foreign background was designated to keep contacts with me and organise. I had to clarify once again that I was interested in teachers covering different roles and with diverse professional and personal profiles, and that the participation should be completely

voluntary, and also that I did not need huge numbers of participants. The response was reassuring, as apparently more than a few teachers offered to be interviewed. Even if I had never worked in that school, some people were ex-colleagues or acquaintances. I managed to interview two teachers in that time, with the agreement to do more interviews in September. In School 2, the head teacher confirmed that it was a very busy time at the moment, but he would leave my file in evidence for the new head teacher, as he was going to retire. Nevertheless, he gave his personal availability to be interviewed before retiring. In School 3, the head teacher, after a consultation with his collaborators, answered in writing that his school could take part in the research, but after the summer pause, after agreeing a schedule for interviews with the teachers. However, he retired in the summer, and I had to repeat the procedure with the new head teacher, who accepted and contacted some teachers that might take part in the interviews. To get in touch with the head teacher in School 4 was more complicated, as he turned out to be covering the position only as an appointed head teacher, covering the full position in another *Istituto Comprensivo*, due to a shortage of head teachers. However, he was willing to let the school take part in the research at the beginning of the new school year, when we agreed to extend the study also to School 5, where he had been a head teacher in a permanent position for the last ten years. In both schools, he put in charge his deputies for the organisation of the interviews. Overall, the recruitment worked well; however, in the conclusions (section 7.8), I will highlight some of the advantages and limitations to it.

My aim was to interview four to five teachers in each of the four schools, and the respective head teachers. The decision about the number of participants was due to the need to have an amount of data at the same time sufficient for a qualitative research,

but also manageable, considering that each interview was deemed to last at least one hour, and needed to be transcribed, and then the transcription translated from Italian into English. Translating, in particular, besides taking time, added a layer of complexity, as I will illustrate in the next section, where I deal with the interviewing choice and process.

### **3.4.3 Interviews**

Interviewing is a widely used method to gather data in qualitative research, with a choice for open-ended, semi-structured questions, which gives access to the participants' perspectives (Bryman, 2016; Merriam, 1988) and can provide rich data (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Interviews are “a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experience” (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563). As Bryman (2016) argues, while structured interviews rely on standardisation for reliability and validity of measurement, and aim to answer research questions which have been rigidly predetermined by the researcher, semi-structured interviews give more flexibility. They have allowed me to start from not too specific research questions, and refine them during the research, according to the direction suggested by the themes and issues emerging from the interviews. To this purpose, I have suggested wide themes, but have, at least at the beginning, let the conversation be quite free. Following Bryman (2016, pp. 466-467), “in qualitative interviewing, ‘rambling’ or going off at tangents is often encouraged – it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important; in quantitative research, it is usually regarded as a nuisance and discouraged”.

Some scholars, such as Jerolmack and Khan (2014), argue that it is inappropriate to try to infer behaviour from interviews, as people's account of what they do is commonly not consistent with what they actually do, and their acts often are not in accord with their expressed attitudes. Researchers who do this, commit what they call “the *attitudinal fallacy* – the error of inferring the situated behavior from verbal accounts” (ibid, p.179, italics in the original), rather than from direct observation. Nevertheless, others argue that “the attitudinal fallacy problem has been over-stated because research suggests that there is often a fairly good correspondence between accounts and actual behaviour” (Bryman, 2016, p. 496).

As stated in a previous section, the interaction between interviewer and respondent is a complex one; it is determined by both subjectivities (Merriam, 1988) and involves their personalities, attitudes and orientations, together with the interviewer's skills. To mitigate the scarcity of previous experience in interviewing, and to check, predict and make the modifications needed to have access to the information desired, without causing unnecessary tension, I role-played and discussed the teachers' interview schedules with two friend teachers from a similar background to those who are interviewed in the proper investigation. This proved to be very valuable to check how the interview worked. Their response was very useful not only for technical aspects such as length, clarity of the questions, fluidity from one topic to another, but also for verifying if some questions might sound awkward or made them feel uncomfortable. Especially questions about national identity and religion were discussed and reframed, as were found difficult to answer. This difficulty also emerged when interviewing the participants, but finding a more ‘oblique’ way to pose them eased the conversation.

I have done semi-structured interviews with teachers and head teachers individually for about one hour. The interview schedules, partially differentiated for teachers and head teachers, have represented a general framework, which has been adapted and modified, both gradually during the investigation with different interviewees, and also during the single interview. The questions were about the teachers' and head teachers' background, their professional formation and aspirations, their feelings as to national belonging, and their views on education and educational policies, with particular regard to the students with immigrant backgrounds. To generate of the questions, I referred to the literature in the field, as delineated in the literature review.

The interviews were carried out in the school premises. These seemed to be the most convenient place, both for the interviewees, who were already there, in a familiar place, and for me, as it provided a safe and easy place where to arrange the interviews. On the other hand, I was aware that this could influence the interviewees' responses, as they might feel a stronger psychological pressure to kind of loyalty towards the institution they were working for at the moment. In my information letter, I asked for a reserved space in the school, where privacy was guaranteed. However, I had the impression that this was left to the individual teacher initiative. This proved to be a critical point in the first interview. The teacher I was going to interview suggested the location be the staff room and insisted on this choice even if I tried to suggest a more private space. My impression was that he wanted to show that he had nothing to hide, maybe more to his colleagues than to me. This I think influenced the interview, giving it a more official character. While at the beginning of the interview we were alone in the room, afterwards other teachers came in as they presumably had a gap hour

between classes. This first interview was quite short (38'); there were questions, particularly those about the school, where I had the feeling he just wanted to cut it short, without going into detail. When this happened, I just passed to the next question, but this highlighted the importance of a private space, where the interviewees do potentially feel freer to express themselves. Therefore, in the following interviews, I made sure that a certain level of privacy was assured.

I recorded the interviews using a laptop and a mobile phone, in case one of the devices might fail. I then transcribed the interviews in full, always trying to do that immediately afterwards. This enabled me to identify information and themes at an early stage, and see what had been working and what not, thus guiding me towards modifications to the interview schedule or the management of the interview in general. Albeit time-consuming, I opted for a full transcription. The aim was to avoid missing important aspects of the interviews that might at first look unimportant, and also to have to go back to the recording in a later moment to recover information which might turn out to be relevant only later on (Bryman, 2016). The transcription process was made easier by uploading the audio files on Transcribe, which I used as a dictation software<sup>4</sup>. This saved me some time, while still leaving me in control of what I was writing. I am aware that transcribing is not a merely mechanical act of putting the spoken word into writing (Bryman, 2016) and that it is already part of the interpretation process (Du Bois, 1991). During the process, several issues arose, from mishearing to how to render in the text stress and intonations, repetitions, half words, dialect forms, 'mistakes'. I transcribed overlappings, hesitations, etc. only when they appeared to be

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<sup>4</sup> Safety is guaranteed as the files uploaded are stored only locally, in the user's computer (<https://transcribe.wreally.com>)

meaningful. Once transcribed, I emailed the interviews to the participants for approval, asking them to check or clarify my transcriptions. The transcripts were mainly approved, but in some cases they were edited quite heavily, both for some content, and for some use of language felt as embarrassing, as I will show in section 4.6.

After the transcription, I anonymised the interviews giving the participants and the places mentioned a code name. I then stored the key for code names in a separate location from the data. I conducted the analysis on the original Italian version of the transcript and I translated the parts I needed for quotation into English. I also took some informal notes, during the interview or soon after, depending on if they were information or my reflections. The notes helped me to reconstruct the background atmosphere and the emotions arisen in the interviews (see section 4.2).

I enclose here a key to the interview transcripts:

- My comments or additional information are given within [square brackets];
- Quoted speech in the interviews are within “double quotation marks”;
- A pause is indicated by an ellipsis;
- Gaps in the interview reported are indicated by an ellipsis in brackets (...).

Before going through the analysis of data, I wish to expose the issues related to collecting data in the language, Italian, that is my own native language, and having then to present the results and quotations of excerpts from interviews, into English, a

language of which I do not have a native-speaker fluency. The translation aspect is often not explicitly discussed, but it needs to be acknowledged openly, as it presents challenges, and can threaten the validity of the study (Temple & Young, 2004; van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). Temple and Young (2004) highlight the danger that in translating, the source language vanishes, highlighting a power imbalance, which can be minimized by making reference to the process. Language difference, especially in qualitative research, matters:

Because interpretation and understanding meanings are central in qualitative research and text is the ‘vehicle’ with which meaning is ultimately transferred to the reader, language differences generate additional challenges that might hinder the transfer of meaning and might result in loss of meaning and thus loss of the validity of the qualitative study (van Nes et al., 2010, p. 314).

This problem was mainly present when translating excerpts from interviews. For instance, a participant defined her family “a family of a certain kind” (literal translation from Italian), which conveys a self-satisfied idea of ‘uncommon’, ‘special’. Only after using it as a subtitle, I found out that in English it does not convey this meaning. Similarly, a literal translation of some adjectives has been interpreted as ‘aggressive’ by native English speakers, while in Italian, even if not considered nice, can be used without being insulting. For instance, at first I had translated the term *cavilloso* (referred in an interview to the attitude of female primary teachers), linked to legal cavils and quibbles, with ‘pedantic’ because I thought that in a country where there is



no written law, the concept would not have been understandable. After multiple consultations with Italian and English native speakers, to see what they understood by the term, I opted for the more neutral ‘meticulous’. Some of the issues have confirmed me in the idea that “people using different languages may construct different ways of seeing social life” (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 164). In writing up the results of the study, I sometimes felt the impact of not having the mastery of a wide enough vocabulary, that would allow me to render the subtlety of meanings that were conveyed by the participants.

Overall, knowledgeable of the discussion between doing a literal or non-literal translation, I have opted for a fairly literal translation, to do justice to what the interviewees said, and also to confront the reader with a manifestation of cultural diversity (Filep, 2009). However, I have made the changes necessary to not inhibit the understanding and to convey cultural meanings. In some cases, I have used footnotes to clarify issues connected to language, or to add information about the Italian context, that I deemed necessary to better understand the analysis of data.

### **3.5 Analysing Data**

To analyse the data, following the qualitative tradition, I adopted an ongoing analysis approach, started since the first interview. This avoids having to face a huge amount of data once finished the interviews and transcriptions and, more importantly, gives the opportunity to see what the emerging themes are, and of adapting the interview guide in order to obtain meaningful information (Bryman, 2016; Merriam, 2010).

After considering the use of software programs for the analysis of the interview transcripts, I opted for manual analysis. The reason was that the amount of interviews, 23, made them manageable, while learning to use analysis software would have been more time-consuming. In addition to this, the need to go through the text many times, provided an opportunity to be more in touch with the transcripts.

For the coding, I read the transcripts a few times, and started by creating categories based on the conceptual frame upon which I built the interviews, leaving it open to the emergence of new themes (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). As I had conceptualised identity as mainly defined by gender, social class, and ethnic/cultural belonging, the interviews questions were mainly built around these themes, and about aspects related to neoliberalism. Therefore, I started creating mind maps of social belonging (Appendix G), gender (Appendix H), ethnic/cultural belonging (Appendix I) and notes of emerging ideas connected with neoliberalism.

For ethnic/cultural belonging, for instance, I first went through all the interviews, highlighting all the parts connected to the theme. They covered the following areas:

- own belonging;
- perceptions about pupils' and families' belonging;
- religion;
- perceptions about pupils' and families' expectations of school;
- what a teacher needs to know in a culturally diverse classroom;
- teachers' expectations towards culturally diverse pupils.

Then, I created a word document titled “Belonging” (meaning “ethnic-cultural belonging”), where I pasted all the parts of the interviews connected to the above themes, preceded by the participant’s pseudonym, and again I highlighted each area with a different colour, to facilitate the reading (Appendix J). Keeping reading the transcripts, I started to make annotations at the margins of the paper, which helped me to go from the observation of data, to a more analytical level. This operation, brought to the emergence of themes, such as the concept of Otherness as mobile, that I reported on the mind map “Belonging” (Appendix I). The mind map helped me organising the themes and sub-themes, visualising connections among them. The mind maps have evidenced the richness of the data, and the complexity of analysing them, as the same chunk of data may be significant in relation to different themes, according to the perspective adopted.

As to social class, for instance, a first big division in the data was between the way the participants see their own social class belonging, and that of their students. In relation to the participants’ own belonging, I isolated three sub-themes: feeling own family as ‘less than the norm’, ‘just the norm’ or ‘more than the norm’ (as explained in section 4.2). Even if the emergence of social class belonging was planned and expected, I was not expecting it to be revealed in these terms. This, made me consider the literature on the emotions attached to social class (see section 4.2), which, in turn, gave me an opportunity to shed a light on the meaning of aspects that I had not considered fully at first, such as the importance attached to the way of speaking. This, again, meant to go back to the literature about language, social class and ethnic belonging.

During the analysis process, I often went back to the data, to verify if my reflections and temporary conclusions were effectively grounded in them. In qualitative research, analysis can be seen as “an iterative process which simply means that it is not linear but involves a toing and froing across the data, reflecting critically on possible choices during the analysis as patterns or themes or anomalies emerge” (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 140). This means having to leave some strands of research, to take up others; different choices would have taken to different directions and to other findings.

As I proceeded with the coding of the other themes, I was also attentive to take note of intersectional aspects. Intersectionality has been particularly relevant in the construction of belonging. While sometimes I have been able to analyse the same topic linking it to different themes (such as for language), other times I had to make a choice between possible analysis directions. However, in doing this, I have sought to make sure that this would not affect the validity of the study, trying to convey the complexity of data. In line with my intersectional approach, I have taken into account contradictory aspects such as perceptions about the relationship between teaching, time, and gender.

In quoting the participants, I have given space to all of them; however, some have been quoted more often than others, as some of the interviews were short and not rich in data, while others were more meaningful, also depending on how willing the participants were in engaging in the interview. The interviews excerpts have been chosen for a diversity of reasons: because they express clearly a common point of view; because they convey ideas that are unique, or because the way they are expressed

give a particular insight on how an individual perceives or embodies a particular condition, more effectively than a content summary could have done.

As previously stated, the conclusions I draw from the data analysis do not mean to be univocal or universal; they are linked to the data of this study, in that peculiar situation. However, as they are grounded in data and built inductively from them, they have a validity that can be critically extended to other situations. In the next section, I express some ethical considerations.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

During my study, ethical dilemmas arose since before the recruitment, when I had to decide how to recruit a diversity of teachers, in terms of identity. I did not deem useful to do a pre-selection by asking preliminary questions, as I presumed not many teachers would volunteer to participate. In addition to this, asking questions concerning, for instance, their background before the interview, would have probably felt invasive. However, when I talked on the phone to the head teachers, I specified that I was interested in a variety of teachers' identities, as to experience, gender and professional profile, in order to avoid the expected misunderstanding that I was exclusively or mainly interested in interviewing the teachers in charge for the students with immigrant backgrounds.

My initial worry for a low participation proved unfounded. The issues emerged in the first recruitment phase and with the first interviews were:

- some head teachers seemed to think it was a massive project, meant to involve the whole school; others thought it was mainly aimed at the teachers who are normally in charge for the students with immigrant backgrounds;
- the head teachers tended to ‘organise’ the participation of teachers, rather than simply pass the information. This was a sensitive issue, because while remarking that the participation needed to be voluntary, I also did not want to ‘close gates’, or make them feel that their help was unwelcome. However, although the teachers were mainly ‘invited’ to participate by the head teacher or a teacher in charge of keeping contacts with me, they were also pleased about having the opportunity to express their individuality and their point of view. While from one side a desire/need to keep an institutional profile, showing loyalty towards the school and a need to feel safe and not too exposed seemed to be mostly evident, on the other hand, they appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions. The head teachers probably saw the teachers’ participation in the research as an opportunity of development for the teachers and the school; only two of the head teachers accepted to be interviewed.

A point I kept in mind was that reflecting on personal facts and beliefs with a researcher may cause tension and moral distress to the interviewee. For this reason, I made clear to all participants that they had a right to not to answer my questions, should they feel uncomfortable, or stop the interview at any moment, and withdraw their data without any consequences, up to two months after the interview. But although this had

been made clear both in writing and verbally before the interview, and I reminded them of it afterwards, it needs to be acknowledged that exercising this right might be felt as embarrassing, a failure or a sensitive area. Strategies used by the interviewees were either a level of self-control and reticence during the interview, or the request to cancel parts of the interview. My answer in this case was that I would transcribe all the interview, leaving to them to edit the transcripts.

Another issue that I, not unexpectedly, had to face during the data gathering, was the participants' anonymity. Two of the schools where I did the interviews were located in the city where I had lived the most part of my life and where I had been a teacher for about 15 years. Even if I excluded the schools where I had worked, and although I had been reserved with everybody about the schools identities, being the city of limited dimensions, some of the interviewees were ex-colleagues or acquaintances, and people kept passing on other people's greetings.

Anonymity is also an issue in the dissemination of the findings. Especially when the investigation is carried out in a relatively restricted environment, it might be practically difficult to guarantee anonymity, as the settings and the participants could still be recognisable. In my case, I tried to omit details or contextual information which could identify the participants.

Prior to starting the fieldwork, Ethical Approval was granted by the School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde, reflecting the University Code of Practice on investigations involving human beings. After sending letters to the schools chosen to present the study, I sent a copy of Participants' Information Sheet and Consent Form to the schools that had accepted to participate in the study, as to allow them to make an informed decision to participate. I then obtained written consent

from all of the participants, before the interview. In the Participants' Information Sheet I had explained the purpose and possible benefits of the research, the type of questions asked, and information about the confidentiality and anonymity of data. I gave assurance that feedback would be provided to those interested, at the end of the research, in the form of a synopsis of the findings. I found it useful to provide the participants with another copy of the Information Sheet before the interview, prior to signing the consent form. No rewards were offered for the participation. Data were anonymised and saved in my personal computer, protected by a password. Copies of files have been saved on memory sticks.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In the present chapter I justified the design of the research as a qualitative study based on interviews; I described the progressing of the research, highlighting issues and choices I had to face in the different phases of the study.

The following chapters present an analysis of the data. Each chapter is organised around a central theme and contain several sub-chapters, according to the themes which emerged from the data collection. Chapter 4 is focused on social class, how teachers position themselves and their students with immigrant backgrounds in this respect. Chapter 5 looks at gender: teaching as a gendered profession, and conceptualisations of gender. Chapter 6 analyses how belonging is constructed around themes of culture/ethnicity. Chapter 7 considers teachers' and head teachers' understanding of educational policies.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Teachers and Social Class**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The idea that individual identities are at the intersection of a diversity of factors, such as social class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, and other aspects is taken as a reference framework for the analysis of the experiences lived by the participants, as expressed in the relationships with me as a researcher and a fellow teacher. Taking the definition of intersectionality “as the way in which any individual is situated at the crossroads of multiple subject positions, groups, identities and power relations”, that constitutes “lived experience” (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 163), I am aware that the different aspects of an individual’s experience are not simply static elements to be listed and reviewed separately, but are in movement and dynamically construct each other. However, for practical reasons, in the analysis of the findings of this study, I focus mainly on one aspect at a time, thematising some of the intersections and highlighting how they work.

Analysing how teachers perceive their own identity and how they construct a normativity for themselves can cast a light on how they perceive and construct their students’ identity, and on how they reproduce their idea of a norm that they might see as neutral, but in fact is classed, gendered and culturally connoted. I have chosen to

consider mainly intersections of social class, gender and cultural/ethnic belonging, considering these categories as particularly relevant in the context of this study.

In this chapter, I analyse how the interviewees see themselves in relation to social class belonging, highlighting how this aspect has gendered inflections and is deeply intertwined with emotions. Important signifiers that emerge from the data as defining social class belonging are occupation, education and values expressed; particular relevance is attached to language and ways of speaking. I then consider how teachers see their students as classed, and what consequences being identified as belonging to a social class or another can have for the students. Following Reynolds (1997, p. 8), “these labels, created by those in position of power, are then internalized and employed in our definitions of self”.

## **4.2 Teachers’ Classed Identities**

Social class is an element underlying and setting boundaries to teachers’ life paths, allowing choices but also giving origin to conflicts. A dated but widely quoted sociological research about teachers in Italy (Barbagli & Dei, 1969) defined teachers as “*le vestali della classe media*” (“the vestals of the middle class”, my translation), that is to say, (female) gendered representatives of middle class aiming at guarding the middle class values (De Conciliis, 2012) (see also section 2.8) or, applying a concept from Bourdieu (1984), at reproducing themselves as a social class. As previous research shows, teaching is more open than other professions to men and women from a working-class background (Braun, 2015), and is regarded by middle-class parents with a certain degree of ambivalence as a possible career for their children. As Devine

(2010) highlights in a study conducted in the UK, they seem to desire more highly paid careers, such as in finances, accountancy, medicine or law for their high-achieving children, especially sons, but teaching is however considered a good career for less academically inclined daughters or even sons.

In the 23 interviews I carried out during my research, I never made use of the term 'social class' while asking the participants about their own family background, educational pathways, aspirations and professional choices. In a time when the idea of social class often sounds obsolete, in favour of a centrality of individual choice and responsibility in the making of one's own destiny (Addison & Mountford, 2015; Raisborough & Adams, 2008), using this category might have sounded ideologically connoted and might have suggested that I was taking up a critical ideological stand and was looking for a certain type of answers. As a consequence, the social class theme mostly stayed 'invisible' (Hall & Jones, 2013) when the participants were talking about themselves. The information about their parents' occupation emerged from how they described their family history in our conversations. On the contrary when, asking about the students, I made open reference to 'social lines' or 'social belonging', the interviewees recognised that social class matters, especially in relation to values. As mentioned in section 2.7, the classic way of looking at social class is considering the family's main breadwinner's profession. In my analysis, I consider both parents' occupation, when it is declared, but also other forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital, as introduced by Bourdieu and discussed and developed by other scholars, as shown in sections 2.5 and 2.7.

According to a social class categorisation based on the professional position and sector of activity of the families of origin (Cobalti & Schizzerotto, 1994;

Schizzerotto, 1988), it appears that most of the teachers I interviewed came from middle class families. In eleven cases, at least one parent had been a teacher, five of whom (four women, one man) in the primary sector that, in Italy, required a four-year secondary school diploma until 1996 (see section 1.9). Three of the teachers' mothers had never actually practiced the profession: two of them were housewives, one had worked in her shop. At least five of the parents had been, or in some cases still were, civil servants. They had worked for *Ferrovie dello Stato* (National Railway) or *Poste Italiane* (Italian Mail Service), in unspecified roles; one of them had been a head-technician (a semi-managerial position). Another father had been a *carabiniere* (policeman). While only one person said that her father (still) was a workman, presumably in four of the households at least one parent was or had been. Other parents had had higher positioned professions: a father had been an academic, one a medical doctor, one had been in business management and another a bank officer. Two of the families run shops, another father had been a wholesale timber dealer. It was evident, however, that when the parents' occupations were not on the same level, the father's one was generally higher than the mother's one, in economic and prestige terms. Four mothers were housewives, but the occupation of seven other mothers was not mentioned, while this happened only for two of the fathers. There was an exception in this male–female professional hierarchical imbalance, as in one case the father was a workman, while the mother had a secretarial work in a school.

However, following Bourdieu, social class cannot be defined only according to economic features, as cultural and social factors are central to understand how class identity is formed and how it may adopt certain practices and attitudes in order to reproduce itself in an educational setting (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Bourdieu &

Passeron, 1990). Another important element is what meaning individuals attach to their social class belonging and how they feel about it. Building on Bourdieu's conceptual framework, some feminist scholars highlight the emotional and psychic dimensions of social class (Adkins, 2004; Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Hey & George, 2013; Reay, 2015; Skeggs, 2004b; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012). In particular, Reay (2015) draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus including affective and cognitive aspects. She argues that "dispositions can include a propensity to fatalism, ambivalence, resilience, resentment, certainty, entitlement or even rage, just as much as a tendency to either theatre going or watching soap-operas" (Reay, 2015, p. 10), and tries to cast a light upon the "frequently overlooked anxieties, conflicts, desires, defences, ambivalences and tensions within classed identities" (ibid.). Her argument is not that specific emotions or affective transactions are peculiar to a certain social class, but that they have different effects according to the habitus they impact on. For example, she claims that

the learning that comes through the inhabiting pathologised spaces within the field often results in a predilection for shame, fear, anxiety or even righteous indignation, while the internalisation of social inequalities in the privileged can result in dispositions of superiority, entitlement, disdain but also a predilection for guilt, ambivalence and discomfort (Reay, 2015, p. 12).

An element that manifests itself in the interviews I carried out is the expression of an emotional relationship with social class belonging. While some participants seemed to

feel at ease with their social class background and with their present social belonging, others betrayed or openly gave expression to a sense of unease related to their social class of origins. This in particular seemed to happen when an inconsistency between the family social class background and the current belonging was present. Therefore, while having as a general starting reference an 'objective' social classes framework, based on professions and education of the family, I intend to emphasise the subjective dimension of class. I wish to take into account "the meaning actors attribute to their experiences" (Loveday, 2016, p. 1144), also through the lens of the feelings raised by talking about themes linked to the social class background. However, as Loveday (2016) points out, "there is some difficulty in adequately capturing the affective nature of experience whilst using a predominantly interview-based methodology" (ibid., p. 1144), as an interview is mainly based on language, while emotions are also conveyed by the body itself. Moreover, as seen in section 3.4.3, when emotions judged not commendable had come out through the language, some of the interviewees asked to remove them, trying to make the interview, in its transcript form, more emotionally 'neutral', presumably to not feel exposed, both emotionally and concretely.

The emotions emerged from the participants in relation to family origins and their profession were often not univocal. While some of the interviewees seemed to feel comfortable with their origins and with their job, others transmitted a sense of discomfort, with different shades and for different reasons. Some of the participants were reluctant to admit their working class origins, and adopted an avoidance strategy; others openly stated that they came from a 'simple family', with different shades of pride and/or self-defensiveness. Some others had instead suggested the idea that their family of origin had a higher social position than the 'norm'. In the description of the

relationship of the participants with their own family background below, I adopt this categorisation based on how the participants view and feel about their family: ‘just a normal family’, ‘a simple family’ and ‘a family of a certain kind’, aware that the same ‘label’ can cover different situations and feelings.

In some cases, an element that worked as a catalyst for discomfort emotions was that, beyond being a researcher, I was also a teacher, like them, doing something apparently more interesting and qualified. This raised curiosity and interest in some of the participants: two of them enquired openly on how to do a PhD, in a foreign ‘high status’ country, as a teacher; other participants manifested curiosity and desire, seemingly accompanied by self-prohibition and self-exclusion; a teacher who had abandoned the academic career, expressed instead a sort of disdain. These sentiments and emotions cannot be linked to social origin only, as they are also intertwined with gender and individual lifepaths. However, there is no doubt that participants with middle class backgrounds showed a higher sense of entitlement, here in the form of self-authorisation, compared to those from a working class environment (Skeggs, 2004).

### **4.3 Just a Normal Family**

The term ‘family’ is commonly used to refer to realities that can be different according to the cultural and historical background; the concept “is essentialist and universalist, ignoring cultural and historical differences”; it “masks the diversity of family forms existing today”, and often “conceals inequalities within the family” (Jackson, 2007, p. 171). As feminists have highlighted since the 1960s (Jackson,

2007), families are a place of inequalities between the members, where the individual first experiences inequalities and roles. According to Jackson, members occupy different positions within the family, with a differential in economic power and standard of living linked to gender and age, even in a time when not always the male is the breadwinner. Jackson (2007, p. 172) underlines that the concept of the family as “an essential, natural unit that exists everywhere and for all time” has been widely contested by feminist anthropologists, as the relationships and the practices within the family vary in different cultural contexts. Even within Europe, there are differences according to class, occupation and geographical area. The very idea of a ‘traditional family’ made of a heterosexual couple, where the man works and the woman is mainly in charge of the home and of the children, is not so traditional. In fact, it is a 19<sup>th</sup> century middle class phenomenon, and extended to the working classes only after World War II, when with industrialisation, production started to be out of the house, and waged work started to spread. This created an ideal of a separation between the world of work and the domestic sphere, with men earning enough to keep a woman at home, taking care of the house and of the children, which became the norm in the middle classes of the 1950s. As in the seventies this model was already changing and women were starting to take waged jobs, it is clear that the traditional family model “was historically a short-lived product of particular social circumstances. As an idea, however, it retains a strong hold on the collective imagination of the late modern societies and has left a legacy that still shapes the lives of many women today” (Jackson, 2007, p. 173). As also highlighted by this study, it is still women that try to fit their career around family needs, while men more often organise family commitments around their work.



In this context, what a ‘normal’ family is obviously depends on what meanings the person who is speaking attaches to this definition, according to historical, cultural and experiential reasons. Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ is very useful to understand how a certain order appears like the ‘natural’ one: the roles and power relationships first experienced and acquired in the family become a disposition through which the individual perceives the reality and that shape their actions (Bourdieu, 1977). When people, in this case in Italy, refer to a ‘normal family’, they are likely to refer to this ideal middle-class family, made of a heterosexual couple, where the husband is basically the breadwinner, and the wife is the one who is more in charge for the home and for the children care. I would add that, also due to the relatively recent immigration history in Italy, and to other reasons I explore further in Chapter 6, they might mean ‘of Italian ancestry’, especially when describing their own family background.

Family background matters as it encompasses the transmission of a certain amount of economic and cultural capital that is passed on intergenerationally, through the habitus, made of aspirations, attitudes and tastes (Bourdieu, 1986), that affects family’s expectations, ambitions and employment choices. This creates a sense of continuation of ‘normality’ or, on the contrary, a feeling of a break of continuity and of being in a foreign field. Understanding if teachers see their professional choice as ‘normal’ and natural, may reflect on their idea of normative pupils and classroom; on the other hand, as I will show in the following sections, a certain idea of what is normative may, in terms of middle-class life and ambitions, impose itself in terms of desirability and normativity to those with a different social class background.

Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities), is from a small town in the inland of Southern Italy. For him, a normal family is a family that had to emigrate to a more

affluent part of Italy to be able to find a job: “My family is a normal family; as anybody else, they had to emigrate, and then they managed to go back”. As the very first thing in his interview, Filippo proudly stated that in his hometown there is no crime at all, neither small-scale nor organised. It is considered honourable in his place either to work or study; as there is no work, everybody study, moving to various parts of Italy and of the world.

Respectability, according to Skeggs (1997), contains judgements about class, race, gender and sexuality, and each group has a different way to display or resist it. For instance, Skeggs states that women tend to link respectability with responsibility and caring, as found by this study, that also show how men tend to place it more on authority, rationality, organisational abilities:

Respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others, what we study and how we know who we are (or are not). (...) It is rarely recognized as an issue by those who are positioned with it, who are normalized by it, and who do not have to prove it (Skeggs, 1997, p. 2).

In Filippo’s words there are elements, that might be peculiar of the Italian situation, where a contraposition between the Southern Italians, seen as occupying a lower social and economic status compared to the Northern Italians has a long history (Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005; Tager & Good, 2005). As McCrae (2007) reports, there are historical reasons for Northern Italy being industrialised and prosperous from an economic point of view, and for the south having a weak economy and high

unemployment, with related poverty and a high rate of primary school dropouts. Linked to this, there is the idea of Northerners as hard working and practical, while the Southerners are judged more impulsive and lazy.

Filippo feels the need to stand up for his origins, making reference to ancient cultural traditions in his own place of origins. His claim for respectability sounds like a defence against the stereotype of Southern Italians not oriented towards action (Jost et al., 2005); his words also contain a reference to the commonplace of Southern Italy as a land dominated by widespread criminality. However, his choice to distance only his hometown from the stereotype of the Southern Italian, sets a new boundary for the stereotype and seems to say that in a way he shares it. As McCrae (2007) shows, in his study on the perceptions of Northern and Southern Italians that both Northern and Southern Italians have similar stereotypical perceptions of the Southerner as higher in “Warmth, Gregariousness, Positive Emotions and Openness to Fantasy”, and the Northerners having a higher sense of “Order, Duty and Deliberation” (McCrae et al., 2007, p. 958).

In Northern Italy, Filippo’s father got a job at Poste Italiane. His mum got a diploma in shorthand typing and then worked as a hairdresser. When Filippo was two years old, the family succeeded in going back to Southern Italy, owing to a work transfer. Filippo’s mother worked for about five years as a hairdresser with her sister, and then stopped working, as the family, especially her sister’s, was growing. After completing his studies, Filippo moved to Marche region, looking for a job. While he was employed as a warehouse worker, he attempted a recruitment competition as a teacher, just as another job opportunity: “I passed it, and became a teacher. But it was an opportunity like any other. (...) At the beginning, it wasn’t my main goal”.

On the other hand, once he had become a teacher, he realised that it was a job that suited him, as it was the only job of the many he had done, where he did not feel stressed in the morning, at the prospect of going to work.

I don't like the bureaucracy, I think nobody does. I relish the work in itself. Being a teacher in today's society is obviously much more complex than it used to be, our role is changed. In a sense, I think that (in) the institutional drift in our liquid society, as Bauman said (...), teachers are sort of the last bastion, they still represent the State. Therefore *in primis* they must, among many other things, fulfil this difficult task of being a bastion, a solid element in a liquid society. This is what I deeply feel as (...) a commitment (Filippo).

Filippo here shifts from defining teaching as 'just a job' to 'a commitment', showing an adherence to the profession and its institutional role, that seeps out from his language choice also in other parts of the interview. His commitment is not only as a representative of the state in relation with his pupils. In a system, like the Italian one, where little change is allowed in a teacher's career, Filippo sees a possibility of committing himself to something useful in addition to his job, becoming a union representative in his school, that he conceives as a practical way of helping other workers:

in general I am very interested in these aspects, and if I can lend a hand, I do. For sure, I conceive trade unions the traditional way, that is to say, a direct relationship with the worker and trying to lend a hand from a practical point of view (Filippo).

When asked about education levels in his family, Filippo talked of a paradox in his family. One of his great grandfathers had a university degree; after him, only Filippo's generation had started to go back to University.

Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages) also defined her family background as "fairly normal". Her dad had been a bank official and her mum a primary school teacher. She was raised and still resided in the same town where she was born. Her younger sister and brother were a teacher and a vet, respectively. With her husband, she had travelled to many countries around the world. Her two children had studied in European universities. One of her children had started an academic career. Sonia said that she was very keen on learning, and was very interested in my PhD experience and in the steps I took to do it, it was something that she would like to try.

After attending the *Liceo Classico*, and getting familiar with Latin and ancient Greek, she wanted to study modern languages at university, in order to fill what she felt was a gap in her cultural preparation. Her dream job was to be an interpreter in the Parliament, but this conflicted with her private life plans, with the desire to start a family. Becoming a teacher was then a realistic choice for her. Things might have been different if she had had the opportunity to go abroad. But even if becoming a teacher was not her first choice, Sonia maintained that it was a beautiful job, and she would not change it.

Sonia's educational and professional route seems to be in line with her "fairly normal" middle class background and with her gender as well. At the end of *Scuola secondaria di primo grado* (Lower secondary school), at the age of 14, the pupils choose a *Scuola secondaria di secondo grado* (Upper secondary school), lasting 5 years. However, schooling is compulsory until the age of 16. The Upper secondary school comprehends three sectors: *Licei* (Lyceums), *Istituti tecnici* (Technical schools) and *Istituti professionali* (Vocational schools). While the *Istituti* aim to prepare students for the work market, the *Licei* give a more academic preparation, traditionally reserved for those who go to university (it was the only possible pathway for University until 1969). The choice for an educational track at an early age tends to be guided by social class belongings, with pupils from a higher socio-economic background going to *licei* and those in a lower socio-economic position heading towards *istituti tecnici* and *istituti professionali* (Checchi & Flabbi, 2007; Contini & Scagni, 2011; Panichella & Triventi, 2014). Comparisons between the two tracked systems apparently similar, such as the Italian and the German one, highlight the higher weight of the family background in the Italian system, where the choice for the secondary school is free, rather than based on the skills shown by the pupils in their early schooling (Checchi & Flabbi, 2007).

The 2018 Almalaurea (syndicate that gathers over 90% of all Italian Universities) report shows that, in 2017, graduates were mainly from a socio-cultural privileged background, with 29.5% of them having at least one parent with a university degree. 67.2% of them came from a *liceo*, particularly *liceo scientifico* and *liceo classico*, 19% from a technical school and 1.8% from a vocational one. 59.2% of all the graduates were female, with a strong concentration on courses such as teaching

(93.6%), modern languages (83.6%), psychology (80.0%) and sanitary professions (69.8%). On the contrary, they are least concentrated in engineering (26.1%), scientific subjects (28.2%) and physical education (31.6%) (Almalaurea, 2018). Data, therefore, show how routes that the individual may feel like natural choices due to personal considerations, are in reality inscribed into general classed and gendered routes, where cultural, financial, social capital, gender have their weight.

An idea of normality transpires from some other of the participants' description of their family background. Some of the families are totally made up of teachers, and the teaching profession was considered the most natural choice. Carla (56, School 5, Humanities) said:

My dad was a Humanities teacher, my mum was the classic class teacher in the elementary school, as it was called in those times. My brother is a head teacher, and my Mum's siblings were teachers, a sister who is a teacher. I was born and raised thinking that the only possible job in my life would be becoming a teacher, not because someone imposed this upon me, or has inculcated this idea, but because it seemed the only job possible, apart from being a doctor, but this has never raised my interest or curiosity.

Her true ambition had been to become an archaeologist, but for reasons linked to her personal life, such as the desire to create a family, and the functioning of the Italian academic world, this dream was abandoned.

Daniela (53, School 1, Modern Languages) was born and raised in the town where she still lived. Her parents were both secondary school teachers. She said: “(...) we have grown up with school in our blood. Consequently, it has been natural to enter the sector”. Daniela acknowledged that, although her adolescence dream was to become a flight attendant, which led her to study modern languages in higher education, she probably had always wanted to be a teacher. The flight attendant life seemed complicated, with constant travel, while teaching seemed more practical.

Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths) had a similar experience of both parents being secondary school teachers:

I was born in a town near Fontenova., a family of teachers, therefore already on the right path, [we both laugh], it runs in the family, to become a teacher myself. I have changed teaching subject, because my parents taught Italian, so...

Beatrice acknowledged that the presence of cultural stimulus in her family had been important for her educational and professional choices. At the beginning, she was thinking more of her formation than of a profession, and had always oscillated between *liceo classico* and *liceo scientifico*, as she was proficient in both humanistic and scientific areas. She finally opted for Physics at University. It had been a challenging experience, but she said she would do it again, as it had been very interesting from an educational point of view. To pursue a career in Physics, she should have had to go abroad, and to set her life differently. After a few years' experience as a computer



programmer in a software company, she passed a selective exam for teaching, and became a teacher.

Carla's, Daniela's and Beatrice's stories speak of belonging to middle-class families, where the cultural capital and the economic capital were deployed to direct the children towards the 'right' educational path and the right experiences (Taylor, 2009). For them, becoming teachers, even if not necessarily the first choice, had felt natural, "the only job possible", "in our blood", "it runs in the family". As I show in Chapter 5, this is also a gendered choice, out of an habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) that is embodied, as the language used by the interviewees testifies. To this Ball (2003a), building on Bourdieu's concept of capital, argues that

Social and cultural capital combine in various ways (particularly at key moments); for example, in generating decoding and management skills in relation to expert (or traditional cultural) systems, like schools and higher education. (...) both of these capitals are intertwined and interdependent with economic and emotional capital. It is the combination of these that is often what makes the middle-class family so effective in the education domain (Ball, 2003a, p. 82).

While in all of the cases above becoming a teacher seems just a natural development of a family history, a sort of continuity, that allows to live a comfortable life, other participants let a tension emerge, between the position they were occupying as teachers and their family background, with its many expectations.

#### **4.4 A Simple Family**

Being part of a ‘simple, humble, poor family’ is how some of the participants described their background. This description was expressed in different ways and, more relevantly, it was apparently accompanied by different emotions. Nobody was asked to describe how they felt about their social backgrounds; nevertheless, different strategies were acted to talk, or not to talk, about social class background. What stood out was that in some cases, family backgrounds were described with similar adjectives, but individuals related to them differently. Personal features and lived experiences intersect with each other in influencing how individuals react to belonging to a working class family.

Referring to a working class family usually does not sound ‘neutral’, as it is different from what is perceived as the ‘normal’ middle class order (Bourdieu, 1984). Participants having a working class family background often seemed to feel the need to state this openly, or the opposite, try to not unveil it. The literature has highlighted that the sentiments attached to belonging to a working class family can be different and are also linked to gender. While working-class men are more likely to be proud of this belonging, working class women more commonly feel shame for their origins, together with a sense of deficiency, which is linked to a harsher judgement of themselves. The intersection of gender and class modifies the ways individuals identify as working class (Loveday, 2016). In this study, some of the male teachers interviewed seem to find a wider explanation for their social class belonging, while from female teachers’ interviews more often a sense of personal responsibility, sometimes inadequacy, emerges.

Fiorella (41, School 1, Humanities) defined her family as simple and humble:

I am from a small village, I can say its name, it's Castellara, I can say that. (...) I have always had a huge passion for studying. I come from a family... quite simple, of humble origins, because on one side my grandparents were farmers... can I say that, can't I? I can tell... On the other side my grandfather was a worker and my gran ran a shop, so a simple family. That's it. And I have always had a big passion for studying, I have always loved studying, perhaps also to fill a lack and I have always been very good at school.

Fiorella kept stressing her humble origins, pointing out that her grandfather was a simple person, who had started as a policeman immediately after the end of World War II. It was quite difficult for him, as there were street demonstrations at the time. Therefore, after a while, he opted for a quieter life, and decided to become a labourer for the town council. But he had always been a curious person, and encouraged her to study. Also, one of her uncles had started studying economics at University, but never finished. He took a different road, he owned a restaurant in Rome with his wife, and they were doing very well.

Fiorella's mother had started working as a supply teacher in primary schools, but then gave up, due to health problems in the family. Fiorella's account of her family was all around humbleness and simplicity, and about intellectual curiosity, academic proficiency, or lack of them. Belonging to a 'humble family' seems to be accompanied by a sense of deficiency. This awareness that being working class has a lower value

than being middle class seems to be shown by many women with a working class background (Reay, 1997a). At the same time, Fiorella stressed the importance of pursuing academic success, as a way to make up for 'other lacks', that remained unspecified. Fiorella set a 'high stake' for herself. Describing her educational history, she stated that she demanded a lot of herself. When she felt that she was not up to the goals she had set for herself, she gave up an academically prestigious secondary school, and contemplated attending a less prestigious secondary school, which would have allowed her to become a primary teacher in four years. This feeling of non-entitlement apparently needed to be challenged by an external acknowledgement:

As to secondary schools, I first attended the *Liceo Scientifico*, then I am very, how can I say, very strict with myself, and as the *Liceo Scientifico* in Fontenova is well-known as a very strict school, and I did not have the results that I had set for myself, not that I was doing badly. Therefore I changed, I wanted to register in the old *Magistrali*, but then, even the administrative assistant, seeing my report, advised me to enrol in the *Liceo Classico*. Therefore, I have always attended, I had high grades, I got a 57 [out of 60] in my final exams. *Liceo Classico*. After that, from *Liceo Classico* I went to *Lettere Classiche*. And I have always worked, I don't know if this may be of interest.

Fiorella underlines here that 'even the administrative assistant' said she could have higher aspirations. It seems that she felt legitimated by someone, another woman, although she occupied a lower grade in the social class ladder. At the same time, this

sounds self-disqualifying. ‘Even’ seems to mean that it was so obvious that she could aspire to something higher, that it was evident even to a secretary; at the same time, ‘even’ seems to suggest that the person who was valuing her did not have so much value. Technically, Fiorella’s background is not strictly working class, but she seems to embody a sentiment of deficiency due to a family background that she deems ‘humble’. As Loveday (2016, p. 1142) argues, “the inscription of lack - and the naturalisation of deficiency – in the representation of working-class lives and experience is well documented” and influences the concept, and the self-concept, of a person value. Her ambition had not been to become a teacher, but a doctor, an architect, or something connected with travelling and meeting new people. Also the school where she was teaching, felt like a small environment to her. Her ambition after studying *Lettere Classiche*, was

Maybe a publishing house. I thought of a publishing house, or maybe archaeology, (...). I also loved studying. I might have been a researcher, when I wrote my degree thesis, I become fond of it. (...) I have to say, I loved, I love studying. I think I have chosen this job not so much for the students, who I have grown to love, I mean, I feel content... but also as it allowed me to study, to keep studying.

Teaching had not been considered, at first; after graduating, she had to take five extra exams, required for teaching. This profession was not her first choice, but it was fine, and her family was happy about it. She had just had a permanent contract, and her ambition was to go back teaching in a higher secondary school, as she preferred the

relationship with older students. Maybe not in a *liceo*, as she felt she might have lost her proficiency in Latin, but in a technical school. She had no interest in changing position at school. What she might want to do, was to write, but she certainly did not want to try and become a head teacher. Fiorella's working class habitus of feeling inadequate, not entirely comfortable and not entitled, conflicts with a sense of entitlement given by her cultural capital acquired through study titles. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, the cultural capital obtained through institutions, such as school and university, has less value than the cultural capital inherited through the family habitus.

How a 'humble family' is lived, may depend on a plurality of reasons. While gender is decisive, other factors can also impact on how individuals relate to their social class belonging. It can be a strong ideology, or religiosity, or other beliefs that situate the individual into a wider perspective. Danilo (54, School 3, Music) described his family as 'a working-class family, basically poor'. He had always dreamt of playing music for a living. Therefore, the choice of studying music at the Conservatoire was motivated by his love for music, but also by the perspective of good work opportunities in the field. Schools were looking for music teachers; therefore, it seemed to be an obvious choice, with good employment perspectives. Even if being a teacher was not his main objective, he said it was a possibility. Danilo said that in those times, people in his situation used to say, "worst comes the worst, I can be a teacher". His passion for music manifested early, as when he was a boy, he joined a music band.

In the past, in this area there were free folk music courses, organised by marching bands. The marching bands, legacy of an old past when they represented a way of bringing people together, like an old-times

recreational organisation, used to organise classes. They were completely free, and they even provided the instruments to those who could not afford them. Certainly not to someone who played the clarinet like me, we could buy that, but certainly expensive instruments such as tubas, trombones, the band provided them. (...) A friend of mine told me that there was a music school that cost nothing and even provided the instruments, and I went, without telling anything to anybody. I liked it, little by little, and then the band, I liked playing with those who were good at playing. To be able to play like them, you needed to study, attend the Conservatoire, and so I had this example.

His family did not object to his study choice. Danilo said it was

No problem, because (for a) working class family, basically poor, studying music was a moment of social elevation. This is what they were striving for. An older brother was studying medicine, I attended the Conservatoire, that was perfect. What mattered to them was that I was doing something, that I was being active.

Danilo expressed a strong social class conscience and pride. He situated his personal and family history in a wider perspective, and gave a political interpretation of it. This elevation from the personal to the historical-political level was also made by Simone (53, School 4, Maths). Although he did not use terms that qualified his family as 'humble', he stated that his parents had low education, because they lived in war times.

The fact that he gave a reason for his parents not having studied long, suggested that he felt that it was a lack. Nevertheless, he placed this in a wider social and historical context, the war time. In his words, the lack of education is not connected to family individual circumstances, such as being a poor or a simple family; it is rather linked to a wider historical situation. Simone got a Surveying diploma, and then studied Earth Science, “for a futile reason”, he says, “because I was fond of the mountains”. While working as a geologist for around ten years, he qualified as a teacher. Finally, he pursued and got a teaching job. His family had always supported him, as he was good at school. He maintained that in his family “I have always been glorified, inflated, probably more than I am really worth [laughs]. They have always had an excellent opinion of me, really”.

Simone’s account corroborates the concept that in a working-class family, going ‘upwards’ is left to one’s self, as parents do not have much cultural and social capital to mobilise. The capital that working class parents of the participants seem to have mobilised is the desire that their children did well, better than them, but leaving it in their children’s hands, without any specific or ‘coercive’ strategy. These families did not have an internal knowledge of the education system, but relied on their child’s ability and willingness to learn, supporting them with supposedly limited economic capital, but emotionally, in terms of trusting their abilities and willingness to progress socially. This, in a time when parental choice of schools that now “emerges as a major new factor in maintaining and indeed reinforcing social-class divisions and inequalities” (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996, p. 110) was “less ideologically endorsed” (ibid.) than at present.



In this section, I have analysed how some of the participants construct their family as ‘less’ compared to an ‘ideal’ norm. I have shown how this feeling is attached to emotions and is declined differently according to gender and to other biographical circumstances, such as age and being brought up in a rural or in a urban context. In the next section, I consider how other participants construct their families as ‘more’ than the average.

#### **4.5 A Family ‘of a Certain Kind’**

Talking about social class seems to potentially involve emotions, especially when the family background is working class, or when belonging to a higher social class created expectations that were not fulfilled, thus causing distress and conflict. As shown in the previous sections, most of the participants saw their social class belonging as representing the ‘normality’; in some cases a deviation from the norm was perceived. In these cases, emotions and a tension seemed to creep out through words and bodily expressions, apparently linked to the feeling that one’s own family is not ‘just a normal family’. Some teachers underlined the ‘exceptionality’ of their family situation or background. This perceived higher position on the social ladder seemed to have projected different expectations on them, and they seemed to struggle with these projections. Following theories of social reproduction, Schoon (2010, p. 25) observes that “the development and maintenance of motivation and aspirations is bound up with family circumstances”; it reflects “their subjective assessment of how far in the education system and the occupational hierarchy they would like or expect to go” (Schoon, p. 27). Children coming from families with a higher income and

education normally have higher attainment in school, and higher professional aspirations and expectations. Aspirations are shaped by structural constraints and individual agency: young people choose from what they feel is available to them, and also according to other circumstances or plans in other fields, such as when to become a parent (Schoon, 2010).

Life plans and structural constraints, such as those posed by an asphyxial labour market, and ambitions that may not be in line with the family's expectations, may create uneasiness in the individual, who may find herself or himself in a position that feels dissonant with personal and their social group's aspirations. Leonardo (49, School 3, Art) was born and was educated up to the secondary school in the town where he was living and working at the moment of the interview. In his words, his family was 'not the norm'.

Well, my family is a bit... let's say it was modern for the times, in so that my parents divorced when I was very young. I have always lived with my mum. My mum gave my brother and me the opportunity to pursue what we wanted to do in our life, so it was our choice, very free, for my brother and I, to study in a different place and make our choices.

Leonardo was undecided on what subject to take at university, if veterinary or architecture, then "The charm of Florence, versus the charm of Perugia, I went for architecture", thus surrounding his choice with a 'flavour' of 'good taste' (Bourdieu, 1984). After graduating, he started his career as an academic and as a professional. As such, he took part in a high profile project, directed by a prestigious, internationally

acknowledged architect. He was awarded a PhD, and had temporary contracts in another Italian university. After four years of reiterated contracts, he opted to leave the academic world to work as a professional architect and as a lower secondary school teacher at the same time.

Honestly, from a financial point of view, school teachers get much better pay compared to University, because... a full-time school teacher earns around 1,700-1,800 euros a month. A contract where a lecturer earns 1,800 euros a month for nine or ten months does not exist. But it is not so much a financial question, because at the end of the day, my career... a private study for sure gives me a higher income. It would be a matter of personal satisfaction.

To continue a career in the academy, would have meant moving to another European country, and starting a life afresh in a new place. He saw a career in Italy as impossible for him, therefore the choice for secondary school teaching: “[School teaching] was not a second-best, it was a crossroads: either 50% profession, or academic career”. However, he clearly stated that the academic career was his ambition; the reasons for giving it up were fundamentally that the conditions were not acceptable (i.e. precariat and low wage).

Leonardo referred to “when as kids at *liceo* we used to go to England” to study English. This seems to be part of those sorts of activities, such as language and music, gymnastics, ballet classes that middle class parents use to ‘make up’ (Vincent & Ball, 2007) middle class children. These activities add to the “inherited capital” and

“contribute to the cultural capital held by and embodied in the family itself and are part of an accrual of class resources” (Vincent & Ball, 2007). Lareau (2011, p. 2) adds that “by making certain their children have these and other experiences, middle-class parents engage in a process of *concerted cultivation*. From this, a robust sense of entitlement takes root in the children” (italics in the original), where with concerted cultivation is meant organised activities, chosen and controlled by parents (I return to this concept in section 4.7, when analysing how teachers view their students’ social class).

Nadia (46, School 1, Humanities) expressed tensions between her family’s expectations and her education and life choices. She described her family as ‘average’, but ‘different’ at the same time. She was raised in a family of teachers, her dad was an academic, and her mum a housewife that ‘might have been’ a teacher, as she had a degree in Humanities. The family seem to have cultivated an idea of ‘intellectual’ middle-classness:

Well, not holding a degree obviously, neither the paternal, nor the maternal (grandparents). An average family though, let’s say. My granddad worked in the National Railways, but he was a writer, he wrote a few books of poems, diaries, that then he published. His children published them, as to leave a memory. With a brother who was a painter; therefore, people... another brother who was the mayor of ... [a town in the South of Italy, with about 8000 inhabitants in 2016], of a certain importance, a family of a certain kind. (...) This for the maternal

grandfather. As to the paternal side, instead, my grandmother was an employee, and my dad's dad I believe was an employee as well.

Nadia described her educational, professional and personal choices as troubled and as the result of multiple tensions, created by conflicting expectations and aspirations. On her side, there was an interest in humanistic disciplines, but not an aspiration to become a teacher, also because getting a teaching post was considered quite hard at the time. She opted then for Law studies, as she realised the importance of getting a degree, but also wanted to find a shorter way. She finally ended up getting a degree in Humanities which allowed her to be a secondary school teacher, but this was not exactly in her family aspirations, and not even in her dreams. Nadia claimed that family expectations “hindered, rather than eased, as the constraint of having to do something, also in my adolescence, turned me away from the interest, in part for rebellion, in part for lack of willingness, in part for my friendships, that at the time were a bit...”.

Nadia's family dream was of her pursuing an academic career, following her dad. This clashed with her own dream of starting a family right away, a family that had been hampered especially by her mother. Nadia also hinted to a professional instability on her husband's side, that has forced him to changes in the last few years, to start new pathways. The family's disapproval on Nadia's choices about career and personal life seemed to weigh on her, as they were supposedly perceived as ‘downwards’ in relations to the family's aspirations for her. She had exercised her agency in opting for possibilities different than those championed by her family, but the discomfort for this was still there, accompanied by the claim that her family background would have allowed her to have a higher status career.

Pietro (37, School 3, Music) too gives a voice to the tension between his family aspirations, his own and his actual choices. His mum had run a tobacconist-stationary shop, dealing also with school books. When he was younger, he used to lend a hand in the family business. He studied accountancy in the secondary school, and at the same time he attended the Conservatoire. After his secondary school diploma, he continued the Conservatoire, and took a course that gave him a teaching qualification. This finally led him to gain a post as a permanent teacher. Pietro was not sure if this is what his family had imagined for him:

Well, let's say that my mum has always supported me but, being a shopkeeper... I mean, of the three (children), I think I was the most... I was the black sheep of the family (...). My sister studied accountancy, and then bought out the family business, my brother started studying law, but then opened a bookshop, therefore he continued in the commerce area. Therefore, I am the one who has gone out of track, it has not been easy to open up a space far from the idea of commerce, because during the summer I used to help with books.

His family might have been disappointed by his choice at first, but then they accepted that he might follow a different path. Pietro acknowledged that he was going through a big crisis as to his job. He had long aspired to a permanent contract in the state school, and once he had reached his goal, he realised that he had less time for other music teaching activities that he found professionally more rewarding. Therefore, he was feeling very uncertain:

In this moment in my life I am in a big crisis. I have always stated that a lower high school teacher, a teacher in general, is not a failed musician, as sometimes this is what people might think, that you go and teach music because you were not good, or lucky, or whatever, enough, to be able to make a living as a musician. I have always fought to affirm that a good teacher, is one who may not have chosen or happened to be a professional musician, but who firmly believes in teaching. This is what I have always thought, but now, living in the lower high school, I realise that, without wanting to sound presumptuous, I feel a bit 'tight'. I mean, the information you can give the pupils are limited, therefore... I am not talking about having a career, you are a teacher and that's it.

Pietro looked visibly relieved when I attempted the conclusion that his future might not be in the school after all. Even only contemplating the possibility of leaving a permanent teaching job in Italy is certainly lacerating, due to the high levels of unemployment and the lack of flexibility in the system. Having to explain this to family and friends makes things even harder.

## 4.6 Language as a Place of Tensions

Language emerges from the interviews as an element catalysing emotions; it sets boundaries, gives value, and therefore causes tensions. I consider in this section the relationship between the participants and the language they used, and what value they attach to it. In their study on how the way of talking is the object of judgement about social class in two UK Higher Education institutions, Addison & Mountford (2015, p. 3) state that “Accents and ways of talking are part of embodied class identities”; they are attached different value. While some accents, or styles of talking, can carry ideas of qualities such as intelligence, others are considered as less valuable. They argue that “how we talk *matters* (italics in the original)”, and “talking the talk is a valuable currency” (ibid.).

Ways of talking are connected to the perception of social class; they can be controlled by the speaker in order to “construct, negotiate and indeed, resist a classed identity (...). Ways of talking is a mechanism (...) with which to ascertain a person’s social identity, and specifically to place them according to an evaluative class schema” (Addison & Mountford, 2015; p. 3). As Addison and Mountford report, the literature tracks a specific relationship between social class belonging perception and phonetic variations. Language, in the form of ‘linguistic capital’ and ‘linguistic habitus’, is a marketable good, whose value depends on the situation where it is produced, and on the capability of the other producers and receivers to evaluate it (Bourdieu, 1991; Wacquant, 1989).

In *Language and symbolic power* (1991), Bourdieu theorises the power relationship forms inherent in the promotion of standardised forms of language in



classrooms, either of a language in bilingual contexts, or of a particular form of the language, in case of division in social classes, where only one language or one form is considered the legitimate one. Bourdieu (1991) highlights the role of school in the production of the linguistic standardised habitus through symbolic violence, where the habitus is transmitted without making this process explicit, but through the repetition of its practice; women are particularly sensitive to the acquisition of this habitus.

Leonardo (49, School 3, Art) seems to be very aware of the value of way of talking and accent. He is very well-spoken, and had an accent that in Italy has been historically considered ‘the right one’ for reasons connected to the Italian history of language<sup>5</sup>. It is not the accent of the place where Leonardo was born and had been brought up, or where he was living; it is the accent of the place of his University studies and the beginning of his academic career. This left me wondering therefore, if the way of speaking had been, even unconsciously, built up in the years, as a way of adhering to a cultured academic environment, where probably this way of speaking is valued. As Cavanaugh (2005) highlights, a real standard Italian, free of regional variations and inflections, is a language that virtually nobody speaks in Italy. Instead, every Italian speaks with an accent, and every region, even small town, speak in their own way:

Accordingly, accents in Italy index groups of speakers from particular places, and Italians utilize them in everyday conversation to negotiate their sociogeographical landscape, a relatively common sociolinguistic

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<sup>5</sup> This is the Florentine Tuscan. This dialect was spoken by the dominant classes in Florence, that in 1400 was in a position of economic and cultural supremacy with Humanism and Renaissance. It was used by eminent literates such as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, and has been codified as the model language for Italian since 1500. After the political unification of Italy in 1861, it became the national language.

phenomenon. However, in order to truly understand the multiple ways in which accents function in Italy, it is necessary to recognise that these accents are also signs of things in the world: indexes of geographical places with social history, and acoustical icons of the sociogeographical identities and stereotypes linked to these places, their very sounds evoking the stereotyped characteristics of their speakers (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 128).

Accents, therefore, function on different levels; they are linked to the subjectivity of the speaker, to the geographical place, and represent the qualities associated with these speakers and places. Accents are between the material (as an embodied feature) and the symbolic, in that they represent places and qualities. While accent is something that we learn according to where we grow up, it is also true that we can alter it, according to the occasion and to the person we are talking to” (Addison & Mountford, 2015; Cavanaugh, 2005); “the phonological shape of speech can exhibit speakers’ attitudes about and orientations towards their own positions in the social landscape” (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 131). Moreover, drawing on Galli de’ Paratesi (1977, 1985), Cavanaugh (p. 133) asserts that “geographical groupings are also social groupings in Italy, which Italians rank according to socioeconomic status and educational background, as well as other more personal characteristics, such as trustworthiness, friendliness, and authoritativeness”.

The awareness of the stereotypes connected to one’s way of speaking is widely present in everyday’s face-to-face encounters and in the media, and accents involve “*sociogeographical characterological figures*, linked to the Italian social hierarchy of

place” (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 133, italics in the original). For example, stereotypes depict people from Naples (Southern Italy) as “emotional and loud” (ibid), while people from Milan (Northern Italy) are considered more reserved and business-oriented, which is reflected in the presence of longer consonants in the Neapolitan dialect, compared to the Milanese one. The political, social and cultural distinction between the North and the South of Italy has solid historic origins and is still lasting; the theme was raised by some of the (male) participants with Southern Italy origins. Leonardo talked about the language you talk and how you learn it:

The same fact of speaking Italian. You do not learn it at school. It is at home that you learn, when children are told “do not say *a me mi*” [a common ‘mistake’ that is taken as an example of low schooling or social background, my note], just to give you an idea, and then you might learn the subjunctives [same as above] not because the Italian teacher is very good, but because you are taught at home. In everyday talking, your ear is used to understanding when a verb hits a wrong note. And this is how you learn history, how you learn culture, how you learn to walk around with your eyes in the air, and maybe recognise a Roman permanence, or a Renaissance building (Leonardo, 49, School 3, Art).

A good Italian, the right language, is therefore transmitted by the family, as an inheritance, and cannot simply be learnt at school. In this view, language is conceived as a good, a commodity (Addison & Mountford, 2015; Bourdieu, 1991), used to claim the belonging to a cultured middle class. An inadequate knowledge of the Italian

language can at times be ascribed even to categories that are supposed to master it as a prerequisite, such as teachers and civil servants. For Leonardo, a minimum requirement for a teacher is to know Italian properly. He noticed that sometimes even people with a University degree, make grammar mistakes that are seen as markers of low schooling:

the quality of culture is not as it used to be, this is true. At least for what I happen to see, even on official documents, you can even read on City Councils [boards] tender notices and so on, with spelling ‘horrors’.

What emerges through Leonardo humorous words is that even those who are supposed to have the right knowledge, as officially stated by a certain level of education, institutionalised form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), or by the position they occupy in the professional world, not always do. This marks a difference with ‘the past’, when apparently this would not happen. These comments seem to suggest the idea that those people who have not been taught the ‘right’ language and transmitted the ‘right’ knowledge at home, are not really entitled to occupy the middle class position they occupy, and betray origins that are less than middle class (Addison & Mountford, 2015); it also confirms Bourdieu’s idea that cultural capital learnt early in the family is more valuable than that acquired through formal instruction (Bourdieu, 1986). As Raisborough and Adams (2008) and Addison (2015) argue, humour is used by the liberal and tolerant middle classes, to distance themselves from practices they attribute especially to the white working class. In a situation, such as in democracy, where there are no legal barriers between social classes, social hierarchies need to be

kept with different means. The ‘middle-classness’ considered as the norm needs to be protected from those who come too close by means such as irony and fun considered more morally acceptable than the expression of disgust, by those who practise it.

Guido (51, School 5, Physical Education), originally from the South of Italy, expressed an awareness that his accent was generally considered as of low status. As Ledgey (2010), building on Sobrero (1988) and Baroni (1983) reports, generally the Southern Italian varieties are not deemed very prestigious, not only by the speakers in Northern Italy, but by the Southern Italian speakers as well. Guido quite defensively joked about his Southern accent, that after many years away from his place of origins still peered out. As other studies show, humour may be employed to approach the “seemingly awkward topic of class association with accents” (Addison & Mountford, 2015), to dismiss the embarrassment of a possible connection between a certain way of talking and any claims on the value of the person. As a reinforcement, Guido claimed that he was proud of his accent:

I have been away for many years, unfortunately this ‘slight Northern inflection’ [ironical, laughs], comes out, but I have always taken pride in it, it has never been an issue, notwithstanding that in my family we have never been used to speak in heavy dialect. I think I can speak the correct Italian without effort.

Guido’s words let on a mixture of sentiments related to his way of speaking; he claimed that he was proud of it, and that at least he could speak the correct Italian when he chose to do so, while “maybe here they are a bit more reluctant to accept Italian. Here

in Palano, they have many indigenous terms”. Here, Guido humorously distances himself from the locals, as they do not speak a ‘proper Italian’, and also from those who, from his own origins, speak in dialect<sup>6</sup>, and are not able to switch to Italian. By doing so, he marks a difference of cultural level, and of social class belonging. For Guido, his way of speaking is also intertwined with being Italian and being from the South of Italy. As such, he acknowledges that he gesticulates while talking, and that he speaks with a firm tone of voice, but this is appropriate to an environment, such as the gym, less structured and more risky than a classroom. In the gym,

when there is something wrong, you cannot be a ‘mammo’ [both laugh, this is a jockey term for a man who takes care of children like a mum), ‘children, be careful!’. When there is a difficult situation, you need to be resolute, have a (...) peremptory tone.

Thus, Guido allocates a gendered quality to the language he speaks, as it is more direct and peremptory, such as is required by the peculiarities of a physical education lesson. Guido exemplifies how powerfully symbolic language is in positioning the individual. His position is at the intersection of multiple traits: he belongs to the Italian ethnic majority, he is a male from a middle class family, which put him in a position of power; contemporarily, he comes from a part of Italy that is deprived, and that is commonly treated as having low status. He internalises this status, but at the same time he protests

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<sup>6</sup> The contrast dialects vs (standard) Italian has a very long history in Italy. Dialects were not corrupted Italian, but different linguistic systems, developed directly from Latin, in different regions. After the unification of Italy in 1861 the Florentine based Italian was used as the official language of the State, but people kept speaking their own local dialect. Owing to different factors, the use of Italian gradually expanded, until “in the post-second-world-war society, Italian came to be associated with middle-class affluence and social prestige (...)” (Parry, 2010, p. 63).

against it, shifting the accusations towards others. This is visible, for instance, in his statement that ‘at least’ he can speak proper Italian in spite of his accent, unlike many locals.

Language was an object of (self-)scrutiny and discussion in the interviews, also when accent was not at stake, as it conformed to the local majority’s one. The use of the language during the interviews was a cause for concern. For some of the participants, it was something to guard strictly, and to subject to editing and corrections during the interview or after that, when the transcription was given back for approbation. Some of the interviewees, in their feedback to the request of transcription approbation, commented on the language they had used, with observations such as “I found the transcription valuable, I only hope that then you took all the ‘well’, ‘that is’, sayings and inaccuracies away” (followed by laughing emojis), or “I have to confess that the transcription induced some (mostly self-critical) reflections on my clarity of exposition. I know well that verbal language follows a different pattern compared to written language, but if I were interviewed again, I would make an effort to speak more like a book. I am therefore grateful for this experience”, showing an acknowledgment and an acceptance of the language they had used.

Other participants, instead, edited heavily not only some content parts, which I am not analysing here, but also the style. I often used a tentative style in my questions, as to open possibilities without suggesting, and in the transcriptions I did not edit my speech, also in order to show the participants that language was not something to worry about. However, some of the interviewees, in particular two women teaching Humanities, apparently felt so uncomfortable with their way of speaking, that they edited even details that might have sounded grammatically inappropriate, according to

a standard, cultured model of Italian, deleting hesitations and colloquial forms. In doing so, one of them even cancelled one of my lines, as it was included between two of her lines that she wanted to remove. In this case, acts that might seem similar, are performed by two women teachers who describe their social background in completely different terms. While the first participant came from a 'simple' family, the other one described hers as culturally 'elevated', which might be her reason for feeling anxious in regard to her use of language. Both of them, though, seemed to attribute a great importance to the language they used. The way of talking marks one's social class, and "how someone talks becomes a way of recognising a person's worth" (Addison & Mountford, 2015, p. 6). Being seen as less educated seems to be connected to being poor and common; this is part of the association between the working class and lack of intelligence (Addison & Mountford, 2015). This aspect has strong implications, as it may have reflections on the relationship and attitudes towards students, as I show in sections 4.7 and 6.7.

#### **4.7 Students' Classed Identities: It All Depends on the Family**

As noted in section 4.2, my participants were more open to talk about social background explicitly when they referred to their students than when talking about themselves. When they described the learning trajectories and outcomes of their students, they often mentioned the social and family environment as the most influential elements, together with their own skills as individuals and their motivation. As literature has widely shown, the socio-economic status is a clear indicator of achievement (Archer & Francis, 2007; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008), although "social



class, gender and ethnicity inflect together to impact on the achievement of different pupils” (Archer & Francis, 2007, p. 13). At the same time, "many studies demonstrate the crucial role of educational success in determining occupational success. Parents' social class position predicts children's school success and thus their ultimate life chances” (Lareau, 2011, p. 29). As I show in this section, middle class parents, especially mothers, often put into being strategies, in terms of time, economic, cultural, emotional and social capital, to reproduce their children as middle class, while working class parents often do not have the financial or cultural resources to put into being strategies to support their children.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the different aspects of which identities are constituted are entangled, and isolating single features is both impossible and inappropriate. However, in this section I highlight especially the teachers' understanding of their students' social class and how this interacts with pedagogic attitudes they have in relation to their students. Bourdieu (1986) explains the differential in school achievement among pupils belonging to different social classes, or fractions of classes, as a disparity in the possession of cultural capital, rather than as a difference in natural capabilities or simply a direct function of the money invested in education. He rejects an economistic explanation, as it fails to take into account all the educational strategies that can be put in place, and does not sufficiently consider the fact that aptitudes and abilities come out of an investment in terms of time and cultural capital. Bourdieu identifies “...the domestic transmission of cultural capital” as “the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). Moreover, “by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital” (ibid.), the educational system contributes to the reproduction of the actual

structure of society. Middle class families invest their cultural capital since the offspring's birth, thus preparing them for academic success in the educational institution. What their children find in schools resonates what they have been brought up with since the early years of their life.

Most of the elements of the cultural capital are 'embodied', that is to say, they presuppose incorporation of features such as easiness of speaking, pronunciation features of a social class or an area, 'good' taste, as a result of inculcation and assimilation. This operation implies the investment of a substantial amount of time by the investor in person. This form of capital becomes part of the person, a habitus that is acquired according to the social class belonging, often unthinkingly, without a deliberate inculcation. Bourdieu identifies the transmission of cultural capital as evidence of its powerful symbolic value. The process of appropriation of cultural capital depends on the cultural capital incorporated in the family; it is a fast, efficacious process only for those brought up in a family with a strong cultural capital, and also by the amount of free time – free from economic necessity – an individual can afford devoting to its transmission and acquisition. This time element thus constitutes a powerful link between economic capital and cultural capital, as only the possession of adequate economic resources can guarantee the possibility of being able to devote time to a series of activities that facilitate the acquisition of cultural capital. Moreover, "because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, it [the cultural capital] is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). The acquisition of cultural capital is therefore work on oneself, an effort aiming at self-improvement. Early home education

represents “a positive value (a gain in time, a head start) or a negative value (wasted time, and doubly so because more time must be spent correcting its effects), according to its distance from the demands of the scholastic market” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244).

The importance of family background, of their level of instruction, of their values and of their ability or willingness to establish a relationship with the school were mentioned by about two thirds of the interviewees. They underlined that more than their nationality or ethnicity, how pupils do at school depends on the family. Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages) explained that, when you meet a child’s parents,

you understand why they are not interested in school at all or why they are so keen on it, and are so determined and committed at getting there, at learning and trying to do something in their life to try to improve and not to do the same life as their parents. (...) I think that at school we try to make them understand that learning, knowing, is for themselves. I keep saying that. Your knowledge is your freedom, because in the future you will be able to understand all of those who are speaking, you will be able to read, you will understand whatever you read, therefore you will have better job prospects if you reach a certain degree of culture, but it is not sufficient when it is said by us, if there isn’t a family background.

Tiziana (46, Humanities, School 5) also stated clearly that a big difference comes from the initial cultural level and from family values, because

the family values at this stage are clearly internalised, in the sense that what the family expect from the kid and their priorities, are also the kid's priorities. It is obvious that if the family comes [to Italy] because still has to solve primary issues, with the objective of 'I want to live well', but culture – in inverted commas – was not in the family's interest, even in the country of origin, this, I think, makes a difference. Then you can see this in the school career.

What Tiziana portrays here is how a family is expected to act to be seen as 'a good family', the type of family that is willing and has the possibility to accompany and push their offspring along the educational pathway in order to acquire a good positionality in the social scene. This is to be obtained through educational qualifications, which for Bourdieu represent the institutionalised form of cultural capital, that later can be converted in economic capital, through access to a better profession, for instance (Bourdieu, 1986).

The literature drawing from Bourdieu's theories, describe what a 'good family' enacts in order to ensure its own reproduction as a social class (Lareau, 2011; Vincent & Ball, 2007). For instance, Vincent & Ball (2007) discuss the role that enrichment activities play in the construction of the 'middle-class child' by middle-class parents, especially mothers. They highlight the frantic 'labour' they undertake to give their small children the opportunity to experience a diversity of learning activities: "The child here is understood as a project – soft, malleable and able to be developed and improved, with the 'good' parent presenting a myriad of opportunities and support for the child to have a range of learning experiences" (Vincent & Ball, 2007, p. 1065).

They underline that “these attitudes are class-specific, their strongest manifestation particularly associated with the professional middle-class (ibid., p. 1065-1066), and that it is relevant in order to understand how the education system functions, and how cultural capital is related to academic capital.

Vincent & Ball (2007) highlight that enrichment activities, such as dance and (preferably classical) music classes, add to the inherited cultural capital, boost the early acquisition of skills and competencies beyond the formal learning, and add to the cultural capital embodied in the family itself. They are part of a middle-class parenting style, where children’s activities are age-specific and organised. According to Lareau, “middle-class parents engage in a process of *concerted cultivation* (italics in the original)” (Lareau, 2011, p. 2). This way of child rearing, is based on organised activities, established and controlled by parents, aimed at developing their children’s talents. These experiences provide the child with a strong sense of entitlement, and the capability of questioning and addressing adults in institutional settings as equals (i.e.: shaking hands, looking one in the eye), which is valued in the job market. Parents consider their children as conversation partners and stimulate the expression of their opinions, feelings, and thoughts. By contrast, working-class parents normally tend to “*facilitate the accomplishment of natural growth* (italics in the original)” (ibid., p. 3). They tend to see their responsibility as parents as related to providing food, housing, watching on safety and health, getting children ready for school in the morning and putting them to bed in the evening. As to the rest, they let them live. They do not normally elicit their children’s opinions, feelings and thoughts, and normally address them with a more directive style. They do not organise their children’s free time; they let them watch TV and hang about outside. Working class children tend to spend more

time with the wider family, rather than in institutionalised settings. This gives working-class children a sense of distance and distrust towards institutions. When working class children and parents come to interact with institutions such as schools, which promote “strategies of concerted cultivation in child rearing”, they find themselves “out of synch” with the logic of the institution, thus sanctioning their sense of distance. Professionals who work with children, such as teachers, generally agree on what proper parenting is: they value reading to children, widening their learning interests, talking to them at length, negotiating rather than imposing the solution of problems, taking an active part in their school life. Therefore,

Because these guidelines are so generally accepted, and because they focus on a set of practices concerning how parents should raise children, they form a *dominant set of cultural repertoires* about how children should be raised. This widespread agreement among professionals about the broad principles for child rearing permeates our society. A small number of experts thus potentially shape the behaviour of a large number of parents (Lareau, 2011, p. 4, italics in the original).

Good parenting, therefore, is not socially neutral (Ball, 2003a). Lareau (2011) describes how middle-class parents, in order to cultivate their children’s academic success, normally intervene at home with homework either personally, by assisting with the homework, or by paying for tutoring; they are active in the school life, and able to negotiate advantages for their children, like the best classes and the best teachers. They monitor school life, and speak up when they think their children’s

interests have not been taken in due account. Conversely, poor and working class parents, although equally interested in their children doing well at school, have a different approach, mostly dictated by the fear of doing the ‘wrong thing’. They are more deferential towards educators and tend to maintain a distance between school and family life. In this regard, Lareau (2011) observes that a ‘deferential’ attitude towards teachers by working class parents is not due to a difference in personality; rather, they do not deem it appropriate, partially because they lack the right language. Another reason, is that they see education as the teachers’ job, and deem them responsible for it.

Teachers do not seem to appreciate this style, and would prefer *concerted cultivation*. Hence, the accusations to parents who more than others should go to school to talk to the teachers, of being those who participate less. These two different ways of rearing children seem "to lead to the *transmission of differential advantages* to children" (Lareau, 2011, p. 5, italics in the original). The habit of talking more in middle-class families leads to features such as "greater verbal agility, larger vocabularies, more comfort with authority figures, and more familiarity with abstract concepts" (ibid), activities and visits to museums, getting familiar with the institutions, create the middle-class children. These acquisitions are acquired through “the class, the teacher, the equipment – conditions that are available only to those who can afford them” (Vincent & Ball, 2007, p. 1074). In addition to this, Vincent & Ball also note that “parenting is increasingly assailed by disparate discourses and imperatives. In particular, the state and the market are offering up versions of ‘good’ and ‘necessary’ parenting which insert themselves into the private choices and decisions of the middle-class families” (ibid). Parents’ effort in transmitting the cultural capital “...to ensure

adequacy and advantage, to ensure the best for the child” (ibid.) is especially big in an age of uncertainty in relation to the social reproduction of the family, due to an augment of competition in a technologically driven world.

#### **4.8 It’s Not Only How Poor You Are: Cultural Capital and Economic Capital**

Some of the teachers expressed the belief that, to use Bourdieu’s definitions, families’ cultural capital does not necessarily coincide with economic capital. In plain words, it does not strictly depend on how poor you are, as families with limited economic means may be in possession of a good education or other forms of cultural capital that enable them to sustain their children’s motivation. As Tiziana (46, Humanities, School 5) observed:

But it is also true, at least that’s my impression, that people whose level of poverty is high, if they value culture, you see families without means, but that have their children educated at great sacrifice. I have goosebumps, because last year a gentleman came to say goodbye at the end, he had had many children here, and said “Now this one is leaving”, as the girl was finishing school, and he said “This is the last year I come to School 5, but I am very grateful”. He said “I have done many sacrifices, but then my children”, he said, “that one has got a university degree, this other one works because he did not like it [studying], [...]”.



This family in particular had undergone significant hardship. The five children's mother had gone back to Nigeria. As Tiziana reported, "she didn't cope". But both parents had studied, so they had expectations for their children. Even if in Italy, the dad 'obviously' had not got a good job, he was qualified to support his five children. Tiziana put this in contrast this with other situations, where there is more money, but the values are different:

Whereas, I have other situations in mind, where they value cars for instance, or cutting-edge technology. Therefore, they may even have a good economic situation, because especially another boy (...) was 'richer', in quotation marks, in money, they had a BMW, both his parents worked, they were rebuilding a house, a big mansion, but these were their values. On the contrary, this other guy... yet, he made sacrifices and let her daughter take part in the school trip. (...) This is also true for our children, if they are used to go to a museum, an exhibition, it is obvious, if you have never been, "why should I spend even four, five euros. I can buy something else with that money". Therefore, I think that sometimes the difficulty is these value scales that people have based on where they find themselves in their, in quotation marks, 'evolution process'.

In Tiziana's words there is a comparison between two families where there is an imbalance between economic capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). While the family of Nigerian origins seems to be rich in cultural capital but poor in economic

capital, the other family's circumstances seem to be the opposite: they seem to possess a bigger economic capital, but a low cultural capital. For this reason, Tiziana places them in a lower position on a value-based 'evolution scale', where the 'good' values, those to aspire to, are getting a good instruction and a good job, while material goods, such as high technology devices or a presumably 'status-showing' home are lower-level values. Life-style, consumption choices and generally cultural values are attributed moral value. They are used to classify, create social class distinction, and maintain a social hierarchy based on moral premises, where middle-classness represents the normality and sets the norm (Raisborough & Adams, 2008). The consideration about the economic means and the values are related to the families' current situation; not much attention seems to be given in the interviews to what may have influenced, for instance, the opportunity of having had access to education or not by the students' parents.

As shown above, most of the participants expressed the centrality of the family and their values, in their children's attitudes and motivation to learn. Only rarely were other, more general factors taken into consideration. Danilo (54, School 3, Music), from a working class family, gave a different perspective on families, placing them in a wider context and trend:

Families are a complex world. Families. First, it is difficult to define a family, as there are families that break apart, open families, therefore it is more and more difficult. And then there is another point (...). My dad generation and ours had a very strong concept (...) of social growth. (...) It was very common and felt as important for the poor to make their

children study to make them grow. As a consequence, also the State, with the Christian Democrat government that was on at the time, even with all its conservatism, favoured this process, somehow. University was not that expensive, studies after all were at a good level... a working class family made sacrifices. (...) This is rarely present now. You can see this in some contexts; basically, I am a farm labourer, my child will be a farm labourer. You can see that from the study quality, (...). In some contexts, studying is not important, as I have not studied to become what I am, and my child will be what I am.

Danilo, acknowledging that the idea of family had undergone changes, lending itself to different interpretations, openly mentioned a 'working class'. He linked what happens in a micro-social context with macro-social dynamics, providing a contextualised analysis of a possible connection between families' attitudes and behaviours and the general historical moment, where the possibilities for social mobility seem to be shrunk, compared to other historical times. In doing so, he seems to take the blame away from the family for its lack of faith in the possibility of social progress. However, his voice represents quite an exception in this respect. More often than looking for a wider political explanation, the participants looked for responsibilities in individuals or families.

## 4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on how teachers make sense of their own social class belonging and that of their students. The relation of the participants with their own social class was expressed in terms of normal, exceptional, and humble. Middle class families, with their values, their economic, cultural and social forms of capital, their way of talking and parenting seem to represent the idea of ‘normal family’ against which to compare the rest of the families. Some families are felt as ‘less’ than that, defined as humble; others are perceived as ‘more’ than the norm. This feeling ‘more’ or ‘less’ is accompanied by emotions such as sense of inadequacy, shame, anger or, on the contrary, feeling devalued, being entitled to something ‘more’ than that. The interviews highlighted tensions and differences linked to gender, characteristic of the background family, and own beliefs. An element that in the interviews underlined these tensions and drawn attention onto relations of power was language, felt and used as an instrument of distinction and to delimitate belonging, according to gendered, classed and geographical lines.

The way teachers feel about their families also reflect on how they perceive their students’ families, whose possession of forms of capital is evaluated and compared to the middle class values specified above. They distinguish families with a good cultural capital, aspiring to a social improvement, from families in possession of lower cultural capital, with more modest educational and professional aspirations for their children. In the participants’ words, the possession of these attributes seem to cross over borders of nationality, even if then some distinctions are made, as I show in Chapter 6.

The individual students and their families are often blamed for their lacks, and a wider analysis of power forces is rarely attempted. This seems to position low achievement as inevitable, somehow out of the reach of the teachers (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). In the next chapter, I analyse the relationship between teachers and perceptions of gender, in how they see their profession in relation to gender, and themselves and their students as gendered.

## Chapter 5

### Teachers and Gender

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first analyse how the teachers and head teachers who took part in this study viewed themselves and their profession in relation to gender. In agreement with post-structural theories of identity, I see gender not as a stable and fixed to body feature, but constructed through interactions with others (Butler, 1999) and usually ‘performed’, or ‘done’, according to what is deemed socially appropriate in terms of femininity and masculinity; I see this ‘appropriateness’ as shaped by what Bourdieu considers acquired through habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). I draw on the concept of habitus to examine how emotional and cultural values that are socially constructed are viewed and felt as natural features of genders (Farioli, 2015; Gill et al., 2016). I also analyse the influence of gender on the professional choice, and how gender shapes the individual’s relationship to the profession.

It is useful in this respect to briefly restate Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field, which I have presented in Chapter 2, and see how they apply to gender. Habitus is a set of ways of perceiving, thinking, acting and being that are experienced as natural and not as the product of a deliberation (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu (2000) argues that the individual is attracted by fields compatible with their own habitus, or where their habitus can be converted into the one requested in the field. Miller (2016, pp. 332, italics in the original) notes that “a *gendered* original habitus draws women into occupational fields like social work, nursing, hairstyling, by

motivating women to enter these fields, and signalling to gatekeepers that they are ‘malleable’ and therefore ‘convertible’. A gendered habitus, and a “gender capital”, intersect with social class to maintain and reproduce occupational segregation (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013). Huppatz and Goodwin, building on Bourdieusian feminist scholars such as Skeggs and Adkins, see gender as embodied cultural capital, that can be mobilised in the work market. Femininity and masculinity are not stuck to female and male bodies; individuals with a male body can have feminine attributes, and individuals with a female body can have masculine characteristics. This means that there are different ways of ‘doing gender’, making use of femininity and masculinity according to the social space; however, “stereotypical or hegemonic gender dispositions may be the most rewarded dispositions (...) and are more likely to be symbolically legitimated” (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013, p. 297).

What seems apparent from the data of this study is that teaching draws mainly women, partially because their gendered habitus fits or is convertible into that of the school as a field; however, their stereotypical dispositions are only partially rewarded. This can be seen both in the fact that the few senior positions are disproportionally occupied by men, and in the veiled or open blame for the feminine character of the institution.

This chapter shows how the relationship between women and teaching is troubled and ‘happy’ at the same time. Women fundamentally choose or end up teaching because it is a career available to women with their cultural capital: it is respectable, it is a means of emancipation, and provides with time flexibility, that allows to combine work with taking care of the family. At the same time, the overwhelming presence of women is at times seen as negative and devaluating the

profession, especially by the few men teachers. The gendered segregational nature of teaching, however, is not acknowledged as discrimination; the cause-effect relation between the concentration of women and an occupation that has lower pay and status compared to other professions is not perceived as a symptom of “a much wider problem with regard to women’s status, power and position in society” (Drudy, 2008, p. 319). On the contrary, gender discrimination is ‘othered’: it is ascribed to families of students with a Muslim background, according to widespread stereotypes that see women as oppressed victims, or caught between their traditional, backward background and the desire to take part in ‘our’ Western contemporary world.

While initially Bourdieu’s theories (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1986; P. Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, 1990) were developed around social class reproduction, he later included gender “as a structuring and dividing mechanism whereby social organisation is enacted and reproduced” (Gill et al., 2016, p. 37). In their early-years experience, primarily in the family environment, but also in other places and forms of socialisation, such as school, children learn to associate particular roles and positions with gender. Even if the separation between paid job and domestic job has been loosening in recent years, this association is quite persistent<sup>7</sup>. Being a female or being a male is also associated with certain emotional traits and moral values that are considered natural constituents of gender. These values are inculcated through a symbolic violence (see section 2.8) exerted by the family education in the first instance, and restated by the

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<sup>7</sup> Italy is the country in Europe where the domestic workload is less evenly distributed among genders: of the daily time spent in domestic work, 72% is spent by women, and 28% by men. This is not only due to the low participation of women to the labour market; it happens even when women are occupied, and independently of the family context. Moreover, women do the ‘core housework’, that is, the everyday, repetitive activities that are more time-bound, such as washing, ironing, cleaning and cooking. Men tend to do more occasional activities, such as small electrical repairing and home accounting (cfr. ISTAT, Rapporto Annuale 2018, *Reti di aiuto e divisione dei ruoli nel lavoro domestico*, p. 222, see <https://www.istat.it/storage/rapporto-annuale/2018/Rapportoannuale2018.pdf>, retrieved 31/08/2018).



school; they tend to reproduce certain perception categories about self and the others, and thus to perpetuate a certain social order (Bourdieu, 1990). However, “while these attitudes and values have often tended to be seen as a product of social conditioning involving passive acquisition, through the lens of Bourdieu’s habitus they can be seen as examples of individual agency which constructs frameworks for understanding on the basis of lived experience” (Gill et al., 2016, p. 37). Thus, children learn a gendered habitus and learn how to ‘perform’ gendered subjectivities (Butler, 1999), but not just passively: they also learn how to resist and recreate them (Reay, 2004b).

As mentioned in section 2.6, Bourdieu’s positions have sometimes been judged overdetermined by the social structures,

destined to become what he/she ‘always already’ was: a mere bearer of social positions, one who comes to love and want their fate: *amor fati* (italics in the original). Equally (...) Butler reads at times as a voluntarist whose individuals freely don and doff their masks, to make themselves over at will through virtuoso performances of the chosen self (Lovell, 2000, p. 15 (italics in the original)).

Reflecting on the analysis of Skeggs (1997)’s study on how working class women understand and challenge class and gender categories, Lovell (2000) suggests that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and Butler’s idea of performativity can be combined, with the effect of attenuating the too restrictive concept of habitus, and at the same time mitigating the concept of performance, setting the social conditions for its possibilities of existence and subversion.

In the second part of this chapter, I see how displacement strategies are put in place, in relation to discrimination related to gender. This tends to be relegated in the realm of ‘what happens to other people’, as the product of other cultures, notably the Islamic one, often through a stereotypical view of them. Van Es (2016, p. 11) defines stereotype as

an essentialist representation of a certain group or category of people that is widely shared in society (...). Stereotypes are typically constructed within unequal power relations: a dominant group (for example the ethnic majority) speaks of and for a marginalised group (such an ethnic minority), thereby reinforcing the marginalised position of the latter.

Therefore, in addition to essentialising and attributing usually negative characters to groups of people, “Stereotypes also help to construct, strengthen, or maintain a symbolic boundary between those who stereotype and those being stereotyped” (ibid.). Linked to this is ‘othering’, that is “a social process whereby a group of people strengthens its collective self-image by constructing an image of another group as essentially different” (ibid.). In this operation, “the Other becomes the mirror image of the Self, and any statement about the Other is also an implicit statement about the Self” (ibid.). The Other constitutes the deviation to the norm represented by the own group. Stereotyping and othering reflect a power relation; those who stereotype consider their own group the norm, and the others a deviation to the norm.

Frisina and Hawthorne (2018) speak of a “gendered Islamophobia in contemporary Italy” (p. 722), where the Muslim is seen as representing “the ‘bad diversity’, that marks the Other as potentially disloyal towards his or her country of arrival and toward democratic life in general” (ibid.). Drawing from Massari (2006), they take Islamophobia as a form of racism, testified by the increasing number of aggressive acts and speech towards Muslims, especially veiled women. In this chapter, I use the terms Islamic, Muslim, Arabic as they were used by the interviewees, in an interchangeable way, to indicate a world that appears to be Other, and that is felt to gravitate around perceived Muslim precepts.

## **5.2 A Job for Women: Time Flexibility**

In this study, the popular belief that teaching is an ideal job for women was embraced by some of the female teachers, doubted by some, and openly criticised by others. This widespread belief is based on the assumption that women are good educators and carers because they are ‘naturally’ maternal and caring, and that teaching is a profession that allows a woman time to raise a family. Often, behind the teachers’ conviction that teaching allows time and flexibility for the family, there is the direct experience of having had a mother teacher, often in the primary sector. At times the profession had been suggested to the participants by their mothers who were also teachers, because they believed that it allowed more time for a family. In other cases, this ‘suggestion’ had been acquired by teachers’ daughters through direct lived experience as a ‘childhood habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977), as a consequence of having been familiarised with it. However, as already seen in the previous chapter, becoming a

teacher had rarely been a first choice. Rather, it often turned out later as the most practically feasible option for many, due to the scarcity of other attractive opportunities, and because it guaranteed a certain flexibility in terms of time management that, mainly for women, allowed combining family care with having a career.

After attending a *Liceo Scientifico*, Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) was undecided if to take scientific studies, such as Life Sciences or Veterinary Science, or to choose Mathematics, that she liked and she was good at. She knew that a degree in Mathematics would allow her to teach, but also potentially have a career in the nascent informatics sector. She chose a course named “Electronic Calculators” in the Maths Faculty, because she thought that this would open up this double career track. However, things did not go as she had hoped:

the first interview I went to, I had to go with my daughter in my arms,  
therefore when they saw me, they said “No, sorry, the deadline for the  
application is over, you can go” [laughs].

Therefore, for a woman with a child, teaching seemed the ideal solution. She said she never regretted this choice, and when, later on, she won a competition for recruitment in the public sector, although she was still in a temporary position as a teacher, she decided to restate her choice for teaching. Antonella’s choice to pursue another more ‘masculine’ profession was met by a rejection; her initial dream of working in the informatics sector has been realised by her brother, with a secondary school diploma.

Many of the interviewees said that teaching was not their first choice, but Antonella expressed this idea with particular clarity. In rendering the image of her going to the interview holding her child, for a post presumably considered more masculine, she clearly showed the awareness of the link between the type of job and gender; this link being due to stereotypes connected to economic considerations by employers on women taking maternity leave and having care commitments. As Braun (2015, p. 261) underlines, “the notion of ‘choice’ in relation to education and occupational decisions” had been widely criticised. In fact, “in particular social class, gender and race inflect in a variety of ways on individual decision-making in relation to occupation and career choices and outcomes” (ibid., pp. 261-262). Referring to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, Reay (2004b) remarks that habitus, shaped in the early forms of socialisation with family, undergoes continuous changes shaped by the individual’s life experience, schooling first of all. While the initial social conditioning has a strong structuring action, the individual’s responses to it can be varied, and are also influenced by the encounter with the field, that is with objective circumstances (see section 2.5). Reay (2004b) argues that choice is inherent in the habitus; however, choice is limited to the opportunities given by the external circumstances, and also by what the individual considers possible, probable, or even conceivable for herself or himself.

Antonella expressed awareness that considering teaching as the most suitable job for a woman is a cliché, and she commented that “it’s not true, it’s not true”. At the same time, she acknowledged that there is truth in that, as “the mum-wife also needs to take care of the family”, and the teaching job allows this. Even if year after year being a teacher had become more complicated and committing in terms of time,

at least a teacher can organise part of the work around family commitments. Antonella explained:

The advantage of the teacher's job from this point of view is that you have, I'm not saying half your daily commitment, but a good part of it, you can organize as you like. Putting it simply, if you have to mark papers, you can do that after 10 pm, if you have enough energy [laughs].  
(...) However it is true, from this point of view, it is a privileged work.

Therefore, it seems clear that, more than having a great deal of free time, teachers' privilege is that they can organise part of the work in a flexible way, especially when they have small children. For instance, some of the paperwork can be done late in the evening or early in the morning, which means that they might work for more time, between profession and family care work.

In more than one occasion during the interview, Antonella expressed ambivalent emotions and views on the relationship between being a woman and being a teacher. Reay (2015), referring to Bourdieu's idea of divided habitus, states that "habitus is fundamentally about the integration or the lack of integration of the disparate experiences that make up a biography" (Reay, 2015, p. 11); a lack of integration that gives origin to inner conflicts and strong emotions. Therefore, "implicit within notions of the divided habitus are ambivalence, compromise, competing loyalties, ambiguity and conflict" (ibid.). For Bourdieu, habitus is comfortable in familiar fields, while the unfamiliar causes tensions, for example when the individual moves from a working-class upwards, and finds themselves in an

unknown territory that requires continuous efforts to maintain contradictory aspects of self, split between opposed loyalties (Reay, 2015). Antonella seems to give voice to a number of habitus fruit of her biography that, in her, sit uncomfortably next to each other. She is the woman who was young in the seventies and is aware of the clichés surrounding gender, and had tried to challenge and question them. She is also the woman who has acknowledged that to raise a family you need time, and teaching was within her range of choices. As I show in section 7.7, like other participants, she is split between the loyalty to a democratic idea of instruction and of egalitarianism, in which she has grown up, and more individualistic values brought by a pervasive neoliberal ideology.

Considerations about time constraints linked to family care were also at the heart of other teachers' choices. Before getting married, Gabriella (64, School 4, Modern Languages) had worked in the foreign department of a private business for two years. The job involved working beyond the canonical eight hours, because at times she had to assist the foreign customers in extra-hours. When she got married, she thought that opting for a teaching position would be a better choice, for a series of reasons. After a few years devoted to follow her husband's career in various parts of Italy and Europe, the family settled back in Palano, and she then started her own career. She chose part-time contracts when her children were small, and transferred to a full-time contract when they grew up.

The theme of time management is met with different reactions and reflections. Fiorella (41, School 1, Humanities) expresses a significant anxiety in relation to time. She lives about half an hour's drive from the school, which she feels quite a distance.

That school year had been difficult for her. It had been her first year in a permanent contract:

This year has been so difficult, I am very tired when I get home. I have no children, I have a partner, we try to do something together, to spend time together especially at weekends, but it is difficult because between class paperwork and... (...). This year, I have to attend training courses for new recruits, therefore, many papers to write... very difficult. Sadly, I often penalise family (...) But I think it is a common problem.

Work time and family time often overlap, work time tends to expand and to occupy free time, even only as a thought:

To be honest, it is not that when you finish working you stop thinking about it. Even when I do the shopping, for a moment I always think “Tomorrow I will do this and that”. You keep having that thought (Daniela, 53, School 1, Modern Languages).

Daniela’s two children were grown up, but even when they were small, and she took them to places, while waiting, she kept working on what she would do the day after. However, Daniela was quite relaxed about it, as she said: “ (...) children become autonomous at a certain age. Even if they are three or four years old, you can leave them with somebody else”.



Among various distinctions, teaching is still considered a good career for a woman with a family, mainly owing to its flexibility. Braun remarks that “Within a social and cultural context where the care of particularly young children continues to be strongly and almost exclusively linked to women, and where traditional understandings of family relationships which place mothers at the centre – whilst locating fathers on the periphery – dominate (...), occupations considered to be ‘parent-friendly’ such as those in education, will continue to be understood as essentially ‘women-friendly’” (Braun, 2015, p. 267). As shown in the previous paragraphs, this view of teaching as an occupation that allows a woman to raise a family, is reflected in the findings of this research.

In a rapidly aging society, like the Italian one, women not only serve as carers for children, but also for the elderly members of the family. To this purpose, Nadia and Marzia had to resort to a part-time contract, which is another form of flexibility that the teaching profession allows with a certain ease. Nadia (46, School 1, Humanities) has a 12-year-old child:

and now there is also the parents’ problem, therefore... We are the only children, my husband and I, our parents are ageing... For instance, at the moment my mother in law is at home with us, she had a stroke last summer, and therefore I chose not to have a full-time commitment [at work].

Five (four women and one man) out of the 23 interviewees at some stage resorted to part-time contracts for reasons connected to family care. Nicola (42, School 4,

Humanities) was the only man who had asked for a part-time contract, with a three-hour reduction, to be able to take his son to school in the morning. Nicola was quite satisfied of how he reconciled his work with his private life, as it left him time for family and for himself, especially if he compared “to those who work in a factory” and “other friends who leave at eight in the morning and go back at eight, nine in the evening...”.

The idea that teaching can be easily reconciled with family life, is also expressed by other male teachers, such as Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities). In general, male teachers seem less preoccupied than women by the family-work balance; in their accounts there is no sign of the many tasks that seem to populate women's days and their thoughts. From Filippo's account of his days, for instance, there is no trace of his one-year-old child, but maybe this fact was not brought up during the interview because it was deemed personal.

This corresponds to a gendered habitus in relation to which the family chores and commitments are mainly the responsibility of women. In particular, as feminist research has highlighted, women devote the most time to childcare, “made up of a complex amalgam of practical, educational, and emotional work” (Reay, 2004a, p. 59). Reay (ibid.) underlines that “within families, women engage in emotional labour far more than most men, taking responsibility for maintaining the emotional aspects of family relationships, responding to others' emotional states and also acting to alleviate distress”. Lovell (2000, p. 23) calls this gendered engagement in maintaining and transmitting symbolic, social and cultural capital of the family through the generations “cultural housekeeping”.

Even if Bourdieu does not mention an ‘emotional capital’ (see section 2.5), he acknowledges that the role of maintaining family and kinship relationships is mainly the work of women. In *Masculine Domination* (2001), Bourdieu describes all the ordinary and extraordinary social activities that women do, with the purpose of keeping the family together, such as organising meals together and celebrations, and enhancing the social relations through gifts, visits, telephone calls. This domestic work can go unnoticed or labelled as futile, or marked as disinterested, simply done out of affection. These activities, that are marked by social class belonging, produce and reproduce symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2001). Reay (2004a), in particular, analyses how and at what price for themselves and their children, do mothers employ their emotional capital with the aim to transform it into cultural capital for their children. However, among the participants, a male teacher too reported that putting family life with the teaching job together is strenuous. Simone (53, School 4, Maths) reported an emotional fatigue:

It is quite hard, also because I have a large family, I have four children. My wife works here, in the same school. She is a teacher as well, for pupils with special needs, she has the same university degree as me. It is challenging because clearly, when I get home, I bring with me all the school commitments, but also at a psychological level all that... and then it has also an effect on home, also with my children unfortunately, I sometimes lose my temper more...

Simone hinted at an emotional overlapping of the personal with work, which more often was evidenced by women participants, and that can be considered part of a feminine habitus. As Westman, Brough and Kalliath (2009, p. 590) note, “women, more than men, are socialized to be sensitive to others’ emotions, to be more emotionally expressive, to report higher levels of affect, and to develop dispositional empathy. As studies on how stress experienced by an individual affects their partner or team member have shown (Westman et al., 2009), this mechanism generally makes women more distressed than men by what happens to others significant to them, and that in a family relationship, they may tend to assume on themselves men’s stress. As Reay (2004a, p. 71) notices talking of how emotional capital is generated through mothers’ involvement in children’s schooling, mothers are “close up”, while men can remain “at a distance”. All of this gendered emotional work, exerted at home but also in school, where a woman teacher is expected, more than men, to be sensitive to the pupils’ emotional needs, seems to make generally more difficult for women to establish emotional boundaries between the two fields of work and private life.

While Simone (53, School 4, Maths) takes his emotions home, for Roberta (49, School 4, Humanities) the overlapping seems to go both directions:

My private life, eh, in recent years, I haven’t had much of a private life in recent years, because I got separated; in short, in these last few years, work has had the role of... Maybe I have even thrown myself into work too much, all this training time, even my colleagues say “Ah, but you do everything”, and I have also had difficult years, because I had bereavements in the family. (...) I need to say that work has helped me.

Taking care of other people (...) has helped me. Therefore with the kids we have helped each other, I help them, but they help me.

Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths), on the contrary, argued that when compared with other professions, teaching leaves free time, in spite of the afternoon meetings and the tests to mark; however, she expressed the awareness that when there is a problem, it is difficult to stop thinking about it in out-of-work hours. This, again, seems related to the mainly feminine habitus of feeling in charge of the emotional labour and the well-being of others (Westman et al., 2009).

Guido (51, School 5, PE) deems himself lucky as his job allowed him free time in afternoons to devote to his daughter, especially after his separation from his wife, when their daughter was six, and still needing the presence of both parents. He is aware that with a different type of job, he would have been able to spend far less time with her. He expressed his happiness because all the time spent with his child, had resulted in her child growing up peaceful and serene:

Having some free afternoons, not all obviously, means that you can get organised better, you can use the time also for possible hobbies, to do some sport. I really like this idea, those projects that are pursuing in Northern Europe, where everybody's work time should virtually be reduced to six hours a day, as to allow people to also do something else with their life, not only work (Guido, 51, School 5, PE).

The issue of free time as moment of freedom from work, rather than freedom of doing more work, in a sort of self-exploitation, seems to emerge as gendered. From the interviews, men seem to be more determined than women to cultivate their own interests in their free time: “There are also the personal interests. I like... I am already planning next year’s holiday trip” (Danilo, 54, School 3, Music).

Sayer (2005) and Mattingly & Sayer (2006) show that use of free time varies by gender. Even if women have historically increased their time spent in paid work, they remain the main responsible for the household and children care. This means that women need to pack more things in their time, and usually have less free time than men. Employment, marriage and children have an impact on free time, more on women’s than on men’s. In the domestic labour division, women generally keep doing routine activities (such as those related to meals and routine childcare), that need to be carried out at specific times of the day and generally coordinate the housework tasks. Men’s house works, such as repairs or taking care of the car, on the contrary can be arranged in times when it is more convenient. Moreover, women face the so called ‘third shift’ (Gerstel, 2000), which is the emotional work of noticing and coping with the family needs and of taking care of external relationships, such as those with friends, neighbours or, as seen above, children’s school. Also the quality of free time is different in men and women. Mattingly & Sayer (2005, p. 209), building on Henderson, underline that:

according to gender theory, the greater societal and structural power of men means they continue to have an advantage in shielding some free time from family responsibilities. In contrast, women’s leisure is more

likely to be interrupted by the exigencies of family needs and demands, such as tending to upset children or folding laundry, whereas men's free time is more likely to be enjoyed without disruption.

This means that women experience a sense of rush, of being short of time, more than men. This was reflected in the interviews, where women more often than men seemed to have restricted time. When asked about family and personal time, normally women did not refer to hobbies or personal interests, but most probably to taking up more responsibilities in work, or doing new training courses. For example, asked if she managed to find time for herself, to do things she liked, Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) said:

A bit less, let's say. Now, yes... [both laugh] it's only the two of us left at home, therefore yes, let's say that I am pouring my time in commitments here and also something outside. Not many, because over the years teaching has become more and more demanding in terms of time over the week.

Also some male participants talked about time constraints, but this was more related to having a second profession, or to being a head teacher. Leonardo (49, School 3, Art), after teaching at university for a few years, had started to work as a school teacher recently. He was also a freelance architect. Fitting together his teaching job, his architect profession and his family life, require:

26 hours a day [both laugh], it is very difficult. Sure, as it is a double commitment, this is very true, but it is also a way of not always doing the same things, it is a way of keeping up-to-date, to question yourself, and it is a way of not flattening. I also think that in private life this is a valuable help. I have young daughters and I relate to school, then see my daughters. It is a help also for family relationships. Time is not much, but you try to make the most of it.

Leonardo did not mention a partner, therefore it did not emerge if and how they shared responsibilities. Putting together teaching and an external profession is something that also Orlando (56, Schools 5 and 4, head teacher) had done at first; however, when he had to choose, he chose teaching. He became a teacher first, and then a head teacher. He offered considerations about the relationship between teaching and time. Teaching allows enough free time; like other men teachers, at the beginning of his career he started doing both his profession as a geologist, and teaching. Therefore, in the first stage, he spent his free time doing, or maybe attempting, another job. Then, he used his time free from work for his family, and finally he decided to become a head teacher, with the time obligations that this involved. Orlando and his wife started both as teachers, but his wife had remained such, and would have liked him to do the same. If this seems to restate a rooted gendered labour division (Bourdieu, 2001) and different gendered dispositions, where the management of the family life is centred around women, while men are more projected towards the external, it is to be noticed that this position is contested by Orlando's wife, who would like him to go back to teaching and share more family responsibilities. Orlando, as well, seems to 'suffer' this



situation, he finds it ‘exhausting’. However, without taking the masculine and feminine habitus as described in “*Masculine Domination*” (Bourdieu, 2001), as fixed and a-historical, based on dichotomies, with all women seeming to have the same feminine habitus and where women “(...) accept sexism because of their feminine dispositions” (Miller, 2016, p. 332), it is to be questioned if the opposite situation, with Orlando’s wife choosing to become a head teacher, and him contesting the choice, would have ever been sustainable.

Valentina (36, School 3, Technology) thanks to a supportive network around her, had managed to fit in a second profession as a dietician, which represented her dream:

I am lucky, because I have a husband that is a free-lance, therefore he helps me a lot. He takes the kids to school and picks them up... and I also have parents, one is retired, the other one still works, but until 14:00, 15:00, then she manages to help me. Therefore, I am surrounded by people who help me. It is important.

However, she conceded that only during summer holidays she could make time for something more personal, like physical exercise while this, for instance, is one of the activities that some men mentioned to exemplify that they have time for themselves. Valentina, like other women, hinted at family members supporting her, thus acknowledging the role of the community, that made possible for her to choose and do. Men in the interviews tended to refer to what they do in a way that is more

individualistic, or that acknowledges a team work with their wife at most. At times they used the language of ‘sharing’ family work, while women talked the language of ‘being helped’, thus stressing the centrality of their role in the family management, assumed as part of a natural order. This seems to reflect Bourdieu’s suggestion that the habitus is accepted by women; however, it is important to see how it can also become a lever to subvert a subordinate position.

Overall, the idea that teaching is half a profession has emerged as still persistent from both male and female teachers. It is still considered a convenient profession for women, owing to its time flexibility, as it allows fitting in all the traditional care work; men, more often the women, try to combine it with another profession, often considered more satisfying. Many participants expressed an ambivalent and defensive attitude towards their profession, that had not always been really chosen, and that is not a profession with a high reputation. The profession is sometimes seen as a ‘vocation’, as a ‘beautiful profession’, ‘very rewarding, especially in the part that allows a contact with the students. However, as Braun (2015) suggests, this seems to be “a strategic positioning to consciously counteract potentially derogatory discourses of teaching as a semi-profession” (Braun, 2015, p. 270). Teaching swings between being considered a ‘good’, a ‘good enough’, but also ‘not that good’ profession, according to the circumstances individuals find themselves in (Braun, 2015), such as contending aspirations and opportunities available to them.

Together with social, cultural and economic capital, gender certainly plays a role when choosing a profession, even if it is not always done wittingly. As Brown (2015, p.270) argues, “sadly, labelling an occupation as female-friendly can mean that all sides lose, with men being seen as doing ‘women’s work’ and women considered

as doing ‘only women’s work’. This has also emerged from this research, where the feeling of the depreciation of the occupation due to the overwhelming presence of women is quite constant. In this respect, Burman (2012, p. 424) also warns that “feminisation is not feminism, and that women have much to worry about in the celebration of supposedly feminine relational and intuitional qualities now entering business and education”. This study endorses the idea that the glorification of feminine qualities in schooling is mirrored in its reverse, that is its disqualification as feminine, and serves to the reproduction of this idea.

### **5.3 Disputing a Feminine Essence**

Although the majority of the interviewees do not seem to have given much thought to the relevance of teachers’ gender on the profession, the idea that some personality features are related to gender, and that they have an influence on how the profession is performed and managed, is quite common. As the literature on teachers and gender has already highlighted, emphasis is on the relationship with pupils and on enjoying it, of being like a mother who takes care of her children, and even sacrifices for them (Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007).

The maternal aspect, which supposedly make it easier for women to establish relationships, was mentioned by three female teachers. According to Daniela (53, School 1, Modern Languages), for example, being a woman and a mum guarantees a higher degree of sensitivity and understanding towards pupils. Daniela refers to a consolidated idea of women as ‘naturally’ nurturing and sympathetic. She talks of herself as a woman and a mum, and from her words it does not emerge if the same can

be said of a woman who is not a mother. In relation to this, I can add that as a childless woman teacher, in situations when my pupils' parents have felt my sympathy or special attention, they have asked me if I had children, and were surprised when I answered that I did not. I have always wondered if there might have been opposite comments when I have not been so sympathetic, in a culture where being a woman and being a mother overlap, being childless is stigmatized (McCutcheon, 2018), and qualifies you as 'lacking' not only children, but also the deeper understanding of the things of life that motherhood 'naturally' brings. As a non-mother, the mother 'game' that part of the women teachers play in school has always created discomfort in me, as felt 'out of place' and an easy one.

Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages) remarked that "sometimes you feel like a mum, and some male colleagues accuse us of this". She finds male colleagues "much more logical and balanced" than women; "we women always have this tendency to prevail over the others, men colleagues are normally much more relaxed". This introduces quite a common opinion about teachers in relation to their gender, quite widespread mainly among male teachers, but shared by many women. This thought was synthesized by Simone (53, School 4, Maths):

I have noticed at times that women colleagues, not always, but they tend to be a bit maternal, (...) to have a different relationship with the pupils, a bit more protective. On the contrary, male teachers are a bit more... tend to be a bit more authoritative, not authoritarian, a bit more detached maybe, a bit firmer on rules, this is what I have noticed. But as I say, this is not always true.

Sabbe (2007) argues that analysis of studies between teaching and gender in a variety of contexts, shows that (feminist) women teachers often claim that they often feel their subject competence and their class management is questioned because of their gender. In this study, the idea that a man might be more authoritative and respected than a woman, was considered by many, with different reflections. Pietro (37, School 3, Music) considers an embodied aspect that makes a difference between female and male teachers, the body as emanating a primordial form of authority generated from dread. Hinting at the use of masculine attributes, such as a low voice, to keep the discipline in the classroom, he seems to make use of masculine symbols to distance himself from what, especially as a music teacher, is regarded as feminine, as if trying to compensate for a feminine subject and perform a sufficiently masculine identity (Sabbe, 2007).

But also other participants, of mixed gender, acknowledge that sometimes in the pupils there is a lesser consideration of women, if you are a woman, they listen to you not as much. A male teacher seems to have more a sense of authority. However, some (of mixed gender) concluded that it depends more on the character of the individual. Gendered habitus, performed according to consolidated social conventions, where the women are more attentive to the needs of the others, are taken as natural and as such seem to be mandatory; at the same time, they are diminished and criticised. As De Conciliis (2012) and Farioli (2015) argue, the riproposition in school of these models reproduce the hierarchy masculine-feminine as dominator-dominated (see section 2.8).

While at times the overwhelming prevalence of female teachers was taken for granted and not questioned, many of the teachers expressed a preference for gender

balance. Danilo (54, School 3, Music) vigorously defended the presence of male teachers in all school levels. He expressed a political motivation for the need for gender diversity among teachers:

School is an institution. Although they want to pass it off as a business, in Italy it is still an institution, and institutions are solid (...). Having it one-gendered, or with a human gender which is prevalent (...), kids need to get used to be in a relationship with both males and females, for how much it should be the same, but essentially the masculine and feminine mental structures are not exactly the same.

For Danilo, usually males are more practical, while females tend to be more meticulous. He spotted a contradiction in women's way of being, they are more prone to collaboration, but at the same time, they are highly conflictual:

First, females fix in on certain aspects that for them, in their world, [are fundamental], okay? There is sort of a contradiction, because while females can cooperate better than males, they are more collaborative, I have noticed this however, each female tends to be a closed circuit, very obstinate. (...) Males, although we are not used to cooperate, when necessary we have mentalities that are more compatible, while females are more strident, because they cannot get out of their little castle, that strong world that they have created for themselves. A female is more anchored than a male. Consequently, especially in the first years of

infancy school, yes, a young female teacher might look pretty, but it's a constant conflict.

Danilo describes how gender habitus manifests itself in the education field. Women have an inclination to collaboration, but this clashes with being 'anchored' to their own way of doing things, which generates conflicts. In addition to this, Danilo sees a substantial difference in the teaching practice:

I had a primary teacher, a male primary teacher that has taught me things, which I see female teachers hardly transmit. Why? For sure it is hard to compare, today's school is completely different from that of 50, 40 years ago, but there are things that a male teacher... geography, he had a perspective on geography, that all the female teachers I have met (...) do not have.

As a child, Danilo had been fascinated by his teacher's pragmatism and his ability to situate geographic and historic facts within a wider perspective: "It was because that teacher was a male. I think this, that surely a female teacher would have been a bit less like this". Danilo ascribes to male teachers the ability to transmit knowledge starting from the pupils' experience, and at the same time to render that knowledge universalistic, to be able to clarify how "systems" work: the valley, the river, the sea, the water, developing knowledge that is meaningful to the learners, and that stays with them for life. Thus, according to Danilo, male teachers have especially the function of transmitting a knowledge that is deeply connected to personal life experience, and of

opening horizons up. He seems to think that female teachers, especially in the first grades of schooling, are less capable of this. In Danilo's views, female teachers seem devoid of this wide perspective, and also seem to be immersed in an exhausting effort of collaboration with each other that end up in tiring conflict.

Alberto (65, School 2, head teacher) had noticed a higher level of conflictuality in women head teachers; according to him, "women head teachers are generally more rigid, and therefore let's say that they more easily fuel conflict". This assumption of a masculine habitus by women in a managerial role, is not uncommon. As Farioli (2015) argues, it confirms the masculine discourse of power, where the masculine is above, and the feminine below (Bourdieu, 2001). Orlando (56, Schools 5 and 4, head teacher) had an explanation for women being more conflictual in school:

generally, women are more in their job, they are more in it. Probably this is the reason why they are also more demanding. Men, on the contrary, often let things go, therefore on one side they create far less problems, on the other hand they are less immersed in their job, they are a bit more detached, I don't know how to say now. This, may have been also from me, but not so much, as it depends on the approach.

Orlando described himself as part of this gendered habitus, of never getting really engrossed or arguing, while women sometimes do, especially in the primary sector, where nearly all of the teachers are women. From his position as a head teacher, he had noticed that women are more normative, they want more respect for the rules, but this might depend more on personality than on gender. As to himself,



Personally, I might stress more the didactic question, I stress more the interpersonal relationships, I try to please everybody, then when it is to say a strong 'no', I am not so good. It's not that I am not capable, but it is not in my nature.

Orlando, therefore, explains this difference in attitude between men and women, of 'letting go', or on the contrary being more rigid, with a different degree of involvement in the job, rather than depending on their intrinsic nature. He perceives this masculine gendered trait in himself; on the contrary, he recognised that for other questions, he had a more feminine habitus.

Guido (51, School 5, PE) explains the preponderance of women in school with the fact that it is not economically rewarded as it should. His opinion is that the working time might be extended and, to improve the teaching quality, the wage should rise to the level of other professions that have involved a similar commitment in terms of education:

This fact that the wage is just higher than that of a workman, is obviously of benefit to women, as a second wage in a home, that gives the possibility of looking after the children, to look after the family better, because there is more free time; a man however is less happy with it at a financial and a professional level.

Curiously, he assumes that the low wage benefits women, for whom work seems less central than for men, while men are not happy with that. Guido criticises the feminisation of the school, as in his opinion the massive presence of women teachers gives the school a character that he defines ‘momism’, with relaxed rules:

I think I am quite authoritarian, or, even better, authoritative. Authoritative because my relationship with the students is open, but always in the respect of the rules, the person, and the school environment. I have few rules, but clear, and they need to be respected. I demand this. What has spread in schools with the feminine environment, what has prevailed, is sometimes a certain basic momism, let’s call it that [both laugh]. I think that on the contrary pupils need to be dealt with in a warm and welcoming way, but with firmness, with clear rules to respect. I think this is what they want....

The reasons for Guido to blame women teachers is therefore related to what is perceived as an essentialised gender feature; in this case, I suggest that Guido’s judgement is also shaped by his professional habitus as a PE teacher. Fernández-Balboa and Muros (2006, p. 206) argue that a technocratic logic is hegemonic in the PE field, both as overt or hidden curriculum, where the focus of the interest is on measurement and productivity, and the relationship based on a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, in the form of “direct-command style” (Vaquero, 2000, as quoted in Fernández-Balboa and Muros, 2006, p. 106), a style based on respect of authority, linked to a masculine habitus, that by force of practice,

becomes the habitus of the field, taken up and reproduced by PE female teachers as well.

Laura (40, School 1, Humanities) suggested that another reason many men do not choose a career in teaching, is that they view school as a place of closure and narrow mindedness. She had noticed that in the public opinion, a teacher had gone from being someone of prestige, like the priest, the pharmacist, the doctor, kind of a community leader, to being seen as a ‘looser’ who cannot afford status symbol goods, and who does not have their say in society. Laura blames the teachers themselves for this, their individualism, their not behaving like a category that could go on strike and stop the country if they wanted. For her “The reason is that we are a very feminine category, and this is a limitation, in this case. It’s a limitation because us women very often don’t feel like fighting for a higher salary, do we?”. Farioli (2015) suggests that this limitation in the political participation is linked to female teachers being the ideal subjects of the double charge of the domestic unpaid work. As part of their work can be organised around the family commitments, and their free time tends to be filled up with the family care, “[female] teachers’ work is rich in free time to devote to the family, but singularly devoid in free time for their intellectual progress and their subjectivisation process. This also involves a lower interest for the political aspect of the school work and a self-limitation to the private sphere, at the expense of the public and of participation” (Farioli, 2015, p. 44, my translation).

Because of this, according to Laura men are much missed in the Italian school system, as they constitute an alternative figure, which provides a different worldview. However, men are more likely to want to be University professors, as they consider the position as more dignified, and University a place where they can express their

views, while in the compulsory schooling system a teacher is considered “a servant of the curriculum” (Laura, 40, School 1, Humanities). In Laura’s analysis, the consequences of a scarce presence of male teachers in schools are multiple. Firstly, women do not fight for better economic conditions, and seem to accept a work that lack in prestige and where the parents are always against the teacher. Secondly, Laura sees that women are often more emotional than men, and this has consequences in the organisation of work: men tend to get to solutions faster, and therefore to not to waste other people’s time. Finally, female teachers, especially the primary ones, tend to be more maternal and condescending. Therefore, it would be useful to the students, to have the opportunity to confront the two sides of the coin, the two approaches and worldviews.

From the participants’ words, therefore, a polarised view of the feminine and the masculine elements has emerged. The feminine is usually seen as flexible, accommodating, maternal, caring, sympathetic, prone to collaboration, but can also be its opposite: rigid, contentious, and tending to normativity. The latter qualities seem to emerge both when they work with same gender colleagues, and when they are in a power position, such as that of head teacher. Male teachers, on the other hand, tend to see themselves, and to be seen by many women colleagues, as more authoritative and respected. Being maternal and welcoming is seen sometimes by women as a positive element, while other women and most men, see it as something that needs to be counterbalanced.

Overall, a picture of a school environment organised according to a scheme that De Conciliis (2012, p. 46, my translation) describes as “apparently neutral, but implicitly structured according to the axis dominants/dominated” (see section 2.8),

emerge from the interviews. In this system, female teachers have the function of reproducing within a structure marked by a maternal authoritarianism, the psychic structure that students need to have to be successful individuals in the society, adhering to the model it proposes. Adhering themselves to this model, female teachers:

serve as a subconscious drive belt, from a bio-cultural reproductive organ of values (especially through the humanistic faculties, “chosen” by the majority of the prospective teachers) of a society that diminishes the feminine and makes it the object of a violence that is all the more effective when dissimulated (De Conciliis, 2012, p. 46, my translation).

Most of the male participants, and also some of the female ones, distance themselves from what they perceive as the feminine sides of the profession. Overall, even if not completely, and not in all cases, the features linked to femininity in the teaching profession, such as flexibility and emotional involvement, are regarded as having a fundamentally negative ‘flavour’, to be counterbalanced by more positive values and practices. These are often identified with the values brought by men, such as authority, objectivity, concreteness, and respect for the rules. Simone (53, School 4, Maths), for instance, gave as a possible explanation for the scarce presence of men, the fact that teaching is not a very stimulating profession:

In the public opinion it is seen as a feminine job, I don’t know why, as in truth... There is this legacy from the past, as it is seen as a feminine job that is not much gratifying. But I think it is.

A feminine occupation, therefore, equals in a way to not being stimulating. This sentiment can find a correspondence in the fact that the jobs that more often are done by women are “frequently linked to social stereotypes and moulded on the traditional care and domestic work (teachers, secretaries, office workers, hairdressers, nurses, shop assistants, social workers, cashiers, dietician, etc.). They are marked by low wages, low qualifications and career perspectives, but they are more compatible than others with the management of family responsibilities” (Rosti, 2006, p. 1, my translation).

It is not clear however if men are seen as more valuable in themselves (as some participants seem to suggest), or because they represent something Other than the feminine majority, positive in so much their presence gives a more complete picture of what is in the real world: “kids need to get used to relate both to males and females” (Simone, 53, School 4, Maths). So here women seem to be ‘the norm’, and men are the diversity that needs to be promoted.

According to Antonella (60, School 1, Maths), more than on gender, it depends on the individual’s character and attitude, because there are women who act as ‘fathers’, assuming an authoritative position; however, “certainly a woman puts herself differently from a man... neither better, nor worse, just differently”. Therefore, it is a matter of the role played, more than of the gender itself.

Braun (2012) maintains that, amongst the competing discourses about what an ideal teacher should be like – a “reflective practitioner”, a “skilled craftperson”, a “competent teacher” (p. 236), an effective, non political, pragmatic teacher, still at a popular level, the concept of the caring, charismatic teacher, such as those proposed

by movies and magazines, is very popular. The idea of teaching as a mission is still present in Tiziana (46, School 5, Humanities)'s words:

I sometimes say that school is like a mission, because I realise sometimes, when I have to set priorities, I put the family, because I have to, but I then realise that if there is a school commitment, I give priority to it. It's something, I say to myself, you always need to monitor, as since I was a child I have wanted to be a teacher, and this has happened, maybe this is why I chose *Liceo Classico*. And I need to say, that it has been a good choice.

Patrizia (61, School 4, Art), talked about a very strong affective relationship with her students, with which she tried to compensate lacks her pupils might have due to life circumstances. She defined her relationship with them very direct and frank:

Being a teacher is not easy. It's not easy nowadays because of the families behind them, families who do not have the true values of the past, people divorce for nothing, therefore many of our pupils are... Therefore, before being a teacher, I try to be someone who loves them. This is for sure, very much. Maybe I am mistaken, but this is me.

A contrast therefore between a supposedly feminine and a supposedly masculine idea of schooling, is at least partially independent from the gender of the teacher. It seems that there is a fight for having it acknowledged as a real profession, in a time when,

after a decade of rising unemployment due to deep economic crisis, men in Italy are going back to occupy school teaching posts. The claim for its acknowledgement seems to pass through the defence of the masculine, not only as a physical presence, but also with the associated qualities of respect of the rules, objectivity, less flexibility, higher wages.

An idea of male superiority emerges from both genders participants' words, based on the naturalisation of an authority they emanate. Males are mainly associated with positive attributes, seen as inherent psychological qualities; this idea seems rooted in the habitus of both genders. Women are fundamentally seen, even by themselves, as less valuable. Paraphrasing Gill et al. (2016, p. 49), blame seems to be put on women for being women. They seem to be the problem, with a behavioural style seen as the product of female psychological features, rather than linked to a socio-cultural context. Thus, gender power relations go unquestioned; they are likely to be presented as 'the natural order' to pupils, rather than understood and questioned as "the product of young people being raised within a culture of long-established gender difference, internalised by participants at a level below conscious thought" (Gill et al., 2016, p. 74).

#### **5.4 The Teaching Environment: non Gender-bias or Gender Segregation?**

Generally, school is described as a neutral environment by the participants in this study. The access to the profession being open to women, and their overwhelming presence as a workforce, are seen as a proof of lack of gender discrimination. In this context, the dynamics coming into play in the relationship with colleagues and the



head teacher, in these cases always a man, were judged not influenced by gender. This contrasts with previous research findings (Sabbe, 2007): in other contexts, women teachers have reported forms of sexism and hostility as professionals from male colleagues, and of feeling treated as sex objects from both male colleagues and pupils. In this study, in one case a (female) teacher reported an episode of harassment by the students; I will deal with this later in this section. In other cases, considerations about gender in the relationship between teachers, students and families, emerged.

In this study, male teachers conceded that in some situations they are in advantage compared to women, and that they are generally acknowledged more authority, especially when they relate to students of Islamic culture. Women admitted that this issue exists, but they often denied having ever been personally involved in problematic episodes or situations. A generalised tendency, instead, was the displacement of gender discrimination towards other cultures, in particular the Islamic one, that are deemed less respectful of women, as discussed in section 6.5.

The sentiment of female teachers in relation to having entered and being part of a mainly feminine workforce, is varied. The generalised consideration that an increased gender diversity would be desirable, is not always accompanied by a reflection on how gender has an influence in the work environment. Gabriella (64, School 4, Modern Languages), for example, was categorical on how her gender might affect her job: “The fact that I am a woman? In no way”. For Tiziana (46, School 5, Humanities), as well, being a woman in a world of women is not a problem. From Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths)’s point of view, a positive aspect of teaching is the fact that it is a profession where there is gender equality:

while in my previous jobs [as a technician in a university and in an ICT company] I had experienced a sense of a reduced consideration as a woman. Even if we are in 2017, I perceived that a woman was considered less than a man. In this job, I don't see the difference. In the students at times there is a consideration of women... maybe they listen to you less, if there were a male teacher, he would be more authoritarian, they would have more the sense of authority.

Antonella (60, School 1, Maths), instead, acknowledged that gender has its weight, even if this does not emerge in an all-women environment. She discussed an aspect that often remained uncovered in other participants' considerations, that the big prevalence of women masks dynamics of gender hierarchy. This may not be as evident as in other more mixed environments, but is still powerfully there. The fact itself that the access to the profession is more open to women compared to other professions, added to the fact that there are basically no career developments, apart from that of becoming a head teacher, gives an appearance of equality and non discrimination. Therefore, the gender segregation of the job is not thematised in the interviews' responses. However, a hint of an awareness of this, emerges when the male figure is evoked or makes its appearance; with their presence, men seem to add value to a 'women's job'.

While female participants argued that being a woman in an almost totally feminine environment implies a lack of gender discrimination, male teachers often expressed the feeling that being a man puts them in a situation of advantage. Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities) suggested that in general, being a male in a world mostly

made up of women, while it does not matter in relation to colleagues or parents, gives an advantage with the students, allowing him to have a better relationship with them. In particular, according to Filippo, it makes a big difference especially with Islamic pupils, as they listen to him much more than they would with a female teacher.

Simone (53, School 4, Maths) had not noticed any differences in the parents' relationship with teachers based on teachers' gender: "It is not that parents who come to me, as I am a man, speak to me differently, I don't see this difference". Conversely, Simone underlined a difference in the relationship with Muslim kids, especially between male pupils and female teachers:

I noticed that in this case the male teacher is favoured, they listen to him more. A woman is always considered a bit... even if she is a teacher, always a bit... what she says is to be verified with attention because [both laugh], she is not considered very credible. I don't know, but this is my impression, therefore they probably have acquired this in their family....

This discriminating attitude is not only directed to female teachers, but also to Muslim girls, that sometimes are sent to the local high school "to keep them under control" (Simone). The view that male teachers have more influence when relating to people of Islamic culture was shared by most participants. Laura (40, School 1, Humanities) asserted that as a woman, she never felt discriminated against in school, but she had heard of people who had had such experience, with "pupils who come from different

cultures, who have a different view of the woman, compared to ours, therefore in those cases there can be a problem”.

Daniela (53, School 1, Modern Languages) had noticed that when you speak to some of the parents, in particular men belonging to ethnicities from Eastern countries such as Bangladesh, or from Africa, you feel a ‘detachment’. She attributed this “to cultural factors and to the role of the woman in their society, the woman who has to stay at home... Italian women, absolutely do not” (Daniela, 53, School 1, Modern Languages). Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths) expressed a more nuanced idea on the same matter:

It happens that some foreign students may consider a female teacher less, just like their mums. Maybe if you say:” I’ll talk to your father”, if you bring in the father figure, then they start to be better behaved.

Sometimes, maybe with those of Arabic, Islamic origin, but not necessarily, because even the Italians at times fear the father more.

Sometimes we need to involve the father, as may be more authoritarian.

Leonardo (49, School 3, Art) as well, having had a personal experience of a mum who had raised a family on her own, suggests that a man or a woman are no different, and this is true also for teachers. Instead, he sees that forms of exclusion are lived by female pupils belonging to some Other cultures:

forms of exclusion experienced more by girls than by teachers; you can notice some difficulties especially when they have constraints that their

friends do not have. Then they feel cast aside, they suffer. It is very difficult to do something, because it's a culture that somehow doesn't let you choose.

Even if Leonardo did not specify what culture he was talking about, the reference to constraints suffered by girls, makes it quite clear to me that he was referring to the Islamic culture, often considered quintessentially restrictive and patriarchal.

An apparent paradox emerges here. It is evident that many of the participants identify discrimination towards women in the Islamic culture, either when exerted towards women of the Muslim community or ethnic majority women teachers, as a big problem. At the same time, they fail to acknowledge or tend to minimise forms of gender discrimination when they are performed within the ethnic majority. To underline this 'split attitude', I make reference to what two teachers reported about harassing attitudes more related to sexuality.

Roberta (49, School 4, Humanities), referred to a type of discrimination that she had suffered, one disguised as flattering jokes such as "A beautiful teacher like you, no wonder that the pupils listen to you!". She found this attitude very irritating, and she felt the need to rectify it, explaining that there might be more reasons for listening to her, and that her students might appreciate other features, such as her being sociable and welcoming. However, Roberta ascribed this type of attitude mostly to people from outside the school environment. She rather suggested that there is discrimination against Islamic women, as they are kept at home by their husbands and fathers, they don't work and keep talking their language. Roberta mentioned a girl from Morocco, who had been her student when she had been a teacher in a secondary

vocational school. The girl was a very good fashion designer student. However, her family decided that she should stop studying after the third year, after getting only a basic qualification:

with tears in her eyes, she had to stop school, because women cannot study. We tried hard with her parents, but there was nothing to do. I don't know now what job she does, now I have lost sight of her.

Also Fiorella (41, School 1, Humanities)'s first thought went to comments of sexual nature, when asked about gender reflections on her job. She thought back of when she had started teaching, 10 years earlier, especially in vocational schools, where there were also 20-21 years old grade repeating students:

but this did not happen to me only, this happened to many other colleagues, I probably wasn't prepared for this, because I come from *Licei*, where students behave differently. In vocational schools in the first years some embarrassing – in inverted commas – situations happened (...) I heard some comments from older students... in this sense. But then it all worked out, because when they get to know me....

Fiorella makes a connection between the students' comments and attitude and the type of school, that is a vocational school, frequently attended by working class, or immigrant students, and argues that in a *Liceo*, more often attended by middle class

students, this would not happen. Her colleagues explained to her how to ‘play the game’:

Talking to colleagues, it was quite normal. They taught me that you need to react, you need to laugh, in the sense that you need to reply in kind, and then they stop. Maybe at the beginning I was quite young, and I found myself a bit....

In a general sense, instead, Fiorella had seen that her gender had affected her relationship with students with immigrant backgrounds, as foreign-born students, Egyptians, Moroccans, especially in higher secondary schools, tend to not pay attention to women. She remembered a particular case from the previous school year:

Fiorella: Last year I had a girl who gave me lots of hassle. Moroccan, she gave me lots of troubles.

Stefania: And do you think that the fact that you are a woman had an influence on this?

Fiorella: A bit... for sure... then it depends, but probably men can... at least with boys, I don’t know with her, but she kept me busy, not that she rebutted, but she was always looking for shortcuts, she often didn’t come to school. She wanted to live like us, therefore she clearly did not accept the hijab, she was... a girl like ours, but she had serious problems at home, because her dad stood in her way, therefore she was... (...) when I see them with the hijab, with the burqa (...) she was very

interested in our way of life, in the sense... a girl who likes our way of dressing, our way of behaving, in fact at home they realised this, a very smart girl, one day she got to school with her hair cut, with the hijab, when I see them like this, I feel so sorry....

What emerges from Roberta's and Fiorella's words here, is that there are forms of (gender) discrimination, such as those with a sexual reference, that the (gendered) individual has to play down, as they are part of 'our' culture and of 'our' game; other forms of (gendered) discriminations, that belong to Other cultures, are considered as more relevant or, at least, more impacting women's lives.

Antonella (60, School 1, Maths), referring to possible reflections of the teacher's gender on the relationship with parents, commented that

It depends on the parent, their culture, on how that parent is culturally ready to listen to a woman or to a man. In some cultures when a woman speaks, you don't really give credence to her [laugh], but this has never happened to me, even because inside of me, having been young in the '60s and '70s, for me male and females must be equals, I have never put my femininity... and you can also see it from how I dress and from my attitude, my femininity in the first place. For sure, a woman behaves differently from a man with other people, but I don't think it's something....



A strong link between teaching and feminine gender is evident in the participants' words; the relationship of female teachers with the profession is ambivalent. It represents a possibility of professional realisation, but at the same time it is kind of an enclosure for the perpetuation of an idea of genders.

### **5.5 The Gendered 'Foreign Pupil'**

International research highlights the intersectionality of social class, gender and ethnicity as affecting pupils' achievement. Archer and Francis (2007) argue that in the UK social class seems to be the main indicator of achievement; however, they also highlight that more recent qualitative research has shown that ethnicity "impacts on constructions and performances of gender and social class, in some cases making the latter variables less salient predictors of educational achievement" (Archer & Francis, 2007, p. 13). However, they add that the three factors do not follow a hierarchy, and in order to understand the difference in minority ethnic pupils' achievement it is necessary to consider them as totally integrated.

Cotton, Joyner, George, & Cotton (2015) in a study about gender and ethnicity attainment gap in UK higher education, finds that minority ethnic students and male students tend to have a more 'surface' approach to study, and devote less time to this activity. Generally males experience a social barrier in devoting time to activities related to study, in fear that this might make them appear as 'geeks'. They also seem to experience less anxiety in relation to assessment, which makes them study less, and finally get lower marks. Cotton et al. (2015)' research highlights that minority ethnic students are penalised by lack of proficiency in the language, that may inhibit

socialising inside and outside the class, and by an unfamiliarity with the education system, which qualify them as having less social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In relation to the gender of students with a foreign background, the idea emerging more clearly is that girls are more hardworking and well-behaved than boys. The literature has highlighted that, especially in an age of continual assessment, girls often outperform boys, as they are “typically good, hardworking students who conscientiously plan for and work through their workload (...) Boys by contrast typically seem to rely on last minute flurries of activity to make up in examinations what they lagged behind in coursework to get through examinations” (Burman, 2005, p. 353). This view is also stated by the OECD (2015) report “*The ABC of Gender Equality in Education*”, based on PISA assessment of 15-year-olds’ reading and maths skills in 2012 across 34 OECD countries and 30 partner countries. Among other aspects, the study highlights the role of self-regulation in school performance: the students who have a higher level of self-regulation, the ‘good’ students, are also those who perform better. “A good student is one who is disciplined, follows rules, acts appropriately and respectfully towards teachers and fellow students, recognises authority, can sit for long periods of time, and follows instructions” (OECD, 2015, p. 53); girls are on average more likely than boys to be more self-regulative in the school environment. The report highlights the fact that teachers, in presence of same level of performance, tend to reward with higher marks the pupils who are well organised, behave well and follow their instructions, while penalising with lower marks and grade repetitions the students who less conform to this behavioural model. The study also reports how the teachers’ common bias about girls’ and boys’ academic strengths influence marks, and thus reinforce the belief that boys are better at maths, while girls

are better with reading abilities. This perpetuation of gender stereotypes seems to damage girls and boys alike, getting them to stick to a habitus made up of socially constructed behavioural patterns, expectations, projections and ambitions. This constitute a hindrance not only for their academic development but, more importantly, for a development of their personality relieved from the constrictions created by social expectations and mistaken for natural characteristics.

In a study about high-achieving 12 to 13 years old girls in the UK, Skelton, Francis and Read (2010), highlight how this view of girls being easier to teach than boys, tends to outshine the fact that “(...) when the interrelationship of gender, social class and ethnic minority status is taken into consideration, a far more complex picture of pupil achievement emerges” (ibid., p. 185). Social class and ethnic minority belonging influence the educational pathways, from school attended to professional advice that follow gendered and classed routes. This study highlights how girls manage to construct themselves as academically successful and having an acceptable femininity, essential in order to be well accepted by the class peers. While boys, to have their cleverness accepted, need to show ‘masculine interests’, such as in sports, girls have to be ‘proper girls’, showing interest in fashion and heterosexual relationships. Fitting into the expected image requires energy and may produce anxiety, when the fit does not happen. Also in the relationship with teachers, females usually tend to show a higher level of anxiety, related to a lower self-confidence about their capabilities; they are expected to be “co-operative, diligent, conscientious with a care and concern for relationships with teachers and friends” (ibid., p. 192).

Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths) spots a gender stereotype of feminine docility that is common to different cultures:

kids from Pakistan, girls are very docile, therefore they may grow up with this sweetness, boys might be a bit more... but I think that it is a cultural issue, like here. Now we are evening out, but a few years ago it was also our culture, a woman had to be sweet, and a man had to show authority, a cultural thing beyond the different cultures.

This parallelism with the Italian culture of other times is also suggested by Antonella (60, School 1, Maths):

Personally, I notice this in the education they give to their children: a male from Morocco, for instance, is not like a female. For instance, without naming names, last year I had pupils from the same family, same mum and same dad, the girls are very well-mannered, maybe they struggle to keep up with studying, because it's a large family, because they have to look after younger siblings. Males, instead, you can't keep them seated. There is a completely different respect of rules (...) As it was here (...) a generation ago.

Butler (1997) refers to an idea of progress conceived as emerging through time. She argues that there is not one time. There are different cultures and “(...) different modalities of time, each conceived as self-sufficient, that are articulated in different and differentiated cultural locations or that come into confused or brutal contact with one another” (Butler, 1997, p. 1). In this contact, “(...) hegemonic conceptions of

progress define themselves over and against a pre-modern temporality that they produce for the purposes of their own self-legitimation” (ibid.). Butler defines this progressive concept of time, where the *now* is restricted in a certain part of the world, the West, while other populations (namely, the Islamic ones) are relegated to “a time of cultural infancy or to a time that is outside time as we know it” (ibid., p.15).

Daniela (53, School 1, Foreign Languages) underlined that foreign pupils do not study much. Only a few, mainly females, study and roll up their sleeves: “Only a few study, study hard and go on. Girls even get to get 10s, some also got first-class degrees”. Among the pupils with a foreign origin, she ranks the Albanian girls as the most studious. The boys, on the contrary, are not well behaved:

In spite of telling you that in their country, they got beaten up, corporal punishments and so on, then they get here, they probably see that our attitude is different, because zero punishments, some reports, but you write a couple of lines, and that’s it. Therefore, they probably feel that they can do whatever they want. But the girls are nice and sweet. Boys, not so much.

Boys are described as more often lazy, rebellious, challenging, especially with female teachers. However, examples of very proficient boys are given. Alberto (65, School 2, head teacher), for instance, remembered a few very proficient Northern African boys, in his school, together with a Nigerian family, where the girl had an interest in school and performed well, while her two brothers met with big difficulties, and one of them even left school.

Girls generally correspond better with the notion of ‘good student’, with its “association with docility and subordination to the school system” (Burman, 2005, p. 353). Burman suggests that it might be a feminised culture, independently from the gendered bodies they are attached to, that allows the girls success. The “associations of femininity with passivity and acquiescence” (Burman, 2005, p. 353) seen as a positive value in so far it is applied to a field such school, seems, on the contrary, as we will see, dislocate the same girls in the role of victims, when displayed in other fields, such as their culturally diverse (notably Islamic) environment, where the ‘good girl’ is identified as a victim. This gender related cliché is also respected in what Daniela (53, School 1, Foreign Languages) identified as the choices for the higher secondary school:

Girls often choose “ISTVASS”<sup>8</sup>, the biology path, then [they become] nurses, maybe carers, I don’t know, but mainly nurses. Boys more technical or vocational schools, mainly the mechanic sector, therefore they look for a job immediately, they do not have cultural ambitions.

In this vision of Islamic women that are discriminated against, girls tend to be seen as victims, and as lacking in agency. In this regard, Fiorella (41, School 1, Humanities) reported:

Sometimes I ask “What do you want to be when you are older?”, and some girls say “I want to be a doctor”. In that case I feel... as I know a

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<sup>8</sup> A technical higher secondary school.

bit how it works in their world... when they tell this, I feel sorry, as I wonder if they will manage, or if their fate has already been, – in inverted commas – sealed. In that case, I think that dialogue is very important, than it will be up to them....

Patrizia (61, School 4, Art) expressed a similar opinion, of Muslim girls deprived of their agency, apparently with the complicity of mothers, seen as victims and allied at the same time of the patriarchal power that oppresses their gender:

Patrizia: I don't know if family has an influence, because I have met now one of my girls, a foreign pupil, Albanian, who greeted and hugged me. I asked her: "Katia, what do you do?". "I don't go to school any more". Her parents didn't let her, therefore the choice...

Stefania: Is established by the family...

Patrizia: I said: "But why didn't you keep studying?". As her mum was there, (...) she said softly: "They didn't let me". She was good at school. "At least you could have... are you working?" I asked her. She is young, only sixteen years old. "No, I can't. But I work at home". Then it depends on the background, because I have girls who are very good, they have taken the *Liceo Scientifico*, or the *Liceo Linguistico*. I know, as they come and see me. But this one now, she has just told me. I have felt very disappointed, because she was so good.

The participants mentioned the choices about education and in general about lifestyle, represented by the hijab or other clothes used to cover one's head, as symbols of lack of choice for the girls and signs of gender discrimination in the Islamic culture. Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages) said that she had been impressed by a girl who used to go to school wearing a turban:

In the first class it was okay for her, in the second class all the same, in the third class, she took it off as soon as she left home, and she came to school with amazing loose hair. She had very thick, very long, beautiful hair; when she got there, all the classmates, and also the teachers said, "You are so beautiful!", and then she wore it again when she went home. Someone told her parents, and the girl came [to school] with her head completely shaved. (...) These are painful things for us, the thought of a 12, 13 years old girl who lives here, sees her girl friends with a certain look, and she would like to be the same, she likes that look. That was very painful for me. To oblige her to this, cutting her hair, I think is a shock from which she will never recover... all her life long.

Another important aspect of what is perceived as the masculine gender oppression over the feminine, is that the adult women, the wives, are left in the ignorance of the Italian language:

If a woman from other countries has no value, she doesn't even learn the language, when she comes here. There are children who come to



parents- nights with their mothers, and then translate to them what the teacher says (Laura, 40, School 1, Humanities).

(...) if in a family a man goes out because he goes to work and he has to learn the language, but he doesn't allow his wife to go out and learn the Italian language as well, there will never be a complete integration. Men will be integrated, but women won't. I often have the kids who translate, because if their dad is at work, and their mum comes, especially in the Arabic culture, the mum doesn't speak Italian even after a year and a half that she has lived here (Nicola, 42, School 4, Humanities).

Overall, Muslim women seem to emerge from this study either as “pitiable housewife” or “rebellious daughter”, to employ categories that van Es (2016, p. 46) uses in a study on how women with a Muslim background were stereotyped in Holland in the seventies, which seems to have a correspondence on how they are perceived in Italy at present. While adult women are perceived as isolated, dependant on men, devoted to family and kept in ignorance, girls are often viewed as split between the family culture and the host country culture. They are frequently felt as victims of a very strict upbringing, that does not allow them to interact with boys, oblige them to the family chores and often bounds them to get married at a very young age. Van Es (2016) highlights the correspondence between “immigrant integration” and “women's emancipation”, as if they cannot integrate because they are not emancipated, and at the same time, they cannot emancipate themselves because they are not integrated. Van Es (2016) highlights a consequence in Muslim women being labelled as victims. While

in the seventies the awareness of being oppressed was the starting point for ethnic majority feminists for fighting to see their right recognised, in the eighties neoliberalism, with its stress on individual responsibility, brought a ‘stigma’ on the condition of being oppressed, which is seen as a mark of weakness. Van Es (2016, p. 77) argues that this means “not being able to keep up with the healthy competition’ that is essential to modern life” and “(...) an undesired departure from the ideal type of neoliberal subject who is always free, independent, and successful”.

From the analysis of the interviews transcripts, a double defensive mechanism is emergent. Firstly, there is a defence of the profession, which many feel devalued. Many connect this devaluation to the prevailing presence of women, seen as both a cause and a consequence of the devaluation. Secondly, a displacement of gender discrimination is enacted: while it is denied or minimised in relation to ‘our’ culture, or attributed to lower social strata, it is commonly acknowledged as foundational of Other cultures, particularly those with an Islamic background. In contrast with Italian women who are described as free and independent, Islamic women are constructed as oppressed, not belonging to the nation, and thus Othered (van Es, 2016) (this concept is explored further through chapter 6).

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analysed the views the participants expressed about their profession and their pupils, in relation to gender. The traditional belief that teaching is a profession suitable for women seem still widespread. The reasons are its time flexibility, which allows women teachers to raise a family, and women seen as

naturally maternal and sympathetic, considered the right characteristics for a teacher. However, these views contrast with the fact that many teachers, especially women, find that teaching does not leave much free time. On the other hand, the idea that a maternal attitude is desirable in school, is also contested, especially by men, and the prevalent presence of women is deemed to disqualify school as an institution. This contrasts with the idea that the overwhelming presence of women in the profession is a proof of non discrimination, rather than evidence of segregation. An attitude of discrimination against women has instead been attributed to the Muslim culture, considered very backward. Muslim girls are mainly seen as powerless in their desire to join the local mainstream life-style, or being harshly chastised when they try to exert their agency.

In the following chapter, I analyse how teachers and head teachers construct themselves and their pupils with immigrant backgrounds in a state of belonging and (non)belonging, and how this reflects in their pedagogical attitudes.

## Chapter 6

### Constructing (Non)Belonging

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how teachers make sense of their own ethnic and cultural belonging and that of their students with immigrant backgrounds. I discuss the findings emerging from my research making reference to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and capital (1986) and to the feminist interpretations of Bourdieu, with the stress on the role of intersectionality and emotions (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004). I also make use of the concept of performativity and its role in identity, as developed by Judith Butler (1997, 2006). These theories help understanding how, like gendered and classed identity, ethnicity is socially constructed, assumed, transmitted, and 'done' according to naming practices. I then refer to studies on Whiteness (Gillborn, 2002; Lander, 2011; Picower, 2009) to shed light on how neutrality about ethnic and race issues, far from being non-racist, constitute instead a form of rooted and disguised institutional racism.

While the term 'ethnicity' is widely used in international scholarship "as a marker of national belonging, of 'culture', of country of birth, or language spoken, as examples" (Allard & Santoro, 2007, p. 119), I choose to not to use the terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic' in the interviews, as in Italian they may be felt as having a strong connotation. They may remind of 'ethnic cleansing', such as the one carried out in the ex-Yugoslavian context and of the many ethnic and nationalistic conflicts "in the name of a presumed collective and exclusive identity, intangible and originary" (Gallissot,

Kilani, & Rivera, 1997, p. 6). In Italy, a debate about race and racism has been absent as well; after the end of the II World War, following a formal banning of racist theories in Europe, and the association between racism and Fascism, in Italy the idea of ‘race’ has been refuted and relegated to a misrecognised colonial past (Giuliani, 2015). Consequently, a “process of concealment and cleaning up that language – juridical and political- institutional – has undergone, since the banning of the terms ‘race’ and ‘racism’”, with the result of ”making the production and reproduction of power relations, that in various degrees establish racialised social hierarchies, culturally invisible” (Giuliani, 2015, p. 167, my translation). Thus individuals are given a place according to how colour, social class, gender and sexuality come into a relationship, and in opposition to a self, constructed as white Mediterranean, but where the adjective ‘white’ is never mentioned. As Giuliani (2015) argues, this does not mean that the idea of normativity has not been assigned specific characters, but simply that they are not considered as connected to the terms of race or of being white in a biological term, at least until the Fascist racial laws of 1938 against the Jewish Italian citizens. Rather, Italian whiteness has been historically considered as the product of a mixture of Mediterranean strains that have produced a glorious past, such as the Roman Empire, and the Renaissance, based on the traditional family and the Catholic moral values. This idea of a community tied together by historical and cultural traits, however, “is only apparently de-racialized” (Giuliani, 2016, p. 555); its racial identity is constructed by the racialisation of the Other, while racial categories are dissimulated as cultural or naturalised ethnic differences (Gobbo, 2011).

Given this traditionally problematic relationship of the Italians with terms such as ethnicity and race, during the interviews, in order not to generate an emotional

barrier from the respondents, I referred to a sense of belonging ‘to this country, to this place, to these people’, leaving the articulation of the concept to the participants. Thus, lines of belonging have surfaced little by little through their words, drawn by a multiplicity of factors intersecting each other, both in relation to the perceivers and the perceived. The idea of belonging and the related concept of Otherness have emerged as in flux, constructed around social, geographic and temporal boundaries. According to Edgeworth & Santoro (2015, p. 415), “It [belonging] is a term connected to notions of ‘boundary’, where to belong is to exist within the bound of accepted difference. To ‘not belong’ is to experience exclusion on the basis of transgressing these same boundaries”. Belonging can be connected to the concepts of habitus and performativity. As Bell (1999, p. 3) highlights, ‘belonging’ is an abstract and problematic concept, as “one does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it”. Bell (1999) building on Butler’s concept of performativity, argues that performativity can also be seen as a device that “can work to maintain religious affect and community”; through it, “common histories, experiences and places are created, imagined and sustained” (Bell, 1999, p. 3).

Following this, understanding how teachers and head teachers position themselves and their students in terms of belonging or non belonging, and according to what lines the boundaries are set, is important for the consequences on educational inclusion and exclusion. After examining how the participants make sense of their own ‘belonging’, I analyse how they position their pupils and their pupils’ families according to the boundaries they trace, and how this orient their pedagogic attitudes.

## 6.2 Drawing Lines of (Non)Belonging: Us and Them

Some post-structuralist perspectives emphasise that belonging is produced by language and practices: “privileged and legitimised forms of knowledge and power determine belonging and define the boundaries of normativity” (Edgeworth & Santoro, 2015, p. 415). Naming have a performative capacity, they produce what they name (Butler, 1997); hence the importance of trying to make explicit what teachers name as acceptable ways of being on the part of the students, to try and unveil how they construct states of (non)belonging, as words and practices have material consequences (Butler, 1997).

Building on Butler’s idea of identity, Bell (1999) states that one does not simply belong to a group; identity and belonging are fruit of the performance; “the question of belonging necessarily incorporates the issue of how common histories, experiences and places are created, imagined and sustained” (p. 3). Thus, how the teachers make sense of what ‘feeling Italian’ is, can be seen as a description of a habitus acquired, but can also be considered as an operation that produces the belonging, both for themselves, and for the others, in this case their pupils.

A vast literature is present on how the sense of identification and belonging is built. It ranges from ideas of the subject that is free to choose among the many possible life-styles present on the globalised market, in a society where structures such as social class and family are weaker than in the past (Giddens, 1991) to theories, such as that expressed by Bourdieu (1984; 1986), where individuality and belonging are structured according to social class, with its related ‘dowry’ of economic, cultural and social capital, and emotions (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004).

In her consideration of how processes of identification work, Southerton (2002) draws on Jenkins's social identity theory. Southerton (2002, p. 172) stresses "the dual process of identification and classification where, through social interaction, people place others within social categories that relate to interpretations of ways of life, values and attitudes". In this process

normative mechanisms, such as understandings of contextual codes and social practices, act to highlight boundaries between Us and Them. Boundaries are the point where group similarities end and difference begin (Southerton, 2002, p. 173).

Southerton (2002, p. 175) states that the symbolic boundaries, constructed and maintained through social activity, have the material effect of including and excluding, based on "economic, cultural and social resources". Yuval-Davies (2006) identifies three levels on which belonging is constructed: the first level is social locations (gender, race and ethnicity, social class, nation, age, kinship, sexuality). She argues that these locations are built along more than one axis of difference, for which reason, an intersectional approach in the analysis of social belongings needs to be adopted. The second level is that of "identifications and emotional attachments" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202): identities are narratives people tell about who they are and who they are not, not only as a collectivity, but also in terms of personal attributes, such as "body images" and "vocational aspirations". These stories "often relate, directly or indirectly, to self and/or others' perceptions of what being a member in such a grouping or collectivity (ethnic, racial, national, cultural, religious) might mean" (ibid.). The third



level is that of the value system according to which people judge their own and other people's belonging. The three levels are strictly intertwined and affect each other. Yuval Davis (2006) builds on the concept that any construction of a bounded collectivity, that includes some people and exclude others, is imaginary, as not based on the knowledge of all of the present, past and future members. Following this idea, she stresses how the construction of "these national imagined communities with different boundaries depend on people's social locations, people's experiences and definitions of self, but probably even more importantly on their values" (Yuval Davis, 2006, p. 204). As emerges from the interviews in this study, personal attitudes and ideologies have a primary role in the definition of the lines according to which these boundaries are drawn. However, personal attitudes and values cannot be considered as the mere fruit as a personal choice, but of an agency exercised within constraint ingenerated by classed, gendered, ethnic belonging (see section 2.6 for a discussion on agency). In the following section, I show how these elements engender lines of belonging.

All the participants in this study were from the ethnic majority and worked in an environment where all the teaching staff was from the same ethnicity. In this context, they tended to naturalise their ethnic belonging, and found it quite difficult to articulate it. They expressed a sense of national identity built around values such as culture, a common history, artistic heritage, territory and landscape, traditions, a philosophy of life and a lifestyle, religion viewed as a set of shared values affecting also those who are not religious. Ideologies and values, life experiences and desires emerged as the main factors in the definition of 'feeling Italian'. One third of the interviewees expressed a feeling of belonging to a wider community than Italy, such

as Europe, or the world. This was sometimes linked to a strong religious (Catholic) creed, lived as something stressing the belonging to a wider human community, not restricted within national boundaries, where a “discourse of benevolence and charity” (Santoro, 2014, p. 439), a generic attitude of moral goodness based on good sentiments take the place of an analysis of the reasons for inequalities, contributing to perpetuate them. This is reflected, for instance, in Gabriella (64, School 4, Foreign Languages)’s assertion that “we must welcome everybody (...) love is a big word, but if this is lacking, if there isn’t a reciprocal love for each other, also respect, it finishes, because you finally get tired”. I will come back to the role of religion in setting boundaries in section 6.6, where I examine how the teachers relate the Others’ religion, stating what is acceptable and what is not.

Filippo (School 1, Humanities) and Roberta (49, School 4, Humanities), quoted a widely known and cited political song by the Italian song writer Giorgio Gaber (1939 – 2003) “*Io non mi sento italiano ma per fortuna o purtroppo lo sono*” (2003) (“I do not feel Italian but fortunately, or unfortunately, I am”, my translation), to express mixed sentiments towards being Italian, with an aversion towards a nationalistic rhetoric, and at the same time pride for aspects such as an ancient cultural tradition. This mix of feelings was also expressed by Antonella (60, School 1, Maths). She explained that her sentiment towards national identity had changed over the years, growing from a sense of refusal when she was young, to an appreciation of its importance in later years. She linked this change to a historical moment: when she was young, World War II was not long finished, and the idea of a national identity still created discomfort because it was linked to nationalism. Hence, a refusal of what might

sound like symbols of nationalism, such as the national anthem. Antonella considered that

a national identity is necessary for every country. It can be the national anthem, or the immense artistic heritage. We must be proud of what we are, with all of our faults. Because the Italians have many faults, sometimes I feel a bit ashamed of being.

This sense of pride and shame together about being Italian is quite recurring in the participants' words. A sense of embarrassment is linked to the tendency ascribed, and self-ascribed, to the Italians, of not being respectful of the rules, of lacking in rigour, and for some political choices. Daniela (53, School 1, Modern Languages) listed, as positive features, availability, openness towards the others, and flexibility, but also underlined that these traits can lead to attitudes of collusion with improper conducts and to 'let it go'. Carla (56, School 5, Humanities) mentioned levity and tolerance as Italian traits; Leonardo (49, School 3, Art) and Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages) talked about a certain style, an aesthetic good taste and a tradition of good food. However, they too expressed a sense of shame, for unorthodox attitudes and behaviours, such as not respecting the rules or not being rigorous. This was especially expressed by those used to travel and to be in contact with the Anglo-Saxon or Northern European countries, normally regarded as populated by societies stringently respecting rules. Thus, a definition and an evaluation of a national identity seems to be often marked by a social class belonging. The Italian 'good taste' some participants referred to, is undoubtedly a middle class good taste, as it is the appreciation for

artwork and for cultural tradition (Bourdieu, 1984). On this respect, Bourdieu's distinction between 'highbrow' culture and 'popular' culture has been questioned by recent scholarship, that has highlighted the emergence of a liberal, younger, 'omnivorous' middle class, able to 'consume' either forms of high culture, and of popular culture, such as visiting museums, and going to gigs (Savage et al., 2013).

Considering "taking life in quite a serene and light-hearted way" and a "good-enough quality of life" (Orlando, Schools 4 and 5, head teacher) as traits of being Italian, Orlando alludes to belonging to a privileged layer of the Italian society. His conclusion that, for how much he admires other countries, he feels "lucky to be Italian", conveys a self-centered view and a value judgement. This sentiment was shared by Guido (51, School 5, PE), who asserted: "Italian is beautiful. [Italy] is a wonderful country, appreciated all over the world" for its beauty, its environment and its climate, and "I think there is a certain envy from other countries towards us as a people, as we are creative, cheerful, and adapt easily to different situations". However, he concluded on a bitter note: "and this is the good part, let's say". Guido's words offer an alternative, unofficial account of how the different parts of Italy were unified and the Italian State was founded; he does not see it as the result of a 'liberation' from the Northern Italian Piedmont's forces, but rather as an act of force, an annexation followed by a depredation. The local cultural, economic and social structures have been destroyed and *mafia*, *camorra* and *sacra corona unita* (organised criminal associations) have taken the place once occupied by the State, that the new authorities have never substantially replaced. Guido concluded that he would never go back there, as in that part of Italy you experience a sense of abandonment; you feel that rights and duties are felt differently compared to the rest of Italy:

I have lived this, therefore I can talk about this first hand, I can talk about its difficulties. Having to leave your own land to work, and having the sensation of not wanting to go back, because even if there were a possibility, I wouldn't go back to those places, because there you have a feeling of abandonment.

As the State is not so present, people need to make do. Guido referred with a certain anger to a big damage made to the Southern regions; it sounded as if he had to cognitively refuse to belong to what he emotionally belonged to. Guido's construction of belonging seems split between his emotional attachments to his origins and his desire to belong to a different story, more acceptable from a cognitive point of view and more 'respectable'. His feeling of belonging seems produced by "the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202).

A split sentiment of belonging was also expressed by Pietro (37, School 3, Music). He explained his lack of a strong national sentiment with his own desire of having been born somewhere else: "many times I have desired and regretted not being born and living in another place. (...) I have a fascination for America, for New York, even if I have never been there. Many times I have wondered, what would have happened if I had been born there?". Pietro, therefore, highlights the role of desire in the feeling of belonging; I will come back to how the dimension of 'wanting' or 'not wanting' to belong, has a relevant role also in the teachers' considerations about people with immigrant backgrounds (section 7.2).

Around half the participants consider the cultural tradition the main element of their feeling Italian. This draws attention on what meaning they attach to ‘culture’ and ‘cultural tradition’. While this was sometimes mentioned in quite a neutral way, as the culture that had been produced in the (Italian) territory, other times as something exceptional, in terms of its history and artistic heritage. The idea of culture emerging from the interviewees is a Euro-centric one, made of ancient buildings and relics, art, literature, philosophy. As I show in the following paragraphs, this concept of culture is taken as universal, and affects how teachers value the cultural capital of their students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Roberta (49, School 4, Humanities) is the only participant who contested the taken-for-granted assertion of the exceptionality of the Italian cultural heritage: “Well, for sure Italy has a long history at a cultural level, but then, if you reflect, what about Greece? If you think of Ancient Greece...”. However, she did not challenge the dominant Euro-centric concept of culture. Some of the participants underlined how their sense of belonging had been something acquired as a life experience and through education, and therefore a fact to just be taken for granted:

I was born and raised in Italy, knowing I was Italian, therefore, there is a sense of identity, but it is innate... probably education, or culture, but it is spontaneous, unmeditated. (...) You know you are, there will never be an intentional reflection on that (Nadia, 46, School 3, Humanities).

For Nadia, therefore, ethnic identity is a habitus, (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984), cultural capital expressed through the body, including the way of speaking. As expressed in

section 2.4, cultural capital is primarily transmitted and acquired informally and unwittingly since the very first moments of life, is internalised and becomes your same nature, something on which you do not reflect. For the way it is acquired and transmitted, it is often misrecognised as capital, and considered instead as legitimate competence (Bourdieu, 1986). This, as Erel (2002) argues, is relevant in the construction of immigrants as less competent on the culture of the country of residence. As Yuval-Davis (2006) underlines, ethnic belonging is normally naturalised and not object of specific speculations, as far as it is not felt as threatened. Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths), used exactly the word *abito*<sup>9</sup> to describe her ethnic belonging: it is, something we have, without even realising, as we are so used to it. It is precisely Bourdieu's habitus. Pietro underlined the "lived experience", meaning the language, living in a place, knowing it, living with the people, feeling part of that culture. He also highlighted another aspect, that of the contrast: "if I went to America, I would probably feel Italian there" as a result of a clash with a different culture, language and habits, while a sense of connection comes when you get familiar to a place.

A collective aspect of ethnic belonging is instead considered by Laura (40, School 1, Humanities). She describes herself as the product of a collective history in a particular place, thus adding a historic character to her ethnic belonging; she acknowledges that belonging is fruit of a historic development. It is the product of multiple forces at work, and it is subject to change; at the same time, it has the 'weight' of history developed in a certain place on it. For Laura, to define what 'being Italian' is, is complicated: as the formal union of Italy in one state is recent (1861), still many

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<sup>9</sup> *Abito* is quite a formal word for 'dress', but also for 'attitude, inclination' (my translation from definitions in Dizionario Garzanti online, <https://www.garzantilinguistica.it/ricerca/?q=abito>).

little Italies exist, distant from each other in terms of economy, attitudes and behaviours. In addition to this, “the world is constantly in motion, and it is not to be taken for granted that what is good today, will necessarily be good tomorrow”. Another layer of complexity is given, in Laura’s opinion, by the fact that now Italy is even wider in its social composition, with people who were not born in the country.

Another element stressed by two of the participants, was a perceived difference in experiencing family ties, in comparison with other populations. Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages) feels “very Italian” as a mum. She believes that in other cultures mothers are more detached, have a looser tie with their children. Even if her children are grown up, and they have not been living in the family home since the age of 19, Sonia is pleased when they are back home, and she likes to know ‘everything’ about their life.

Fiorella (41, School 2, Humanities) as well, identified strong family ties as an Italian trait: “Family, because I have seen what an Irish family is like, as my sister’s husband is Irish, a different way of living, ties for sure less... I don’t know, I cannot say less tight, but [they have] a different approach”. It is not clear if Sonia and Fiorella do actually believe that the way people from different cultural backgrounds perform their affection is a sign of experiencing the sentiment differently, or a difference in style and a product of a gendered, ethnicised habitus that has been acquired and naturalised.

An observation on different ways of living affective ties was also made by Roberta (49, School 4, Humanities). She told that her home was always full of Macedonian boys, as her 23 year-old nephew, had always had them as friends. When Roberta’s nephew had been asked by his mother for what reason he did not have even



a single Italian friend, his answer had been that the Macedonians have a stronger sense of a friendship and of protection; they are a closed circle, but you are a brother to them. When Roberta's nephew lost his father as a child, his Macedonian friend slept with him for long, in order to not to leave him alone. Roberta quoted her nephew's words: "I have found this strong friendship, I have it with them and not with the Italians, who are more superficial". She perplexedly concluded: "But this is what my nephew says, this is his point of view". Roberta sounded split between the pride of showing that in her family they are open and welcoming towards the Other, and the desire to remark a boundary that seems in danger of being crossed by her nephew. She underlined a difference with the rest of the population in Torrealta, where people in the street comment that "It's all of them"; at the same time she sounded uncertain about her nephew's choice of 'always' being the only Italian amidst Macedonian and Albanian friends, in a kinship perceived as strongly gendered and patriarchal. She referred of discussions she had had with them, where they claimed to have stronger and sounder values. She criticises them for going out with the Italian girls 'just for fun', and then, still very young, going back to Albania to get married to Albanian girls they hardly know. However, her criticism sounded like a 'blunt weapon', as she concluded "and then these marriages last", while she experienced a separation. She did not sound completely sure, therefore, that her own cultural beliefs, with which she identified, worked better than others.

Building on Bhabha and Ahmed, Skeggs (2004, p. 165) argues that it is not "the dangerous other" that is felt as threatening, but rather the "proximate stranger", the one who is difficult to distinguish and, for this reason, "poses a symbolic threat to the boundary maintenance of the self, for those who can have a self". Skeggs (2004, *ibid.*)

highlights an ambivalence in how the stranger is seen: she or he can be “the origin of danger”, but also some strangers are welcomed through multiculturalism “as the origin of difference, a potential object of consumption with possibilities to propertize”. I will deal with this aspect further in section 7.7.

As discussed in section 1.7, in Italy students with immigrant backgrounds have long been referred to as ‘foreign students’, both in official documents and in the everyday school life. While the most recent documents have partially amended this definition, calling them either ‘non-Italian citizens’, ‘students with immigrant backgrounds’, or ‘foreign students’ (Ongini, 2016), in practice ‘foreign students’ is still predominantly used. Following Butler (1997), I am aware that ‘naming’ has the practical effect of producing the subject it names; however, as in the interviews I did not want to put too much stress on a language that might have sounded unnatural, I have often shifted between ‘students with immigrant backgrounds’ and ‘foreign students’.

The concept of who the ‘foreign student’ is, has emerged as quite problematic from the teachers’ words. The positions expressed around when a student from an immigrant background can experience a sense of belonging to that place and community, have been very varied, ranging from the very easy to the difficult and almost impossible. The judgement is fundamentally built around how distant the value system of these people is perceived from that of a middle class ethnic majority that are considered the ‘normal’, desirable values. First of all, this is seen as a function of how long they and their families have lived in Italy, of their place and culture of origin. In the next section, I analyse time as an important factor in the construction of belonging.

### 6.3 Time and Language as Factors of Belonging

Time is often the first element mentioned when talking about what constitutes belonging. Some of the teachers expressed the idea that the sense of belonging is easy for the ‘second generation’ immigrants, children born in Italy from foreign parents, and for the ‘one-and-a-half generation’, children born elsewhere, but who moved to Italy early and have attended school entirely in Italy.

Marzia (45, School 5, Humanities) underlined that small children do not feel they belong to any nationality, they might simply know that their parents come from another place, for example Morocco, but without feeling neither Moroccan nor Italian. They can feel Italian when they have had an educational history in Italy. Having friends, going to school, knowing the language can make them feel part of the community. Marzia, therefore, expressed her consciousness that belonging is constructed through social relationships, and that a sense of commonality builds on “affinity of interest and experience” (Bentley, 1987, p. 29). An ‘ethnic habit’ is generated from living in similar material conditions, although significant differences in habitus are dependant on class, gender and other individual circumstances (Yelvington & Bentley, 1991). Marzia sees this process of ‘getting to belong’ harder for adults, as for them it might be “more difficult to want to be Italian, it might be a betrayal of their origins”, thus acknowledging the role of desire and of a sentiment of loyalty in ‘wanting to belong’ that, as I will show, is often not taken into account.

With respect to time, some interviewees consider foreigners only those who have arrived in Italy recently, and that do not speak Italian. Other participants think that they stop being foreigners at second or third generation; others see the process

even more complicated. Carla (56, School 5, Humanities) underlined an emotional, almost visceral link with the land: “feeling completely part of a land that is not yours, is really a difficult objective”. However, she added that feeling welcome and desired can considerably ease the process, also for people who might not find easy to adapt to a new situation. Carla commented that, regardless the area of origin, there are differences due to personal experiences and character: some people adapt more easily, others are more rigid. Time helps integration, but the process is very long and complicated. In her opinion, the pupils feel that they do not belong anymore either to their place of origin, or to the place where they live. Carla mentioned a historical reference she would make in her classes (first year, age 11). While presenting the Roman history, she would introduce and discuss the concept of who a foreigner is. Carla would highlight that in text books the German peoples that invaded the Roman Empire used to be called ‘Barbarians’, but this derogatory name had been more recently substituted by a more neutral ‘Germanic people’:

now we think of the French and the English as people who have always had our same culture. This is not true, these are those who in some books are called Barbarians. (...) they were Germanic people who came here. (...). Therefore, I mean, here there was the Roman Empire, and then they arrived. How long did it take to get to Europe, to get to share, to feel not... We do not consider the English, the French or the German foreigners. We consider foreigners those who come from countries outside the (European) Community, and who however come here out of motivations.

In Carla's opinion, getting to belong is a very long process. A welcoming attitude has a positive influence, but time is a relevant factor in building a habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984) in consonance with the ethnic majority, and in overcoming a feeling of not belonging neither to the world left behind, nor to the present one. Through the reference to the Germanic people and the Roman Empire, Carla stresses the arbitrary, culturally and historically constructed idea of who is in and who is out, and the importance of the language used in 'naming' groups (Butler, 1997; 1999) and constituting them as insiders or outsiders, as legitimate or illegitimate, such as in the case of Barbarians/Germanic.

The relevance of 'naming', especially in policy documents, both at national and single school level, needs to be kept in mind for its enormous consequences on what they produce and make legitimate or illegitimate. If, as mentioned in the previous section, some appellations in education policy documents have been corrected recently still commonly in schools and in the wider society individuals with a foreign background are called 'foreigners', regardless of their being citizens or not. This practice is also certainly rooted into the restricted idea of who is a citizen and who is not, and shows the powerful effect of naming. In section 7.2, I analyse the relevance of the positions around citizenship.

While sharing with many of the participants a difficulty in defining until the time when a foreign person can be considered as such, Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths) introduced the idea that language knowledge may help to make a distinction:

Foreigners, according to what should I define them foreigners?  
According to their name? Because they might have a foreign family name, but in fact they are Italian. There is no difference, we don't know how... it is difficult to write if they are foreigners or not. If they have just arrived and do not know the language, we can define them foreigners, otherwise....

The criterion of knowing the language was expressed by many of the participants. However, there is a huge variation in the degree of knowledge considered necessary to 'actually belong'. While some teachers referred to being able to understand and communicate, others suggested that a deeper knowledge of the language is required. Some expressed the belief that even an accent that does not sound native Italian is a sign of not belonging: "when you have an accent that is not the natural one, they know that for the Italians you are a foreigner, and you keep being a foreigner, at least as for your origins" (Sonia, School 5, Foreign Languages). Sonia seemed well aware of the deep role of emotionality attached to the sense of belonging, and of how an undercurrent of emotions can reinforce feelings of (non)belonging. For instance, when a Mum goes to a parents' night, although she might be able to understand and make herself understood, she probably is aware that the teacher understands she is not Italian, that was not born and raised in Italy, and this as a consequence makes her possibly feel in a state of 'not belonging'.

In the past, the teaching of Italian as an additional language in the school had more relevance, because the influx of students coming from other countries was higher. Now that they are mainly second generation, the initiatives in this direction

have become less significant. In this respect, Marzia (45, School 5, Humanities), stressed two critical moments in relation to language in the school life. The first moment is when the attention and the curiosity of the local students towards the newly arrived risks to be neutralised by their absolute lack of knowledge of the Italian language. If they cannot communicate in Italian, they ‘almost naturally’ end up by being set aside by their schoolmates, who normally lack the necessary awareness and patience. Marzia emphasised the role of the teacher, who in this case should do some intercultural work. Acting as a mediator, a teacher should give the class some background information about the newcomer, underlining the commonalities among them, such as going to school, studying, doing sport. However, Marzia acknowledged that not always there are these similarities, for instance when children come from countries at war. She suggested that, in that case, the teacher should try to make it clear that:

they might not know the Italian language, but they know their own language, therefore they might not be able at the moment to tackle the curriculum subjects, to show what they can do, but they have competences that come from their own.

Marzia had had a long experience as a teacher of Italian as an additional language and showed a familiarity with matters related to this. According to her, the moment when the pupil has enough language competence to be able to communicate is another critical moment, because teachers expect that when the pupils can communicate, they can also study proficiently. However, it is not that simple, because learning in a new

language, immersed in a new cultural context, may be complicated. This may generate problems, as teachers expect results, for which pupils are not ready yet:

Then you may think that (...) they do not want to study. They need more help, but teachers tend to think that the problem is solved. And sometimes some of these kids might lose self-confidence, they see the first failures, and then let themselves go.

Therefore, Marzia was knowledgeable of the issues connected to language learning and its challenges, such as those linked to a distinction between conversational and academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000). Teachers ought to know that being able to interact does not exhaust the students' linguistic needs. For this reason, according to Marzia, there is a urge for more preparation on the teachers' part on this topic. The many simplified versions of school textbooks, aimed at students who are not proficient in Italian, that had been published recently, do not solve the problem. In fact, they might look easier than the original textbooks, but in reality may be full of unexplained concepts that stay obscure. Hence, the teachers' mediation is still important, but it is not always exerted. Alberto (65, head teacher, School 2), suggested that a basic precondition in culturally diverse classrooms, is for the teachers to have a constant "awareness of the presence of the foreign student", but this is not always granted. According to him, teachers generally lack in the specific preparation: therefore "they do what they have always done, independently from the presence [of students with immigrant backgrounds]. Then, (...) their attention is more focused on remediation work than on normal activities".



Language is seen as a central issue not only for its instrumental value, but also because it is highly symbolic. Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities) smiled while mentioning a kid of Chinese origins speaking with the local accent, as if this was a paradox. The way the boy speaks marks him as belonging to the place. However, lacking the physical features of the dominant majority population, he “(...) will necessarily have a lesser claim to national belonging than those whose ‘entitlement’ is determined by these characteristics” (Edgeworth & Santoro, 2015, p. 420). Others, such as Roberta (49, School 4, Humanities) and Patrizia (61, School 4, Art), referred to immigrant families speaking ‘their’ language at home, as exerting a resistance to integration.

As seen in section 4.6, knowing the legitimate language (Bourdieu, 1991), which in this case is the ethnic majority language, is considered important in defining who belongs and who does not. The degree of knowledge required to people with immigrant backgrounds spans from the ability to communicate, to not having any type of foreign inflections. On the other hand, not all the teachers have had a training to acquire the competencies and give the due consideration to the complexities connected to language, in terms of acquisition and in terms of an important identity element (Cummins 2000).

#### **6.4 Yesterday’s Others: the Albanians and the Romanians**

As seen in the previous section, when defining belonging boundaries, the participants refer first of all to how long the students and their families with immigrant backgrounds have been living in Italy, and to what extent they know the language.

Another relevant criterion is how distant they are from the culture of the ethnic majority, in a middle class declination. The geography of proximity and Otherness can take different configurations in relation to a perceived distance from an ideal of integration in the mainstream society. The boundary delimitating who is in and who is out is very mobile, but, even when at first denied, it invariably makes its appearance.

Some of the participants view countries or areas such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Northern Africa as culturally distant, Albania, Macedonia and Romania as closer. This reflects on how well they do at school. This classification is often based on an essentialised view of ethnicities, as to their characteristics, behaviours and motivations. Kids from Albania, Macedonia and Eastern Europe are usually considered good students from an academic point of view. Orlando (56, Schools 4 and 5, head teacher) and Simone (53, School 4, Maths) suggested that they may be either brilliant or very bad, there seem to be no ‘in-betweens’. This restates a stereotypical representation of the Other already acknowledged by previous literature. For example, in a study about ethnic inter-relationships in a multicultural school in Australia, Arber (2008, p. 132) observes that “Identities are described as exhibiting characteristics that seem contradictory and extreme. Such people are better or worse, more acceptable or less acceptable, more wonderful or more dreadful than us”. At the same time, pupils from Albania, Macedonia and Romania are described as aggressive and badly behaved, in a way that seems to resonate with “well-rooted stereotypes about the Balkans” (Škevin & Grgić Maroević, 2016, p. 1) reinforced with the war fought in the years 1991-1995, of Balkan people as aggressive. In their analysis of how in 1995 the Italian newspaper “La Stampa” reported the war in Croatia and Bosnia, Skevin & Grgic Maroevic (2016, p. 1) notice

the occurrence of stereotypes expressed through several types of polarised representations, for example, the one between the good (Italy/Europe/West) and the bad (Croatia/the Balkans – associated with “primitive” nationalism and chaos).

Slavdom is represented as undifferentiated and chaotic,

all massed up together to serve as Western Europe’s very own exotic and chaotic Other (...) a region always criticised for its backwardness, and on occasions also romanticized for its raw, loud, manner-less, short-tempered, confused but likeable nature (...) implies a sense of supremacy of Us (West Europeans) over Them (East Europeans, Slavs or Balkan peoples (ibid., p.10).

While this “Balkanophobia” was on the occasion caused by a sense of fear due to the proximity of the war, it reflects a long-standing view about people from the Balkan regions from Western European countries (Škevin & Grgić Maroević, 2016). A habitus (Bourdieu 1977; 1984) acquired through socialisation in the family and/or in a different country is essentialised and considered part of the individual’s nature. A way of performing masculinity – in this case perceived as aggressive – and femininity – (Butler, 1997) is seen as intrinsically attached to a certain ethnicity, possibly feeding a circuit of expectations that acquire a performative power.

As seen in section 5.5 about intersections of gender and ethnicity, the literature has analysed how teachers' expectations of students, both related to achievement and behaviour, have an important role as 'self-fulfilling prophecies', especially when such beliefs are shared by the teachers of the same school (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Thys & Van Houtte, 2016). Demanet and Van Houtte (2012) have underlined that, although previous research has shown that teachers' expectations on students are partly accurate, because based on their actual achievement and behaviour in class, both accurate and inaccurate expectancy influence future conduct and commitment in study. Students considered low achieving and misbehaved, usually "receive less effort and less affect from teachers" (ibid., p. 866), which can produce misconduct as a result of feeling powerless towards own school attainment, and of not feeling part of the school community. The presence of strong social and emotional connections with peers, teachers and the institution have a strong positive effect on school conduct (Demanet, Van Praag, & Van Houtte, 2016). Demanet et al.(2016) explain that in schools where there is a diversity of ethnicities, misconduct issues are more common in the ethnic groups with a low congruence (that is, a low percentage of students of the same ethnicity in the school). They suggest that this is related to the fact that, in a society where ethnic minorities are often subjected to stereotypes and prejudices, it is difficult for them to fit in. The presence of other students of the same ethnicity – and, I would suggest, similar habitus – facilitates the adjustment. This would also help explaining why, as some of the interviewees suggest, misbehaviour is more common among students from ethnic minorities. Reflecting this view, Simone (53, School 4, Maths) stated that kids from Eastern Europe often have an aggressive attitude, and find it hard to integrate.

Orlando (56, Schools 4 and 5, head teacher) argued that the majority of the pupils who are ‘up to something’ in school, are often Albanian or Macedonian, as “they have something inside, I don’t know”. He concluded that it might be a matter of ethnicity. From his position as a head teacher, he had noticed that generally, in ten pupils who are taken to his office after doing something wrong, easily six or seven are foreigners. This does not reflect the percentage of the student with immigrant backgrounds in the school, that is around 17%. He specified that “half the foreign students come from Balkan countries, Macedonia and Albania, that have quite an ‘animated’ nature.

In contrasting them with other ethnicities, Orlando noticed that pupils from South America and from India are very quiet, while pupils from the North of Africa, from Morocco and Tunisia in particular, can be naughty, but not all of them. This essentialised view of ethnicities is also extended to their proficiency: Latin Americans experience difficulties in following the curriculum; the Eastern Europeans, particularly the Romanians and the Russians, do not have particular problems; the Albanians can be top of the class, but generally perform poorly. The Indians usually have many problems, but “they are diligent, more than other ethnicities, therefore they do what they have to, and this leads them to some results, but it is very hard for them, maybe also because their language is completely different” (Orlando, 56, Schools 4 and 5, head teacher). Orlando synthesises a common way of seeing Indian pupils in Italian schools, where a way of performing an ethnic and classed identity, acquired as a *habitus* (Bourdieu 1997; 1984), is essentialised as part of the nature of the ethnic group, and interpreted as passivity (Butler, 1997).

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017, the population with Indian citizenship in Marche Region was 3.98% of all the non-Italian population<sup>10</sup>, therefore quite a small percentage. As Gahra and Paparusso (2018) remark, Italy that does not have any cultural, political or historical link with India; immigration from India is a new phenomenon. The Indian community in Italy is quite diverse, in terms of region of origins, religion, reason for emigrating, level of instruction and occupation, which make their integration in the mainstream society quite fragmented. It is also affected by the fact that often their long-term plan is to move on, and settle in an English-speaking country, where they have a higher cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), in terms of language knowledge and kinship connections. This entails that often they have a relative interest in learning the Italian language and becoming part of the local community. They are often low-educated and employed in low-wage occupations, also owing to the Italian policies, that make the acknowledgement of their educational and professional qualifications difficult. This shows that what is perceived as an ethnic feature, is rather to be linked to the characteristics of the immigration of a segment of immigrants from India, in the Italian territory. This is also evidenced by statistics and studies showing that, in a country where immigration from India has a different history and feature, Indian pupils outperform their peers, and are highly motivated. For instance, the 2015 Scottish Census reports that school success – in terms of higher education qualification rate – is higher among some groups of ethnic minorities – such as Chinese and Indians – if compared to other native categories, like White-Scottish or Other British.

Daniela (53, School 1, Foreign Languages) too gave quite a homogenous description of ethnicities: the kids from Asia do not study much, and do not show an

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.tuttitalia.it/marche/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2017/>

interest in school, they just “stay here and hang around”, and their families do not take part in the school life. She expressed deep irritation for the bad behaviour of male Albanians and Romanians. They say that in their country of origins teachers are much stricter, and the students have to study a lot, “... order, rigour, manners... then they come here and... they do not behave as they would do there”. Only a few among the foreign students really study, and they are mainly female Albanians. Also at a behavioural level, Daniela contrasted the nice girls with the not-so-nice boys, thus adding an ethnic element to the gendered idea of the good and well-behaved student discussed in Chapter 5.

Daniela hypothesis was that the motivations that push the families to emigrate might explain why some ethnicities are more proficient than others in the Italian school. She suggested that the Albanians had immigrated to Italy for a social and cultural redemption, and not only for economic reasons, “therefore, they probably hope that their children can get ahead, can earn more than their parents, because their mothers are all housekeepers or caretakers, or don’t do anything. Fathers... many are bricklayers”. This willingness to progress on the social ladder, accompanied with a geographic and cultural closeness, makes, in Daniela’s view, of the Albanians a community that is better integrated in the Italian society. Even if she blames them for generally meeting with other Albanians outside of school, she contrasts them, and the Romanians, to tighter communities, such as the Bangladeshi, that for her “are mentally in another place (...) they always stick together, never mind the Chinese, probably they have taken their culture and want to keep it”.

Danilo (54, School 3, Music) too, suggested that it is easier for the Albanians and the Romanians to feel and become Italian. He highlighted some historical and

cultural reasons: “(...) Albania has been an Italian colony, sadly, as a consequence Europe still sees Albania as an Italian protectorate. Therefore it is faster. Even if they have many incompatibilities, like the other, even religious, however...”. Danilo remarked that Albanian language is very similar to the dialect spoken in Apulia, the Italian region facing Albania on the opposite side of the Adriatic Sea. He observed that the cultural difference between these two regions is small, as testified by the presence of ancient Albanian communities in Apulia<sup>11</sup>. Same for the Romanians: due to a linguistic familiarity, both Italian and Romanian being Romance languages, they learn Italian with more easiness. “They keep being Romanian, and also, you need to distinguish, as there are the Russian speaking and the Romanian speaking, but I see them on the way [to feel Italian], also for religious reasons”. Danilo introduces here the importance of religion as a cultural element structuring identity (Butler, 2008). This aspect will be explored further in section 6.6.

The Albanians first of all, then the Macedonians, and partially the Romanians are, in the words of many, the students who integrate more easily, who do better in school, especially if they are females, and who have the ‘right’ ambition to social progress. From my personal and professional experience, I found this a quite surprising turn in attitude, as it used to be different. The first big Albanian migrations to Italy happened in 1991, after the end of the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania. Within a few days, 26,000 migrants arrived on a boat in Southern Italy, and around 20,000 in August in the same year. Since the 1970s, the Italian television was visible in Albania; therefore, the Italian language was reasonably known to young people, who had

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<sup>11</sup> In Southern Italy and Sicily there are Arberesh communities, founded by Albanians who fled the Ottoman occupation in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.



undergone a sort of “*anticipatory assimilation*” (King & Mai, 2009, p. 122, italics in the original). King and Mai (2009) highlight that after a first reaction of sympathy at the Albanian landings, in a few months, also with the help of the press, that described the immigrated Albanians as “desperate, poverty-stricken, abject, childlike” (ibid. p. 123), they came to be “persistently associated in the media with human trafficking, drugs, prostitution, burglaries and violent behaviour” (ibid.); “*albanophobia*, an all-encompassing and irrational fear of all things Albanian, became entrenched with the perceptions of the Italian populations as a whole” (ibid., italics in the original). This very negative stereotyping not only led to discriminatory behaviours on the side of the Italians, as to employment and housing, but also affected how the Albanians socialised. The research conducted by King and Mai (2009), show that some of this stereotypes were internalised, leading to the choice of socialising mainly with the Italians. King and Mai’s study has also evidenced a preference, in some cases, for not being identified as Albanians, sometimes to the point of parents encouraging their children not to speak Albanian in public. The authors state that the teenagers they had interviewed have reported “being isolated, taunted, accused of having diseases” (King and Mai, 2009, p. 125). In the interviews I conducted for this research, there is not much echo of this perception of the Albanians. Even if it seems that a wild side is still there, testified by the (males) bad behaviour, the attitude towards the Albanians in Italy seems to have softened up, and they are seen as an ethnicity that easily integrate in the local society. Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) commented that people who have come from Albania now may be 40 years old, they might have attended University in Italy, they work, so no difference at all with the Italians. A similar point of view was shared by Guido (51, School 5, PE), who had friends among the Albanians, and who placed them among

those who send their children to University, in contrast to other ethnicities that just ‘hang around’ (see p. 321). Similarly, the Romanian community, the largest in Italy, had been perceived as made of dangerous people, as if emigrated after 1989 and 1991 (the end of Ceausescu dictatorship and of the Soviet Union) to Italy with the precise intent of committing crimes, without any moral restraints, with men devoted to heinous robberies or informatics crimes, and women seen as deceivers, taking advantage mainly of elderly Italians to obtain personal favours (Valtolina, 2012). Valtolina (2012, p. 17, my translation) argues that “in this sense, it may be assumed that they have replaced the Albanians in the collective imagery (...) becoming for many Italians the new symbol of depravation”. At the same time, Valtolina (2012) evidences a concurrent representation of the Romanians, as people easily assimilable, as representing what the Italians were before the industrialisation: men deeply Christian, although not Catholic, valuing the family, loyal and hard workers, women seen as devoted to family and subordinated to their husband. In the interviews, I have not have heard any echo of the ‘really bad’ representation of the Romanians, therefore maybe the ‘positive’ one, the one underlying similarities, has prevailed, at least in the situations explored.

The place of Albanians and Romanians as Others seems to have been taken up by other ethnicities seen as having a strong Muslim identity. In fact, although most Albanians are Muslim, “that is not a predominant aspect in their cultural construction and representation in Italy” (King & Mai, 2009, p. 131). In support of this, King and Mai (ibid.) have found that

many Albanian Muslim migrants strategically downplayed their affiliation to Islam, which tended to be referred to in terms of family tradition rather than faith, and were prepared to baptise their children as Catholics as a way to support their children's assimilation.

This aspect, of attaching little importance to the Albanians possibly being Muslims, is also present in this study, where this link has never emerged. I show in section 6.6 that it is not religion in itself that seems to matter, but rather how it is lived.

In conclusion, groups that had been considered as 'Others' in the common view for many years, such as the Albanians and other Eastern Europeans, have emerged from the interviews as not particularly 'problematic'. The boundary frontier seems to have moved, pointing towards other groups of immigrants: the most mentioned are those from Northern Africa, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and China, with different motivations and degrees, as I show in the following sections.

## **6.5 Today's Others: the Muslims**

The inter-gender relationship was the aspect most emphasised by the participants in this study, and presented as the most incontrovertibly deplorable in the Islamic culture. A widespread perception was that in this culture, women are subjected to men, while in the Western world, women and men allegedly have equal rights. An appropriation of feminist values in an anti Islamic function is highlighted by Butler

(2006). She observes that, following the attack to the Twin Towers in 2001<sup>12</sup>, the Bush administration “retroactively” used the liberation of women as a motivation for the military action against Afghanistan.

Here, there is no belligerent ‘exportation of democracy’, but there is nevertheless an underlying diffused neo-colonial attitude. As shown in Chapter 5, as to women situation, the Western world emerges, in the participants’ words, as the one where there is gender equality, while in Islamic societies women are seen as victims of a patriarchal society. However, it needs to be stressed that gender equality in the Western world is often not defined by the interviewees as such in itself, but in opposition to the Islamic world.

Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) considers the inter-gender relationship as the most evident and most problematic aspect of this intercultural collision. Teacher need to deal with sensitive areas with care. For example, forcing a Bangladeshi girl, who finds sitting next to a boy challenging, would not be right of a teacher. This is a goal that may be reached with time:

I believe it is right for boys and girls at this age to work together, but I cannot violate a person that finds taking this step so difficult. (...) In a generation or two, there will be no difference. They need time.

Antonella sees things as developing through time; time is an element that creates belonging (see section 6.3). She contemporarily presents the Western gender-

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<sup>12</sup> The reference is to the terrorist attack to the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001.

relationship model as the one to tend to. Talking about second generations, she noted that although many families coming from countries such as Morocco and Egypt integrate in the Italian society, there is still a difference in the way they bring their children up. In particular, she referred of a family with many children, where girls were very well mannered, but not so proficient in school, as they needed to help looking after the younger siblings, while the boys were very poorly behaved. In Antonella's view, this type of gendered education seems to be attributed to an Islamic culture essentially sexist, which needs to be overcome.

The idea that some societies, namely the Islamic ones, are backward, especially in inter-sex relationships and in women freedom, emerges quite often from the teachers' words. These societies are seen as opposed to Our Western world, where there is freedom of choice, especially for women. In this respect, Butler (2008) points out the centrality of the problem of time and of progress, where "hegemonic conceptions of progress define themselves over and against a premodern temporality that they produce for the purposes of their own self-legitimation" (ibid., p. 1). Butler stresses that "certain secular conceptions of history and of what is meant by a 'progressive' position within contemporary politics rely on a conception of freedom that is understood to emerge through time, and that is temporally progressive in its structure" (ibid., p. 3). Thus, a division between 'secularism', with its belief in sexual freedom, and anti-racist, anti-Islamic positions seems sometimes to emerge, and intolerance can be carried by secularism and religiosity likewise. The point that Butler makes is not "to abandon freedom as a norm, but to ask about its uses" (ibid., p. 3), in order for it not to be instrumentalised and used for repression. In particular, with reference to the women's condition, she suggests that "Whatever the relation is between Islam and the

status of women, let's begin with the proposition that it is complex, historically changing, and not available to a quick reduction (...)” (ibid., p. 19), such as the veil being considered a symbol of connection to fundamentalism and a means to communicate the idea of women's inferiority to men.

In her experience as a teacher, Carla (56, School 5, Humanities) had observed that Muslims usually live religion with more fervour than Catholics. Carla stressed her belonging to the Catholic cultural tradition, although as an atheist. She expressed the idea that one of the reasons for this higher involvement, is that Islam is a religion that affects everyday life, with its embodied aspects, such as the way of dressing and behaving. This makes the degree of families' conditioning on their children easily visible. She added that not many of the families she had met, fully respect the Koran precepts. However, she had also directly known sad stories, such as that of a girl who, when her mum got to know that she had taken her veil off during the school break, had her hair badly cut, so that she would feel ashamed to not wear the veil again. She also remembered a boy who had remarked that he could not be in a relationship with a girl in the same school because she was not Muslim. But Carla (56, School 5, Humanities) says that these situations were rare, and what more than else she noticed

a bewilderment generally in children, this sense of non belonging either to their religion and to their land, their traditions, and to our traditions. Therefore, a hybrid comes out, sometimes it has come out, I remember a girl asking me: “Miss, what religion am I?”, but the others, even if they do not manifest their discomfort, I think it is... I perceive it, I do.

Among the episodes seen as examples of Islamic illiberalism and oppression, the most mentioned were those of the girls who had their hair cut as a punishment for not wearing their hijab in school. The comments were mainly focused on the hair beauty, implying a connection between beauty and the desire to show it, according to a Western hedonistic idea.

What seems to make of the Islamic culture a marker of an Other culture, is that it is seen as denying the freedom of choice. It prevents women from being free and equal, and children from enjoying aspects of the social and cultural life. Another aspect that is often criticised, as considered linked to being fundamentalist, is not allowing children take part in school events connected to the Catholic tradition. The interviewees, often see Christmas celebrations in school and school trips that might include a visit to a church, as cultural products, part of a heritage that is often linked with religious themes and life. Muslim families are sometimes blamed for not understanding that the school proposes these activities as cultural moments, not necessarily with a religious meaning.

Nicola (42, School 4, Humanities) for example, argued that this does not depend on where families come from, but on how integralist they are. He emphasised that indeed, not all the families behave the same way: some families are traditional and celebrate Ramadan, but at the same time they let their children attend (Catholic) religious education classes. Other children do not attend these classes, but they are allowed to take part in school recreational moments, such as school trips. Others, especially the newly arrived, are quite rigid in this, but then in the course of the three years of lower high school they seem to understand what the real purpose of these

visits is. Nicola therefore described a reality made of different ways of living religion, where there is a variety of attitudes, that may change through time:

When we go on a school trip, I speak with the parents, and I try to get them to understand that I do not bring them into a church to follow a liturgy, I take them into a church to see a monument. As I would be the first one to enter a mosque, eh, I do not mean to make distinctions.

The families that are marked as irreducibly Other are those that do not accept to give up their identity, in terms of the language spoken at home, of taking part in religiously marked school events – but seen as cultural from the school – and in general in terms of not accepting the ethnic majority mainstream idea of culture. The interviewees view religion as double faced: a faith fact and, even more importantly, a cultural fact. While a few of them view religion as a fundamental element in their life, the majority define themselves as not practicing, or atheist. However, they commonly acknowledge that been brought up in a Catholic environment had shaped their values. What they often seem to blame (fundamentalist) Muslims for, is that they seem not to acknowledge this cultural aspect of religion. In doing so, they attribute to a religious creed what might instead be the fruit of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in their possession, or of a habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) according to which religious precepts invest life in a more pervasive and visible way. Another aspect that may be missed, is that a perceived lack of openness by the families, can also be the result of a defensive mechanism, enacted to protect their own identity, guarding its cultural borders. On this point, Nicola observed that sometimes parents are on the defensive, and at times even get



angry if for organisational reasons, an alternative to the Religion Education teaching class is not available since the very beginning of the school year, as the school should guarantee.

Someone has accepted that in the first part of the school year, for instance, the R.E. teacher, when she does not deal with specifically religious topics, but deals with themes such as love and beauty, someone has accepted (...), when they do lesson like this, they can stay with the class (...). Others, absolutely not, when there is R.E., their child has to stay out. For me, it is lack of self-confidence, because if you are sure about your religion... I might be in touch with anybody, I would not change my mind.

Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages), instead, argued that religion has no reflections in the school life, “apart from someone who persists in doing the Ramadan”. She expressed the view that this practice is damaging to the pupils, who “resent this in school”; its performance is seen as a form of ‘obstinacy’ to assert identity. Other participants who criticised some of the Muslims’ attitudes towards religion, seemed to believe that what they do is a bit irrational, even childish, like a refusal to understand and acknowledge ‘our’ more logic line of thought and behaviour. The overall idea that emerged, is that being ‘integrated’ in the local society, entails assimilating to it.

In this scenery, the Chinese community seems to be standing on its own. The remark made to the Chinese community has always been that of being ‘too tight’ and

unwilling to 'integrate' with the surrounding population and culture (Casti & Portanova, 2008); this view is confirmed by some of the participants' comments that they constitute an impenetrable community. However, some interviewees suggested that things might be changing. Filippo (39, School 4, Humanities) mentioned the case of the Chinese boy who paradoxically was felt as very local, as he spoke with a very local accent. Danilo (54, School 3, Music) referred to another Chinese boy who was friend to his daughter: "He is very good, studies and plays the violin, he is part of an orchestra, he is integrating (...) he is becoming Italian, less and less Chinese, and more and more Italian". Danilo seemed to think that the boy of Chinese origins is more and more Italian because, in his view, he concretely 'does' the Italian, taking up what he sees as the local mainstream teenager habitus (Bourdieu 1977; 1984). Interesting, however, is that he seems to transit from being Chinese, to becoming Italian, suggesting the idea that you need to lose your ethnicity to be part of another one. But Danilo concluded that "he suffers", in a school situated in a middle class area. Danilo highlights that "even my son has felt marginalised in that school, never mind the Chinese kid". What Danilo, that has described his family of origins as working class and poor, stresses here, is that social class counts, as even his son, a teachers' child, feels discriminated against in a school situated in a middle class area, and also that ethnicity too counts, as a factor of discrimination that he attributes more easily to a higher social class. On the other hand, he also notices and praises the boy's agency, in not retreating in the Chinese community, and in taking up those activities, such as playing an instrument, that seem to place him in an 'integration' path connoted by ethnic majority middle class values, (see sections 2.7 and 4.7) seen as normative (Farioli, 2015; Picower, 2009).

## 6.6 Values and Religion

As seen in section 2.6 (Biesta et al., 2015, Figure 1), and as confirmed by this study, beliefs and values have a central role in shaping teachers' attitudes and judgements. Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) expressed an awareness of herself as encultured, in the sense that "we reproduce models that we have learnt, a bit like being a parent, the way you have seen it performed, in the good and in the bad. Therefore, surely my identity as an Italian reflects on how I teach". She also expressed a consciousness that there are degrees of diversity, and that the diversity of the kid who comes from 1,000 km away, who wears different clothes, eats different food, and that might behave differently, makes things complicated:

Sometimes it is hard, because on impulse you would think that we are all the same, even for the law... this is not true, we are not all the same, we are all different, and sometimes my desk mate's diversity can even bother me, right? At the beginning some annoyed reactions of our Italian pupils annoyed me; instead [now] I see that I need to consider this. For sure, I need to punish the pupil who misbehaves, but I need to take into account that, if I want them to stay together, and if I want that they even work together, eh, I need to go easy... It's not that simple, eh!

However, if most interviewees acknowledge that their cultural identity can affect their attitude in class with students with immigrant backgrounds, this remains mostly

uncovered, and some values are never discussed. As seen in the first part of this chapter, Simone (53, School 4, Maths), talking about his own belonging, said that “I do not feel this difference so much, in the sense that I probably don’t have a belonging”. He added that there might be habits and traditions that are different from other people’s, but that “apart from someone who keeps steady in their traditions (...) our attitudes are acquired quite easily”.

Tiziana (46, School 5, Humanities) seems to establish a value norm against which other cultural and social values are to be evaluated. For example when, as often happens, pupils with immigrant backgrounds do not take part in school trips, this is more the result of a choice out of values, than of economic constraints. As evidence of this fact, she cited a family where a single father of five really wanted to send his daughter to a school trip, but could not afford it. In this case, the school decided to support them with a bursary for the purpose; on the contrary another family, in better economic conditions, preferred to spend their money on material goods. Tiziana commented that this is also true for ‘our’ kids, so it depends on the family values and cultural level, that is linked to the “scales of values that one has, in relation to where one finds oneself in their – in inverted commas – evolution...”. What emerges from Tiziana’s words, is that a standard of values representing the norm to tend to is set by the school culture, where “school goals are largely based on White and middle-class values and expectations” (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013, p. 150) and norms, that parents and carers are asked to follow to pursue academic success (Ball, 1996; 2003; Lareau, 2011; Vincent, 2007). Family choices and behaviours are then analysed and judged through this lens; families and pupils are sanctioned as worthless, as not having the right values, or as worth of benevolence and charity. While

these attitudes may potentially affect all parents, their effect is particularly powerful on those who are not from the dominant majority (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

Tiziana does not question the imbalance of power between the immigrant families and the families with a lower cultural capital and the school, with its mainstream, regulative culture. She rather takes it as a lower positioning on a scale set in a 'positivistic' world, where a linear idea of evolution leads towards middle class Western values. This is also confirmed by her passion for international cultural exchanges for her children, where the counterpart, the 'foreigners', are American, therefore belonging to a culturally 'high status' part of the world.

A few trends in the relationship with religion resulted from the interviews. About 25% of the interviewees stated that they were atheist or not religious, 25% maintained that they were very religious, 25% that they cultivated the spiritual part of religion or, on the contrary, appreciated its stress on the common good and its principles of solidarity, but did not normally go to Church. The remaining quarter did not express their ideas about religion. However, beyond the personal position on religion, the participants commonly acknowledged it as a cultural element that shape people's value system; having grown up in an environment traditionally characterised by the predominance of Catholicism, has served as a common cultural element. As Nadia (46, School 1, Humanities) noted, religion "As a cultural element, helps creating a sense of identity, of belonging". Fiorella (41, School 1, Humanities), on the contrary, argued that while in the past religion might have had a 'unifying' function, this was not true anymore for the Italians. However, although she declared that she lived without religion, without the Church, she acknowledged it as a powerful element:

But then, sure, in moments of fear, in moments of discouragement, I might think as well, maybe because I have been taught, I have been inculcated, this is something I wonder, if it is a need of mine, or it comes from the fact that I have been taught since I was a child, to think of something bigger.

Fiorella views religion as something ‘intimate’, not to be judged. She is critical towards aspects that can derive from religion, such as the lack of consideration for women. She also claims for school the freedom of dealing with the cultural aspects of religion. In her interview, she mentioned a lesson in which she talked about Jesus, Joseph and Mary, because the focus of the lesson was a painting having the Holy Family as a subject. She wants to feel free to explain what Christmas or Easter, are, because they are part of the local culture. She would get angry if parents protested for this, as “school needs to be free, at least school”.

Some participants put their religiosity in direct relation with an attitude of acceptance towards the foreign students. However, this does not seem to necessarily translate into attitudes and reported practices different from those self-ascribed by the participants who declared not to be very religious. Gabriella (64, School 4, Modern Languages) sees religiosity as fundamental in her life. She claimed that, like anybody else, she transmits what she is and brings it into school: “Christ is the centre of everything. For other people it might be God, God is one at the end, isn’t it? But it’s important for me”. She argued that religion is equally important for Muslims:

therefore my respect for this is absolute, it is not that I want to impose myself, therefore respect is needed, because the person who has a different religion, respects mine as well, because however, I am Christian, so that's it.

What appears in Gabriella words, is a reversed situation, where the part which is in power, claims for respect from the part which is not. She expressed her strong disagreement with the idea of taking the cross down from schools walls, of not making the Crib at Christmas, “(...) because we are in Europe, Europe is... we are Christians, this are our origins, aren't they? Then it is true that there are also the Muslims, the Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses...”. What she seems to appeal to, therefore, is a 'right of the majority' to write the rules, in a generic atmosphere of reciprocal respect and benevolence. Gabriella brought up an episode that was mentioned by various interviewees in this school, but while the other participants made almost a 'casual' reference to it, the way she told it betrays a high emotional involvement, and highlights that it had been, and still was, a rather important subject of contention and of tensions in the school. Gabriella referred that until not many years before, she used to organise for a Mass to be held in the school before Christmas. She had conceived it as a reminder that Christmas is not only a moment of gifts and traditions, but also a celebration of a historical event. She made reference to some colleagues that had not been happy about this celebration, therefore the decision to stop it was made. It is not clear if the tensions ended up in an open debate. However, she said the protests did not come from families or pupils from other religions, and even some of the Muslim kids

would took part in the Mass, or watch a film with one of the teachers, and then reach the others for an after-Mass reception.

The same episode of the Mass was hinted at by Orlando (56, Head teacher Schools 4 and 5), who implicitly contradicted Gabriella (64, School 4, Modern Languages)'s version that there were no protests from Muslim families. Orlando made a distinction between the need for spirituality, that he understood and shared, with the attachment, that he deemed sometimes excessive, to religious symbols and rituals such as the Mass or the cross. He said that some problems had arisen with the families of students with immigrant backgrounds, in connection with religion:

the usual things, such as the Christmas carols for the Muslims, the priest that comes for the blessing of the classrooms at Easter, when those who are not [Catholic] go out, or the class alternative to Religious Education. Or once happened that a pupil wanted to attend the normal Christian Catholic class, but their father, a Muslim, wanted them to attend the other one. Luckily, they ended up with an agreement, otherwise I would have needed to turn to the judge.

Orlando explained that he was a Christian and a believer, but he favoured things that go in the direction of promoting peace and solidarity, more than religion in itself. In this view, the school had participated in activities such as projects aimed at the education to peace and conflicts management, had taken part in a national peace march, fund-raising for charities, visits to retirement homes for Christmas and Easter wishes. These, and other initiatives, were taken "to make them [the pupils] breath some



peace and solidarity in here”. Orlando seems to put his religiosity, therefore, in direct relation to educational choices of the school, such as the spreading of the practice of Christian charity and education to peace. While this forms of education can have a positive value, as promoting solidarity and participation, they can also become practices that perpetuate a system of oppression, where the values of those who are in power are inculcated on those who have to endure the authority. This is also suggested by the ‘normalisation’ of the Christian Catholic classes, and the Othering of different religions, as emerges from his words.

As stated above, a recurring theme in the interviewees’ words is this distinction between the spiritual and the cultural element in religion, and the connected criticism of those who seem to be unable to distinguish between the two elements, and therefore refuse any contact with anything having to do with Christianity. Laura (40, School 1, Humanities) defined herself as a practicing Catholic. She distinguished religion from faith, wishing there were more faith and less religion, as religion, taking a certain historical form, can bring division, while faith is a unifying element of humanity. Religions, in her view, need to be taught as a cultural element. At the same time, faith is the acknowledgement of something Other than ourselves, and represents the clash between freedom and external rules. In this sense, she sees the confrontation with religion as a moment of growth. However, she acknowledges that as with culture, religion is not a shared value. Laura cited the case of a Jehovah’s Witness girl, whose family did not want her to take part into a school performance, because it was held in premises connected to the parish, as the only difficult case related to religion in school. The school finally managed to convince the family that the drama club needed that girl for that show, in the assumption that religion cannot divide. Laura then reported

another episode, happened in another context, in another city, more as the result of a 'logic', a 'mentality'. It was about a father from Tunisia, who had raised his children in Italy, "children reared here, good... religious, he didn't let them back to Italy because they were 'bastardising', and one took his life, and the other ones run away...". Laura stressed that even if they were good students and also good Muslims, their father did not accept was that they were acquiring the Italian mentality.

Marzia (45, School 5, Humanities) underlined the fundamental importance of religion as a cultural element. As such, it needs to be contextualised, and represented as a historical fact, that is transmitted as a cultural tradition. It is important to transmit the pupils that even if you are a believer, you need to be critical towards your own religion:

I always try to transmit to the kids, that religions are important, all of them, but they are based on faith and the culture within which they have been transmitted, therefore you need to have a critical perspective. Because they may be able to watch themselves from outside, to interrogate themselves on their own culture and values, that are fundamental, but they also need to be somehow contextualised and compared to the others.

The beliefs and values the participants expressed, including about religion, are diverse and reflect their social background, personal characteristics, life trajectories and choices. However, they commonly identified themselves in values about instruction, culture, expectations of families, as seen in the first part of this section, that can be

considered ethnicised and expression of a White middle-class mentality assumed as a model (Farioli, 2015; Picower, 2009; Thys & Van Houtte, 2016). The way religion is lived and considered is part of this habitus; it becomes an issue when it trespass certain boundaries and becomes too visible on the body, or a hindrance to adhering the values mentioned above. This delineates what teachers feel as normative; against this normativity they evaluate their pupils.

### **6.7 A Deficit View of Immigrant Pupils and Families**

Linked to the view of what is considered and felt as normative, is that what departs from that, can be perceived as irregular and possibly lacking (Skeggs, 2004; Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Lareau, 2011). In this study, through many distinctions, a deficit view of pupils and families with immigrant backgrounds emerges from the interviews. The deficit is on the level of the pupils' preparation and appropriate behaviour, and of how families interact with school, bring up and support their children. A common idea is that most students with a foreign origin are deficient in school, with some exceptions of outstanding students, backed by the right type of family, in possession of enough cultural and social capital, with the ambition to do well and get on, who succeed, through the display of the 'right' qualities (strong will, being strict with themselves). These exceptions demonstrate that the individuals who have the right values and the right attitude, can succeed, notwithstanding their background; bringing out 'successful exceptions', is also a way of denying a racist or classed bias (Gillborn, 1995).

A view of the students with immigrant backgrounds as essentially problematic was expressed by Leonardo (49, School 3, Art). He defined the school where he was working as a “*scuola di frontiera*”, a ‘frontier school’ in a deprived area, not easy to attend, due to the presence of many foreign pupils, which hinders the pace of the teaching:

those who attend a multi-ethnic school like this, (...) might be a bit more in deficit [as to preparation], because it is difficult to carry on with the curriculum, as in two hours’ lesson you waste half an hour saying ‘stay still, stay quiet’, because these guys make such a mess, because as a culture, they don’t have... they are a bit, say, wilder compared to us, because they live in a reality where their family work, they are a bit more left to themselves.

Leonardo maintained that, on the contrary, in schools where “the Italianity level, not in a genetic, but in a cultural sense” is higher, a teacher is able to do two hours lesson in a row, without interruptions. Immigrant students were described as a trouble for the school community, with their ‘wilder’ behaviour affecting negatively the teaching and learning pace of the class. Leonardo seemed to attribute their ‘wildness’ to families busy with work, and therefore unable to look properly after their children. As Leonardo admittedly had a double job and very long days, working as a teacher and as a professional, his observation about families who work a lot sounds contradictory. This suggests the idea that some people’s work represents a hindrance, and other people’s does not, depending on the type of work that keeps them busy, and ultimately on their

status, based on ethnic and social belonging. In this and in other cases, when families are deemed to not have time to properly look after their children, the hidden criticism seems to be on the families' inadequate cultural capital, including their linguistic skills (Bourdieu, 1986), which does not enable them to adequately support their children in their learning process (Bonizzoni et al., 2014).

Similarly, Orlando (56, head teacher Schools 4 and 5), stated that the academic work in School 5, historically with a high number of foreign pupils and of poor Italian families, as located in a council housing area, had been slowed down by the presence of the immigrant pupils. Generally they had problems in following the class activities; however, the work planned had always been completed.

Limited language knowledge and families not always capable of supporting their children, are among the factors that, according to Simone (53, School 4, Maths), explain why generally all the foreign kids experience more difficulties in school, with lower marks and higher failures:

Maybe they already have many problems, and therefore the children are left alone, they might have parents with a low level of instruction, therefore... although, my parents had a low level of instruction too, but... therefore, certainly it's not only that, but probably... here a different way of life might have to do with that, maybe in the countries they come from, school is not considered so important. Therefore there are more factors that have an influence

Simone suggested the idea that different factors intersect, giving place to varied and original outcomes. In his opinion, social class does not explain all, as also his working class family had a low level of instruction, but they supported him with motivation and enough economic capital to be able to afford to pay for University. He reinforced his explanation with a cultural factor, a possibility that in the students' countries of origin, school is not valued much. This, at the same time, clashes with the reality that some of the foreign students are excellent. An element that Simone misses in his analysis, is that the social and economic scenario in Italy in the second decade of the second millennium is not the same as in the 1970s, when the perspectives of economic growth and social mobility were higher. He also does not consider that a family with an immigrant background might feel that their children do not have the same education and professional opportunities as a local family (Bertozzi, 2016; ISMU, 2018).

Nicola (42, School 4, Humanities), added another element to the portrait of the 'family-with-an-immigrant-background' deficit view: the presence of many children. He argued that parents cannot look after four or five children with the same care as they would do with one or two. Nicola had noticed that in large families the older children might not have any school achievement or behaviour problems in school, while the others might have. Besides the family that due to work commitments, lack time for appropriately supporting their children, that sometimes are too many, the Muslim family, where the mother stays at home, was mentioned by other teachers as equally deficient. When, on the contrary, the cultural capital seemed to be adequate, the families were praised for that, and taken as good examples of immigrant families, positive exceptions that prove a negative rule.

Families were at times considered deficient also in respect to education related to behaviour. This, as illustrated in previous sections of the thesis (sections 5.5 and 6.4), is gendered and mainly related to some ethnicities. A resentment directed towards families that are deemed basically 'absent', except when there is something to ask for, or families who do not seem to trust the school, was expressed by some of the participants. Nicola (42, School 4, Humanities), for instance, complained about the families that protest if their children are flunk out, and that are demanding about aspects of the school life that have to do with religion. Families were sometimes accused of not having a real interest in school, and of showing up only when there is something to claim, even something the school deems unfair. This highlights a problem in the relationship between school and parents who do not belong to the mainstream culture, for reasons connected to ethnicity and social class, with a mismatch between school requirements of adjustments to the school practices, and the needs and desires from culturally diverse families (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

## **6.8 School Tracks**

As mentioned in section 3.4.1, lower secondary school is a critical segment in the Italian education system, because it preludes to a streamed higher secondary school, the choice of which tends to prove the existent social stratification. As the teachers have a say on this, in terms of orientation and advice, it is important to see on what beliefs their opinions on this are shaped.

A deficit idea of the pupils with immigrant backgrounds and their families also emerges, in an intersection between ethnicity, social class and gender (Skeggs, 2004;

Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Lareau, 2011), when the interviewees deal with the students' and families' expectations from school. The participants mostly made a distinction between the families who had been in the country for some time, and those arrived recently. Many described the expectations of the second generation, children of parents who have a job and are well established, as 'average-high', similar to those of the Italians. They may want for their children a good education, to improve their social condition, be part of the Italian society. As to the recently immigrated, some of the participants make distinctions according to nationalities. Fiorella (41, School 1, Humanities), for instance, thinks that Bangladeshi parents expect their children to learn the basic things, maybe the language, as a help for the family, whose Italian often is not very good. On the contrary, the parents of a Filipino girl, a very good student, who are young and "live like us", probably expect a solid instruction for their child. Fiorella always tries to motivate the newly arrived. However, she was surprised at a girl who said:

"I want to be a doctor", (...) then one day I asked her: "What does your mum say about that?", as I know that they usually get married at an early age, and even... She answered: "Mum said I must do what I do best".

Therefore, there might be an opening, I don't know, I hope there is....

Fiorella's words highlight how teachers' expectations can be built upon essentialised and preconceived ideas attaining to ethnicity and gender, where the students of foreign origin are frequently seen as in need of being motivated, and girls not free to choose. At the same time, Fiorella is surprised and even perplexed at seeing that the motivation



is already there, even exceeding her expectations, thus evidencing a paternalistic view on her side. Beyond some essentialisation, especially regarding ethnicity, most teachers tend to see a link between the ‘type of family’ in terms of social class, their level of instruction, and their expectations, assuming that often they tend to be low (Demanett & Van Houtte, 2012; Jones et al., 2008; Thys & Van Houtte, 2016; Becky & Hey, 2009).

In addition to the family element, some participants mentioned the importance attributed to schooling in the countries of origin. Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) referred to the Eastern European countries belonging to the old socialist block, as countries where school is still valued, ‘even more’ than in Italy. She argued that if they emigrated, it was because they wanted something more than what they had, and they believed in pursuing a more solid future through education, similarly to the Italians who emigrated in the past. On the contrary, others think that in general, students and families with immigrant backgrounds do not value school and culture a lot, but rather conceive them as an obligation, and just a way to get a qualification.

A more nuanced judgement was expressed by Laura (40, School 1, Humanities). According to her, families whose children were born in Italy expect a social redemption from the children’s education; families that are perfectly integrated, have the same expectations as the Italians. Others, only expect that their children have an adequate instruction. Then there are those who are completely disinterested, and send their children to school only because it is compulsory. In her opinion, this depends exclusively on the family cultural level, that can be varied within the same nationality. The higher the social class, the more they will value culture; “those who have more ‘tribal’ origins”, sometimes care about education, for a social advancement, sometimes

do not. Laura highlighted embodied features of social class belonging (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984): “There are kids of different origins... you can even see physically their cultural level... for how they dress, for how they move, for how they...their cultural level of origin”.

Guido (51, School 5, PE) mentioned another element. He had met families that were very attentive, respectful of the role of the teacher and believed in school as an institution, while other parents seemed to see school only as an obligation. These parents

are afraid of the confrontation, they do not feel they [their children] have the same level of preparation as the others, therefore they suffer from the situation, and for this reason sometimes they are obstructive, seek to argue, and disagreements with teachers may arise. Both situations have occurred to me.

Guido articulated a paternalistic view on the expression of disagreement, as the product of ‘not feeling up to’ the others, thus diminishing its value and questioning the legitimacy of criticism coming from immigrant families.

The interviewees mostly explained the fact that the students with immigrant backgrounds mainly opt for vocational or technical schools, as an objective consequence of their difficulties at school, or the result of a preference for an instruction pathway more directly connected to the work market. They mostly spoke of a ‘choice’ that the pupils and their parents make in relation to secondary schools. Although the participants seemed generally aware that the school choice is conditioned

by the family economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the idea that families with immigrant backgrounds are responsible for a lack of ambition, a ‘being contented’ with a vocational school even when they might aspire to something higher, seemed to filter from their words. Some teachers also mentioned the critical role of a net of relationships that can serve as a vehicle for information, a social capital that works in particular in combination with a cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986):

The parents who have an instruction or that however firmly believe in schooling, chose the schools they deem the best ones (...), living here, they speak with friends and relatives that come from the same countries, they know very well which schools permit to go ahead... (Antonella, 60, School 1, Maths).

Similarly, Leonardo explained with a lack of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) the fact that, according to him, students with an immigrant origin’s higher secondary school track choice is mainly based on a geographic vicinity criterion. He ascribed the families a inability to perceive the difference between the cultural and teaching level in a school, as “for them it is all new”, and they do not have the culture of choosing a school according to its quality. He made no mention of the orientating function of the school that should compensate this ‘deficits’.

In Orlando (56, head teacher Schools 4 and 5)’s opinion, instead, this as a problem of the Italian school system, in which not only the students with a foreign background, but all those with learning difficulties are steered towards vocational schools, that require “less mental activity, and [where] manual skills are privileged”.

Orlando thus expressed a criticism of a common line adopted by the teachers in higher secondary school orientation, a habit that takes the shape of an ‘institutional racism’ of the Italian school system (see section 7.5).

If some participants did not agree that there should be this almost ‘predetermination’, many expressed the idea that this is the natural and right choice for immigrant students. As often they have had a difficult educational history, or “objective difficulties” (Gabriella, 64, School 4, Modern Languages), it is normal that they choose vocational or technical schools, or even that they leave school early.

A sense of paternalistic protection was expressed by Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities) about a girl born in Italy from Filipino parents. As she was proficient in Italian, his opinion was that she would be fit for the prestigious *liceo classico*. However, Filippo’s worry was that both she and her family might not find a welcoming environment in a kind of school typically attended by children from higher social strata. Filippo assumed that a student of foreign origins in a higher-middle class environment would feel uncomfortable, owing to an expected racist and classist attitude. However, it is not clear if Filippo would actually advise the pupil to enrol in the *liceo classico*, where her academic merits would position her, or if he thought it preferable, for both student and family, a less prestigious pathway, where presumably she would not feel out of place. He did not clarify if the “obstacle” represented by her origins was something to try to overcome, or to succumb to. Filippo’s conclusion was that ‘integration’, happens at lower secondary school level, but not in higher secondary school, with its differentiated pathways.

This protective attitude has also been highlighted by Bonizzoni et al. (2014), in their study about Italian teachers’ guidance in the educational track choice of immigrant

students in Italy. Many teachers think that it is right to orientate them towards vocational or technical schools. They either paternalistically assume that immigrant families cannot afford their children going to university, or want to protect them from possible frustration that they might experience in a school, like a *liceo*, “commonly perceived as devoted to preserving the Italian highbrow cultural heritage” (Bonizzoni et al., 2014, p. 13).

Sonia (54, School 4, Modern Languages) introduced a neoliberal theme of merit (see section 7.7), which should prevail over social class and census. She blamed the families for not always choosing their children secondary school based on their abilities. Some parents send their children to a *liceo*, only because there is a family tradition in that sense, or “they think it is the pathway their child needs to take to get to become someone, therefore they force them”, although they might not have the right abilities. On the contrary, other parents claim they do not have the money to send their children to university, therefore they push for a vocational or technical school. Carla (56, School 5, Humanities) argued:

I try to force this, because I find it extremely unfair. I think it is really important that the kids who are really good, smart, willing and able, independently from their families, have the opportunity to study, to get on, and become the future ruling class. It needs to be them, not those who have a wealthy family behind, who for this reason have to go to university, get a degree maybe in five, six, seven years, and with low marks. They won't get to anything in this country, I think they have no chances.

Carla talked about a girl with an immigrant background, who was really gifted academically. She went to a *liceo psico-pedagogico*<sup>13</sup>. When she explained that she had chosen that school because it would allow to easily find a job as a nurse, Carla had insisted, with her and her family, that she opted for a *liceo classico* or *scientifico*. She claimed that she was so brilliant that society needed her as a doctor, rather than as a nurse, and that the family would have found a way to fund her studies, but all of this was unsuccessful. Carla harshly contests the unfairness of a system where being able to afford to go to University depends more on what context you were born in, than on the person's capabilities. However, she leaves this on an individualistic level: it is to the individual family to try to find the resources for their exceptionally gifted children. Families are blamed if they do not act in this direction. No mention is made of a system that might be unfair, in which also families are entangled, and whose constraints cannot be easily overcome on an individual or family level. Meritocracy appears as an egalitarian value because it is apparently opposed to inherited forms of privilege. In reality, it is based on a concept of intelligence as independent from other circumstances such as the possession of adequate cultural, social and economic capital, that only waits to be brought out through commitment and hard work (Littler, 2013). This aspect will be developed further in section 7.7, as an aspect of neoliberal ideology.

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<sup>13</sup> Now called *Liceo delle Scienze Umane* (Human Sciences Lyceum), it was started in 1998-99 and replaced the old 4-year *Magistrali*, that traditionally prepared primary school teachers. It lasts 5 years. It allows to go to any University, but is specifically devised for human sciences (pedagogy, psychology, sociology, anthropology) related topics. In the year 2018-2019, 89,5% of the students enrolled in a *Liceo delle Scienze Umane* were females, while they represented 70.8% in *Liceo Classico*, and 50% in *Liceo Scientifico* (see <https://www.miur.gov.it/-/iscrizioni-on-line-licei-ancora-in-crescita-li-sceglie-il-55-3-dei-ragazzi>).

In this section I have shown how constructing the students with immigrant backgrounds and their family as in deficit of the right form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), in the form of legitimate knowledge, has consequences on pedagogic attitudes and decisions, such as considering them good or not good enough for certain education pathways.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, after examining how belonging and non belonging are constructed, I have shown how lines that determine those who belong and those who do not, emerge from the data (section 6.2.) One's own belonging is not easy to define. It is often taken for granted, but sometimes contested (6.2; 6.3). Belonging is mainly felt in terms of culture, tie to a territory, history and values. Others' belonging is seen as function of time of permanence in the place, of language spoken, of values and of desire to belong. However, these criteria are always shifting: yesterday's Others have been replaced by new Others, in a continuous mechanism of juxtapositions. The Others are ranked according to the different power attributed to their culture, in an intersection with social class, that defines the values they hold, and gender. The pupils with immigrant backgrounds and their families, in particular those who do not reflect white middle class values, are often constructed as deficient, they are perceived as not valuing instruction enough, and as not having ambitions to pursue. This perception, held by many teachers, has consequences on pedagogic attitudes and expectations of students. These expectations tend to be lower in relation to the students with immigrant backgrounds, than for the others; this helps perpetuating educational inequalities. In

the next chapter, I analyse how the participants conceptualise the relation between legal recognition and sense of belonging, and I examine those aspects that can relate to the teachers' understanding of wider ideological, political and policy contexts.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Policies and Pedagogies**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine teachers' understanding of the national and local school policies in relation to the students with immigrant backgrounds. After considering the participants' attitude towards citizenship, I investigate how they make sense of the school policies and how they see their own practices. I then highlight aspects of the neoliberal ideology, using mainly Apple (1979; 2000)'s and Ball (1998; 2016)'s analysis as tools to unveil the pervasive presence of neoliberalism in the educational environment. This is considered both in its practical aspects, such as standardised testing and teachers' accountability, and at an ideological level, with an accent on meritocracy and on responsibility put on the individual.

#### **7.2 The Value of Citizenship**

In Italy there is an on-going debate regarding the awarding of citizenship (see section 1.3). Asked about how relevant being a legal citizen can be in terms of sense of belonging, eighteen out of twenty three participants supported the idea, with different motivations, that those who were born in Italy, should be granted a legal status. Daniela (53, School 1, Modern Languages) voiced the opinion that legal citizenship has no influence on children, as for them being born in Italy coincides with being Italian, as they are not aware of the importance of documents. For twelve of the

participants, being a citizen is important to facilitate belonging at an emotional level. The other six participants, appreciate it is a bureaucratic facilitation, with no reflection on how people feel. Generally, the practical and symbolic value of the citizenship status was not hugely considered. The interviewees did not seem to be generally aware of the possible effect on the self-image and in the construction of identity, of not being recognised as legitimate members of the society (Fangen et al., 2011). This shows how difficult it is to fully make sense of the practical, emotional and symbolic burden of administrative procedures on immigrants. Studies on immigration bureaucracy show how to remain 'legal' for immigrants in Italy is source of great frustration, due to inconsistencies and contradictions between a law that is restrictive, and frequent programmes of regularisation, that allow many interpretations. This situation ingenerates distrust, confusion and anxiety in the migrants (Tuckett, 2015). In a system where, compared to other European countries, it is difficult to naturalise (Bianchi, 2014; Tuckett, 2015), or even be granted long-term residence permits, most immigrants have to face the bureaucratic procedure for temporary residence permit every two years. Tuckett (2015) argues that what makes 'navigating' the Italian bureaucracy more difficult, is the wide gap between the written rules, and how they work in reality. Immigrants would need a knowledge of the system that they usually do not have; as a consequence, they have to rely on often contradictory interpretations by insiders, such as the employees in the immigration offices, or on supportive associations.

Marzia (45, School 5, Humanities), for instance, argued that being legally citizens may be a "helping factor" for those children who were born in Italy, but are not proficient in the language of their family's country of origin. An example of this

can be the kids who do not write Arabic and, for this reason, risk not feeling to belong to neither country. In spite of recognising the need for a sense of belonging, her idea seems that an institutional acknowledgement is not an essential factor to sanction it. She does not seem to consider that such acknowledgement can have numerous practical and emotional effects, such as making social participation possible, feeling secure, and giving the opportunity to pursue better jobs (Mendoza, 2013). Marzia's view is that being given the Italian citizenship can turn into a potential factor of confusion for those kids who were born in Italy, but then later might have to leave the country if their family lost their job. Marzia's reference is to what had happened after the great 2008 financial crisis, the effects of which were strongly felt in the area where School 5 is situated, owing to its economic texture (see section 3.4.1). The recession not only caused a decrease in the number of arrivals but, with the rise of unemployment from 8.1% in 2008, to 12.1% in 2012 among the non-Italian citizens, many of them had to leave the country (32,000 in 2011, considering all Italy) (Bettin & Cela, 2014). However, emigration from Italy is a phenomenon that regards equally foreign citizens, Italians with an immigrant background, and those with Italian ancestry, who equally look for better opportunities and enjoy the possibility to move freely in Europe<sup>14</sup>. For Marzia, granting citizenship represents only a partial solution:

It can be helpful, but it is not the solution to every problem, because it also depends on how the family accompany their children through the integration process, because if the family does not accept it, or is

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.vocidiconfine.com/non-e-un-paese-per-giovani-italiani-o-stranieri-dallitalia-si-emigra-sempre-piu/>

obstructive, it can be equally difficult. There needs to be a reciprocal progress of the individual within the family and the hosting society.

Such as for the education outcomes, the final responsibility for the children being more or less ‘integrated’ in the local society is once again put on the individuals or on the family, who does not possess the right education, skills (Gorski, 2008) or willingness to ‘integrate’ in the local mainstream society. Leonardo (49, School 3, Art) even links the desire to belong to the country to a right to have the Italian citizenship: this is to be given to children born in Italy, never mind their parents provenance, while “For those who come here and always bring in their heart the sentiment and the desire to go back to their country, well, things may be different”, as it means to belong to the Other country. This does not acknowledge the possibility of belonging to more than a country and ethnicity, and that desire to belong can also be affected by the actual possibility to belong.

Overall, there is a dichotomy in how citizenship is perceived: it is seen as a bureaucratic facilitation, but is often considered as opposed to ‘real’ integration, that is how other people treat you, or if you really want to integrate. A connection between these different aspects of citizenship is mainly missed. Simone (53, School 4, Maths), for example, argued that being awarded the Italian citizenship, when all the Italians consider you a foreigner might not be as important as being acknowledged as a conational and treated as an equal by the Italian community. Simone motivated his belief on the basis of he himself not feeling a sense of belonging; however, he expressed awareness that being an Italian citizen surely carries important practical consequences.

Alzetta (2011) connects belonging with a sense of self-identification in relation or in contrast with the environment: an ‘inward-looking’ reflective process of self-identification is accompanied by an ‘outward-looking’ self-positioning in relation to the social context. Building on this, it can be argued that a public acceptance as a legitimate citizen constitutes part of a sense of belonging. Bianchi (2011), underlines that citizenship principally encompasses four dimensions: “legal status, rights, political and other forms of participation in society, and a sense of belonging” (ibid., p. 322). Legal status determines who qualifies as a citizen, usually citizenship is determined according to *jus sanguinis* or *jus soli*. As described in section 1.5, the Italian legislation on citizenship privileges the blood line, while making it difficult for those of foreign ancestry living and even born in the territory, to be acknowledged as citizens. Legal status involves that some basic rights are guaranteed, and duties are established as well, in a way that formally puts all the citizens on the same level. The political aspect covers the possibility for all the citizens to take part in the governance of the state, either as electors and as elected. Finally, citizenship is about a sense of belonging, connected to a concept of national identity based on an imagined idea of a culturally cohesive society, where the immigrants represent “an out-group” (Bianchi, 2011, p. 323) present within national borders.

As shown above, a sense of belonging depends on a plurality of factors, such as ethnicity, language, social relations and connections with the institutions (Herz & Johanson, 2012); in this view, having citizen status is a condition that lays the basis for feeling, and actually being, a legitimate part of the wider community. As Alzetta (2011, p. 187) argues

Status and an implied emerging hierarchy of belonging are crucial aspects in revealing the processes of inclusion and exclusion in current multi-ethnic societies. Where ethnic, linguistic, social, cultural and economic differences emerge in a society, selective processes are employed primarily to rank differences and subsequently to appoint and grant anyone with a place in a hierarchy according to their relevant belonging.

As I show in the following section, diversity is ranked (Back, Sinha, & Bryan, 2012), and to be considered acceptable, diverse individuals need to ‘demonstrate’ to be deserving. Some individuals and families are constructed as ‘exceptional’, and for this reason worthy, thus throwing shadow on those who are not.

### **7.3 The Model Minority Individuals and Families**

The outstanding individual, the exceptional family, who work hard, who are determined in their ambition to get on and make sacrifices for that, and are willing to adapt to the Western mainstream values are accepted and appreciated. In this research the idea of ‘model minorities’ (Gillborn, 2008), emerges but is not univocal. Danilo, for instance, portrays the Chinese as a “model minority”, ready to take advantage of any learning opportunity offered, “to improve themselves”. He opposes them to the Africans, that he views as lacking the idea itself of advancement. More commonly, the interviewees praise ‘model individuals’, in opposition to ‘deficient’ ones. The ‘type of

family' is considered the most relevant element, with the 'model family' characterised by middle class values.

Gillborn's thesis that Americans of Japanese and Chinese heritage "provide a model of hard work, family stability and self-sacrifice that illustrates the best way for any migrant community to achieve social mobility by taking advantage of the freedoms and opportunities offered to all in the USA" (Gillborn, 1995, p. 152), can be transferred to individuals who work hard, want to progress, and are backed by a family who share the right values. Gillborn suggests that "minority success" in itself proves that there is no bias, no racism against minority groups; at the same time, "comparisons are made with underachieving groups so that the latter are cast as deficient and even dangerous" (ib., p. 152).

This links to what discussed in section 6.4, about Albanians and Romanians now often considered 'good immigrants' and opposed to more 'visible' and less 'integrated' ethnicities. It shows again how this mechanism of naturalising differences and creating juxtapositions can be mobile in how it ranks individuals and groups of people, but the classifying mechanism is very steady, and brings practical consequences for the classified, as I show in the next sections.

#### **7.4 Between Policy and Practice: Benevolence and Power in the Classroom**

The participants' reports on the school policy and practice were quite contradictory: while schools were generally described as committed to integration, things were different when they talked about practices, or about specific aspects, such as standardised testing or the final exams. While these were questioned, contradictions

and paradoxes emerged. The teachers most directly involved in the organisation of pedagogic activities aimed at students with foreign backgrounds, sometimes were those who considered the school actions most insufficient. They expressed a feeling of having been delegated and left alone. Other times, they voiced the idea that the school policies were generically good, but at an individual level a feeling of guilt was expressed, due to the awareness of having an inadequate knowledge about what to do with students with a foreign background, or for not having enough time to devote to acquiring that knowledge. In their words, care and interest often clash with a vision of difference that, even if formally denies a deficit view of other cultures, puts ‘Our values’ as the target to aim to. Other times, the blame is shared; some families and kids can be held responsible for not wanting, or for not doing the right things to integrate. At the same time, the teachers can be self-critical about not doing enough. However, the interviewees’s attitude in this regard is often self-absolutive; as for a teacher’s action to be effective, “you would need 48-hour days” (Daniela, 53, School 5, Modern Languages) and classes with less pupils.

Most teachers had not had a specific formation about teaching in a culturally diverse environment. Only three (female) teachers had attended, of their own initiative, a postgraduate course of studies or specific training courses on intercultural matters and the teaching of Italian as a second language. This testifies a feminine tendency to compensate with official forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) a sense of inadequacy. Generally, those without a specific preparation on the subject, think that what matters is having the right attitude, in terms of openness, availability, and common sense, and that knowledge is acquired through experience. Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities), for example, argued that more than what a teacher knows, what



they are willing to learn is what matters, because a teacher needs to try to understand the students' culture, to "open doors, to communicate". He added: "When you find the way of valuing the culture of their country of origin, so that it does not appear alien to the rest of the class, Italians and not, you generally find the way of facilitating learning and inclusion in the class".

Simone (53, School 4, Maths) as well, emphasised the role of empathy, passion and *buona volontà*, 'a disposition to do well' (De Mauro), where the accent is on the goodness of the intention. For him, being able to create a good relationship with the pupils counts more than the specific preparation on the subject taught. He underlined that all of his personal background and history, his parents and grandparents, his education, have a weight on the way he teaches, regardless of his own will, and this affects also his expectations, what he deems important.

Gabriella (64, School 4, Modern Languages) stressed the role of good sentiments: 'We' need to be welcoming and animated by love towards people with an immigrant background, but they need to take notice of this, and therefore also try and accept some of our limitations. Gabriella's request for a 'reversed' tolerance, might be seen as an acknowledgement that 'We' are faulty, and therefore need the Other's tolerance; this might also be seen as if 'We', as privileged members of the ethnic majority, are also asking those who are unprivileged, to be understanding and patient, in a vision that seems to be deeply influenced by a view of the human relationships as regulated by Christian concepts of love and charity (see section 6.6).

Antonella (60, School 1, Maths) expressed her belief that "it would be important to know the educational principles of the school system of the countries they come from, to "meet mid-way". She reported an episode that had occurred in her career

which shows her awareness of a structural imbalance of power between the local majority and the immigrant minority. In her maths lessons, she had found out that kids from India and Pakistan tend to struggle with geometry, as it is abstract. She argued that the reason might be that geometry is taught differently in their countries, while

numbers are in their tradition, they make important calculations using their finger tips. I didn't know this, I have learnt it looking at the kids, (...) they have a different way of finding the lowest common denominator, another kid from Bangladesh taught this to me a few years ago... he said, it is quicker the way we do it. He did it in no time! (...) I tried [to teach it to the class], but then you also ought to explain it to parents as well, as there are those who help them, and they come to school with the homework done like... you have to be careful.

Antonella refers here to a cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) in possession of the ethnic minority family, that is in contrast with the mainstream culture of the school. Baker, Street, and Tomlin (2003) argue that mathematics, such as other forms of knowledge, is socially constructed, in the sense that it is affected by contexts, that are made of values, beliefs, ideologies, institutions, power relations. Drawing from Bourdieu's concept of capital, they refer to "cultural resources of the family", expressed by numeracy practices that can be other than those practiced in school. Baker et al. (2003) argue that, rather than blaming the teachers, the pupils, or homes for pupils' underachievement, it is recommendable to recognise different practices of numeracy, and try to build also on the informal ones. In their study on the relationship between

numeracy home and school practice, they focus on the practice of counting on fingers, where one finger counts three in Pakistani practice. Building on this, they draw a model according to which school could build on the home resources when teaching numeracy. They acknowledge that these resources are not immediately accessible, but getting teachers and families to know them, might change the teaching of numeracy, and make it accessible to pupils from different backgrounds.

Antonella's attitude of being in dialogue and learn from other's experiences, and bring their cultural practices to the class, clashes with a structural imbalance of power. She does not fear being displaced herself (Freire, 1970/2000), shifting from being a dispenser of legitimate knowledge to a position of learning and acknowledging Other practices. Antonella recognises and values difference, in terms of home culture (Blum, 2014). However, she feels that she has to comply with other forces, in this case, the other pupils' parents who help their children using the technique they have learnt in Italian schools. Antonella's worries might be motivated by the desire to not to exasperate tensions that, even if never named as such, are actually racial. Antonella tries to put together recognition and equality; she appreciates the diverse pupils' home culture, considers their needs and is committed in giving quality teaching (Blum, 2014). However, she highlights "the difficulty of putting together, not so much of me relating to them, but the whole class with each of them". This difficulty that also other teachers stress, is often resolved in favour of those who are in a position of privilege, as belonging to the ethnic majority. As School 1 is a mainly working class school, it is evident that their privilege is relative. Describing what attentions she had in multicultural classes, she underlined that pupils with immigrant backgrounds must be given the opportunity to get themselves known, without having to expose themselves.

When she presents a topic, she tries to do that using a more visual, graphic language, rather than words.

Similarly to Antonella (60, School 1, Maths), also Filippo (39, School 1, Humanities) values listening to students and learn from them, as a way of “centring the ‘other’” (Keddie & Niesche, 2012, p. 344). They acknowledge an imbalance of power in the classroom, with cultures that might seem ‘alien’, as opposed to the dominant, ‘normal’ culture and knowledge of the majority that may seem more legitimate than others. Filippo and Antonella highlight the role of the teacher, that carries the dominant culture and way of knowledge, in the legitimization of other cultures. At the same time, Antonella is aware that this can become a problem when it leaves the classroom and comes into contact with the families, challenging their status of ethnic privilege. In her interview, Antonella expressed her belief that racism is present in the society, and that in school it is necessary to find a way of ‘keeping things together’. In the minimum common denominator episode, she finally chose to ignore the method she apprehended from the Bangladeshi pupil, thus privileging the ‘social peace’ with the other pupils’ families. The imbalance of power is therefore acknowledged but resolved reinstating the normativity of the predominant culture, at the expense of the marginal Other, whose necessity to assimilate is reaffirmed. Antonella expresses a critical point of view, she sounds genuinely open towards the Other’s point of view and strongly questions common place, racist affirmations about people of immigrant origins; she also seems committed towards values of social justice inside and outside school. However, she does not really challenge the power relations underneath.

As seen in section 2.9, culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Santoro, 2017), take into consideration power differentials in the classroom. They consider the underachievement in school outcomes for ethnic minority pupils, as the result of the lower power their culture holds compared to the mainstream one. In this view, it highlights the importance of giving all cultural heritage full citizenship, and build students' knowledge on their previous experience and cultural characteristics. This contrasts with another tendency expressed by the participants, that difference is not so important.

### **7.5 “As If They Were All Italians”**

While cultural diversity and social differences are often acknowledged, their actual importance is frequently denied in favour of an egalitarian view, where the boundaries of inclusion are not drawn on the basis of ethnicity, but of values that “are opposed to the racial stereotype of the foreigner as a deviant”; “*the other (...) becomes us*” when they acknowledge and share the values, when they “(...) become respectable citizens”, (Calabrò, 2013, my translation, italics in the original). In Italy, the concept of race has been often dismissed as ‘racist’, based on the assumption that race does not exist at a scientific level. The effects of racism are often ascribed to ignorance or to a sentiment of fear. Thus, “in line with a general Western trend, whiteness in Italy is neutral, and invisible and yet powerful” (Migliarini, 2018, p. 441). Migliarini (2018) argues that in the field of education, both in policy documents and practices, a colour-evasive rhetoric is present. The term ‘race’ is banished in favour of terms such as ‘culture’, ‘ethnicity’, or concepts of ‘difference’ and ‘alterity’, overlooking the fact

that this implies “a normative state of being against which the ‘Other’ or the ‘different’ stand out” (ibid., p. 439).

An idea of equality expressed through the negation of race and ethnic difference, at times also emerged from this study. Orlando (56, Schools 4 and 5, head teacher), for instance, argued for considering every pupil as an individual with their own characteristics:

I don't think that a teacher should have a specific preparation as to foreign students. In general, a teacher should, as soon as they enter a class, consider pupils one by one, and build a profile of each pupil, which does not mean label, it means understanding everybody's difficulties and qualities. Therefore, you might have a foreign student who does not know the language, but you see that they are genius in, let's say, a determined manual activity.

However, the example of the foreign student that has ‘manual abilities’ proves how strong ethnicity-biased judgement are. As a head teacher, Orlando expects teachers to be empathic, and understand immediately the difficulties and strengths of any pupil. That ethnicity actually matters a lot is also shown by Orlando's words about School 5. In the years when the school had had the highest percentage of foreign students, it had been considered as a school to avoid, and when the schools catchment areas in the town would be revisited, controversies would arise, because some families did not want to be included in that school's catchment area.

Diversity emerge from the interviews as mainly linked to cultural and social factors, with gendered declinations. The idea of race did not come out explicitly, as it was always included within culture and moral values. However, there are aspects in the mobile geography of Otherness where the skin colour might have a role. For instance, it might be an unsaid factor for Eastern Europeans, once seen as ‘Others’, being replaced by new ‘Others’, with a darker skin, as seen in sections 6.4 and 6.5.

Some of the teachers, while acknowledging cultural diversity, reduced this to the normal range of diversity present in a school. Therefore “there is attention for everybody, that might be cultural, religious, related to family... as if they were all Italians. Each with their own features” (Daniela, 53, School 1, Modern Languages). This view, that all the students are the same, that the differences are only those normally ascribable to individuality, can be used by the teachers and head teachers to cover “the fear that difference sometimes evokes” (Allard & Santoro, 2007, p. 123), and to give themselves permission to avoid to try to face the diversity, covering this attitude with a discourse of egalitarianism connected to religious, politic or civic beliefs. As literature on culturally responsive pedagogy has highlighted (Allard & Santoro, 2007), teachers often avoid topics such as race and religion because they do not feel comfortable discussing these topics.

Danilo (54, School 3, Music) expressed his firm belief in impartiality. Although it would be good to know about the different cultures, this is practically impossible. Therefore, his choice had been to be the same with everybody, as this was what he had learnt from his own experience. Even if the norms prescribe personalisation, “my formation is the teacher who is the same with everybody, who concedes themselves equally to everybody; as a consequence, I find it difficult to

personalise the teaching too much”. For him, this in tune with his idea of giving the same opportunities to all. He expressed the aim to “bring them to us”, and to provide all of his pupils with the means to understand a musical fact, “regardless of them being Pakistani, Turkish or Chinese”.

Considering the music produced in the American continent, and its influence on the European musical world, he tried to make them understand that, in a globalised world, there is a globalised music. He confessed that, both for personal interests, and for cultural limitations, he was unable to consider, for instance, the music produced in China. On the other hand, for him this would also constitute a discrimination towards other ethnicities. This neutrality, ‘wanting to give the same opportunities to everybody’, is something that he had learnt as a pupil, and that he had lived as fair and positive, as it had afforded him the opportunity to raise from a working class to a middle class status. Danilo acknowledged that the legislation prescribes personalisation, and that moving towards the students, taking charge of their cultural diversity, might be theoretically desirable. He mentioned lack of time and of the right competencies as an hindrance to a personalised approach; however, he also seemed to believe that being neutral, behaving the same with everybody, and ‘bring[ing] them towards us’, are the right things to do. This is inscribed into a big picture of a “reciprocal movement”, where people blend in: “Those who will stay here, will become Italian, but we are changing as well”. For Danilo this is a normal historical process, where people move around, mingling and becoming more similar to each other. He feels part and agent of this process of assimilation but also of reciprocal accommodation, regarded as not only inevitable, but also as an equalising factor and an opportunity of social advancement for the immigrants.



This position of ‘neutrality’ was also expressed by Valentina (36, School 3, Technical Education). She recognised that her studies were not formative on the theme of cultural diversity; on the other hand, she did not notice a big difference at a didactic level for pupils that might have different cultures and behaviours. She rather seemed to attribute an aesthetic beauty and an exotic allure to diversity: we are all different as individuals, and difference makes things more interesting. The view of other cultures as exotic and ‘enriching’ for the mainstream ethnic majority, is based on power relations that justify a cultural imperialism, and that has, as the other side of the coin, a vision of the other as deficit (Santoro, 2014). Valentina maintained that in her lessons she tried to connect the local traditions with other cultural traditions: “For instance, there is always the little Chinese, that tells you about the silk worms they grow in China, that is also our tradition, therefore these are assets that might be used”. Diversity and commonalities emerged as something quite superficial from her words, with an essentialised view of ethnicity, in this case Chinese, taken as an example of the Other. She used the term *cinesino*, ‘little Chinese’, that sounds patronising and diminishing.

Only Guido (51, School 5, PE) openly mentioned the skin colour as a possible problem. He compared his experience as an emigrant from Southern to Northern Italy with the recent immigration to Italy from other countries, that he saw as a not very manageable “wave”. When he had moved to a little, isolated town, where people spoke an incomprehensible dialect, having a job as a teacher put him in the condition of having a social and affective life. This was not the case with this type of immigration:

I see many young men in the streets, 16, 18, 20 years old, who hang around in groups, all day. In addition to the Council benefits, here in Palano they are very sensitive to inclusion (...). But in the future, what are they going to do? How will they integrate? The skin colour, however, is an important factor. Even at an affective level, will they have the possibility to have a family, to find a woman... These are difficulties that cannot be underestimated.

Guido exposed an element that went unreported by the other teachers, that is the race element, connected here with the possibility of setting human relations and building affective ties that can function as a social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Guido extended his considerations to a setting wider than school, exposing the troubling perception of coloured bodies as visibly occupying a public space “in groups”. In Guido’s perceptions, it seems that these bodies are ‘out of place’ or, as Puwar (2004) defines them, ‘space invaders’, menacing for the mere fact of being there, especially if in the space of leisure that, as illegitimate, may allude to illicit activities. The skin colour is a major hindrance to the possibility of ‘integrating’ in the local life; the solution suggested does not seem to work to overcome these difficulties, but rather to remove them, limiting immigration. This position, passed off as legitimate, even altruistic ‘worry’ for the Other’s well-being, speaks of racist attitudes that are widespread in the Italian population, and that are coming to the surface, after a longtime denial (see section 6.1).

## 7.6 A Less Eurocentric View or a Tokenistic Multiculturalism?

Most teachers acknowledged that it would be good to know about the students' background cultures, but argued that this clashes against time constraints, due to the many task that they have to perform, and the great variety of ethnic origins and situations they have to deal with. Some of the interviewees admitted that the kind of knowledge that the school transmits is Eurocentric; therefore, they tried to expand its horizons, and to sometimes put the Other's culture at the centre. However, this usually was limited to creating limited spaces for Other cultures, restricted to specific aspects.

Nicola (42, School 4, Humanities), for instance, expressed the awareness that textbooks always have Western Europe as a standpoint, while Eastern cultures, such as the Arabic and the Chinese ones, are not much studied. He argued that, when you teach in a culturally diverse class, it is important to try not to always put Europe at the centre. Teachers need to think that non-Europeans have a different point of view; they need to question themselves whether what they are saying can be clear for every pupil, whatever their origins. Nicola expressed a disposition to try to understand his pupils' point of view, but more than questioning the legitimacy of the knowledge he transmitted (Bourdieu, 1986; Santoro, 2017), he wanted to make sure that they had access to it. He also underlined the importance of creating a relationship with the pupils with immigrant backgrounds, for instance asking them for information about their cultures, to make them feel comfortable.

As a way to make her students with immigrant backgrounds feel involved, Gabriella (64, School 4, Modern Languages) asked a Nigerian boy to present Nigeria, following her indications on the contents to present, in English to the class, and an

Indian girl to make an Indian breakfast in school, to show her traditions. Overlooking now how insidiously gender is reproduced in school through the proposition of apparently neutral and natural activities, that instead are rooted in gender stereotypes, centring the attention on knowledge related to the students' with immigrant backgrounds can be empowering for them on occasions. However, there is a need for going beyond episodic and tokenistic activities seen as 'multicultural'. Especially if this is only linked to aspects of knowledge strongly connoted from an ethnic and cultural point of view, they may reinforce the idea that the pupils with immigrant backgrounds are only experts in a knowledge mostly marked as 'ethnic' and peripheral from a European point of view. This would prove their marginality and the centrality of the Italian, majority culture and approach to culture, which is just taken as the 'default' one, which does not need to be explained and 'shown' as another form of difference. This type of activities de-ethnicise the dominant culture as they do not discuss it as one among the others, but rather pose it as the legitimate one. This seems apt to continue "the hierarchical status quo of the *metropolitan coloniser*", that is the school as an Italian institution, "and the new colonised", the migrant children in the Italian school (p. 450; Migliarini, 2018).

However, as seen also for other aspects in previous sections, a change in perspective on the curriculum, from Eurocentric to a curriculum that rejects hierarchies and a colonising attitude, cannot be expected by the individual, if it is not first promoted as a policy (Gorski, 2008). In the next section, I analyse how neoliberalism powerfully shapes the participants' beliefs and attitudes.

## 7.7 A Neoliberal Western Habitus

In line with what research has shown at a more general level (Fekete, 2004; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Yaqin, Morey, & Soliman, 2018), the vast majority of the interviewees view Islamic societies as the most distant cultures. The distance is not marked by the religion in itself, as highlighted by the Albanians case discussed above in section 6.4, but rather by the extent to which they conform to a value system that can be defined as being Western and middle-class. This value system is marked by neoliberal values such as individual responsibility, an ambition for the individual to self-improvement, aimed at going up the social ladder through meritocracy. These neoliberal values seem to be considered intrinsically good; they have the self-evidence of a (Western) habitus. When the individuals are not committed in taking part in this ‘meritocratic’ mechanism, either because they do not share it, or because they lack the right forms of capital, they are blamed for that. This is proven by this research – as seen in previous sections of this chapter – students and families are criticised when they do not seem to aspire to an upward social class mobility, and do not ‘work hard’ in view of that.

One of the cornerstones of neoliberalism at school level are the standardised tests (Apple, 2000; Au, 2016). In this study, the attitude teachers expressed in this respect was not uniform. Some participants considered them a guarantee of quality and think that they have positive reflections on the everyday didactics, as they focus on the evaluation of competences, considered innovative and intrinsically good by many. Others, instead, criticised standardised testing for lacking in flexibility and for not considering alternative ways of thinking. The practice of standardised testing caused

many polemics when it was introduced in Italian schools in 2007; however, teachers stated that it did not influence their way of teaching.

Orlando (56, Schools 4 and 5, head teacher) expressed a different view. While he argued that INVALSI standardised tests can be positive as a means to compare schools and to promote the development of competences, he rejected the idea that they can be used to assess the school quality, because “it would be like judging a picture from a fragment of it”, as school is more complex than an objective test can capture. However, he acknowledged that teachers feel judged for the tests results, which scare them. He knows that “some teachers who care about making a good impression”; invite the students with immigrant backgrounds and those with learning difficulties to not to attend school when a standardised test is taking place. Orlando’s use of feminine markers<sup>15</sup>, perhaps unintentional, highlights how this request for accountability is primarily exercised on women teachers, maybe under the control of a male head teacher, and how stressful they find a climate of induced competition based on performativity and accountability, dictated by neoliberal policies. Ball (2003a, p. 216) defines performativity as

(...) a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employ judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentives, control, attrition and change (...). The performances (...) serve as measures of productivity or output, or display of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or

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<sup>15</sup> In Italian, nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs are gendered (Orlando refers to “*alcune insegnanti*”, “some female teachers”).

represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement.

Performativity creates pressure and brings insecurity. While it has an appearance of objectivity, it has a strong emotional impact on teachers, ingenerating sentiments of anxiety, shame, envy or pride. Ball suggests that performativity can bring a sense of success, but also conflicts, inauthenticity and opacity, through a mechanism that he calls ‘fabrication’: representations by the individual or the organisation, informed by “the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment – examination results, retention, racial equality, social participation”. (Ball, p. 224). Fabrications are, in Ball’s view, both “an act of “*resistance and capitulation*” (ibid., p. 225, italics in the original). Orlando excluded that objective testing brings a ‘teach to test’ attitude; however, he acknowledged that there is lots of preparation in view of the tests. This can be supposed to erode the time, already scarce, and the energy, usable for activities aimed at the inclusion of all the students.

The interviewees mostly admitted that they had never thought about this aspect, but then conceded that the standardised tests can put the students with immigrant backgrounds, particularly those of quite recent immigration, in a position of disadvantage. In fact, they might pose a challenge not only because of their scarce language knowledge, but also because they are based on a logic that is different from the one they are used to. As Guadalupe (2017) argues, using standardised tests to measure learning is a contested practice; it poses challenges particularly in relation to diversity mainly linked to language, cultural, and context, including social class. Moreover, international tests are culturally biased, shaped according to the viewpoint

of those organisations, such as OECD, which promote the testing, and their political views through it (Guadalupe, 2017).

In relation to pupils assessment, Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths) highlighted an unresolved ambiguity in the Italian legislation: while teachers are legally given the possibility to provide a personalised curriculum, after labelling pupils as Additional Support Needs (ASN) pupils (see Section 1.6), at the end of the school cycle these students have to stand the same examination<sup>16</sup> as the others, which ‘feels like betraying them’. This seems to qualify as a charitable attitude (Santoro, 2014), followed by a punishment, looking like a form of institutional racism, which marginalise and exclude non majority groups (Gillborn, 2002; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015) through “the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin” (Macpherson, Cook, & Stone, 1999, p. 321). In this case, the institution ‘helps’ the ‘deficit’ pupil, thus showing its ‘goodness’ but then, often after not enough time, make them accountable for the standard programme, putting the responsibility on them.

Sometimes different aspects of the same phenomenon were viewed with different attitudes. For example, Carla criticised standardised tests, as promoting the single thought or, as Addey (2017) claims, ‘the single story’, where a neoliberal idea of global literacy expressed through a universal language is promoted. By “choosing, defining, organizing, measuring, legitimizing and interpreting (...)” (Addey, p. 330), a project of literacy is created and reproduced through the routine repetition until it becomes the single story of literacy and delegitimises the others. At the same time,

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<sup>16</sup> The examinations in conclusion of the three-years secondary school is partially made up of school based assessment, and partially of national standardised tests.



Carla sometimes had suggested her pupils with immigrant backgrounds to get a certification for the assessment of the Italian language. She observed that they mostly did not care about this, as they did not know if they would ever do anything with this certification, if they would keep living in Italy, move to another country, or go back to their home country. Carla added that just a few understand the importance of studying, and invest a lot in school.

The emergence of a neoliberal language, even in the words of those who criticise the most evident aspects of neoliberalism, show how deeply it is interwoven in the teachers' way of thinking, and how it is an important element in shaping the way the teachers look at their students. The participants in this study considered the streaming system in the higher secondary school, with lyceums, technical and vocational schools (see section 1.4), as a natural response to the different abilities and ambitions of the students and their families. Contemporarily, they were mostly against the formation of streamed classes in lower secondary school. They generally found this useful for the newly come foreign pupils, to give them the possibility to learn a base level of language; after that, this system would result penalising for those who are not top of the class, as they would be left behind. Mixed abilities classes were considered to work best, because, as Beatrice (45, School 3, Maths) argued, "working together, at the end the result of the group is obviously higher compared to the result [of the singles]". Similarly to others, Beatrice did not like homogenous groups. She expressed a belief in the collaboration among peers, where individuals compensate one another and learn from each other.

However, a few participants noted that the 'level' of the schooling had become lower, and that not much was done for the 'excellences', as the resources, in terms of

care devolved, were mainly drained by the pupils that experience difficulties. Patrizia (61, School 4, Art), for instance, claimed that school should pay for enrichment teachers, as everyday activities are directed to those who have difficulties, and the best students are neglected. Together with a few others, she gave voice to the idea of kind of reversed discriminations, where the most capable students are not given enough opportunities.

Sonia (54, School 5, Modern Languages), defended the idea of level groups, based on her knowledge of the English system, that she seemed to consider good ‘by default’. In Sonia’s view, the purpose of level groups is not to split the good from the bad students; rather, it is based on the assumption that students with learning difficulties will never go over a certain level. Only insisting on a basic knowledge they will be able to acquire some notions by the end of the three lower high school years. At the same time, this allows the ‘excellences’ to work together and to get to a higher level. Therefore, for Sonia this is as an opportunity both for the excellent and the ‘problematic’ students; however, she claimed she was aware that her thinking was not mainstream.

Sonia seemed to privilege culture as a means of self-promotion, to get a better job than the parents’, in a world based on competition, where those who are good, who are very committed and study hard, get on, or should get on, regardless of their social or ethnic origins. As to the students with immigrant backgrounds, she argued that if they study hard and are determined, they can do better than “the real Italians”, thus reducing a matter of social equity to an individual ambition and purpose. She concluded that the persuasive power of school towards the importance of having a

certain level of culture to be able to make one's own way in the world, is limited. It needs to be backed by the family, that is attributed the ultimate responsibility.

However, often parental engagement is framed in terms of white and middle-class manner by school staff, and intersectional issues arising from race, class, and immigration background are often missed, and rather constructed as deficit (Baquedano-López et al., 2013), as discussed in section 6.7. Sonia's view is strictly connected to a neoliberal vision of a meritocratic world, where "whatever our social position at birth, society ought to offer enough opportunity and mobility for 'talent' to combine with 'effort' in order to 'rise to the top'" (Littler, 2013, p. 52). From a relatively privileged position, Sonia expresses a belief that we are in a society where equality is realised on an individual level, through the display of talent and hard work, and where a solution can be found to overcome economic constraints, through family's sacrifices. Thus, like in other cases, not being driven by an ambition for social mobility seems to acquire a moral disvalue.

In Tiziana (46, School 5, Humanities)'s words, this ambition and purpose seems to even take a religious shade. Talking about a student with an immigrant background that she defined 'bright' and whose family has enough economic means, she regretted him having opted for a vocational school. Her statement that "you cannot throw away all of these skills, these talents", falls between a neoliberal imperative of transforming capabilities into professional success, with its economic and social capital inflections, and the biblical sin of not maximizing one's own talents<sup>17</sup>. In

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<sup>17</sup> According to the New Testament "Parable of the Talents" (Matthew, 25:14-30) a man, before leaving for a long journey, leaves his goods to his servants, according to their abilities: five talents to the first, two to the second, and one talent to the third one. When he comes back, the first two servants have doubled the sum received, while the third one has hidden his talent in the ground, in fear of losing it. The master gets very angry at him, as he has not put the talent he had been given to work, and gives it to the servant who had ten.

conclusion, the participants expressed different views, linked to different individual positions as to gender, social class, and personal beliefs; however, they mostly seemed to share neoliberal values. As shown above, some neoliberal values are felt as natural; however, a reflection on educational practices such as standardised testing, in some cases bring to a reflection on their being discriminatory towards pupils with immigrant backgrounds. This shows that introducing a reflection on the theme can at least generate awareness.

Along with seeing the presence of students with immigrant backgrounds in the classroom as a source of challenges, some participants highlight this as an opportunity of ‘enrichment’ for the majority pupils, the possibility of capitalising social skills, such as being open, flexible, and able to virtually work in a multicultural and international environment, without any problems. Research in the UK context (Crozier et al., 2008; Hollingworth & Mansaray, 2012; Hollingworth & Williams, 2010), has highlighted the value attached to a multicultural educational setting by families and educators, and its limitations. As also this study shows, while the mix of ethnicities is celebrated as culturally ‘enriching’, in reality rarely there is ethnicity (and social class) mixing, especially out of school. Therefore, the social mix is contingent to the school space and time, and does not really change relations of power, with being White and middle class seen as normative (Hollingworth & Williams, 2010). Crozier et al. (2008) also notice a contradiction in White middle class families between the desire to send their children in high ethnic diversity schools, and the worry that they could feel ‘out of place’, between wanting to do the right thing in terms of what they deem fare, such as social mixing, and the anxiety of not making the best choice for their children. This

reflects in some of the participants' position, of seeing multicultural school as an opportunity and a challenge at the same time.

Nadia (46, School 1, Humanities), commented that in her school not only the teachers, but also the students were very tolerant. The pupils grew up with an open mentality, that would help them cope in the society they live in, presumably be more and more characterised by "interculturality, integration with the other, the different". Orlando (56, School 4 and 5, head teacher) as well, considered the contact with other cultures as beneficial to the local students. Thinking of his own daughters, he was convinced that for them going to school with kids of different ethnicities had been an advantage, as they got " (...) a different view even on a relational level, a contact, even if limited, with other cultures". Therefore, if the high presence of students with immigrant backgrounds might seem penalising in certain respects, it is compensated by benefits to the local students in terms of middle classes 'cosmopolitan disposition' (Skeggs, 2004). Skeggs defines cosmopolitan disposition as a competence acquired through "(...) the cultures of others, turning them into objects of distanced contemplation for oneself" (ibid., p. 158), where the others are used as a resource. Skeggs (2004) inscribes this in a global capitalism mechanism that exploits difference, where

In order to know who, why and how to engage with others we also need to know their value; is their culture worth knowing, experimenting with? And value is established through different symbolic economies, (such as (...) taste, art-culture system, lifestyle, in different fields" (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 159).

The idea of a differential value attributed to different cultures, emerged through words of fascination that some participants expressed towards some cultures, while being patronising towards others. Tiziana (46, School 5, Humanities), for instance, manifested her keenness in exchanges and relationships with foreign people, in so much that her family had hosted foreign people in the family home:

The two experiences we have had have been exceptional indeed. Moreover, my daughter has also had an opportunity to go, she has been hosted. [They were] American. She was hosted last year, for a long period, for around two months and a half. She was also very young when she left, she was not even 14 last year.

In addition to investing in her children 'cosmopolitan' formation, Tiziana also expressed her desire to have an experience as a teacher of Italian abroad. Through her words, foreign people populate two distinct categories: one made of an international élite of people who travel to have experiences and improve themselves and whose closeness constitutes an 'exceptional experience', while others are to be judged on the basis of their values. This proves that the Others are classified not only according to how distant their culture is from Ours (see section 6.2), but also in relation to the prestige of that culture. At the same time, acquiring the ability to relate to a diversity of people, is part of a 'cosmopolitan formation' that adds to a social and cultural capital of the ethnic majority, giving them the opportunity to 'ideally' become competitive at a global level.

## 7.8 Conclusion

Although the vast majority of the participants are for granting the Italian citizenship (7.2) to pupils with immigrant backgrounds at certain conditions, its practical and symbolic value of legitimising equal treatment and rights (Oliveri, 2018) is not fully acknowledged. In the classroom, an attitude of generic benevolence and of showing ‘good will’, also influenced by religion, seems to substitute an analysis of power relation. Some participants view treating the students as if they were all the same as a sign of equality. Others, try to create a relationship and a connection, often limited to particular aspects with their culture. Race does not emerge as a category; teachers generally look for points of contact, rather than stress differences and conflicts. A Eurocentric point of view, criticised by someone, is rarely really challenged, also due to the complications of having to keep together the needs of all the pupils and the background pressures of the families. Tensions in this sense might also be ingenerated by neoliberal imperatives about standardised assessment and performativity, which tend to lead the attention towards objectives different from inclusion, not always in a way that is self/evident. However, during the research often critical positions towards this ideology were expressed. This may represent a starting point for unveiling and engaging with a school system and a pedagogy that tend to reproduce inclusions and exclusions.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusions**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In the previous four chapters, I have analysed how teachers and head teachers construct themselves and their students with immigrant backgrounds in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity and culture. I have also shown how these conceptions are linked to their attitudes towards the students, and to a widespread neoliberal ideology, with its belief in values such as individualisation, meritocracy, innovation, the stress on competencies and their standardised assessment. While aware that the aspects constituting identity are not isolated, but intersect with one another in a dynamic relationship, I mainly focused on one element at a time for manageability reasons.

In this chapter, I summarise the findings on the themes above, bringing them together to offer conclusions related to the research questions of this study:

- How do the teachers' and head teachers' identities, in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity shape how they perceive students with immigrant backgrounds in Italy?
- How do the teachers' and head teachers' perceptions of students with immigrant backgrounds affect their pedagogical attitudes?



- How do their understanding of education policies inform their beliefs and pedagogical practices in classes with students with immigrant backgrounds?

Then, I delineate the main contributions of my thesis in relation to existing research on teachers' identity and attitudes in a culturally diverse classroom and point out the limitations of this study. I highlight the implications for teachers' preparation and indicate paths for future research. I then conclude with reflections on limitations of the study, recommendations for policy and some personal considerations.

## **8.2 How Teachers' Gender, Social Class, Ethnicity and Culture Matter**

Gender, in conjunction with other elements, such as social class, ethnicity and culture, is a powerful element in shaping teachers' identity and their perceptions of students with immigrant backgrounds. Teachers' stereotypes on gender are related to the constructions of both ethnic majority and ethnic minority students and families. Generally, the gender attributions in the local mainstream culture are assumed to be natural; those perceived as belonging to other ethnicities are felt more as a product of a specific culture, and are often questioned as backward and oppressive, especially in the case of pupils from Islamic backgrounds (van Es, 2016).

As studies in other contexts have widely shown (i.e. Braun, 2012; Drudy, 2008; Farioli, 2015), women teachers often see themselves and are seen as more maternal and attentive to the relational aspects of their profession, while male teachers consider themselves, and are often considered by their female colleagues, as being more

authoritative. Equally, the students are generally constructed according to gender clichés (Archer & Francis, 2007; Burman, 2005; Gill et al., 2016). Girls are considered sensible, respectful of rules, responsible and sometimes hard working students, while boys tend to be seen as less respectful of the norms and less often good students. This study proves that these findings are valid also in the context of this research; however, as mentioned above, aspects related to ethnicity intersect in teachers' constructions of gender clichés. These constructions have direct consequences in terms of models offered and on the shaping of expectations, that is a powerful element affecting students' behaviour and choices, as the literature has shown (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Francis & Hey, 2009; Santoro, 2007; Thys & Van Houtte, 2016).

Previous research literature (Bonizzoni et al., 2014) has investigated the role of teachers' orientation practices in the transition from lower to a tracked higher secondary school system for students with immigrant backgrounds, highlighting this aspect as a factor reproducing social inequalities and segregation. In my study, I have aimed at filling a gap in knowledge about what makes this happen, that is, how teachers' attitudes are rooted in their own gendered, classed, and ethnicised identities. With all the limitations of the power of reflexivity as a lever for change (Adkins, 2004; Taylor, 2004), highlighting how certain attitudes that support a social order based on inequality reproduce themselves and are reproduced, can be a first step to try to challenge them.

In this view, this study has highlighted that constructions of gendered, classed, ethnicised students have an effect on teachers' practical acts, such as recommendations for pupils' higher secondary studies. Clichéd assumptions and related pedagogical dispositions seem to depend more on a lack of awareness of issues around gender, than

on a conscious acceptance and wilful perpetuation of gender stereotypes. There seems to be a shared, unsaid agreement on the lesser value of women teachers, while male teachers seem to add prestige to the profession with their presence. This is clearly in contrast with a widespread use in the Western rhetoric, and also emerged in this study, of feminist arguments to state a more progressive and egalitarian character of the Western countries, compared to the Islamic ones (Butler, 2006).

Gender stereotypes have an ethnicised inflection, with the almost generalised assumption that discrimination against women belongs mainly to Islamic societies, where women are seen either as passive victims of patriarchal power, or harshly punished when they dare to challenge it. This ignores that gender discrimination is present also in the Italian and Western society, even if in different forms. I assume that overlooking this fact is either a self-defensive mechanism, or a strategic device to mark a convenient border between Them and Us, putting Them in a deficit position and in need to be patronised by the ethnic majority.

Families with immigrant backgrounds often are perceived as having values characteristic of lower social strata: most of them are considered not so much interested in culture and more inclined towards a vocational instruction for their children, in order to get them working soon and contribute to the family economy. Distinctions within families with immigrant backgrounds are operated according to lines of ethnicity and social class. While the strongest shaping factor is considered the family background, in terms of importance attributed to culture and professional aspirations, a classification based on ethnic belonging is also effective. Different scales of 'Otherness' are drawn, according to the extent their values differ from the middle-class, Western ones, with Albanians and Eastern Europeans positioned at the closest

end of difference and the ‘integralist’ Muslims at the extreme end of Otherness. Erel, Murji and Nahaboo (2016, p. 1343) observe how hierarchies of Us and Them are constituted through the racialisation of the other as part of a “separate species”, not necessarily based on biologic differences. They argue that race boundaries are shaped “through ideas, practices and institutions” (ibid., p. 1343), that have practical consequences on them, in terms of concrete possibilities and opportunities. An example of this, can be citizenship as a legal status, as seen in section 7.2. In this perspective, the unwillingness or inability to learn the local language is used as an argument to prove the culturally irreducible distance. Language and values are defined “a post-racial mask for new processes of racializing migrants” (ibid., p. 1346), that are not categorized according to big homogeneous groups, but rather more dialectically, such as the ‘good Muslim’ and the ‘bad Muslim’, the middle class immigrant and the poor one. This view is proved by my study, where the lines of belonging are fluid and flexible, but strong.

Most participants seem to expect and wish, as a natural outcome of a process of integration, a conformation on the side of the pupils’ families to the majority, middle class culture. This seems to be true both for the working-class ethnic majority, and for the students with immigrant backgrounds, who are subjected to the additional burden of having to leave their ethnic identity behind. Talking about social class inequalities, Reay (1997b, p. 24) states that “the solution to class inequalities does not lie in making the working classes middle-class, but in working and dismantling and sharing out the economic, social and cultural capital which go with middle-class status”. Extending this assertion to ethnicity, it can be argued that equally, the solution to ethnic inequalities cannot be asking the Other to become Us, where the Other is a generic,

clichéd deficit individual, and the Us is an idealised White middle class one. Shedding light on how teachers' expectations and projections are shaped by acquired habitus related to gender, social class, ethnicity and culture and undiscussed conceptions, can be a way to pursue a more inclusive, just and democratic instruction and society.

### **8.3 Teachers' Identity and Attitudes towards Students with Immigrant Backgrounds: a Contentious Relationship**

As research carried out in other contexts on the relationship between elements of teachers' identity and pedagogic attitudes (Hoadley & Ensor, 2009) has shown, it is not possible to establish a straightforward link between elements constituting identity, nor was it the aim of this study. Rather, my research is an exploration of how elements such as social class, gender, ethnicity, culture, can constitute important factors in the reproduction or countering of inequalities in an educational setting and how teachers make sense of them for themselves and for their students. As the literature has widely shown in other contexts (Cotton, et al., 2015; Hey, 2013; Loveday, 2016), the various elements that constitute people's identity always interact in personal ways, also according to their beliefs, the contingent situation they find themselves in, and their willingness to accept or challenge the position they are in. This has emerged from this study, where the concept of Bourdieu's habitus (1977) has been a powerful interpretative tool that has highlighted constraints and recurrences in the participants' dispositions. Equally, the role of agency has clearly emerged. As discussed in section 2.6, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, a structure that is generated by social class and associated forms of capital, and that informs perceptions and actions, has been

criticised for not leaving space to the individual's agency. However, as also this study has shown, habitus constitute a structural frame, that individuals can resist in various forms and subvert taking different positions. Individuals make decisions and take up or challenge situations and facts, according to their set of beliefs and ideology, that are inscribed and constructed within a habitus, but not 'determined' by it.

Links between identity and dispositions in the classroom highlighted by previous literature (Hoadley, 2009; Santoro, 2014) have also emerged here, but they need to be put in relation to the Italian context, and not be generalised.

Teachers' attitudes towards pupils can have classed and gendered inflections. Male teachers more often than female teachers have expressed a neutral attitude towards diversity. It seems to be based on the belief that treating all the pupils the same way and offering the same knowledge to everybody, independently from their social or ethnic background, is a sign of social fairness. In the case of one of the male participants, this attitude seems to be rooted in having experienced inequality as a working class boy. Some other male working class teachers have expressed an interest in setting a more personalised relationship with the pupils, but this only sometimes seems to translate into an effort towards a consideration of the students' peculiarities. Also, male teachers generally state that their preparation on cultural diversity is sufficient, even if entirely acquired on the field. As I will show later in this section, this is not true for women, who are expected to be empathetic and over-competent, especially if working class. Often, men teachers seem to see the matter as a question of paying a bit of attention and being welcoming, having a good disposition and managing some practical problems, such as communication when the students are just arrived. They also often express the belief that being men facilitates them in the

relationship, which suggests that they have in mind a certain type of ‘foreign’ student: male, not very well behaved, possibly Muslim. Overall, being a male in the Italian secondary school seems a valued form of capital in itself, of which men are well aware.

Women teachers in this research, particularly those with a working class background, seem generally more attentive and more prepared on the theme of cultural diversity; they express a more personalised view towards the pupils and their needs. This undoubtedly has to do with a generally different attitude of women teachers who, out of a feminine habitus that wants them ‘maternal’ and ‘caring’, often direct more energies into the relationship with the individual. Some of the women teachers, mainly working class, have a specific preparation and a long experience of work with pupils with immigrant backgrounds. They rely on their experience, but also value a more ‘academic’ preparation on themes of inclusion. This resonates with the previous literature (Addison & Mountford, 2015; Loveday, 2016; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012) highlighting how working class women experience a sense of inadequacy, attached to their social class background, constructed as deficient and inadequate. The form of capital they have, ‘institutional capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986), is considered and felt as less valuable than that acquired to the family; this may be a motivation to accumulate more ‘institutional capital’ to be able to feel competent.

Another emerging aspect is that teachers with a middle class background seem to be more prone to use categories inspired by a neoliberal view, such as excellence and competition. However, most teachers put the emphasis on the value of collaborative skills in the classroom, especially when expressing an almost generalised aversion for competency level groups. In this, religion, as a cultural background element is an important shaping factor, with its accent on good sentiments and ‘good

will', and its stress, at least in some of the forms it takes, and at least at rhetoric level, on the community, rather than on the individual. The resistance to the neoliberal ideology of the individual, even if largely assumed as natural, is at the same time contended by the individual's adherence to (Catholic) religion or ideological beliefs.

#### **8.4 Constructions of (Non)Belonging**

Belonging and (non)belonging are constructed according to lines drawn in terms of 'distance' from an 'idealised' local culture and values. The acceptability of students and families with immigrant backgrounds seems mainly based on how different they are, on how willing to 'integrate' and fit in Western, middle-class, neoliberal values, such as an ambition to do well in school and in the profession, a less visible way to live religion, a 'modern' way of life, where women are free to act like Western women. Those who are 'docile', who make an effort to 'belong', are acceptable; those who are considered least acceptable are those who are less available to leave their own culture behind, to assume the shape of the container where they are now.

In this construction of (non)belonging, emotions play an important role. Those who are felt as non belonging, are often deemed responsible for 'not wanting to belong' to the ethnic majority society. In this, great importance is given to the language knowledge; not speaking Italian at home is seen as a sign of 'not wanting' to become part of the majority society. In some cases the participants do not seem to be aware of how complex the cognitive and emotional issues around language are and of how important to retain competence in one's own language is as a safeguard for identity



recognition (Banks, 2014) and for cognitive operations. Alternatively, this might be a sign that the Others are often expected to be available to 'give up' part of their identity, to 'make space' for the local majority one. Pupils and families with immigrant backgrounds are basically constructed as deficient: to become part of the local society, they need to overcome their deficiencies, and more importantly, they should want to overcome them. As highlighted by previous literature, often different ethnic groups are counterposed: some groups, or individuals, are considered deserving, as adhering to the desirable values, disqualifying others by contrast.

Another important element in this classification is a temporal shifting of belonging and (non)belonging, where ethnic groups, such as the Albanians, the Romanians and other Eastern European have gone from a state of (non)belonging to one of belonging, and have been overall replaced by Muslims as designated Others. However, being Muslim is not in itself the ultimate line of Otherness, as shown by the case of the Albanians and Macedonians, partially of Islamic religion. This is also proven by the emergence of the 'acceptable Muslims', those who keep religion as a private fact, not making it too visible through their bodies, social habits and practices, such as the veil or the Ramadan, and not letting their religious creed interfere with the school organisation and activities. In this respect, many participants criticise the fact that They, the Muslims, do not make a distinction between the faith and the cultural aspect of religion. This seems to convey the idea that the Western culture, seen as able to conceive this distinction, is more advanced than the Islamic culture. The assumption seems to be that while we can comprehend Them, they cannot understand Us. This clearly does not consider the complexity within the Us and the Them, in terms of economic, social, cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) and personal beliefs. Race, or the

colour of the skin, are hardly mentioned; ethnic difference is perceived as ‘cultural’, and mainly based on the difference of values, with an assumption of White middle class Western values as more progressive and the ones to foster.

### **8.5 Neoliberal Views on Education: an Uncomfortable Acceptance**

The global distribution of power is not criticised; to be included, the students with immigrant backgrounds are expected to become part of a society that is ordered in a way that keeps them in a subordinated position or excludes them. A positive solution is present for deserving individuals: a neoliberal concept of meritocracy applied to this context moves the responsibility from a global unbalanced distribution of power, in its various forms, to a problem of personal competitiveness. The attention seems to be on how the students with immigrant backgrounds and their families should be and should become, in order to join the benefits of the Western society, with little or no criticism about structural injustices. The widespread underlying idea is that if a student manages to be a good student and to acquire good knowledge, this will take to a good job and to a social improvement. This, as Apple (2001) remarks, is based on the idea that knowledge is neutral while, on the contrary, it tends to ratify social divisions based on class, gender, and race. It also overshadows the fact that, especially in a country, like Italy, with high rates of unemployment, the link between good education and good jobs is quite weak in general, and even more for people with immigrant backgrounds. As research shows (Fullin & Reyneri, 2011), while immigrants in Italy are not disadvantaged in terms of being unemployed compared to Italians, they are relegated to low skill occupations and underground economy. This

disadvantage is not linked to poor education: on the contrary, the disadvantage increases when education level is considered. This shows that entering a good profession is not simply the consequence of having good schooling, particularly for immigrants, but resides in wider structural inequalities in society. However, a school based on neoliberal principles plays its part in the reproduction of gender, class and ethnic inequalities, as also this study shows. The stress on standardised assessment and on performativity, and the scarce consideration for cultural diversity – diverse students' mother tongue, an apparently culturally neutral curriculum – reinforces a 'fear of the Other' (Apple, 2001), where the Other can be a diverse individual, idea, or logic, that does not conform to the 'neutral' Western individual, embodying middle class values, white, local, and male.

The stress on education as a means to implement individual competitiveness is quite accepted as part of a 'modern', universal truth but, as mentioned above, there are also critical voices stressing the value of collaboration over individualisation. Overall, the strength of neoliberal values such as merit, performativity, and individual responsibility resides in that they sound as an internationally shared common-sense. However, most of the participants in this study acknowledge that standardised tests are discriminatory towards the students with immigrant backgrounds, especially if first generation, both for language knowledge reasons, and for the logic they are based on, different from the one they are used to. This aspect may represent a 'breaking point' in the vision of the educational institution as neutral, a starting point for a critical reflection on institutional discriminations. It highlights the fact that treating everybody as if they were the same, represents a formal neutrality that hides a substantial

discrimination. Pupils who do not possess the forms of cultural capital required to perform well in culturally biased tests, are assessed through them (see section 7.7).

An attitude towards students with immigrant backgrounds, based on paternalism and relying on good intentions, such as being generically welcoming and sympathetic, accompanied by a lack of formation on issues related to cultural diversity, leaves exclusion unchallenged, and may instead reinforce a system based on segregation and inequalities. This aspect, however, should not be left to the individual's good will and personal reflection, but rather be substantial part of policy regarding pre-service and in-service formation.

In conclusion, this study highlights a general lack of explicit reflection on class, gender and ethnicity by teachers and head teachers. Although a straightforward, unequivocal link between their identity and how they perceive and position their students with immigrant backgrounds cannot be established, notions of (not)belonging are present and are attached to students. Such notions of (non)belonging are connected to values and practices linked to gendered, ethnic majority middle class habitus, which constitute the norms. Difference is positioned and opposed to these norms in hierarchical terms. Neoliberalism, as a background ideology, is widespread in the educational environment and is normalised. However, elements of critical awareness are present.

## 8.6 Recommendations and Implications

As mentioned above, this study highlights a lack of reflection of teachers and head teachers on issues related to gender, social class belonging and ethnicity, in particular on how these elements can shape a construction of belonging and (non)belonging of students with immigrant backgrounds. These themes do not represent a significant part of any teacher training, neither pre-service nor in-service. A bill on “*Introduction of gender education and theories in the activities and didactic materials of the schools and universities*” (my translation) was deposited in the Italian Senate in 2014. However, after a fierce controversy with the Catholic Church and political forces attached to an idea of gender as naturally given, and based on the binary and hierarchic male/female categories, it has been set aside. The present regulations about the education system in Italy (Law 107, 2015) encompasses “education to equality of sexes, the prevention of gender violence and discriminations”. However, the sporadic initiatives at school level aimed at a knowledge of how gender constructions and stereotypes are built and work, are often contrasted as manipulative of children, and opposed to a natural or divine order, according to personal ideologies. On the contrary, as Butler (21 January 2019) affirms, teaching gender shows the complexity of the human experience and opens spaces of freedom through often “narrow and cruel” social norms.

A reflection on gender construction is not easy because the gender habitus is deeply rooted (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; P. Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, 1990; Lovell, 2000; Reay, 2004a); at the same time, it would be immensely beneficial in a profession made in majority by women and in an environment that has a deep influence on the

young generations. This is useful not only for an understanding of the pupils by the teachers, and to try to avoid reproducing gender according to a naturalised, ethnicised class habitus and models, but also for opening up for them possibilities of freedom of choice and to promote wellbeing and equity.

Equally, a consideration of how certain features may be linked to social class belonging, either for teachers and head teachers and for pupils and their families, may help avoiding to categorize people out of context. Considerations based on the analysis of social classes can help understand that some values that are often considered as neutral and self-evidently good, are middle class, while dispositions more typical of the lower social classes are criticised.

Learning to see oneself as culturally and ethnically placed, can help avoiding positioning oneself in a 'neutral', 'normalised' Whiteness that sees all what is different as Other and ethnicised, proposing, or imposing, oneself as a model. This might help teachers and head teachers to analyse their role and to escape the traps of stereotyped reproduction of gender, social class, ethnicity in school and in the society, and to support the pupils understanding the role of social and cultural elements in gender construction.

In order to promote a teaching based on reflectivity and reflexivity, there is a need for a preparation of high academic level that takes into account international research and debate. Although teachers usually seem to value more learning from practice and experience, it is from the contact with theories and ideas built on research that innovative practice can start. Otherwise, the risk is to keep repeating what we have experienced in situations that would require a different disposition, especially for those teachers who have in mind the contribution to a more inclusive and equitable society.

An open reflection on our own and others' ethnicity is equally missing. It is necessary to abandon a blind attitude towards race, and instead to take into consideration the issues around it. This is even more relevant in a changed political climate in Italy, where the widespread presence of racism cannot be denied anymore. Institutional racism needs to be unveiled, and also the individuals' racism needs to be tackled. For this reason, it would be important for teachers and head teachers to become aware of this aspect and deal with it in a way that goes beyond the dealing of themes connected to racism, but rather starting from a reflection about (self)identity, also recognising the role of emotions. It is necessary to acknowledge that teachers and head teachers are pressured by many demands, often coming from different stakeholders, and how some participants have underlined, what is difficult is putting everything together.

In discussing the validity of the conclusions of this study, it is important to consider that it is set in an area of Italy, framed by a generally progressive political discourse, where generic values of openness and integration are prevailing. The fieldwork was also set a few months ahead the 2018 General elections in Italy, that saw the rise of a populist government, that has made of the discourse of (non)belonging its warhorse. As in the new political scenario discourses of exclusion are legitimised and turned into something spectacular and with a propaganda value by the political power, one year later the tone of the conversations might have been different. In this context, as Apple (2010) suggests, looking at different critical traditions, such as Bourdieu, Butler, feminist theories (among others), to which culturally responsive teaching theories can be added, as built on the same critical post-structuralist

foundations, “can illuminate spaces for progressive work and alliance building inside and outside education” (Apple, 2010, p. 154).

While at times the teachers and head teachers acknowledge that there would be a need for more formation on the themes of cultural diversity, what seems to be lacking is not only a knowledge of the particular culture and lived experience of the culturally diverse students. As culturally responsive pedagogies underline (Gay, 2010; Santoro, 2017), this needs to be accompanied by teachers and head teachers’ consideration of one’s own positioning not just as the neutral one, but as marked by gender, social, ethnic and cultural belonging. The attention tends to be drawn by technical or practical problems, or by the mastering of information about other cultures, while a reflection on own positioning, own values, beliefs and attitudes is absent or scarce, as also highlighted by research in other contexts (Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015).

It is also to be noticed that the background mainstream culture has a strength that goes beyond the personal belief or orientation. For instance, the permanence of a neo-colonial language even in the teachers who are quite aware of their cultural self and are oriented towards social equity, suggests that commonly there is only one language available, that is a neo-colonial one. A reflection and a work on this needs to be done, if we want to create, in a ‘Butlerian’ sense of language as performative, a different reality (see section 2.4).

## **8.7 Future Research**

This study aims to explore an area that has not been much researched internationally and in Italy in particular. The object of the study is how teachers and



head teachers view themselves and their students in terms of gender, social class status, ethnicity and culture, and how this can relate to their educational attitudes, in the wider field of pedagogic relationship with students with immigrant backgrounds. The focus has been on teachers' dispositions as stemming from their identities; the way the dispositions have been enacted has not been object of the study. I have interviewed two head teachers as well. I was interested in their point of view, as influential in the school, but I did not emphasise their managerial role. This would be an area where to extend research. In addition to this, the pupils' voices have been left out. Extending the research to them, listening to their voices, would allow to shed light on how the teachers' attitudes impact on them, how these influence their self-perception in relation to key aspects of their own identity and on their sense of inclusion to the local and wider national community. It would also be important to explore the way they perceive teachers' attitudes and how these influence their feelings of entitlement to choices about their educational pathway, and ultimately their future. It might be wondered if, for instance, what the teachers see as a lack of motivation or ambition, might in turn include a feeling of non entitlement linked to gender, social class or ethnic belonging, that needs to be recognised and dismantled.

Due to the ethnic homogeneity of the teachers it has not been possible to enquire how teachers of different ethnicities construct their and their students' identity in the schools object of the study. In this regard, it has been only possible to elicit opinions on a hypothetical presence of ethnic minority teachers. The teachers' ethnic homogeneity certainly contributes to considering being members of the white ethnic majority as 'normal' and invisible. Engaging with the concept of whiteness would help developing a better understanding of ethnicity and race (Santoro, 2014). Therefore, it

would be important to extend this research to other settings, very few in the Italian territory, where teachers with a culturally diverse background are employed. The theme of recruiting and retaining minority ethnic teachers is an issue in other countries, as well. The Scottish Government (2018), for instance, has published a report aimed at increasing the number of ethnic diverse teachers, as a step necessary to reflect and give confidence to a growing diverse population of pupils, and where diversity is considered the norm. To make this possible, the report recommends positive action to be taken to challenge and confront conscious and unconscious barriers, both institutional and cultural, and address discrimination in the form of racism. The very concrete objective is to reach a percentage of 4% teachers from under-represented communities by 2030.

As discussed in section 1.6, Italian education policies informed by intercultural education are more oriented to reconcile differences. They consider prejudice and racism in an abstract way, without any link with the Italian context, as if they did not have real space in the Italian society. Not addressing these issues, does not make them disappear by themselves (Love & Varghese, 2012). Further research in Italian educational settings on the themes of lack of racialisation of the ethnic majority, and of differential racialisation of ethnic minorities, highlighting power relations, would be beneficial, as it would allow to bring to surface prejudices and biases, shaped by a habitus that is an obstacle to the educational process and outcomes of the students with immigrant backgrounds, and to their social inclusion.

## 8.8 Final Reflections

This study has meant to explore how school teachers and head teachers make sense of their own and their students with immigrant backgrounds' identities in terms of gender, social class, culture and ethnicity, in order to contribute to understanding how this can construct them in a state of belonging or (non)belonging, and how this may influence their pedagogic attitudes towards them.

As discussed in Chapter 3, being a teacher in a school of the same area of those involved in the research, has provided me with a better understanding of the data. Being knowledgeable of dynamics in the profession in secondary schools, has made it possible to have meaningful conversations and therefore rich data, even in the time limitations imposed by the school schedule. Moreover, my familiarity with the background culture, with the object and the setting of my research, has enabled me to make sense more easily of the underlying and surrounding emotions arisen during the interviews. However, I need to acknowledge that a limitation may have been the recruitment form. While I addressed the head teachers as gatekeepers, to have the permission to contact the teachers in an autonomous way, in order for them not to feel any pressure in the participation, the head teachers themselves, or another authoritative figure in the school, acted as recruiters for me. This on the one hand made things easy for me; on the other hand, it presented disadvantages. In some cases the teachers were reportedly chosen *ad hoc*, among those more 'sensitive' to the theme of inclusion, while in other few cases they were caught by surprise and could not refuse, even if I offered the opportunity to confidentially opt out. However, I need to acknowledge that the participants have generally shown an appreciation of the interviews as a means of

reflection on aspects that normally are not object of self-scrutiny, and some have expressed the opinion that more occasions for self-reflection on these themes would be useful.

Examining these aspects, does not mean trying to put the blame on the individual teachers and head teachers, as they operate in a given cultural context and policy system, that affects perceptions and attitudes and create constraints. The fact remains that in the teaching profession it is necessary to be aware of one's dispositions and of their roots, in order to be able to evaluate the possible consequences on the profession and on pupils' lives. A collective reflection might be promoted at a policy level, both aimed at pre-service and in-service teachers.

Raising awareness on own identity and biases, and on students different identities, is a starting point that needs to be supported by more research on the field, and by a willingness on a political level to connect research with people operating in schools. As one of the head teachers who participated into this study denounced, universities go to school for research, but then there is no follow-up, in terms of repercussions on the school. In this regard, one of the actions at the conclusion of this work, is to send a feedback to the schools that have taken part in this study, in the form of a report to the schools and the participants who have expressed their interest in this. However, it would be important that professional development activities were carried out, to help generate awareness and promote an ability to deal with diversity, not only in terms of mere practicalities or pure theory.

I wish to conclude with an annotation of what I have personally learnt on the theme, as a teacher researcher. This study has helped me to make sense of many facts that happen in educational settings, that are more powerful than the explicit curriculum

but that normally are not properly recognised and given relevance. Being caught in views influenced by gender, social class, ethnic and cultural habitus is a common condition that needs to be dismantled, with the aim of bringing a positive change in education towards pupils with immigrant backgrounds. More than ever, it is important to stress the role that school as an institution, made of policies but also of professionals with their own agency, can have in the construction of a society based on inclusion and equity.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A Participant Information Sheet for Teachers

#### Department of Education

1. Title of the investigation
- 2.

#### **Teaching in Culturally Diverse Classrooms in Italian Schools: how teachers' identities matter**

My name is Stefania Pigliapoco. I have been a teacher in Italian secondary schools, and am now a student researcher at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. I would like to invite you to participate in my research.

It is every day's teachers' experience to make educational choices in increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. International research has shown that the students' learning outcomes are connected to many factors, such as their social, cultural, economic background, but has also acknowledged that teachers, with their day-to-day educational choices, can certainly make a difference to their students. I am conducting an investigation on how teacher identity can shape decision about students in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms in Italy. I also aim to study how these decisions are conditioned by how teachers and head teachers understand the Italian education policies. Listening to teachers' and head teachers' voice, and to understand how their decisions are influenced by who they are, can be helpful as a self-reflective professional tool, and to suggest new paths in the teachers' education, with the aim to provide all students with good learning opportunities.

If you agree to participate I will interview you individually for about one hour. The participation in the investigation is voluntary; you have a right to withdraw at any moment of the investigation within two months from the interview, by contacting me or the other Investigators. You can also refuse to answer questions, should they make you feel uncomfortable, without having to give a reason for that and without any consequences.

The interview will be about your background, your professional life and views about education and educational policies, particularly concerning students with an immigrant background, and about cultural belonging. The interview will take place in a reserved space in the school premises, by appointment, outside of lesson hours. No forms of payment or reimbursement will be provided. The investigation will be carried out between May and December 2017.

The information and the opinions given during the interviews will be regarded as confidential, except in case of an imminent danger for someone, and anonymity of the participants (persons and schools) will be guaranteed. I will record and transcribe the interview, and submit the transcriptions to you for approbation, and then I will translate it into English. After that, data will be anonymised, through giving you an identification code, and will be stored as soon as possible in the University of Strathclyde repositories, which guarantee safety. After the research completion, anonymised data will be stored for ten years in the University repository, which is like a library which can be used for future studies. Only the Investigators have access to the key for code names.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

If you are happy to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming this.

However, should you not wish to participate with the project, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your attention.

When the investigation is complete, the participants who are interested, will receive a report outlining the main findings of the research. The results of the investigation will be used in a doctoral thesis. Parts of the interviews may be quoted or reported in an anonymous form. The results of the investigation might also be published, but your name will not be used.

**Please contact me if you want to take part in the investigation.**

**My contact details:**

Stefania Pigliapoco  
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This investigation was granted ethical approval by the School of Education Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Virginie Theriault  
Chair School of Education Ethics Committee  
University of Strathclyde  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
School of Education  
Lord Hope Building  
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Glasgow G4 0LT

Email [v.theriault@strath.ac.uk](mailto:v.theriault@strath.ac.uk)

## Appendix B Consent Form for Teachers

Department of Education

**Title of the study: Teaching in Culturally Diverse Classrooms in Italian Schools: how teachers' identities matter**

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded during the interview.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to two months after the completion of the interview, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. In this case I will contact the investigator, who will destroy any data collected from me. To allow the investigators to remove my data, I will be given an identifier code; only the Investigators will have access to the key.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

## **Appendix C Participant Information Sheet for Head teachers**

### **Department of Education**

#### **Title of the investigation**

#### **Teaching in Culturally Diverse Classrooms in Italian Schools: how teachers' identities matter**

My name is Stefania Pigliapoco. I have been a teacher in Italian secondary schools, and am now a student researcher at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. I would like to invite you to participate in my research.

It is every day's teachers' experience to make educational choices in increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. International research has shown that the students' learning outcomes are connected to many factors, such as their social, cultural, economic background, but has also acknowledged that teachers, with their day-to-day educational choices, can certainly make a difference to their students. I am conducting an investigation on how teacher identity can shape decision about students in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms in Italy. I also aim to study how these decisions are conditioned by how teachers and head teachers understanding of the Italian education policies. Trying to listen to teachers' and head teachers' voice, and to understand how their decisions are influenced by who they are, can be helpful as a self-reflective professional tool, and to suggest new paths in the teachers' education, with the aim to provide all students with good learning opportunities.

If you agree to participate in my study I will interview you individually for about one hour. The participation in the investigation is voluntary; you have a right to withdraw at any moment of the investigation within two months from the interview, by contacting me or the other Investigators. You can also refuse to answer questions, should they make you feel uncomfortable, without having to give a reason for that and without any consequences.

The interview will be about your background, your professional life and views about education and educational policies, particularly concerning students with an immigrant background, and about cultural belonging. The interview will take place in the school premises, by appointment. No forms of payment or reimbursement will be provided. The investigation will be carried out between May and December 2017.

The information and the opinions given during the interview will be regarded as confidential, except in case of an imminent danger for someone, and anonymity of the participants (persons and schools) will be guaranteed. I will record and transcribe the interview, and submit the transcription to you for approbation, and then I will translate it into English. After that, data will be anonymised, through giving you an identification code, and will be stored as soon as possible in the University of Strathclyde repositories, which guarantee safety. After the research completion, anonymised data will be stored for ten years in the University repository, which is like a library which can be used for future studies. Only the Investigators have access to the key for code names.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

If you are happy to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming this.

However, should you not wish to participate with the project, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your attention.

When the investigation is complete, the participants who are interested, will receive a report outlining the main findings of the research. The results of the investigation will be used in a doctoral thesis. Parts of the interviews may be quoted or reported in an anonymous form. The results of the investigation might also be published, but your name will not be used.

I would appreciate if you could forward the Information Sheet for teachers to the Secondary School teachers in your school.

**Please contact me if you want to take part in the investigation.**

<b>My</b>	<b>contact</b>	<b>details:</b>
Stefania Pigliapoco Department of Education University of Strathclyde Lord Hope Building 141 St James Road Glasgow G4 0LT Tel. +39 328 4594687 - +44 7761 689 844 Email <a href="mailto:stefania.pigliapoco@strath.ac.uk">stefania.pigliapoco@strath.ac.uk</a>		

<b>Chief</b>	<b>Investigator</b>	<b>details:</b>
Professor Ninetta Santoro Email <a href="mailto:n.santoro@strath.ac.uk">n.santoro@strath.ac.uk</a>		

**Other Investigator:**  
Professor Yvette Taylor  
Tel. +44 141 444 8048  
Email [Yvette.taylor@strath.ac.uk](mailto:Yvette.taylor@strath.ac.uk)

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the School of Education Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Virginie Theriault  
Chair School of Education Ethics Committee  
University of Strathclyde  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
School of Education  
Lord Hope Building  
141 St James Road  
Glasgow G4 0LT

Email [v.theriault@strath.ac.uk](mailto:v.theriault@strath.ac.uk)

## Appendix D Consent Form for Head teachers

Department of Education

**Title of the study: Teaching in Culturally Diverse Classrooms in Italian Schools: how teachers' identities matter**

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded during the interview.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to two months after the completion of the interview, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. In this case I will contact the investigator, who will destroy any data collected from me. To allow the investigators to remove my data, I will be given an identifier code; only the Investigators will have access to the key.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

## **Appendix E Sample interview schedule for teachers**

- 1) Name
- 2) School
- 3) Subject taught
- 4) Permanent/non permanent position
- 5) Years of teaching (consider as 1 school year if you have been teaching for at least 6 months): Up to 5 years          More than 5 years
- 6) Permanence in the actual school

### **Social background**

1. Can you tell me about your background?
  - a) Where did you grow up?
2. Can you tell me about your educational history?
  - a) How does that compare to other family members?
3. Have you always aspired to be a teacher?
4. How did your family members feel about you becoming a teacher?
5. What does it mean to you to be a teacher?
6. Tell me about your preparation as a teacher.

### **Gender**

1. What is it like to reconcile your teaching job with family/personal life?
2. What are the repercussions on your family/personal life?
3. What are your aspirations as to your career?
4. How do you feel being a woman/man teacher affects your role in your relationship with pupils, parents, etc?



### **Culture/Ethnicity/Schooling**

1. When do you feel you are Italian?
2. When do you think that a person with an immigrant background might feel Italian?
3. How important do you think religion is in people's lives?
4. Can you briefly describe what the situation with students with an immigrant background is in this school?
5. What do you think students and families with an immigrant background expect from education in this school?
6. What do you think is important to know when you teach students with an immigrant background?
  - a. Do you feel that you have a preparation for that?
  - b. Where does your preparation come from?
7. How do you provide for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in your class?
8. On what basis do you think your pupils with an immigrant background will take their secondary school path?
  - a. What do you think about these criteria?

### **Policy**

1. What are your schools' values about linguistic and cultural diversity?
2. How would you describe the current national education policy about students with an immigrant background?

3. Let's talk about the standardized testing. How does this shape what you can do in classes with students with a migrant background?
4. A recent school reform gives the schools the opportunity to organise lessons in level groups. What impact do you think this might have on the students with an immigrant background?

## **Appendix F Sample interview schedule for head teachers**

1. Name
2. School
3. Years in the position
4. Years of permanence in this school

### **Social background**

1. Can you tell me about your background?
  - a. Where did you grow up?
2. Can you tell me about your educational history?
  - a. How does that compare to other family members?
3. What did you dream to become when you were a teenager?
4. How did you decide to become a head teacher?
5. How do your family members feel about you becoming a head teacher?

### **Gender**

1. What is it like to reconcile your job with family/personal life?
2. What are the repercussions on your family/personal life?

### **Culture/Ethnicity/Schooling**

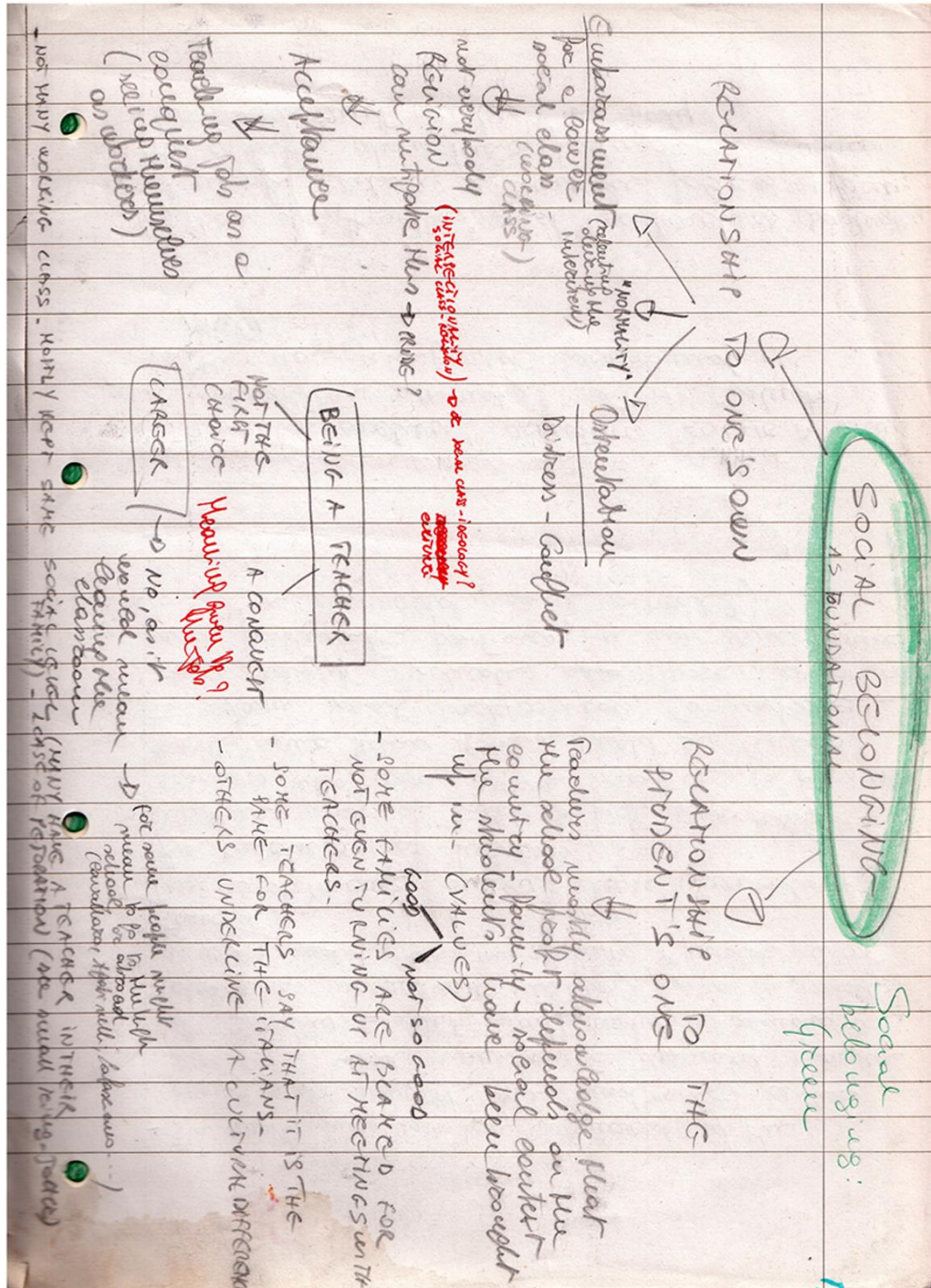
1. When do you feel you are Italian?
2. When do you think that a person with an immigrant background might feel Italian?

3. How important do you think religion is in people's lives?
4. Can you briefly describe what the situation with students with an immigrant background is in this school?
5. What do you think students and families with an immigrant background expect from education in your school?
6. What do you think teachers should know when they teach students with an immigrant background?
  - a. Do you feel that they normally have a preparation for that?
7. How does your school provide for linguistically and culturally diverse pupils needs?
8. On what basis do you think they will choose the secondary school?
  - a. Do you agree with these criteria?

### **Policy**

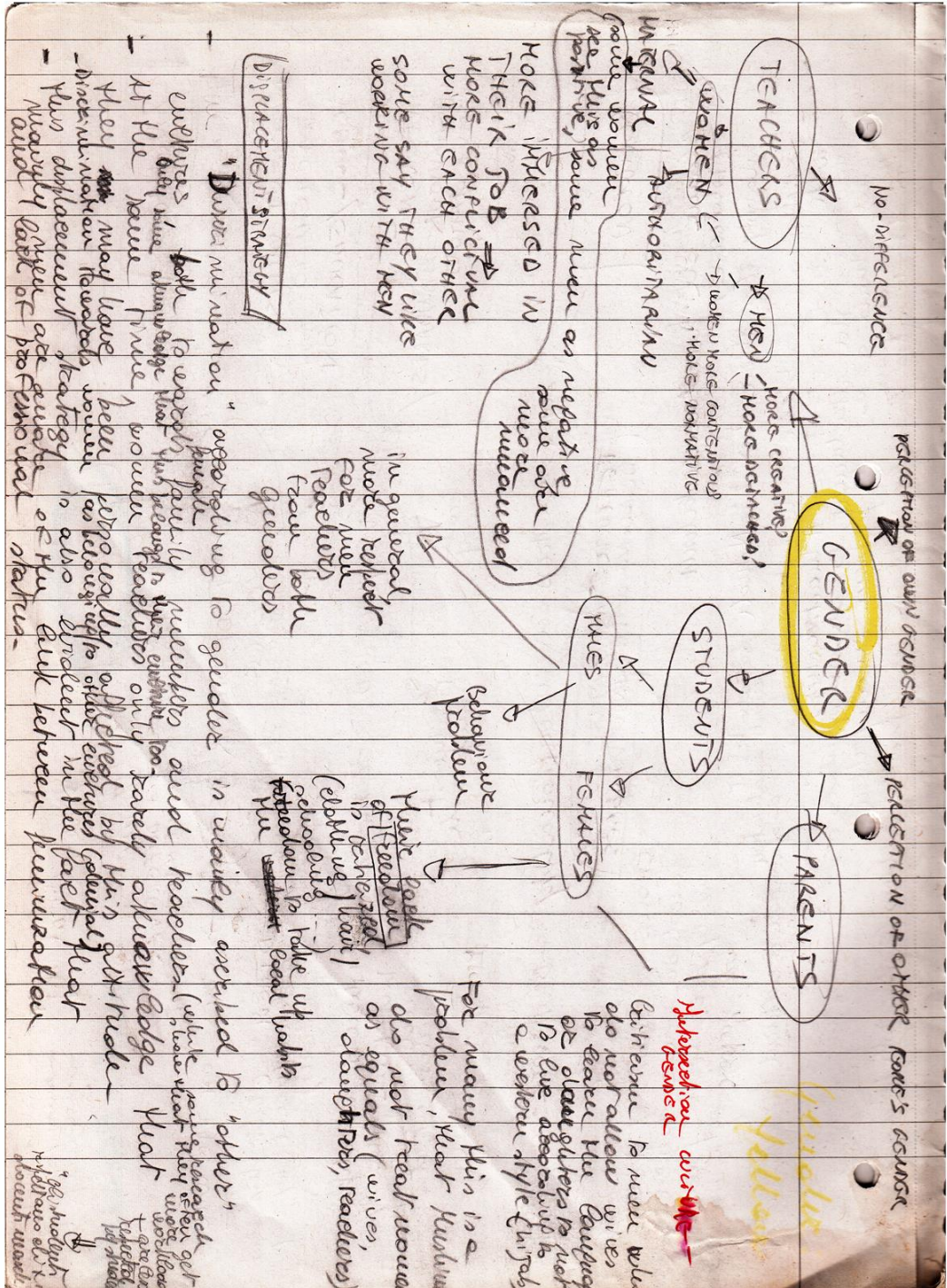
1. How would you describe the current national education policy about students with an immigrant background?
2. How do you think that the school reforms carries out in the last few years (with a stress on standardized tests and accountability), may shape what teachers can do in classes where students with a migrant background are present?
3. The recent law 'La Buona Scuola' gives the opportunity to organise lessons in level groups. What impact do you think this might have on the learning opportunities of the students with a migrant background?

## Appendix G Mind Map: Social Belonging



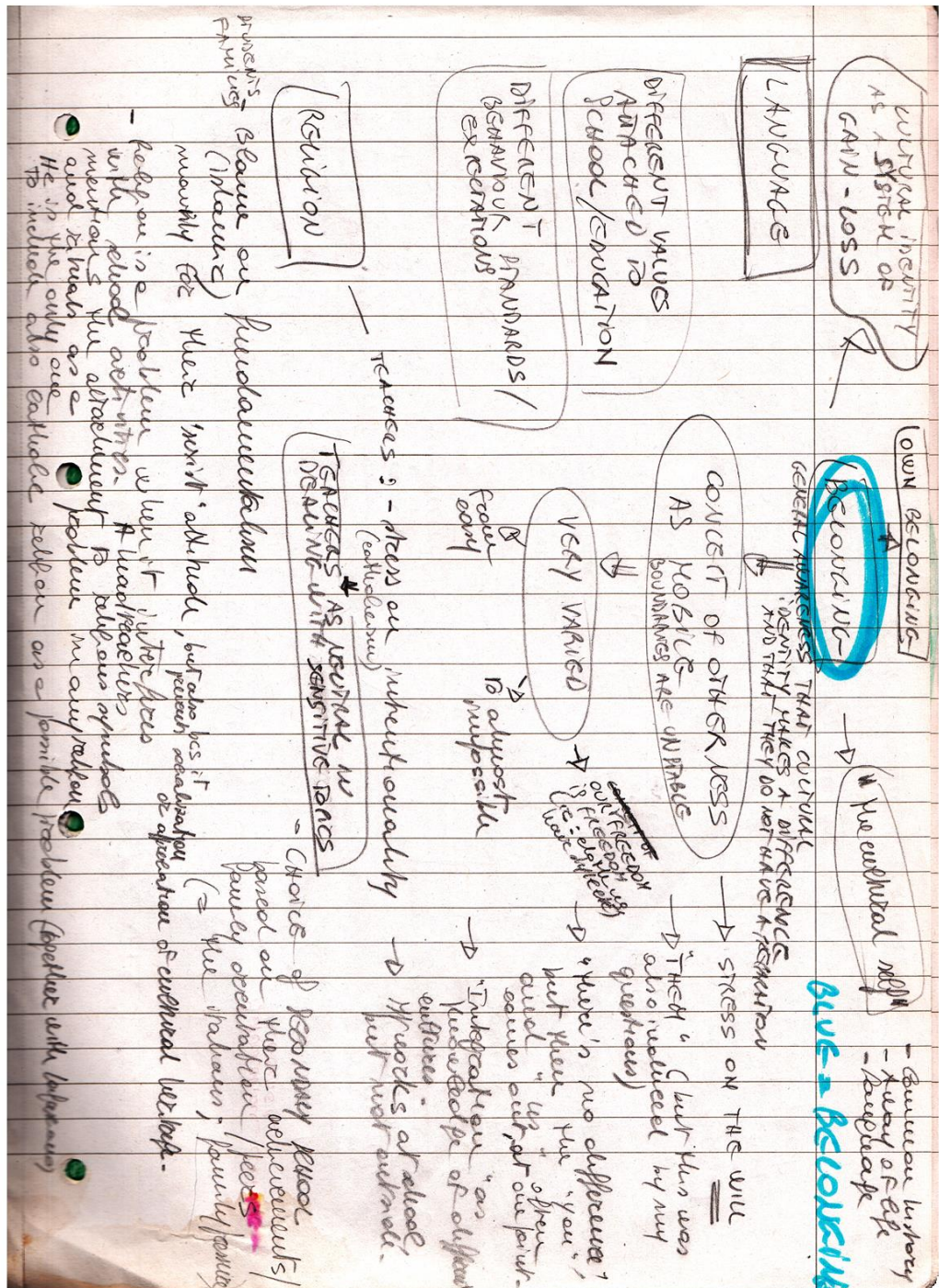


## Appendix H Mind Map: Gender





# Appendix I (Cultural/Ethnic) Belonging



## Appendix J Coding

### Appendix J Mind Map - Coding

appartenenze proprie  
 appartenenze altrui  
 religione  
 altre appartenenze altrui e famiglia  
 che cosa deve sapere l'interculturale  
 appartenenze

W - intercultural reality  
 little Chinese people

BELONGING CODING

01 SI (alias Filippo)

L: [risata] mi viene in mente la canzone di Gaber che canta "Io non mi sento Italiano ma per fortuna o purtroppo lo sono".

I: mah, io percepisco la mia italianità molto nel legame con la nostra... sia antica che recente tradizione culturale. Cioè io credo che nonostante i problemi evidenti nella crisi d'identità che sta attraversando adesso la nostra nazione, noi abbiamo, rispetto ad altre nazioni, un patrimonio culturale che per immensità e varietà è unico. Questo mi fa sentire molto italiano. Poi essendo io insegnante di italiano, ovviamente... cerco questa italianità soprattutto nella letteratura e nella filosofia italiana.

I: e cerco di trasmetterlo come insegnante, nel senso che, per esempio una delle cose che cerco di fare è cercare di contrastare questo pessimismo assurdo con cui questi ragazzini crescono non cecando di edulcorare la realtà, cercando di fare capire loro che comunque in Italia la realtà è anche altro. Sì certo, c'è corruzione, c'è disoccupazione, ma c'è anche genialità e inventiva, anche recente, non per forza alle glorie relegate nel passato, per cui molto spesso quando c'è qualche eccellenza italiana che in tempi recenti si è fatta notare a livello internazionale, io lo segnalo e cerco sempre però di far passare anche un altro aspetto, cioè il fatto che l'Italia da sempre è multietnica e multiculturale. Questo insegnando storia viene da sé. Quindi io cerco l'unitarietà nel nostro patrimonio culturale, e nella varietà dell'unicità. [Questa frase c'è da ricontrollare, non so se ho sentito bene] Bah, a leggerla, questa frase, lascia un po' perplesso anche me, ma credo proprio di aver detto così. Probabilmente intendeva evidenziare che nella varietà del nostro patrimonio culturale, sono comunque presenti delle caratteristiche che lo rendono unico e, in quanto tale, facilmente riconoscibile.

R: e secondo te quando una persona con origini straniere può sentirsi italiana? Quand'è che uno comincia a sentirsi italiano?

I: questo è molto complicato perché poi...

R: questo anche a livello intuitivo, non so...

I: è molto complicato perché poi... noi qui siamo in una scuola... la più multietnica di Ancona e veramente provenendo i ragazzini da più parti del mondo, è difficile rispondere a una domanda del genere, perché c'è chi magari proviene da una cultura più vicina, più facilmente si sente italiano. C'è chi magari proviene dal Bangladesh e lì... diventa complessa la faccenda. Per cui non saprei rispondere in realtà, è troppo complicato, è troppo difficile, a seconda dell'origine del ragazzino

R: quindi più la cultura di provenienza è distante in senso così... culturale, più è difficile...

I: sì ma... non saprei nemmeno dire se questo si possa affermare in maniera così deterministica. Che a volte magari capita il ragazzino di origini cinesi... che però è italianissimo, anconetissimo [ridiamo]. E... e quindi... non so. E' una domanda a cui non si può rispondere facilmente.

R: sì, lo so! [risata] Un'altra domanda a cui non si può rispondere facilmente è secondo te la religione nella vita delle persone che importanza ha? La religione in generale.

I: Bah, allora, inteso come senso del trascendente secondo me ha ancora un'importanza enorme. Poi, a differenza del passato anche recente, è meno istituzionalizzata. Oddio, è... è cambiata molto, è vissuta in maniera da un lato collettiva, nel senso di alcuni valori basilari condivisi, ma dall'altro è molto personalizzata. Per cui oggi la frase che si sente più spesso ripetere è dirti: "ho origini e cultura cristiana" io ci credo ma non

Gaber  
 tradizione culturale  
 (Hobsbawm "I Temi grandi dell'Occidente")  
 Italy's history is made of invasions and foreign troops, so there is a history of people fighting each other.  
 appartenenze: alcune strane, complicate  
 ↓  
 dipende dalle origini, ma forse no  
 parlare con alcuni locali molto appartenenze  
 religion as shared values



## Appendix K Thumbnail sketches of participants

**Alberto**, 65, head teacher, School 2, has been head teacher for 10 years, seven of which in the present school. He was born in a small rural town in the inland of Marche (the same town where School 4 is located), but his family moved around Northern and Central Italy for his dad's career in the Police (he was a *carabiniere*). Alberto has not lived long in his town of origins, and has moved around Ancona province. He attended *Istituto Magistrale* as a secondary school to become a primary teacher, and then studied Pedagogy at University. However, his passion is the natural world, and if he could turn the clock back, he would choose to be an ethologist. His mum had no education and never worked; his sister has not studied, either, but by marriage she got to a very wealthy position. His decision to become a head teacher was due to his desire for a change, in a career that does not allow many, and also to pursue better economic conditions. Alberto is due to retire just a few days after the interview. He is looking forward to it, owing to the work load and the responsibilities the position involves. He is separated.

**Antonella**, 60, School 1, teacher of Maths and Science, was born in a city in Northern Italy, but attended all the schools until her diploma in the coastal city where she lives and works now. Her father was employed in *Ferrovie dello Stato* (the national railways company) after being a primary teacher after the war. Her brother has a secondary school diploma. Teaching was not her first plan, and she thought that by studying Maths she might be able to have a career in information technology. She ended up teaching, as it proved to be a more feasible option. Later, when she was chosen in a

public selection for another job, teaching became the fruit of a conscious choice. She has been teaching for over 30 years now, and has worked in the present school for nine. Antonella is married and has two daughters.

**Beatrice**, 45, School 3, teacher of Maths and Science, was born in a village near the town where her school is situated. As she was good in both scientific and humanistic subjects, she was undecided what *liceo* to choose in her secondary school. She finally opted for classical studies, but then switched to Physics at University. Her parents were both secondary school teachers, so it sounded natural to her to become a teacher. However, she started her career as an ICT technician at University, and then as a programmer in a private informatics firm. When twelve years ago she won a selective examination for a teaching post, she changed career. She appreciates the creative aspect of her job, the freedom the teacher has to choose what and how to do things in the classroom, and the challenge some situations with students pose.

**Carla**, 56, School 5, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography), was born into a teachers family in Southern Italy. She got a degree in prehistoric archaeology, and would have liked to be an archaeologist or a researcher, but a teaching career seemed to be more compatible with setting up a family. She moved to the town where the school is situated because her husband was from there. Carla has been working as a teacher for 22 years, seven temporary and 15 permanent, 12 of which in the present school. She has accepted this year to act as a deputy head-teacher because her two children are now grown up and go to University. In the school, she is also in charge for the orientation activities to the secondary school.

**Daniela**, 53, School 1, teacher of Modern Languages, was born and grew up in the coastal city where she lives and works. Her parents were both Maths teachers; her brothers and sisters all have university degrees and one brother is a teacher too. She has been a teacher for 19 years, ten of which in the present school. Even if her girlhood her dream was not to become a teacher, this sounded as the most realistic and natural choice. She enjoys her job, in particular the relationship with the students, but she complains that the many commitments take time away from the preparation of the class work. In her school, she is in charge for the activities connected to the students with an immigrant background, and is the one who has kept the contacts in the school between the interviewees and me. Daniela is married and has two children.

**Danilo**, 54, School 3, teacher of Music, was born and has always lived in the same inland town where he also works. He describes his family as working class, fundamentally poor. For them, having children who became one a teacher and the other one a doctor, meant a progress on the social ladder. He started working as a teacher in a stable way 34 years ago, but he became permanent 16 years ago. Danilo says that he loved music, but he saw studying music also as a professional opportunity. Teaching for him is a way of earning a living through music; it is also a profession which he regards as allowing young people to develop. Danilo is married to a primary school teacher and has two children who now attend secondary school.

**Filippo**, 39, School 1, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography), comes from a small town in a poor area in the inland of Southern Italy, from where his family emigrated to a more industrialised area in Northern Italy to make a living. There,

Filippo's dad got a job in *Poste Italiane* (national mail service), while his mum worked as a hairdresser. When Filippo was two, his family managed to go back to their original region, where Filippo completed his studies. He then moved to Marche, to look for a job. Prior to teaching, he had several other jobs, including working in a warehouse. To qualify as a teacher, he has attended SSIS (*Scuola di Specializzazione all'Insegnamento Secondario*, a two-year teacher training course for secondary schools), in a Marche University in Marche region. He has worked as a teacher for nine years, two of which in a permanent position. This has been his first year in this school. He is also a union rep in the school, committed in helping a hand to colleague teachers. His partner is a secondary school teacher as well. They have a one-year old child.

**Fiorella**, 41, School 1, teacher of Humanities, Italian as an Additional Language, and enrichment activities, comes from a small village in the inland of Marche. Her grandparents on one side were farmers, and on the other side a workman and a shopkeeper. Both of her parents got a diploma, and her mum started teaching in primary schools, but then she had to abandon her career due to family problems. Fiorella underlines her great passion for studying and for culture. She attended *Liceo Classico*, and then got a University Degree in Archaeology. Fiorella has become a teacher after attending SSIS, but teaching was not her first plan. Her dream was to be an architect, a doctor, a researcher, something connected with travelling or the publishing industry. She has been a shop assistant, has worked in art exhibitions, and has been a teacher assistant for a disabled boy. After seven years of temporary contracts, this has been her first year with a permanent contract, and the first in this

school. She is planning to go back to the higher secondary sector, after this experience. Fiorella's partner is a teacher as well.

**Gabriella**, 64, School 4, teacher of Modern Languages, was born in the nearby industrial town where School 5 is. Her mum was a primary teacher, her dad a head-technician in *Ferrovie dello Stato* (see p. 403). When she was four her family moved to a town on the coast, in a nearby province, and they went back to their hometown when she was 25. After attending *Liceo Scientifico*, Gabriella opted for Foreign Languages at University because it seemed to open up more professional opportunities than just teaching. After her degree, she worked for two years in a private firm, but then she chose the teaching career, as it seemed to be more compatible with raising a family. However, for a few years she moved around Italy and abroad for her husband's job. Only when they settled back she could finally pursue her own career. She has been a permanent teacher for 20 years, 19 spent in the present school. She has two daughters, who both have a degree in Economics, and a son, who is a biologist and is doing a PhD abroad. The aspect she appreciates most in her job is the relationship with the students, and the challenges it poses.

**Guido**, 51, School 5, teacher of Physical Education, was born, studied and lived until he was 27 in a town in Southern Italy. His parents were both teachers. One of his brothers has a degree in Economics, while the other got a technical specialism. Guido attended a *Liceo Scientifico*, and then chose Sports Science at University. After that, he specialised as a teacher for pupils with special needs, and moved to the North of Italy to start his career. After ten years, for sentimental reasons he moved to the town

where he lives and works now. He has been teaching for 24 years, 17 with a permanent contract. This is his third year in this school. After working for years as a teacher for pupils with special needs, he now teaches Physical Education, which was his dream job as a teen-ager. He is separated, and has a 12 years old daughter, who attends the same school where he works. He would like to move to a higher secondary school.

**Laura**, 40, School 1, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography), was born and grew up in the coastal city where she lives and works. Her parents' occupation was not alluded to during the interview, but her mum's sister has been a teacher and then a head teacher in Northern Italy. Laura studied 'Conservation of Cultural Heritage', with an archaeological specialisation, as her passions are art, culture, literature, archaeology. After her degree, she worked in the Cultural Heritage sector for three years. She finally chose teaching, as it seemed to be the most interesting option for her, as it allows her to develop everyday her passion for humanistic and cultural topics. She started working as a teacher eleven years ago, the last five years with a permanent contract in the present school. She is a single.

**Leonardo**, 49, School 3, teacher of Art, was born in the same town where he is working now. His parents were in business management, his brother is an engineer. He attended schools until secondary in the same town, then he moved to a different region to study Architecture. He started his career as an academic and as a professional architect; after a PhD and 4 years teaching at University, he abandoned the academic career, because of the instability of the position and the poor economic conditions, and opted for the secondary school teaching and the profession as an architect. This is his

third year in a secondary school, where he is working with temporary contracts. He has two daughters of 6 and 8.

**Marzia**, 45, School 5, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography), attended *Liceo Classico*, and then the faculty of Philosophy. Since 2001 she has worked as a teacher of Italian as an additional language for immigrant students, in projects organised and financed by the local authorities, in collaboration with the schools. After ten years, in 2011, she started working in schools as a Humanities teacher. In the last two years she has worked in the present school. However, she is temporary, as she has not a teaching qualification. In her family she is the only one to have attended higher education; her dad was a civil servant; her brother works in a factory. She has chosen to work part-time in order to be able to assist the older generation of her family.

**Nadia**, 46, School 1, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography) was born and lives in the coastal city where the school is situated. Her dad was an academic; her mum has been a housewife, but ‘could have been a teacher’, as she has a degree in Humanities. Nadia’s maternal grandad was employed in *Ferrovie dello Stato* (see p. 403), but was also a writer, and her great-uncles one was a painter, and another one the mayor of a town in Southern Italy. Her studies have been affected by a tension between her family’s high expectations on her career and her own desire to start a family. She found the *liceo* she attended hard, but once at university, she studied with passion. After starting Law studies, she turned to Humanities. She then started teaching in the secondary school and after some temporary contracts, she has been permanent in this school for six years. She is married and has an eleven-year-old child. At the

moment, she has opted for a part-time contract, in order to be able to take care of her son and of elderly parents. Her husband in the last few years has experienced a period of professional instability. He is away for a few days a week for his job.

**Nicola**, 42, School 4, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography) was born and lived until he was 30 in the nearby industrial town where School 5 is situated. He attended *Liceo Scientifico* there, and then studied Humanities and got his teaching specialism through SSIS in a bordering region. He has been in a permanent contract for 12 years, ten of which in the present school, where he acts as a deputy head teacher. Becoming a teacher has been his dream since he was a child, because of his admiration for his Maths teacher. He was good both in scientific and in literary subjects; his decision to turn to Humanities at University was due to the experience he had in the high school, where an appreciation of the qualities of the Humanities teacher, as opposed to the Maths one, made him decide. He is very happy with his job, and he would never change it, even if he knows that many people see it as a women's job. Nicola's parents were factory workers; his younger sister studied Economics and works for a private firm. He is married and has one 6-year-old child, and another one on the way.

**Orlando**, 56, School 4 and 5, head teacher. grew up and went to schools, in the town where School 5 is, until *Liceo Scientifico*,. He studied Earth Sciences at University. He has a passion for science in general, and is attracted by research. He started his professional career as a freelance geologist. Meanwhile, he won a selective examination that qualified him as a Maths and Science teacher; after a while, he opted



for teaching. His parents had a secondary school diploma, which allowed his mum to be a PE teacher. They were keen on their children attending University. Orlando's siblings are either teachers or professionals. Such as for becoming a teacher, being a head teacher was not part of his plans. He considers teaching as more rewarding than being a head teacher, as this has to do with lots of bureaucracy. At the same time, teaching can be tiring and stressful, so a change after some time may be positive. He was hoping to be able to contribute to the quality of school also from this new position, but realises now that most of the working time is spent in dealing with aspects that do not have much to do with the quality of education. Therefore, he cultivates his passion for research and innovation in out-of-office work hours. He has been a head teacher for 11 years in school 5. In the past two years, he has also been in charge for school 4. Orlando is married to an Art teacher, and has three daughters.

**Patrizia**, 61, School 4, teacher of Art, has been teaching for 40 years, always in the same school, in the town in the rural area where she was born and where the school is. Her dad was a wholesale timber dealer; from him, she took her passion for art. When she was 11, she went to study art in a college in a town on the coast, where she took all of her qualifications. She stayed in a Swiss college, where she could study ballet and do sports. She remembers it as a hard but beautiful period. She prides herself of a very good relationship with her students, based on frankness, and of her freedom in implementing the curriculum. She is now near to retirement. She has a son and a grandson.

**Pietro**, 37, School 3, teacher of Music, has always lived in a little town near the coast, not far from the school where he works. His parents owned a stationery-bookshop, where he used to lend a hand during school holidays. While his siblings kept working in the commerce sector, he studied at the Conservatoire and started his own business, that provides musical tuition to up to ten-year-old kids. He says that even if his mum supported him in his choice, his parents were seemingly disappointed that he did not follow the family professional pathway. He started teaching in a state school five years ago, and has been permanent for two years. This is his first year in this school. He is torn between the employment in a State school, where he feels a sense of limitation as a musician and as a teacher, and his interest in his own business, where he can give a more personalised service. He is still looking for a balance between these different aspects.

**Roberta**, 49, School 4, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography), was born in the same town where the school is situated. Her dad was a medical doctor and her mum a primary teacher. Her interests have always been split between art and literature, and so have her studies. After going to an art school, she studied Humanities in a nearby region. She started working in museum educational activities and as a tourist guide. She got her teaching qualifications in Humanities and Art with selective examinations, and in economic and politic geography through a qualifying course. She also attended SSIS to qualify as a teacher for students with special needs. This specialism allowed her to have more substantial contracts. After three years with temporary contracts, she became permanent 10 years ago, and moved to the present school 9 years ago. At the moment, Roberta is attending a course in art-therapy in

Rome. Her professional aspiration would be to become an art teacher in the higher secondary school. What she likes about teaching, are the creative and the psychological, relational aspect. She feels a bit confined in a small environment such as the one where she lives, and values openness towards the wider world. She is separated.

**Simone**, 53, School 4, teacher of Maths and Science, was born in a small town in a rural area in a nearby province. His parents, grown up during the Second World War, had only little education. After studying Surveying in a secondary school, he got a University degree in Earth Science, that he chose for his passion for mountaineering. After that, he worked as a geologist for about ten years; during this time, he qualified as a teacher through selective examinations. Simone, after four years teaching in temporary contracts, got a permanent position eleven years ago. He has been teaching in the present school in the past nine years. Teaching was not in his plans at first, and he saw it as a work opportunity. However, once started, he has found an interest in it, and is now fond of it. His wife, who did his same studies, works in the same school, but as a teacher for students with special needs. They have four children, aged seven to eighteen.

**Sonia**, 54, School 5, teacher of Modern Languages, was born and raised in the town where she still lives and works. Her dad was a bank officer, her mum a primary teacher. Her sister is a teacher as well, and her brother a vet. Sonia attended *Liceo Classico*, and then studied Modern Languages at University. After that, she started a very long period of precariousness (almost 20 years). A permanent contract arrived only twelve

years ago. She has always worked in this school since then. Her son has done a PhD, and has started an academic career. She is very curious about my PhD, and asks for information as she would be interested in trying herself. She says that curiosity and willingness to learn are among her main features. She is happy about her job, that has given her the flexibility of growing a family, but has always had the desire to live abroad for some time, in order to refine her knowledge of the English language and master it completely. She has travelled a lot with her husband.

**Tiziana**, 46, School 5, teacher of Humanities (Italian, History, Geography). Her parents owned a shop outside of the town where the school is. Her family lived in the same place where the shop was. Her mum was an elementary teacher, but she never worked as such. After attending *Liceo Classico*, Tiziana studied Humanities. She has a long experience in the educational field. She started working in schools 17 years ago, first as educational class support teacher and home tutor of children at risk, then as a teacher for pupils with special needs. She has also been a teacher of Italian as an additional language for immigrant students. She finally qualified as a Humanities teacher through SSIS (see p. 406). She became permanent five years ago, and has worked in this school in the last eight years. Nobody in her family has had a similar educational or professional pathway. One of her dreams is to have an experience of teaching abroad, as she loves being in contact with different cultures. She tries to transmit this passion to her children, and sometimes has hosted people from other countries in her family house (from the USA, so far).

**Valentina**, 36, School 3, teacher of Technology, lives in the little town where she was born, in a rural area in the inland of Marche. Her dad is a workman, her mum an administrative employee in a secondary school. She is an only child, and the first of her generation and wider family to have attended university. She got two degrees, one in Food Technologies, and another one in Biology. This was necessary if she wanted to become a nutritionist, which was her dream. Meanwhile, teaching ‘has happened’, as there was a shortage of teachers in her subject at the time. She has been teaching for 12 years; this is her second year as permanent, and her third year in this school. She manages to combine teaching whilst practicing as a professional nutritionist, aided with the support of her husband and parents, who help out with the two children.