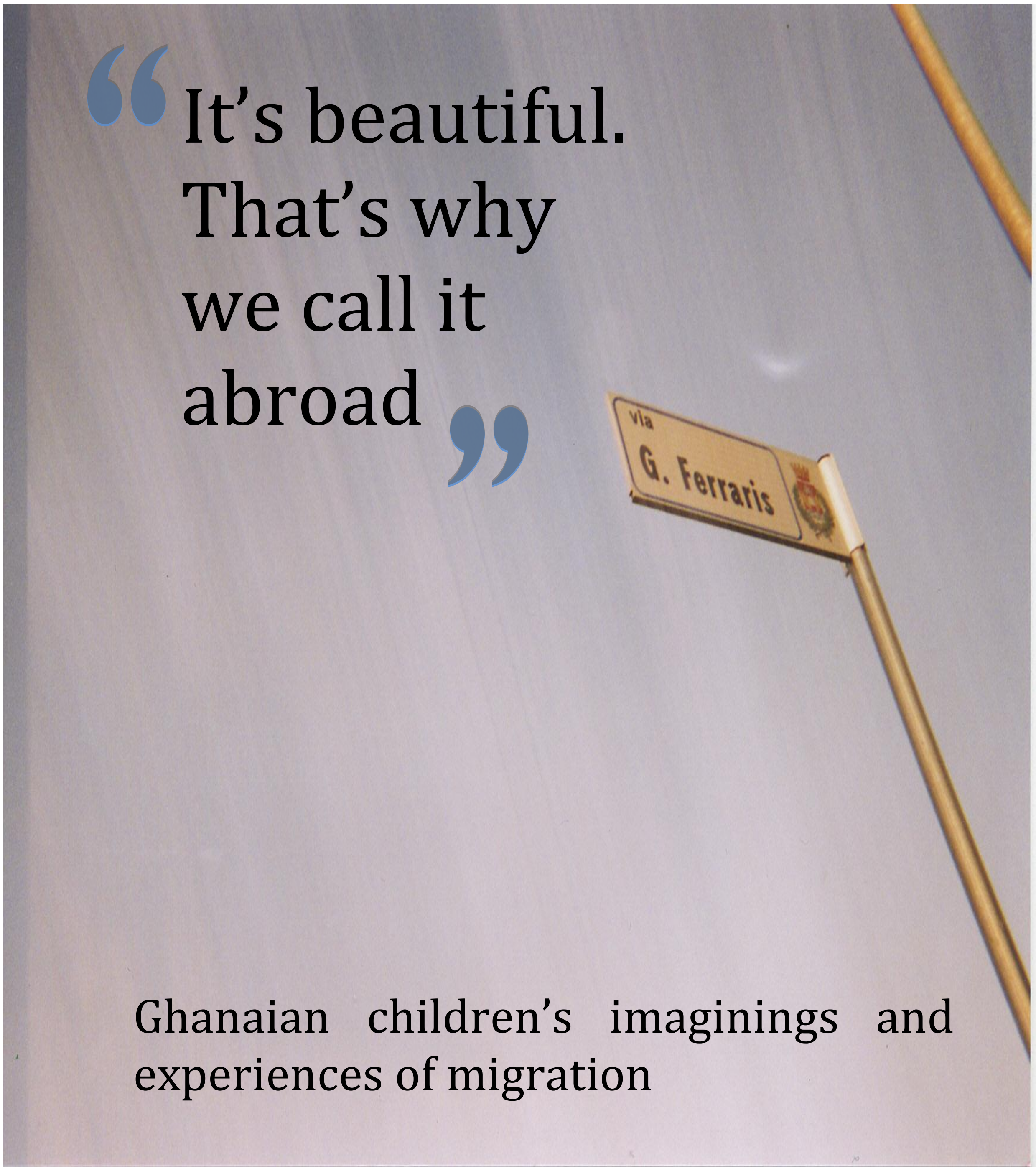

# “It’s beautiful. That’s why we call it abroad”

## Ghanaian children’s imaginings and experiences of migration

PhD Thesis

Giovanna Fassetta
University of Strathclyde

# "IT'S BEAUTIFUL, THAT'S WHY WE CALL IT ABROAD": GHANAIAN CHILDREN'S IMAGININGS AND EXPERIENCES OF MIGRATION

Giovanna Fassetta

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Strathclyde
School of Applied Social Sciences

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# Published Work

A modified version of Chapter 3 was published by the author in the peer- reviewed journal *Enquire* (Fassetta, 2010).

An article based on material from Chapter 6 is currently being amended, following peer-review, for publication in the journal *Families Relationships and Societies,* Policy Press.

An abstract for a paper on language issues, which draws from several Chapters from the Data section, was accepted for publication in a special edition of *Languages and Intercultural Communication*, Routledge

Signed: Date:

## Abstract

This doctoral research explores young people's specific imaginings, expectations and experiences in relation to migration. In line with the tenets of the sociology of childhood, this qualitative study aims to bring children's voices into the debate on migration. In order to achieve this, the study investigates the imaginings of Italy (the country, the people, everyday life) among Ghanaian children left behind by migrant parents. It looks at migrant children's own assessment of their previously-held expectations in the light of the experience of moving. It also explores how children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents imagine Ghana and how they relate to it. The questions the research set out to investigate are: how do children imagine a country they do not know directly but to which, through significant others, they have emotional ties? What is the role of these imagined countries in the children's expectations and ambitions for the future? How do young people assess their expectations in the light of the encounter with reality?

The findings reveal how the children invest their own specific expectations for social advancement in the migratory project; trace the echo of colonial discourses in their characterisation of Ghana and Italy; illustrate the disappointment migrant children experience when faced with the social demotion migration almost inevitably entails. The study also explores the important role played by the children in maintaining social ties across borders and the way in which they appear to live within 'transnational emotional spaces'. It investigates how young migrants keep dreams and aspiration alive by repositioning them in space, to yet another country. Finally, the research shows how the children share, but also resist, dominant stereotypes, and how they play with and between different cultural expectations in order to defy and resist adults' demands.

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To my father, who would be so proud.

"I looked at the guides in their basketball vests and Nike sneakers. America for them meant Kobe and Shaq and Michael Jordan. Across from them stood the tourists. In their eyes Africa was a land of enduring wisdoms. […] Both groups saw in the other a reflection of their own dreams. Africa and America converged in the car park, each searching the other's eyes for a glimpse of jungle or a glittering skyscraper."
*Ekow Eshun (2005, p. 41)*

* * *

"Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."

*Antoine De Saint-Exupéry (2002, p. 6)*

# INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 2006 I was working in Italy, teaching Italian as a second language to adult immigrants. I worked in the evenings, to allow those who were in employment (although most of my beginner students were not) to attend the twice-weekly classes, free for them as part of a national public scheme for adult literacy. I thoroughly enjoyed the job: the students' demographics ranged from young men and women in their late teens to middle-aged adults, with a slightly higher proportion of male; they were all keen to learn and glad of the opportunity to meet other people in an institutional environment where they were made to feel welcome. Usually there would be a dozen different nationalities in one room at any one time, and almost as many languages were spoken.

The largest national group in my beginners' classes (and also those of my colleagues) was that of 'the Ghanaians', as they were collectively known among the staff. They stood out amongst other national groups for sheer number, because their average schooling appeared to be relatively low, for the slightly puzzling fact that they seemed to obtain Italian identity cards quicker than everyone else did, and that they were the ones 'in the know' about how to best negotiate the often labyrinthine nature of Italian bureaucracy.

Two of the topics we covered during our language lessons with the beginner students were 'Occupation and Work' and 'House and Family'. It was when talking about these specific topics that a few of my Ghanaian students mentioned being in a hurry to learn Italian, as they hoped that this would improve their odds of finding a job and thus of meeting the requirements for obtaining a family reunion visa[1]; this would mean the chance to be finally reunited with a spouse and/or the children they had left behind in order to migrate.

I could not help wondering how these children (left in Ghana, my students told me, in the care of grandparents or aunts) were making sense of their parents' absence, how they pictured their parents' lives in such a different setting, and what this setting was like, in their imaginings. Some of the children were, they told me, very young; a mother had left an 18-month-old daughter and a three-year-old. A couple had come with their five-year-old, having left two older children in Ghana. Another mother had one son at university in Ghana, as well as a younger one living with her sister's family back in her hometown. The parents were missing their children greatly, but they also appeared quite matter-of-fact about it. They had their plan set out: they needed first of all to learn Italian; then find work for both so they would meet the required minimum income; find a house or a flat that satisfied the required standards; and finally apply for the visa. They were not expecting long separations: a few months, a year at the most.

I do not know whether they have now managed to be joined by their children, but I know that, by the time the classes ended, in the early summer of 2007, a couple of them were getting quite anxious and frustrated, as finding a job was proving much harder than they had expected a few months previously. I did not get in touch with them for this project as I did not have their addresses and phone numbers, and the Italian privacy rules would not have allowed the institution's office to disclose them, but their stories were the spark that started this study.

---

[1] The following documents must be produced by the migrant applying for family reunion: **Housing** – certificate (from the appropriate municipal office) that testifies that the dwellings are conforming to health and safety requirements. If renting the accommodation, copy of a contract for a lease of at least 6 months.
**Income** – proof of an annual income at least equal to the amount of the social benefit (equal to 5,349.89 euro per year in 2010) plus an extra half for any dependant for whom applying. (Source: Ministero dell'Interno website: http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/ Accessed on 12th May 2010)

## Researcher's 'objectivation'

The previous section gives a general idea of where the 'roots' of this research project are buried, and how it came to be. Its final shape took a few months to come into focus, through reading and thinking, and more reading. At first I was keen to investigate the parents' points of view, as they were struggling to meet the requirements that would allow them to bring their children to Italy. However, I realised that, while the adults' voices have been recorded by many other researchers (e.g. Mazzucato, 2008; Riccio, 2008; Altin, 2004) and there is an increasing body of work that looks at children's perspectives (e.g. Faulstich Orellana *et al.,* 2001; Salazar Parreñas, 2005; Penn and Lambert, 2009, Dreby, 2010), the work available relates mainly to young people's contingent experiences, to their modes of adapting to a *specific* situation: either as children left behind, as migrant children, or as children of migrants born in the receiving country. No study appears to have been done, as yet, to look at how (the prospect of) moving to a different country and belonging to transnational families affects the children of these families and at what narratives, before and after migration, this trans-nationality engenders about the various countries involved.

Personal history is woven through this project in several different threads, often unforeseen and unplanned. I do not wish, here, to engage in what Bourdieu rightly dismisses as "[...] the facile delights of self-exploration [...]" (Bourdieu, 2003, p.202), but to illustrate the personal experiences that shaped my research. Bourdieu himself, in fact, argues for 'researcher's objectivation' in anthropology (but this can be applied to other social sciences) and points out that "what needs to be objectivized [...] is not the anthropologist performing the anthropological analysis of a foreign world but the social world that has made both the anthropologist and the conscious or *unconscious* anthropology that she (or he) engages in her anthropological practice" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 283, my emphasis).

When looking at the shape my research was taking, a number of months into its first year, I realised it mirrored some of my own experience. This was not planned nor a conscious choice, but the fact that there are some similarities between the topic of my research and my personal history cannot be the fruit of chance; it must have influenced in some way my readings of the young participants' experiences. For this reason, I shall briefly describe the 'points of contact' between my personal history and the topic of my research: the imaginings, expectations and emotions linked to the prospect and the experience of moving.

My parents migrated (albeit only regionally) when I was eight. They were initially expecting their move to be a temporary one, and that they would be back again in matter of a few weeks. They left me behind in the care of a neighbour, so that my schooling would not be disrupted. As it happened, four months passed before my parents decided they would remain in the town they had moved to, and finally came to collect me. I remember being left behind as a fairly difficult time, even though it was for a limited period and my parents managed to visit me every weekend, a 'luxury' that the children left behind by international migrants cannot experience.

Having joined my parents in the small town where they had settled, I had to negotiate new friendships and a new school environment. On the first day in my new school, I set off wearing the uniform that Italian primary children are expected to wear: a black overall with a white collar. My white collar was tied together with a large blue ribbon, the one I had been wearing in my previous school. I entered a classroom full of unknown, staring children to discover, to my utter shock and dismay that, in this school, girls wore *red* ribbons and *boys* wore blue ones. This was a small instance of different school practices clashing, but the fact that it is still etched in my memory is proof enough of its magnitude. Finding my space amongst a pre-existing network of peers also required a considerable amount of adjustment on my part, despite the fact that my looks, as well as my family's cultural and social background, were very similar to theirs.

Comparable clashes, sometimes on a more traumatic scale, are of course a common experience for children who migrate, particularly so when they move from a developing country to Europe.

As an adult I have been a migrant several times since 1986, when I came for the first time to the UK to study English. In 1992 I obtained a job teaching in Italian schools abroad (in a scheme run by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and I was assigned to the Italian school of Asmara, in Eritrea. It took several months between being notified of the post and my actual moving to Eritrea, a country that had seen fewer and fewer foreigners enter its borders since the start of a 30 year war to gain independence from Ethiopia. I was very much looking forward to moving to Asmara and, before I left, I imagined the place where I would live, the things I would do, the people, the heat, the landscape. I chatted to others who had been there; I looked Eritrea up in books… but nothing had prepared me for the encounter with the 'real' country, so different from my imaginings: the bright light, the dust, the smells, the tastes of the food, the sounds of the language and the music: none of this had entered my imaginings. The real was unexpected and rather strange, despite the fact that, as an educated adult, I had done my best to be prepared.

Above all, however, I remember the surprise at the amount of attention that being white was attracting in a country that had seen few white people in recent times: the curious stares, the children's shouting 'Talián' (Italian) wherever I went, the constant awareness that I stood out, that I would never be able to disappear in a crowd, in the town that was to be my home for the next three years. However, not only was I a white Italian in an African country, I was a national of the ex-colonial master now living in the former colony. My status was radically different to that of young migrants who move to countries where they are often discriminated against and ostracised. I was an object of curiosity, never of contempt. But I believe that remembering how uncomfortable all the attention had felt, even in my privileged migrant position, helped me to better appreciate the extent of the discomfort black African children must feel when settling in a new, mainly white, Western country.

I have now lived in Scotland, on and off, for 11 years. I follow Italian politics and I am involved in several networks of Italian teachers fighting cuts to education in Italy and at a European level. Whenever I go 'home', or my mother comes to visit me, I stock up on Parmesan cheese, coffee and coarse sea-salt (essential for pasta), ever the caricature of the emigrant. And, of course, I also have my life in Glasgow: I read British papers; I follow British politics, I have Scottish friends and I volunteer with local groups. However, these two aspects of my life are not clearly compartmentalised, and Italy is part of my daily life in Scotland, while Scotland is part of my daily life in Italy, whenever I return. I feel very much a trans-national, living 'my countries' through the banality of daily practices. I recognise the double privilege of social status and geographical proximity I enjoy: as a professional, white, female adult who is moving between European countries with no visa restrictions, my life across borders is (relatively) easy to maintain. My research too contributed to this trans-nationality, as it took me 'home' for my fieldwork, but under the auspices of an official institution of my 'destination country'. And then it took me to Ghana.

I had never been to Ghana before I decided to embark ion this project. I chose Ghana for my research because there are so many Ghanaians in the town where I was teaching, because I puzzled over the reasons that had made them choose Italy and not the UK as a destination and also because there would not be a language barrier between me and the participants, as we could speak Italian and/or English. I therefore saw Ghana for the first time when I went there to carry out my fieldwork, filled with my memories of Eritrea and with the knowledge gathered from books, articles and home-movies posted by people on Youtube. Yet again, my imaginings had failed to prepare me for reality.

These are some of the similarities between my personal history and the stories of the young people I set out to collect. Then, of course, there are fundamental differences between my experiences and those of the participants in this study. As I remarked earlier, my migration history is undeniably that of a privileged individual, certainly so when compared to the children of unskilled labour migrants who move from a sub-Saharan country to Europe. Whenever I moved, I could rely on the many advantages that accrue from being a white, middle-class, educated, Western adult. As such, I had access to a substantial amount of social, symbolic, financial and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) from which to draw, and on which to fall back had I needed to. Nevertheless, 'objectivizing' my personal experiences, reflecting on the similarities and, most importantly, on the differences, was essential in helping me to interpret the data but also in making sure that, while still aiding me in making sense of the young participants' narratives, my own experiences would not be allowed to skew their meaning.

## The project's aims

The full extent of individuals' and families' (emotional) investments and the costs they pay when deciding to migrate to a different part of the world can be only partially understood if the voices of young people are missing from the debate. This project seeks to broaden this understanding by exploring the emotional, as well as practical, investment that young individuals make in relation to migration; it does so from a 'multifocal' perspective, one that takes into account the different stages of migration trajectories. Focused on the Ghana-Italy nexus, this research looks at migration when it is still a 'potentiality' for the children, a project which is present, even though it lies in the future; it looks at migration as the children's lived experience of finding a space in the new society; and it investigates migration as the legacy of adults' choices, made before young people were born but still, nevertheless, impacting on their present.

This project aims, as a consequence, to explore young Ghanaian's expectations and imaginings of Italy, the country where their parent(s) live and where they too are expecting to live in the (near) future, in order to highlight what processes and narratives shape the expectations of the children who are left behind, and what their specific investment in the migration project is. It also aims to investigate how children who have moved to Italy to join their parents assess the imaginings and expectations they held before leaving Ghana, which aspects of the anticipated life in Italy were confirmed, and which disconfirmed, by their experiences in the destination country. Finally, it aims to look at how young people who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents picture the country of origin of their family, what narratives they construct of it, and what role it has in their everyday lives and their (imagined) futures.

## Overview of the thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 illustrates the historical and geographical migration background of the countries that are at either end of the migration path in question: Ghana and Italy. It looks at the specific pattern of migration between these two countries, drawing from the available literature and official statistics and from a large study published in the year 2000 by Eurostat and NIDI (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute). It also gives an overview of the school systems of the two countries, with regards to the policies of integration of foreign pupils in the Italian school system and the colonial roots of the Ghanaian educational institutions that still inform, at least to some extent, what constitutes the recognised 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) in the country.

Chapter 2 reviews the empirical and theoretical literature that forms the backbone of the present thesis. The first part of this chapter looks at literature concerning the sociology of childhood and also at the specific literature on children and migration. Part two of the chapter explores the theoretical literature on migration and on the transnational links which migrants sustain, while part three examines how colonial legacy, as well as global popular culture, still contribute to shape the ways in which children imagine 'the Other'.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology chosen for the data collection. It illustrates the rationale behind the choice to carry out a qualitative study, and the different techniques used for the data collection, highlighting advantages and disadvantages of the choices made. It discusses the difficulties encountered in obtaining ethical approval and in accessing the participants; it also debates the ethical issues that arose during the fieldwork in relation to the need to protect 'vulnerable participants' while still allowing them agency and free, informed involvement in the research.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6, are devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the data collected and illustrate the findings of the study. Each of the three chapters deals with a specific group of themes, in expanding circles that encompass the personal, community and societal accounts of migration by the children.

Chapter 4 looks at the young participants' personal narratives of migration: the expectations of the children left behind that migrating will mean for them (and their families) social advancement, as well as the disillusioned narratives of the migrant children; the long wait for the family to be reunited and the effects of distance and separation on family relations; the future projects of the children of migrants that are born in the receiving country and their desire to move on, and away.

Chapter 5 explores themes that concern more directly the community lives of the young participants. It looks at how discourses on migration cross borders to contribute to a 'myth' of success that, in its turn, feeds the ‘collective lie’ (Sayad, 2004) that sustains migration. It also looks at how stories about Ghanaian witchcraft and evil eye underline an idea of migration as a limited resource that may be jeopardised by other people’s envy; finally, it explores how young migrants attempt to exploit the differences between the cultural mores of the sending and the receiving countries in order to impose their will and/or challenge adults’ authority.

Chapter 6 looks at how the legacy of colonial rule still trickles through the Ghanaian school-system and young peoples’ discourses and at the ways in which migrant children negotiate the different requirements the receiving society has of them. It illustrates the way in which ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu, 1979b; 1990a) ensures that migrant children know their place within the receiving country and also that they come to share the Western constructions of ‘Africa’ as backward and needy. It also explores migrant children’s realisation of the arbitrary nature of specific cultural practices, the children’s critiques and their challenging of the receiving country’s practices, as well as the alternative views of ‘Africa’ they put forward.

Chapter 7 summarises the finding and highlights the contribution this study has to offer to an understanding of young people’s perception of migration. It also draws some practical implications and points to the avenues for further research that this project opens up.

# CHAPTER 1. THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND: GHANA AND ITALY

This chapter looks at the migratory history and patterns of the two countries that are the physical setting of this study: Ghana and Italy. It starts by illustrating how Ghana has been alternatively a country of immigration and emigration, at a regional level, since it became independent in 1957; it also looks at how international migratory patterns have, over the past three decades, seen sizeable Ghanaian communities established in European countries (particularly in the UK, the Netherlands and Italy), as well as the US and Canada.

The chapter then explores the changes that have occurred in Italy since the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when a country that saw itself primarily as one of the largest exporters of labour found that it had become the destination country for a substantial number of labour immigrants. It also illustrates the delay of successive Italian governments in recognising this change and in responding to what was believed to be a temporary phenomenon (Bonifazi, 2007).

The chapter goes on to examine the history and specificity of Ghanaian migration to Italy, examining the dimension of this particular migrant flow and its patterns of settlement within the receiving country with the aid of statistical data made available by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). It also reviews sections of a study conducted in 2000 by Eurostat and NIDI (Netherland Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute) that are of specific relevance for this research, such as the information on the destination country held by migrants prior to leaving and the sources of this information.

## Ghana and migration

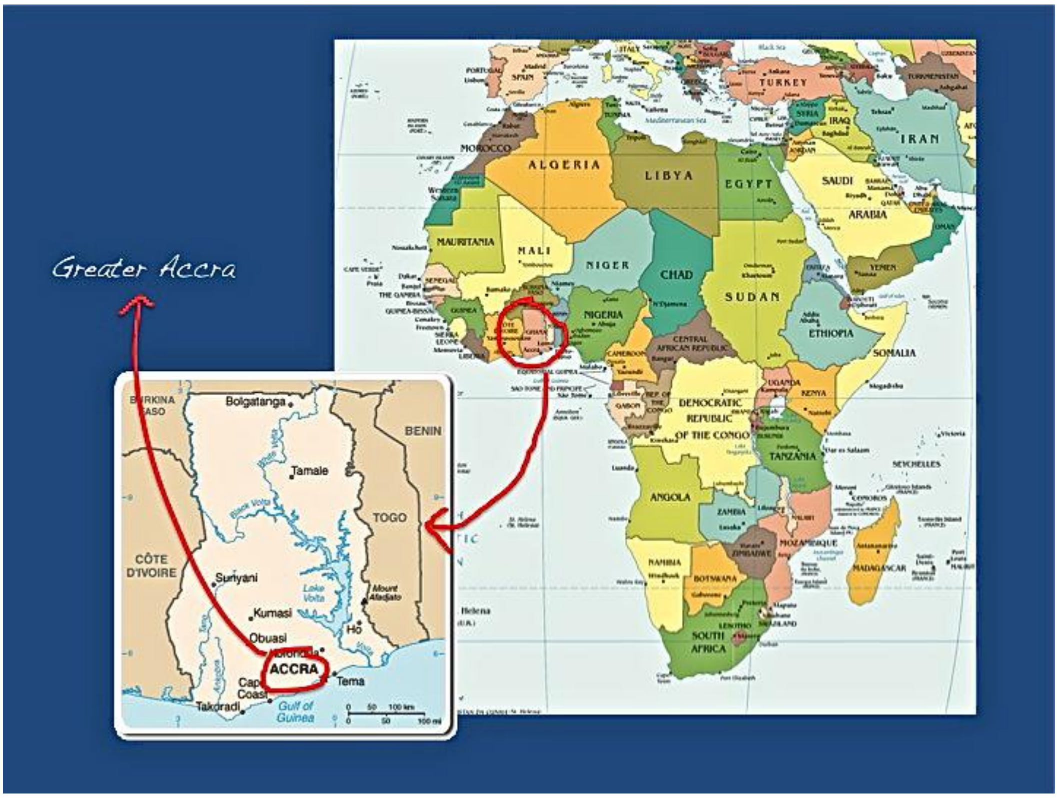
Greater Accra
BURKINA FASO
Bolgatanga
BENIN
Tamale
Black Volta
White Volta
TOGO
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
Sunyani
Lake Volta
Mount Afadjato
Kumasi
Obuasi
Ho
ACCRA
Tema
Cape Coast
Takoradi
Gulf of Guinea
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
ITALY
TURKEY
MOROCCO
ALGERIA
LIBYA
EGYPT
SYRIA
IRAQ
IRAN
SAUDI ARABIA
MAURITANIA
MALI
NIGER
CHAD
SUDAN
YEMEN
NIGERIA
ETHIOPIA
SOMALIA
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
CAMEROON
UGANDA
KENYA
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
TANZANIA
SEYCHELLES
ANGOLA
ZAMBIA
MOZAMBIQUE
ZIMBABWE
NAMIBIA
BOTSWANA
MADAGASCAR
SOUTH AFRICA

**Figure 1: Site of fieldwork in Ghana: Greater Accra**

Ghanaians have migrated for centuries, and internal migration was (and is) quite common throughout the territory of what was formerly known as the Gold Coast (Manuh, 2003). In the past three decades, however, an increasing number of Ghanaian people have started to move within sub-Saharan West Africa and also to different parts of the industrialised world (ibid.).

The first Sub-Saharan country to obtain independence from a colonial power, in 1957, Ghana is a former British colony whose economic history is one of ups and downs, and its emigration pattern is one of the tangible manifestations of these swings (Eurostat-Nidi, 2000). During the 1970s, large numbers of Ghanaians migrated to oil-rich Nigeria, their movement facilitated by the creation, in 1975, of the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) and by its Protocol on Free Movement of Persons (Adepoju, 2005). Migration from Ghana to countries outside West Africa increased in the 1980s, as migrants sought alternative routes after the collapse of Nigeria's economy (Altin, 2004). While emigration was at first male-dominated, the increase in unemployment of the1990s saw a larger proportion of women leave Ghana in search of work abroad (Sabates-Wheeler *et al,* 2008).

While global economic dynamics can help to explain how emigration trends were established, the diversification of destination countries, which saw the progressive inclusion of nation-states which have no historical, political or economic links to Ghana (Black *et al.*, 2003), must also take into account the gradual consolidation of transnational migration networks and the role they play in guaranteeing greater returns on individuals' social capital (Faist, 2000). There are, we have seen, sizeable Ghanaian communities in several European countries, as well as in Canada and the US (Black *et al*, 2003). The choice of Anglophone speaking countries as a destination for migration can be explained by the historical links to the British colonial power, the aid and trade links created within the Commonwealth (Fumanti, 2009), as well as the practical advantages derived from the fact that English is Ghana's official language.

However, a sizeable number of Ghanaian citizens have chosen to settle in other European countries, as well as in the UK, countries with which there were no previous ties (see Vasta and Kandilige, 2010; Mazzuccato, 2008; Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Riccio, 2008) with different languages and education systems, something which may make the transfer of what Faist (2000) terms 'human' capital (i.e. education and training) potentially more arduous. The choice of settling in these countries may be explained as an effect of the gradual diffusion of migration networks, which can substantially facilitate migration by providing information and logistic support to would-be migrants, thus reducing the effective costs and risks of migration (ibid.).

## Italy and migration

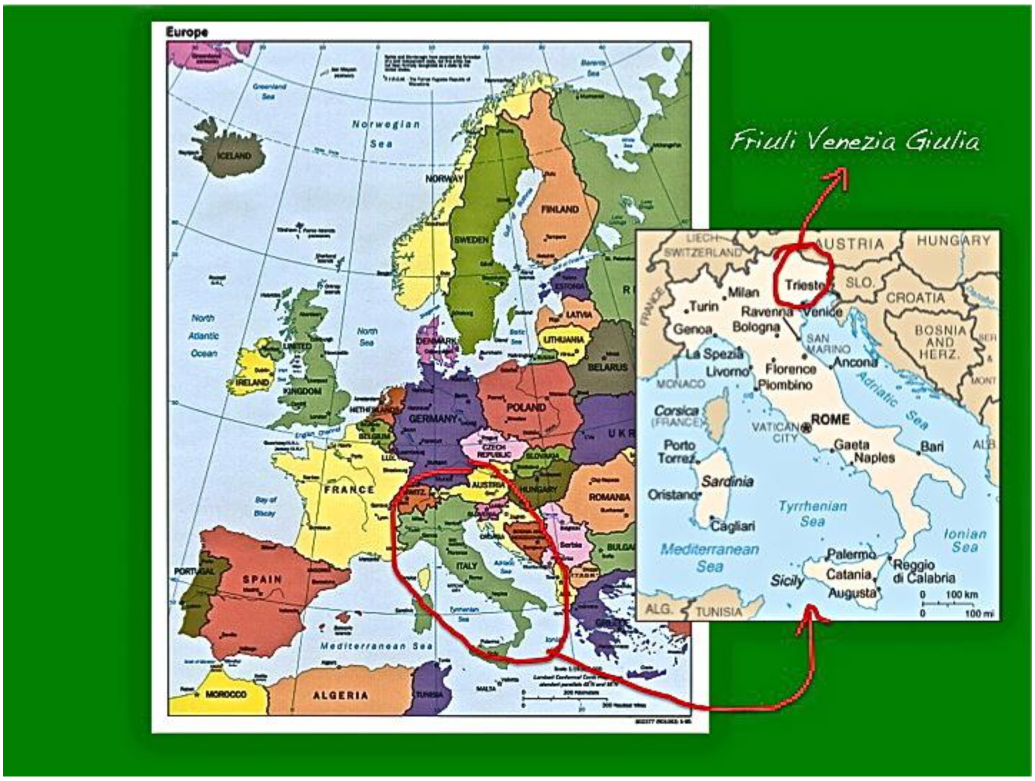
Europe
Friuli Venezia Giulia
Norwegian Sea
ICELAND
NORWAY
SWEDEN
FINLAND
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
BELARUS
North Atlantic Ocean
North Sea
IRELAND
UNITED KINGDOM
DENMARK
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
GERMANY
POLAND
CZECH REPUBLIC
SLOVAKIA
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
ROMANIA
FRANCE
Bay of Biscay
SPAIN
PORTUGAL
ITALY
Mediterranean Sea
MOROCCO
ALGERIA
TUNISIA
MALTA
LIECH.
SWITZERLAND
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
Trieste
SLO.
CROATIA
BOSNIA AND HERZ.
FRANCE
Milan
Turin
Ravenna
Venice
Genoa
Bologna
SAN MARINO
La Spezia
Ancona
Livorno
Florence
Piombino
MONACO
Adriatic Sea
Corsica (FRANCE)
ROME
VATICAN CITY
Porto Torres
Gaeta
Naples
Bari
ALB.
Sardinia
Oristano
Tyrrhenian Sea
Cagliari
Mediterranean Sea
Palermo
Reggio di Calabria
Ionian Sea
Sicily
Catania
Augusta
ALG.
TUNISIA
0 100 km
0 100 mi

**Figure 2: Site of fieldwork in Italy: Friuli Venezia Giulia region**

Only since the early 1970s has Italy become a country of (net) immigration, having been, from the second half of the 19th century, one of the European countries with the highest rates of emigration (King, 2002; Angel-Ajani, 2000). During the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when more established immigration destinations were tightening border controls and trying to curb the number of people they were letting in (Benneh, 2005), Italy was still relatively easy to get into, as restrictive laws and regulations for immigration had yet to be put into place (Bonifazi, 2007). Workers from overseas were attracted by the availability of jobs in the service and domestic economy, which offered poorly paid, less skilled jobs (Riccio, 2008) that were not very appealing to the local population. Moreover, the restructuring of the economy, which characterised the 1980s and 1990s, meant the loss of guarantees for workers and opened up demand for unskilled, flexible and cheap labour, making Italy a desirable destination country for many migrants willing to take up jobs which offered little security and low wages (Einaudi, 2007; Calavita, 1994).

A series of amnesties[2] meant that undocumented migrants were eventually regularised and that, as a consequence, they were entitled to apply for family reunion visas which would mean being joined in Italy by their spouses and children (Bonifazi, 2007; Einaudi 2007). Thus, forced by the restrictions imposed by northern-European countries to find alternative destinations, unskilled migrants found their way to Italy, into manual jobs for which language proficiency was not immediately relevant.

## Ghanaians in Italy

Ghanaians in Italy have a varied range of educational attainments and skills (Riccio, 2008); however, Ghanaians with higher levels of education are unlikely to migrate to Italy (Sabates-Wheeler *et al,* 2008) as language barriers mean less opportunity to find jobs suited to their skills and training. During the 1980s Ghanaian migrants settled mainly into the informal and/or low skilled job market, particularly in the south of Italy. However, subsequent amnesties, which provided regularisation of undocumented migrants, meant that they could leave these jobs for the more secure and relatively better-paid ones in the north of the country (ibid.).

Most Ghanaian immigrants in Italy come from the central and southern parts of Ghana, generally from the two main urban areas of greater Accra and Kumasi (Altin, 2007; Riccio,

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[2] As listed by Einaudi (2007), the following Italian laws include amnesties for undocumented immigrants: Foschi law (1986); Martelli law (1990); Turco-Napolitano law (1998); Bossi-Fini law (2002). Moreover, article 1-ter of law 102 of 2009 regulates an amnesty limited to domestic help and elderly care workers (Full text of law available from: www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/09102l.htm - Accessed on 7th May 2011).

2008). The north of Ghana is, generally speaking, poorer and has lower levels of schooling; this means that people from the northern regions have less financial and social capital to draw from in order to face the costs of migration (Riccio, 2008).

Looking at the most recent data available (see tables 1, 2 and 3), it is clear that Ghanaian citizens in Italy cluster mainly within a relatively small portion of the Italian territory, particularly in the north-east of the country, which enjoyed an economic upturn during the 1990s (known as the 'miracle of the North-East'). This expansion was made possible, at least in part, precisely thanks to the availability of low paid workers (many of whom migrants) who constituted a pool of cheap and flexible labour (Calavita, 1994). The low-cost workforce that immigrants represented stalled the relocation of production to countries with cheaper labour and where costs of social provisions for business are minimal (ibid.).

As the following data (table 1) shows, the number of Ghanaians resident in Italy puts this community in 22nd position for its overall size:

| **Italy: foreign population at 31.12. 2009** | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Romania | 409464 | 478299 | 887763 |
| 2. Albania | 253048 | 213636 | 466684 |
| 3. Morocco | 245198 | 186331 | 431529 |
| 4. China | 97504 | 90848 | 188352 |
| 5. Ukraine | 35811 | 138318 | 174129 |
| 6. Philippines | 51941 | 71643 | 123584 |
| 7. India | 62912 | 42951 | 105863 |
| 8. Poland | 31051 | 74557 | 105608 |
| 9. Moldova | 36193 | 69407 | 105600 |
| 10. Tunisia | 66153 | 37525 | 103678 |
| 11. Macedonia | 52441 | 40406 | 92847 |
| 12. Peru | 35077 | 52670 | 87747 |
| 13. Ecuador | 35469 | 50471 | 85940 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Egypt | 56834 | 25230 | 82064 |
| 15. Sri Lanka | 41913 | 33430 | 75343 |
| 16. Bangladesh | 49662 | 24303 | 73965 |
| 17. Senegal | 55693 | 16925 | 72618 |
| 18. Pakistan | 43415 | 21444 | 64859 |
| 19. Serbia | 29505 | 24370 | 53875 |
| 20. Nigeria | 21900 | 26774 | 48674 |
| 21. Bulgaria | 17822 | 28204 | 46026 |
| 22. Ghana | 25092 | 19261 | 44353 |
| 23. Brazil | 13704 | 30363 | 44067 |

**Table 1 (source: Istat)**

However, when looking at the data available for the north-east of Italy (table 2), the concentration of Ghanaian residents is apparent and this national group ranks at no. 12 in the official statistics on foreign presences:

| **Northeast Italy: foreign population at 31.12.2009** | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Romania | 87074 | 97827 | 184901 |
| 2. Morocco | 75476 | 60492 | 135968 |
| 3. Albania | 67746 | 57552 | 125298 |
| 4. Moldova | 19011 | 36607 | 55618 |
| 5. China | 27217 | 25508 | 52725 |
| 6. Ukraine | 8526 | 36202 | 44728 |
| 7. Macedonia | 21589 | 17211 | 38800 |
| 8. Serbia | 19745 | 16473 | 36218 |
| 9. Tunisia | 20912 | 12184 | 33096 |
| 10. India | 18821 | 12890 | 31711 |
| 11. Bangladesh | 17977 | 10205 | 28182 |
| 12. Ghana | 15730 | 11847 | 27577 |
| 13. Pakistan | 14236 | 7689 | 21925 |
| 14. Poland | 6455 | 15312 | 21767 |
| 15. Nigeria | 10455 | 10756 | 21211 |
| 16. Senegal | 14236 | 4416 | 18652 |

**Table 2 (Source: Istat)**

When examining the official data for the north-eastern region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (table 3) – the area where the present research was conducted - the clustering of the Ghanaian community becomes even more apparent, and this group ranks to 4th for size, the largest group from sub-Saharan Africa (the next sub-Saharan community is the Nigerian one, in 20th place).

| **Friuli Venezia Giulia 31.12.2009** | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Romania | 8545 | 9611 | 18156 |
| 2. Albania | 6751 | 6240 | 12991 |
| 3. Serbia | 4991 | 4243 | 9234 |
| 4. Ghana | 2823 | 2174 | 4997 |
| 5. Croatia | 2757 | 1883 | 4640 |
| 6. Ukraine | 830 | 3474 | 4304 |
| 7. Morocco | 2247 | 1781 | 4028 |

**Table 3 (source: Istat)**

The above official data only accounts for individuals who have residence in Italy and who are, therefore, regularly employed and/or in possession of a *permesso di soggiorno* (permit to stay); consequently, it does not account for undocumented immigrants, for those who do have the necessary documents but have yet to apply for residency, and for those who have obtained Italian citizenship (which can be applied for, according to Italian rules, after a minimum of 10 years of consecutive residence)[3].

Despite these limits, the data clearly demonstrates the tendency of migrants to cluster and to make the most of the available networks. As previously noted, although many Ghanaians originally settled in the south of Italy, with time they have moved to other areas of the country, and the most recent official figures indicate that over a half of the Ghanaians living in Italy are concentrated in the North-East of the country. This has also the advantage of being a relatively small geographical area, within which relatives, friends and acquaintances are never more than a couple of hours away by car or train.

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[3] For the rules on obtaining Italian citizenship for foreigners, see the website for the Italian Home Office at: www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/temi/cittadinanza/sottotema002.html (Accessed on 7th May 2011)

The clustering appears to have aided the formation of a community upon which newcomers can depend for support (Riccio, 2008). As the number of people who settle in the same area increases, potential migrants become more and more reliant on migration networks for support once they arrive in the destination country (Ali, 2007). As a consequence, migrants may not always feel they have to acquire a lot of information on the country of settlement prior to leaving.

The following table (table 4) comes from a study carried out under the auspices of the European Commission and published in the year 2000. It shows the information on Italy, divided by topic, which Ghanaian migrants declared to have possessed prior to leaving. The research reports the responses of one individual for each household taking part in the survey (percentages add up to more than 100 as more than one option could be indicated).

| **Topics:** | **percentage** |
|---|---|
| Level of wages | 32 |
| Opportunities to find work | 57 |
| Cost of living | 17 |
| Unemployment/disability benefits | 2 |
| Child allowance | 3 |
| Health care system | 9 |
| Admission regulation for foreigners | 21 |
| School system | 5 |
| Attitude to foreigners | 21 |
| Taxes | 4 |
| No information at all | 21 |
| Number | 665 |
| Missing | 1 |

**Table 4 (adapted from: Eurostat-Nidi report, 2000)**

The data in table 4 indicates that the migrants' main concern before leaving was to gather information about job opportunities in the country they expect to join and, to a lesser extent, also about the level of wages. Although Ghanaian migration has a more settled and 'family' nature (Altin, 2004), the percentage of individuals who stated they possessed information on the Italian school system is, at 5%, quite low.

A few reasons could account for this low percentage, such as the fact that prospective migrants rely on others already living in the country of destination for everyday practical support with accommodation and legal procedures, or that (in line with the children's narratives examined by the present study) Italian schools are assumed to be good and no specific knowledge of the system is deemed necessary prior to leaving. Moreover, since the study was published in 2000 (and therefore the data was collected prior to this date) it is also possible that the migrants who were interviewed were, at the time of the data collection, still mostly individual men and women and that migration from Ghana had yet to acquire a family pattern. In the absence of targeted studies that could clarify why this percentage is low, the above possibilities all remain open.

Similarly, the fact that 21% of the individuals interviewed said that they had no information at all before leaving Ghana could be proof that some individuals migrate as a consequence of a 'culture of migration' having been established in the sending country (de Haas, 2010). Once this culture has taken hold, in fact, the migration project becomes a motivation in itself and practical information on the country of destination is less essential for the decision process. However, this element too would need to be further investigated to gain clarity about the reasons for the lack of information that migrants admitted to.

The role of the migrant network becomes further apparent if we look at the following table from the same study. Table 5 illustrates the sources of information on Italy that were indicated by Ghanaian migrants:

| Sources | percentage |
|---|---|
| Have been there before | 8 |
| Family at destination | 50 |
| Family at origin | 42 |
| Television, radio | 14 |
| Newspapers etc | 22 |
| School | 10 |
| Agencies at origin | 7 |
| Agencies at destination | 0 |
| Tourists | -- |
| Other sources | 3 |
| Number | 456 |
| Missing | -- |

**Table 5 (adapted from: Eurostat-Nidi, 2000)**

As we can see, the main source of information is the family, both at destination and at origin. Unfortunately the survey is not more specific and therefore we do not know whether the members of the family in the country of origin are migrants themselves (perhaps on visits), returnees, or people who have a link with Italy in any other way. Clearly, however, the information on the country of destination (particularly on the availability of jobs) is shared within extended families at both ends of the migration trajectory.

It is also interesting to notice, in the data presented in table 5, the relatively large role played by the media in providing information, as well as the 10% of Ghanaians who declared to have gathered information in school settings. This appears to point to a variety of sources of information for prospective migrants that spans age-groups and that passes through a range of channels. Unfortunately, the study does not reveal what particular type of information each specific channel conveys, and this is a further area of research that could benefit from additional exploration.

The availability of a close network favours further clustering and also fosters a more settled type of migration, with individuals choosing to remain in one locality at least for the medium term, thus ultimately facilitating family migration. As children's education generally requires more frequent contact with local institutions, family migration can engender a better understanding of services and of the procedures required to access them (Riccio, 2008) something which, in turn, may further encourage settlement.

A significant role in keeping the Ghanaian community together is also played by the Christian churches to which a large proportion of migrants belong. The Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, in particular, appear to be an important focus for the Ghanaian diaspora in Italy (Altin, 2004), as they provide a focus for individuals to get together, to worship, but also to socialise and augment and consolidate their social capital. Belonging to a church-based community can also help individual migrants to gain (back) the social status that can all too easily be lost with migration (Fumanti, 2009).

Bourdieu (1990a) terms 'symbolic capital' the resources that derive from social recognition, respect, honour and prestige. This is a form of capital that is very much embedded in the individual's community of origin, one which takes a long time to be accumulated and which cannot be easily transferred to the country of settlement. Social spaces such as community based gathering and churches can offer opportunities to reinstate symbolic capital vis-à-vis other individuals in the diaspora, that is, in relation to other people in a similar, and thus comparable, situation (Bottomley, 1992).

## Ghana and Italy: the school systems

Once a particular migration trajectory is established, family reunion starts to acquire importance as a contributor to the increase in the number of migrants. The Ghanaian community in Italy is noticeable, when compared with other groups from sub-Saharan Africa, for the large number of individuals who are 17 or below. Official data sets the total number of

Ghanaian children present in Italy in January 2009 to just above 14 thousand, meaning that almost one in ten Ghanaians present in Italy at this date was a child[4]. These are children who are either joining their families from Ghana or who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents. The data relative to the reasons for entry of Ghanaian citizens who entered Italy during 2008 (and were still present in January 2009) shows that while 2 300 people entered on a work visa, 1 100 arrived on a family reunion visa. No data is available that will indicate both reasons of entry and age groups, so unfortunately it is not possible to distinguish between family reunion visas for spouses or offspring.

Once they settle in Italy, the children enter the Italian education system. Italian law guarantees the right to education to all children, regardless of their parents' 'legal' status. Going to school means, for the family, engaging with an Italian institution (Riccio, 2008) and, for the children, entering an important site of socialization and acculturation, as well as the loci of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The following section sketches a view of the historical roots of the Ghanaian education system and of the ways in which it still helps the perpetration of a colonial discourse through the use of the former colonial power's language and discourses of 'Ghanaianness' and 'Africanness' centred mainly on folkloric representations and practices.  A subsequent section looks at the Italian school system, as it tries to adapt to increasing numbers of pupils with foreign background and to implement policies destined to aid their integration and to boost their educational attainment.

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[4] As defined by Article 1 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For more on this, see page 45.

### *Ghanaian school system*

The origins of formal schooling in Ghana can be traced back to the end of the 17th century, when the need for interpreters was the motivation for the Royal African Company to set up a school in one of the coastal fortresses of the Gold Coast (Graham, 1971). The first schools catered exclusively to boys, although by the end of the 19th century they also provided for girls' education; some schools were set up directly by the British colonial government ('government' schools), but the majority of schools ('assisted' schools) were run by missions (Coe, 2005). The missions' schools were supported by grants from the colonial government and were staffed, initially, by European teachers and then by local teachers who had been trained to the missions' standards (ibid.). The colonial school system was modelled on the British school system (Graham, 1971) and these schools were meant to instil the colonialists' religion, language and culture to the children of local chiefs, who would then act as agents of 'civilization' under the control of the colonial masters (Coe, 2002; Graham, 1971).

While the missionaries meant education to furnish individuals with Christian values and to create disciplined, obliging workers, "[...] Africans reinterpreted schools and Christianity to mean non-manual employment, 'modernity,' and 'progress'" (Coe, 2002, p. 25). Access to schooling thus became the main route for those seeking upward social mobility (Coe, 2005), as it allowed the accumulation of officially recognised 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). As a consequence, traditional roles, knowledge and skills, which had been the basis of authority and influence in pre-colonial Ghana, were progressively replaced by official academic titles as sources of 'symbolic capital', the form of capital that rests on attributes of honour, prestige and influence (ibid.). These titles were bestowed by an education system firmly grounded on taxonomies of knowledge shaped by the values of the Western religious and secular powers that had first established them, and the 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1979b) they conferred and of which they were the product was designed to perpetrate these same values (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) observe, schools are the most important loci of transmission of socially valued cultural capital and, as such, the places in which social differences are legitimated and replicated. Schools also play an important part in children's lives and in shaping the way in which they come to make sense of their 'selves' and their social environment. Rooted in the colonial past, the Ghanaian school system is one where the language of the former colonial power has higher status than the 'home' language, and in which local culture is reduced to the more celebrative, performative aspects, and, as a result, is often disconnected from the community's lived experience (Coe, 2005). All these are factors which contribute to shape Ghanaian pupils' perception of the nature of their country's 'culture', of its role in their personal lives and ambitions, and of its (subordinate) position in a perceived hierarchy of world cultures.

The current syllabus for Universal Basic Education[5] prescribes the use of a Ghanaian language, as well as English, as a medium of instruction up to the third year of primary school. After this, the teaching of the local language and culture is limited to specific allotted times and English becomes the main medium of instruction. The teaching of Ghanaian 'culture' (often reduced to its folkloristic and ceremonial features) as a school subject has implications over the way in which it comes to be perceived; it carries the risk of representing Ghanaian culture as a set of practices that are 'outside' the individual and that can be reduced to standardized 'chunks' to be delivered, tested and assessed (ibid.).

While the British colonial power concentrated on educating the elite classes that were to have a part in the administration and the economy of the country, the Nkrumah government[6] focused its efforts towards achieving mass education (Coe, 2005). This meant the introduction of free Basic Education (compulsory education) and a nation-wide increase in the number of schools, as well as the expansion of post-secondary and university education (Graham, 1979). However, for several decades after independence, most of the Ghanaian political elite were still being educated in the UK, the US, and Eastern European countries[7] (Peil, 1995; Tonah, 2007).

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[5] Universal Basic Education is compulsory. It lasts for a total 11 years, which include: 2 years of kindergarten; 6 years of primary school; 3 years of Junior High School (Source: Government of Ghana website: http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=331:ministry-of-education&catid=74:ministries&Itemid=224 Accessed on 7th May 2011)

[6] Nkrumah's government started in 1952, five years prior to independence, under the 'self-rule' policy (Dowden, 2008).

Since 2003, successive Ghanaian governments have kept up their commitment to the achievement of the 'Millennium Development Goals' by 2015; this includes policies aimed at attaining 'Education for All' and at improving the quality of teaching and learning in all Ghanaian schools (Ampiah, 2008); this has also meant working towards a marked increase in the number of girls that are enrolled in comprehensive education (ibid.). However, there are persisting difficulties linked to the poor conditions in some of Ghana's state schools, particularly in the more rural areas, which suffer because of inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding and a lack of teaching resources and materials for pupils (Sefa-Dei, 2004; Ampiah, 2008).

A substantial number of schools in Ghana offer 'residential' (boarding) facilities for their pupils. It was not possible to find a reference to the exact number of boarding schools in the country, but at Senior Secondary Level (post-compulsory education) 65% of pupils attend a boarding school (Ajayi, 2009). While this percentage may not be indicative of the general trend amongst Ghanaian pupils, and younger children (such as those in the age-bracket considered by this thesis) may be educated in larger proportions in day-schools closer to home, there appears to be a comparatively high number of residential schools in Ghana (Saki-Addo, 2006). This factor is indicated by the Ghanaian historian Daniel Kofi Baku (ibid.) as one of the reasons for the relatively low incidence of inter-ethnic conflict in Ghana. A legacy of Nkrumah's time in power, the widespread mixing of pupils of different ethnic origins within boarding schools, Baku argues, acts as a 'social leveller'. As was found in the course of this research, the choice of a publicly-funded, residential school makes particular sense for migrants who leave their children behind, as they can ensure that their offspring are educated and cared for in a protected environment, and thus they can avoid putting too many demands on kin.

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[7] This includes the current president of Ghana, Prof. Atta Mills (Soas Alumni Online Community: http://soasalumni.org/page.aspx?pid=441)

### *Italian school system*

Data compiled by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) and available from the Italian Ministry of Education shows that, during the school year 2008/2009, children with foreign nationality enrolled in Italian schools represented 7% of the total population of pupils. This percentage is higher when considering only pupils in compulsory education[8]: 8.3% of pupils in primary schools and 8.0% of pupils in middle schools have foreign nationality. According to the Istat figures, 37% of foreign pupils were born in Italy and therefore are ‘second generation’ migrants (Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research, 2009)

Overall, during the school year 2008/2009, the number of Ghanaian pupils (both first and second generation) in Italian schools was 8 401, 1.33% of the total foreign population (ibid.). However, percentages are much higher in the regions of the centre-north of Italy, as this is where a higher number of Ghanaian migrants have settled (Riccio, 2008).

Foreign pupils are generally assigned to a specific class according to their chronological age, as indicated by article 45 of the Presidential Decree n. 394/99[9]. However, the same article also allows schools some flexibility by taking into account previous education attainments and the individual child’s competences. Article 45 recommends, moreover, that the number of foreign pupils be evened out as much as possible throughout individual schools and also different schools in the same area, to avoid 'ghettoisation'[10] (Favaro, 2008). Modules for the teaching of Italian as a second language, alongside linguistic and cultural mediators, should be available, according to official policies, in all schools where foreign pupils are present. The role of the mediators is to "[...] welcome and tutor newly-arrived pupils and help them integrate at school. They also have interpretation and translation duties, and serve as mediators in parent-teacher meetings, especially in specific problem cases" (Eurydice, 2009, p. 15).

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[8] Schooling in Italy is compulsory for a total of 10 years, up to the age of 16 (6 years of primary school, 3 years of middle school and 2 years of secondary school). However a recent law (2010) allows for the 10th year to be spent in job training (http://www.repubblica.it/scuola/2010/01/20/news/obbligo_scolastico-2017082/ Accessed on 3rd May 2011) thus in practice reducing compulsory education by one year.

[9] For the text of the full Decree see: http://www.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/1ebac8e2-3ed5-49cd-8427-926c4e705122/dpr394_1999.pdf

However, the support to which foreign students are entitled is not always adequately backed-up by financial provision and/or by a sufficient number of purpose-trained professionals. The allocation of resources for the support of foreign pupils is left to local authorities, while their practical organisation rests on the individual institutions (Euridyce, 2009; Favaro, 2008). This results in differing standards of provision between different local authorities and individual institutions, as the implementation of guidelines tends to rest on contingent needs and on the availability of human resources already present in the schools (Favaro, 2008) or in the areas covered by the local authorities.

## Summary

According to Massey *et al* (1998), migration is more likely between countries that are connected by a shared colonial past, as the colonisers maintain trade links with the former colonies and have left behind institutions and administrative structures that are modelled on their own. Moreover, the colonisers have often left their imprint in the official language, making it easier for individuals from the ex-colony to move to a country whose language they already speak. However, in the past three decades, established European immigration countries (and ex-colonial powers) such as the UK or France, radically limited the numbers of unskilled immigrant workers recruited from overseas. Concurrently, European countries which were traditionally exporters of labour, such as South European countries (e.g. Greece, Spain, Italy), experienced an economic upturn which, coupled with their geographical 'approachability', made them the destination of increasing numbers of labour migrants. As a consequence, individuals started moving also between countries with no traditional or colonial ties and, once the migration flows were established, chain migration and family reunion have further consolidated migrant communities in these 'new' countries of immigration.

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[10] A recent ministerial note (8th January 2010) puts a cap of 30% of foreign pupils in each class. This cap can be extended in the case of foreign pupils who demonstrate an adequate knowledge of Italian (http://www.istruzione.it/web/ministero/cs080110 Accessed on 3rd May 2011)

Ghana and Italy do not have any historical connection, but Ghanaians have started migrating to Italy in substantial numbers since the late 1980s and the 1990s. Migrants from Ghana constitute, according to the latest available official figures, the 22nd group, for size, of all immigrant groups in Italy. However, Ghanaian migrants concentrate in the North and East of the country, and in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, at the end of 2009, Ghanaian nationals were the fourth largest immigrant group.

The Eurostat-Nidi (2000) study shows that migrants who move from Ghana to Italy have some information about the destination country prior to leaving. However, this information appears to concentrate on the available opportunities for work, the wage levels, and on the practicalities of housing and costs of living. Ghanaian migrants to Italy appear to gather, before they move, much less information about other topics, such as the workings of the Italian school system, the opportunities for child benefit or the organization of Italian health care. Arguably, this may be due to the fact that the data of this study is now quite old and that the individuals interviewed were still 'first wave' yet to be interested in family reunion issues or concerned about possible health problems. The same study also reveals that the family, both in sending and receiving country, is the principal source for information on Italy. Many of the facts on the destination country are also gathered from various media, primarily television and newspapers. However, again because the study is now dated, it is quite possible that the Internet and satellite broadcasting may now form additional important sources of information.

As migrants settle and are joined by spouses and children they left in Ghana, the number of Ghanaian children who move from quite different educational institutions increases. Italian school policies for the 'integration' of foreign pupils suffer from lack of appropriate financial backing, from a dearth of appropriately trained staff and from the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the provisions offered by the single schools. Moreover, the support offered can be quite patchy, as it is left to the individual educational institutions to 'tailor' their programs to the needs and specificities of their pupil base. As the experience of the young participants in the present study demonstrates (see chapter 6), for some newly arrived pupils this may mean too little and unreliable support, something that can make them feel isolated and frustrated and may result in underperformance and loss of motivation.

Ghanaian children of school age, moreover, often come from educational institutions that are quite different from the ones they find in Italy upon arrival, and the requirements of Italian schooling may prove, at least in the first weeks and months, quite confusing and stressful. Language is a major issue, since children come from a country where English is the media of instruction and officialdom. The Ghanaian educational system, in fact, has its roots in the schools that were first set up by the missionaries and, subsequently, administered (and initially also staffed) by the British colonial powers. As a consequence, the 'cultural capital' officially recognised within Ghanaian society (and the one that determines access to more prestigious or powerful positions) has its roots in the one that was determined as valuable by the colonial administrators.

# CHAPTER 2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THE QUESTIONS RAISED

This chapter illustrates and discusses the empirical research and the theoretical framework that constitute the foundations of this doctoral study. These works shaped the research project, which, in turn, aims to make a contribution to the available knowledge by adding the specific point of view of children whose emotional ties and everyday practices extend over national borders.

Researching the literature was not a linear task but a 'cyclical' process, one of recurrent exploration of topics and theories at different stages and from different angles. While the bulk of the reading precedes the data collection, as it was to inform and focus the research questions, the chapter has been subsequently revisited to include more recent studies in the areas relevant to the research and also the literature that was accessed as a result of interaction with the data collected. Some of the themes that emerged from the analysis, in fact, could not have been anticipated, and therefore some important insights were gained, at a later stage, from readings which allowed a deeper, and more grounded, understanding of the data.

The linearity required by writing is, of necessity, somewhat artificial and it fails to capture the complexity of a long, often exciting, at times frustrating, but always deeply rewarding, journey of discovery. This chapter aims to recreate in the most faithful way possible the 'road map' of this journey, to retrace the steps that led to the research project, to highlight the gaps that were found along the way (and which this study set out to fill) and to illustrate the understandings that it brought.

The following diagram was drawn in order to visually convey, however imperfectly, the structure of the present chapter, and to clarify the relative links of the different subjects that were explored:

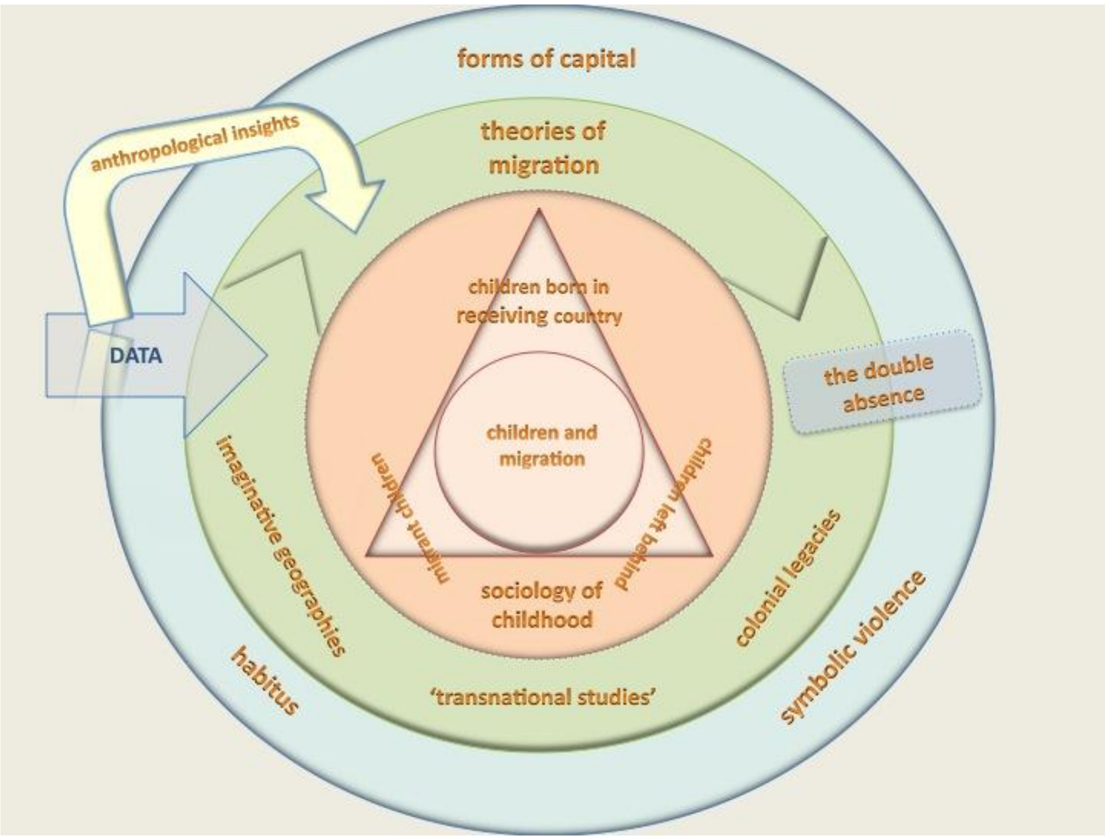
forms of capital
anthropological insights
theories of migration
DATA
children born in receiving country
children and migration
migrant children
children left behind
the double absence
imaginative geographies
sociology of childhood
colonial legacies
symbolic violence
habitus
'transnational studies'

**Figure 3: 'Road map' of literature review**

While, as noted previously, the literature was approached in a recurrent, cyclical fashion, the conventions of writing require that it is illustrated as a linear endeavour. The organisation of the sections and sub-sections of the literature review does not reflect in any way a hierarchical order of importance, and the layout of the present chapter is, consequently, largely a pragmatic choice. As Figure 1 shows, the order of the various sections of this chapter was decided by arranging the different topics around the 'core' of the thesis: children and migration. This central topic is framed within the debate over the socially constructed nature of the concept of 'childhood' and its geographical and historical specificities. The chapter then looks, in increasing degrees of abstraction, to the dynamics and practices of migration and at the theoretical tools put forward by Bourdieu in order to explore the mechanisms through which dominant discourses are produced and reproduced in societies.

Prior to starting the review itself, however, I wish to clarify some of the concepts that are used throughout the rest of this thesis. Specifically, I will discuss my use of the terms 'identity', 'culture', 'racism', 'integration' and 'acculturation', all terms which identify a set of very important, highly debated and often controversial concepts. The aim is to establish a shared understanding of how they are meant in the context of the following discussion, and to clarify the terms of the 'writer-reader contract'.

Following the clarification of the main concepts, the first section of the literature review starts by offerings an overview of the role that children play in research on migration and also, more specifically, on the available literature on the three main groups which are the focus of the present study: children who are left behind by migrant parents; children who moved to join their parents in the receiving country; and children who were born in the receiving country of migrant parents, the so-called second generation 'migrants'[11]. This is situated within the broader context of the tenets of the sociology of childhood, which looks at the ways in which the categories of 'child', 'children' and 'childhood' usually employed in research refer to the socially constructed categories of Western society.

In the following section, the various theories of migration, and the (many) different elements that come into play when individuals decide to migrate, are briefly outlined, to give a wider overview of the social phenomenon which frames the experiences of the young people involved in it; this leads to a discussion of the relevant literature in the field of transnational studies, in order to ground the project which is at the centre of this thesis, a project that adopts a transnational perspective and a transnational methodology in researching children's experiences in relation to migration. Consequently, the ways in which migrants engage in practices which span across borders and the extent to which children are involved in these practices are discussed, as are the ways in which transnational links, global popular culture and the legacy of colonial discourses come together to shape the imaginings and expectations of children in relation to migration.

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[11] In the present thesis, the term 'second generation migrants' is avoided whenever possible and the term 'children of migrants' is preferred. When the term 'second generation migrants' is used to refer to children born in the receiving country, the word *migrant* is in inverted commas. Since individuals belonging to this category have never moved, the term 'migrant' is felt to be inaccurate and it foregrounds their foreign roots independently of self-identification (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). However, the term will still be employed, as it is widely used in migration literature, when the use of 'children of migrants' could cause misunderstanding.

A third section illustrates the conceptual tools, outlined by Pierre Bourdieu, which can help us uncover the way in which dominant discourses are produced and reproduced in society and the ways in which different forms of capital influence the opportunities and life trajectories of individuals and groups, including international migrants and their children. This will be followed by an overview of the writings of Abdelmalek Sayad, whose work, based on the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, adopts a transnational perspective and emphasises the power of narratives across borders, thus bringing together different areas of the literature introduced here. Central to Sayad's work, in fact, is the idea that an immigrant is always also and emigrant, an individual who is present in two communities at the same time but also, necessarily, at the same time absent from both. As a consequence, understanding the real economic and human costs (but also gains) of migration requires a view of the entire migration process rather than a focus on separate, often isolated segments.

The last section, as can be seen from the 'road map' illustrated by the diagram, and as anticipated previously, has its roots in the data collected during the fieldwork. This part of the literature, in fact, was approached at a later stage in the research, as the interaction with the data created the need for clarification and further background readings. This data-driven exploration of relevant literature concerns primarily the field of anthropology and, in particular, the work of Mary Douglas on dirt and cleanliness; it also looks at studies on witchcraft beliefs, at the available work on Charismatic Christianity in Ghana, and at other material which was essential to analyse and interpret the data collected.

## Setting out the 'terms of the contract'

Before entering a discussion of the literature which constitutes the 'backbone' of this thesis, I wish to clarify some of the terminology I will use throughout the discussion on the study undertaken. It is important to keep in mind, in fact, the 'originative' capacity of language, its power to "[produce] experience by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of experience [...]" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 42). Language, then, constructs that which it talks about, and is never (nor can be) neutral or simply descriptive. As Fairclough (2001) observes, language rests upon common-sense assumptions that can be shaped by ideology, and which rest on relationships of power. It is necessary, therefore, to define the (forever shifting and negotiated) 'boundaries' of words as used in a specific context, in order to reveal the internal workings of understanding, and to ensure shared meaning. In particular, I shall define the concepts that lie behind the terms 'identity', 'culture', 'racism', 'integration' and 'acculturation', to clarify how they are (not) understood and used in the context of this thesis. While this exercise is necessary to establish shared meanings between writer and reader, the concepts discussed are the object of on-going academic debate and the topic of numerous books and articles. Therefore, the following definitions will, of necessity, only attempt to scratch the surface of what are weighty and complex notions.

As Hall (1996) argues, 'identity' is a concept whose essentialist character has been thoroughly deconstructed by post-modern thought as not being reducible to a single (or even a set) of stable characteristics. Rather, identity is a "[...] point of temporary attachment to the subject position which discursive practices construct for us.” (ibid., p. 6). It is thus a provisional, yet powerful, claiming for the self of characteristics that are in fact the result of social processes. As such, identity is constantly changing and shifting, relational and negotiated, rather than fixed and inscribed in the individual and in his/her history. Moreover, each individual’s identity is a constellation of personal traits and social roles, and each of this constellation’s constitutive elements can acquire different weight and prominence according to different social situations (Sen, 2006).

Even when it is grounded in the shared historical, linguistic and cultural narratives of a specific geographical area, as is the case for migrants, identity is not an assemblage of fixed characteristics, but the process of representation of the individual in relation with others. The relational aspects of identity are particularly evident in the case of immigrants, especially when they belong to a visible minority. As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) note, young immigrants often experience as a shocking surprise the ‘othering gaze’ through which the receiving society frequently looks at them. Coming to terms with the way in which they are ‘identified’ by those belonging to the majority group in the receiving country is a slow, sometimes very painful, process. The ways in which children react to any negative image that is reflected back to them (by accepting or by rejecting it, to varying degrees), shape how these young people will come to think about themselves and about their own position in the wider community. While ethnic background can be only one of the many elements in the make-up of children’s and young people’s representation of the self, its importance can acquire greater weight precisely because of the part it plays in others’ perceptions. Visible minority children can come to be identified primarily through their ethnic belonging (e.g. a ‘Ghanaian, a ‘Senegalese’, or even as a generic ‘African’) and, as a consequence, they can come to think of themselves through these categories.

A similar semantic shift has also interested the widely debated concept of 'culture'. In talking about 'culture', I refer to a set of signifying practices which are socially transmitted and shared by individuals, and which are passed on (albeit seldom unchanged) from one generation to the next (Cohen, 2009). As Geertz (1973) proposes, culture is the totality of the webs of significance that individuals themselves have spun and into which they are suspended. However, while this useful image conjures the idea of the interconnectedness of practices and values, it also appears deceptively static. Culture is, in fact, never homogeneous nor fixed, and even within bounded groups of people who share a relatively uniform historical trajectory (as is the case of some nation states) culture needs to be thought of as plural, shifting and 'hybrid' (Hannerz, 1996; Bhabha, 1996), particularly so in the contemporary, globalised world. When talking about culture, therefore, I shall refer to the general practices, beliefs and values that are shared by a specific ethnic group, in the understanding that these are composite and fluid.

The term 'racism' will be used in this thesis to refer to beliefs, attitudes and practices that marginalise and belittle people on the basis of their phenotypic traits and/or ethic belonging (Clark *et al.* 1999). The term 'racism' has undergone a transformation in relatively recent times. Discriminatory discourse and practices (however disguised) have increasingly become unacceptable and are now, in several countries, legally prohibited, and openly racist remarks and ostracism have become less commonplace. This does not mean, however, that discriminatory discourses and practices have disappeared; often they have been simply 'driven underground' or structurally 'calcified' as institutional racism. As a consequence, they can be more easily 'misrecongised' (to use a Bourdieusian concept), that is, not identified for what they are, thus leaving the victims of discriminatory practices less able to challenge them. When referring to migrants, the term 'race' has, in some cases, been supplanted by that of 'culture' as the all-encompassing explanation of differences (Park, 2005), and individuals and minority groups are often referred to as being 'from a different culture'; this is an apparently innocuous statement which, however, often hides preconceived value-judgements and which is commonly used to highlight difference as a marker of intrinsic inferiority.

I will discuss the terms ‘integration’ and ‘acculturation’ together, as they are conceptually related. Both terms, in fact, refer to the processes through which migrants become part of the receiving country’s social fabric. However, the two terms are not synonymous, and the underlying concepts need to be clarified. While integration is a process of adding new cultural elements to the existing ones, and thus implies the co-existence of different signifying practices, it is, however, increasingly used as a synonym of ‘assimilation’ as a result of a semantic shift (Sivanandan,2008). This is a ‘subtractive’ view according to which individuals need to lose part of their ‘before’ selves (language *in primis*, but also social practices or values) and become native-like. However, integration can (and does) also result in the ‘addition’ of new knowledge and skills to the existing ones (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), thus expanding individuals’ experience and know-how.

The term ‘acculturation’ will only be used in this thesis when reviewing some of the literature on the children of migrants that are born in the receiving country (the so-called ‘second generation migrants’) and, more specifically, when discussing the ways in which they can come to balance different signifying practices. Acculturation is not necessarily a one-way process and the concept, which comes from anthropology, denotes the way in which cultures change each other when coming into contact (Berry, 2008). However, in some of the literature that looks at children and migration (e. g. Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Crul, 2003), the term is used primarily to designate the pace with which young ‘second generation migrants’ adopt the receiving country’s mores and language, and the influence this has on their relations with parents, the ethnic community, and the wider society more in general.

## Childhood, children and migration

Research that looks at children and aims to give them a space to let their voices be heard needs first of all to define the meaning of the categories 'children' and 'childhood', something that is not as straightforward as 'common sense' may have it. In order to work on a project that looks at the experiences of children in relation to migration, who is assumed to be within the category 'children' must first be clarified. This entails also looking at the ways in which 'childhood' is not simply a homogeneous, biologically determined category, but also a social construct which has geographical and historical variables. Moreover, the way in which children are represented in the literature that deals with migration needs to be problematised, in particular in relation to children's specific experiences and roles in the migration project and to the expectations that sending and receiving societies have of young migrants.

The present section deals with these main issues and several others, discussing the idea of children and the ways in which it is a historical and geographical construct. It looks at 'the sociology of childhood' (Corsaro, 2005) and at how this has challenged the dominant view of childhood, i.e. a time of apprenticeship geared towards adulthood; instead, the sociology of childhood has put forward a notion of children as competent social actors who actively shape their worlds and their place in society and whose views are relevant in and of themselves. It also illustrates the way in which social research on migration looks at the role of children and discusses the relative paucity of studies based on children's expectations and on their evaluations of what migration entails for them and for their futures.

### *Children and 'the sociology of childhood'*

Article 1 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a 'child' as "[...] every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." In the present thesis the terms to identify the individual 'child', the social group 'children', and the social phenomenon 'childhood' (Mayall, 2000) will likewise be used to refer to human beings of seventeen years or less, in the awareness that there are objective and important differences within this group which are determined by chronological age as well as geographical and historical specificities. As Lansdown (2005) emphasises, in fact, childhood is not an undifferentiated period and children's needs and capacities vary greatly with age, while the social roles ascribed to children (and the relating expectations of and for them) can change according to historical and geographical coordinates (eds. Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). The UNCRC acknowledges the differences between children of different ages by introducing the idea of "evolving capacities" in Article 5, thus recognising that childhood is not a homogeneous category and that children's abilities, and their autonomy from adults, change with age and circumstances, even though their rights remain fixed and universal (Lansdown, 2005).

Nevertheless, the need to define childhood in order to enforce children's specific rights means that in Western societies, as argued by James and James (2004), childhood has become an institution, one that is based on the binary distinction between adults and non-adults. This distinction is regulated by the legal system and practically implemented through official cut-off lines drawn between chronological ages. This view of childhood as an institution is furthered by the work of Corsaro, who talks of childhood as a 'structural form of society', a 'socially constructed period' (Corsaro, 2005, p. 3) whose members change constantly but which is, nevertheless, a permanent feature of society.

On the grounds of what is then a structural distinction, individuals' rights (e.g. right to vote, work, marry, etc.) are determined, as also are the specific traits they are expected to show and what they are deemed able or not able to do (ibid.). As a consequence, what children need, how they develop and what is consequently appropriate for them are constructions based on adults' studies and conceptualisations. Invariably, children "are those whom *adults* have defined as non-adults" (Mayall, 2000, p. 245, my emphasis) and their needs and rights are increasingly determined by professionals and on the grounds of adults' representations of childhood (ibid.)

While all human beings necessarily go through a physiological stage called 'childhood', many of the limits and peculiarities of this stage are socially constructed and, as such, are subject to changes in time and space (eds. James and Prout, 1990). Moreover, childhood is not a homogeneous category: it is cross-cut by other social categories, such as class, ethnicity, gender, etc. (eds. Holloway and Valentine, 2000a) and this needs to be borne in mind by researchers engaging in studies with under-age participants. Since children are gendered, classed, racialised members of society, their agency (as well as their experiences, expectations, concerns), like adults' agency, encounters limits set by the specific categories they belong to and by the way in which these interplay (James and James, 2004; Corsaro, 2005). These limits, however, combine with those imposed by chronological age to make childhood one of the most marginal categories in any society (ed. Knörr, 2005), one that is deprived of the right to have a say in matters that concern those who belong to this group because of its lack of political say, since "children [...] are presented to us as pre-people, outside the polity" (Mayall, 2000, p. 246).

James and Prout (eds., 1990) draw a historical genesis of the idea of childhood as a physical and psychological universal phase for all humans, and trace the modern view to the evolutionary idea of psychology as put forward by Piaget in the first half of the 20th century (Schaffer, 1996). The various 'stages of development' Piaget identified were thought to be universal and necessary, with a rigid progression from one to the other. The strict succession of

Piaget’s stages was grounded on a view of childhood that looked at the individual in isolation, mainly in experimental situations (ibid.). As James and Prout (eds., 1990) observe, Vygotsky, a contemporary of Piaget, brought a social dimension to the study of childhood in his theory of learning, by acknowledging that social interactions are essential in determining what children can achieve, in particular when the interaction involves individuals with different level of skills (Schaffer, 2004). Vygotsky argued that through the practice of ‘scaffolding’, that is, through the constructive help more expert others can offer (adults, but also other children), young people’s learning can progress quicker than it otherwise would (Schaffer, 1996 and 2004; Mercer, 2000; Corsaro, 2005).

Even though Vygotsky sought to look at children’s development within a perspective grounded in social interaction, he still overlooked, argues Corsaro (2005), children’s active role in interpreting and shaping the reality they are part of, their ‘agency’ as competent individuals. In Corsaro’s view “[...] children do not simply imitate or internalize the world around them. They strive to interpret or make sense of their culture and to participate in it. In attempting to make sense of the adult world, children come to collectively produce their own peer worlds and cultures” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 24). This view of children and young people as active agents echoes the point made by James and Prout (eds., 1990) when they observe that children are “active participants in their own rearing process” (p. 18). The fact that children have an active role in shaping their world, and their social relations within it, is, arguably, the main tenet of ‘the sociology of childhood’.

While the influence children exercise on the wider society, its policies and regulations, its economic and social organization, is usually indirect, via their parents or carers (e.g. in relation to children’s role as consumers of goods or services), it is no less important or incisive (James and James, 2004). However, children’s influence on adult society is certainly not the only relevant aspect of children’s agency. Each individual child contributes to the social construction of 'childhood' by pushing the boundaries set by adults (Corsaro, 2005; eds. James and Prout, 1990; Lansdown, 2005), by challenging these boundaries and by finding gaps and cracks that will allow them a degree of independent action. Proof of this, as James and James (2004) argue, is the need to set fixed age limits (e.g. limits on drinking age or minimum age for paid work) and to have them enforced and revised as they are constantly tested and pushed by young people.

While the sociology of childhood's insistence on children's agency is important in highlighting the need for research that focuses also on children's contributions in shaping contemporary societies, there also is a constant tension between children's agency and children's vulnerability, and this creates contradictions that pose a series of ethical issues for research (Mayall, 2000; Lansdown, 2004). The need to protect children from harm or exploitation means that their welfare and safety require laws and policies that ultimately confine their agency within the limits of adults' control, such as the need for parental consent (an issue that will be discussed more at length in chapter 3). As Mayall points out, the problem lies "[...] in the control elements inherent in protection and provision. For if children are socially controlled, then their ability to participate may be limited." (Mayall, 2000, p. 249). However, children's own assessment should inform laws and policies which define their childhoods, and most scholars agree that young people should take an active part in the consultation and decision processes in matters that concern them (e.g. James and James, 2004; Corsaro, 2005; Mayall, 2000; Lansdowne, 2005).

### *Children and migration*

As with other social phenomena, most research in the area of migration still focuses on adults' roles and experiences (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b), and young people's voices are often heard as accessories, elements that take on significance only insofar as they are determinants of adults' behaviour (van Blerk and Ansell, 2004). Children's own responses to migration and the way in which they adapt (or not) to life in the new country is, however, widely researched (e.g. Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes, 2003; Crul, 2003; Zetter *et al.*, 2006; Penn and Lambert, 2009) but often limited to their experiences as 'adults in the making' whose responses take on significance as they shape the way in which they will 'incorporate' (or fail to) into the receiving society. Researchers agree on the fact that immigrants will eventually incorporate, but the question is into which 'segment' of society they will incorporate (e.g. mainstream culture or inner city values and norms) and what path their social trajectory will follow (Portes and Zohu, 1993; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and DeWind, 2004).

As Faulstich Orellana *et al.* (2001) observe, ignoring the influence that children exercise on the processes of migration means overlooking first of all one of the main reasons for a family's decision to migrate, but also the way in which children can shape the practical choices regarding the timing of migration and the country of destination (which will often take into account children's educational needs), as well as the social fields in which all the members of the family will move in and the types of connections and experiences they will have within these fields. Young people thus shape their family's journeys, "[...] and in shaping those journeys, the children of immigrants shape their own trajectories as well." (Faulstich Orellana *et al*, 2001, p. 558)

Several influential studies focus specifically on the various ways in which children are involved in, and affected by, the migration process. Amongst others, D'Emilio (2007), Salazar Parreñas (2005) and Dreby (2010) focus on the consequence of parental migration for the children left behind and for the relationship patterns within the family; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) and Robben and Suárez-Orozco (eds., 2000) look at the psychological consequences of migration for children; Portes and Zohu (1993), Penn and Lambert (2007) and Portes and Rumbaut, (2001) explore the modes of adaptation of the second generation 'migrants'. In all these studies, the consequences of migration for children are explored, bearing in mind that, however, the decision to remain or leave is one they do not have direct control over, due to their subordinate position within the family and, more in generally, society. Grinberg and Grinberg observe that “parents may be voluntary or involuntary emigrants, but children are always “exiled”: they are not the ones who decide to leave, and they cannot decide to return at will” (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989, p. 125). Nevertheless, children are not just passive objects of parental decision, and they can actively influence, or attempt to, the decision to migrate and the effects of migration for their families. They can, for example, make their voices heard in regard to the choice of leaving, by challenging it or by supporting it, and can go to great lengths to influence their parents’ decisions (Dreby, 2010), both in an overt and covert manner.

By undermining their academic performances (e.g. by playing truant or by underachieving), the children of migrants can also challenge, and even invalidate, parental choices made precisely in the hope of guaranteeing future success for their offspring (D’Emilio, 2007). For some migrant children this may result in ‘transnational disciplining’ (Faulstich Orellana *et al*, 2001) and young people can be sent (back) to the sending country (or the threat made, as was found in the present research) in order to be educated in an environment that is perceived to foster more respect for adult authority, and stricter moral standards.

As Dreby (2007) points out, the children who are left behind can manifest a series of behaviours that appear aimed at ‘punishing’ parents for leaving them. These may take the form of refusing to call their parents mum/dad during phone calls (sometimes using instead these terms of endearment with those who are looking after them); refusing to abide by parental authority and only recognising the guardians’ authority; playing parents and carers’ demands one against the other; engaging in risky behaviour; etc. (ibid.)

Even when they are not actively trying to shift and shape the migration project, children will have an important role in mediating between their parents and the country of destination (Faulstich Orellana *et al.,* 2001). Because they attend schools in the destination country, children have generally greater contact than their parents do with the new country's mores and can therefore adopt its lifestyles and adjust to new customs more quickly than adults (Suárez-Orozco, 2000; eds. Berry *et al.* 2006). However, the assumption that children are more adaptable to the new is partly due to the fact that, however emotionally difficult and frightening a new environment may be for them, children have no other choice but to adapt to what remains, after all, the adults' choice (Riesman, 1992).

Within the receiving country, children often represent an important link between their parents and official institutions (such as schools), as well as the channel through which the receiving country's social and cultural mores enter the family home (Faulstich Orellana *et al.*, 2001). However, children's schooling and education can also play an important part in keeping migrants in the receiving country beyond the time when the parents would, otherwise, return to their country of origin, but can at the same time also be the reason why some parents choose not to migrate (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

As the present study demonstrates, the children of migrants, whether they live with their parents or were left in the sending country in the care of kin, often constitute an important link between those who migrated and those who were left behind, as their welfare is one of the main reasons for regular contact between the adults (Yeoh and Lam, 2006). Where parents have left their children behind in the care of kin, providing for them and ensuring that they can have the best opportunities they can afford is another reason that can keep individuals abroad (Dreby, 2010).

All the above mechanisms and practices reveal the complex generational interplay within the family unit that can affect the decision to leave or remain at all stages of migration. What is clear is that very often the desire to provide their children with greater opportunity for social progress (by expanding their cultural capital) plays a fundamental role in adults' decisions concerning migration, together with the aim of improving the family's financial situation. Young people's own expectations, worries and desires, however, are equally important in determining the success of the project, how they will fit into both the sending and the receiving countries and how their emotional well-being will be affected. Children are also important elements of innovation in their parents' lives and they are often the ones who 'socialise ' the adults as they may adopt the mores of the new country more readily and 'bring them home' with them every day.

### *Migrant children*

Despite the important part children play in all the stages of migration, social research has given little space to the way in which children experience life in the receiving country nor to the relation between these experiences and the laws and policies of the receiving country, as well as the effects of the attitudes towards immigration of the national majority. All these factors, however, influence greatly the everyday lives of a substantial number of individuals who are not, because of their chronological age, given any formal power to shape their own experiences (James and James, 2004; Corsaro, 2005).

Research by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), Robben and Suárez-Orozco (eds., 2000) and also Ward *et al.* (2001) has contributed in a significant way to the understanding of the emotional and psychological states children go through when faced with the reality of migration, states whose echo can be clearly perceived in the words of the young participants in the present study. They highlight the euphoria and anticipation the children experience when learning about the imminent move (Grimberg and Grimberg, 1989; Losi, 2006), the sadness associated with leaving the familiar, and also the worry about the unknown. They also expose the frequent disappointment young people experience when, having had contact with reality, they find (or perceive) themselves discriminated against and marginalised, part of the lower echelons of the receiving society (Losi, 2006), something which most of the young migrants in the present study remarked upon. Moreover, these studies stress the fundamental role of schools, as children's main space of social exchange in the destination country, in facilitating or hindering the children's transition from the sending to the destination country (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). The environment of the school is also central to this project, both as the physical setting of the research, but also for the central role it has in the participants' lived or imagined experiences of the (future) receiving country.

Several factors (class, gender, provenance, etc.) contribute to shape the experience of migrant children in the country of immigration and, indeed, migrant children's experiences will depend on how these factors combine (Penn and Lambert, 2009; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). As well as these factors, however, the policies towards immigration of the receiving country, and its social attitude towards immigrants (over which young people have very little, if any, control) will play a big part in determining how the children come to see themselves (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The greater or lesser difficulty in settling in the new country is also influenced by the amount of time the children spend away from their parents, studies showing a higher incidence of anxiety and depression in the young people who were separated from their parents for longer periods of time (Suárez-Orozco *et al.*, 2010). When the separation has been very long, in fact, the unavoidable difficulties linked to getting to know a new country and finding a space in the receiving society are compounded by the effort of having to get re-acquainted with one's parents (and siblings) and of having to adjust to a new network of relationships, something that clearly emerged from some of the interviews with young participants involved in the present study.

### *Children born in the receiving country*

The ways in which children gradually adapt to the new country and the new social reality are the object of a substantial number of studies which look at the so-called 'second generation' migrants, the children born in the destination country of immigrant parents. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Portes (2003) identify three main modes of incorporation to the new country that children may adopt. The three possible outcomes are defined in relation to the parents' adaptation and are termed 'consonant', 'dissonant' and 'selective' types of acculturation. 'Consonant acculturation' sees both children and parents adopt the new country's mores and language and gradually abandon those they arrived with. In the case of 'dissonant acculturation', adults and their children's adoption of the new country's lifestyle, values and language proceed at different paces, with young people assimilating more quickly than their parents the receiving country's mores and language. 'Dissonant acculturation' can be the cause of intergenerational conflict, with children embarrassed by their parents' appearances, language and practices on one hand, and, on the other, with parents anxious about the children's distancing from them and the culture of their country of origin. 'Selective acculturation' sees both children and parents holding on to their original values, habits and language while gradually also adopting the new country's. Generally the support of a strong community framework aids this outcome and, in this case, the children will be bilingual (with a functional proficiency in both languages), fully members both of their ethnic community and of the new country. The three modes of incorporation are not mutually exclusive, and young people may show different patterns of acculturation at different times and changing circumstances (Portes and Rumbaut , 2001; eds. Robben and Suárez-Orozco, 2000)

As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) demonstrate, a series of factors can influence the type of acculturation that children and parents will experience. They are a combination of parental human capital (i.e. social, symbolic and cultural capital), family structure (single parent family, nuclear family, extended family), official policies of the receiving countries (e.g. passive acceptance or active support of migrants communities) but also the majority group's attitudes towards immigrants and the narratives of migration developed by the media. The type of acculturation experienced is likely to influence the children's future, and a 'selective' type of acculturation offers the best outcomes as far as young people's educational success and socio-psychological well-being are concerned (see Ward *et al.*, 2001; Portes and Rumbaut, 2005). The authors also stress the importance of making the most of the resources brought by migrants and observe that integration within society will not come "[...] by pressuring immigrants and their children into a uniform mould but by making use of the values and resources that they themselves have brought" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001, p. 276) which can also embrace, as in the present study, considerable amounts of enthusiasm, optimism and excitement at the prospect of starting a 'new' life in a Western country.

While some authors (e.g. Castles and Miller, 2003; Faist, 2000) stress the importance of state policies in determining immigrants' integration in the receiving country, others, such as Crul (2003) stress the importance of the opportunities offered by national institutional arrangements in the areas of education and transition to the labour market. These opportunities can contribute to the shape of young people's futures and determine which segment of the population they will become part of. As Portes and Rumbaut observe, the central question is not whether or not the second generation will assimilate, "[...] but to what *segment* of society it will assimilate" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001, p. 55).

### *Children left behind*

While receiving countries' institutions try to deal with the presence of children of migrants within society and while the need to offer them appropriate support means that they are at the centre of research and policies (e.g. policies on linguistic and cultural diversity[12]), a less obvious 'side-effect' of adults' migration relates to the experiences of the children of migrants who need to be left in the sending country for what may be very long periods of time. Receiving countries' policies in relation to migration and family reunion play a huge part in determining the timing and the order in which different members of a family arrive in the receiving country (D'Emilio *et al.*, 2007).

Traditionally, male migrants would leave first and, once settled, send for their wives and children. However, patterns of migration are quite diverse and change over time, and it is not uncommon for a female to be the main migration agent, for the parents to leave together, or even for children to leave on their own (Castles, 2002; Salazar Parreñas, 2005; Yeoh and Lam, 2006). Whatever the order of arrival, there will be times when members of the same (nuclear) family are separated, and very often those who are left behind are children. In the majority of cases, the children remain in the sending country with the remaining parent, with grandparents or with aunts and uncles; in a few cases, children may be fostered by distant relations, or even by strangers, in exchange for help with housework and menial jobs, a historically common practice in western Africa (Goody, 1982; Peil, 1995) which, to a lesser extent, is still exercised in some areas of Ghana today (Kuyini *et al.*, 2009).

Some parents leave in the conviction that their children will join them as soon as they are settled. However, the difficulties in finding a good and secure job and appropriate housing are often greater than migrants expected (Olwig, 1999; Dreby, 2007 and 2010). Moreover, the bureaucratic requirements of the new country's family reunion policies and the difficulties in obtaining the necessary documents can mean that families remain apart for considerable periods of time (Salazar Parreñas, 2005). This affects in particular migrants with lesser financial means, who may find it very hard to meet the requirements for family reunion applications (D'Emilio *et al.*, 2007). In some cases, in particular when they have been separated from their parent(s) for lengthy periods, children may refuse to leave their carers, while in other cases the parents' considerations for the children's education and wellbeing may mean that their application for family reunion is postponed for several years (Dreby, 2010). As a consequence of these factors, a large number of families live separate lives in different countries, something which has emotional, psychological and practical consequences for all involved.

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[12] for examples of policies at a European level, see:
http://ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/move/45/index_en.htm

A study commissioned by UNICEF and carried out by D'Emilio *et al* (2007) highlights some of these problems from the perspective of young people. The researchers notice how, together with improved material circumstances, the children who were left behind by one or both parents can also experience emotional difficulties. These can take the form of risky behaviour, educational underachievement and emotional withdrawal, caused by feelings of abandonment, loss of self-esteem and anger. According to this particular paper, furthermore, far from parental protection and care some of the children left behind may also experience lack of appropriate care and/or bullying by other children. All of these factors, the researchers argue, call for further studies in order to assess the extent of the emotional difficulties experienced by children who are left behind because of migration, and for policies specifically tailored to address their needs. While not aiming to assess emotional difficulties the children left behind experience (something for which specific training is required and, indeed, essential), the present study can, nevertheless, help to uncover the emotional investment children make when faced with the prospect of migrating to join their parents abroad, as well as the difficulties they anticipate in leaving behind the familiar.

In her extensive study of Mexican families separated by migration, Dreby (2010) notices how, on aggregate, the children who are left behind show better health thanks to the improvements brought by their parents' remittances. She also notices how, paradoxically, separation can also strengthen familial bonds through the experience of nostalgia and via the regular long-distance contact which the members of the family often come to entertain. Indeed, the children left behind who took part in the present study appeared to enjoy some advantages deriving from their parents' migrant status, such as being able to attend a good boarding school, and all seemed to have regular contacts with their missing parent(s). However, as Dreby (ibid.) observes, the lives of parents and children divided by borders can suffer from the lack of physical proximity and the loss of 'temporal coordination', as different members lose track of the others' daily actions and of their changing with time, something which is symbolised by the fact that migrant parents may send back clothes that are too small for their children (ibid.).

In her study on migrant Filipino women, Salazar Parreñas (2005) highlights the paradox of mothers who have to leave their children in the care of fathers and/or relatives in order to work as domestic help abroad, often to look after other people's children. She also argues that the gender stereotypes which expect mothers to be the emotional caregivers and the fathers to be the material providers mean that mothers are more often criticized and blamed for leaving their children, while fathers are, to some extent, *expected* to do so. This has repercussions on the way all members of the family perceive separation, and children can be more critical of their mothers and develop hostility towards them as a consequence (ibid.). Mothers, for their part, feel more guilty than fathers about leaving their children, and that they are failing in their role as primary carers (Dreby, 2006). However, Salazar Parreñas (2005) also argues that the quality of surrogate care the children receive, as well as the dedicated 'transnational parenting' of many mothers and fathers, means that children do not necessarily have to experience separation as a completely negative phase of their lives.

According to Olwig (1999), children can learn to accept separation as a necessary and unavoidable situation, and to appreciate the care that is demonstrated through remittances and presents, something which, as shall be discussed within the data chapters, can also increase children's prestige amongst peers quite considerably. Even when 'parenting across borders' (Levitt, 2001) manages to reduce the impact of separation, "a family in the absence of regular physical proximity requires conscious rationalization" (Bryceson and Vourela , 2002, p.15) and the concerted and regular effort of all involved. It also requires considerable financial and emotional investment and a good dose of determination, as parents can feel they are gradually losing touch with the children they left behind and, in some cases, may feel that they are also losing the closeness and familiarity which is developed through daily interactions and conversations (Basch *et al.* 1994). While some groups of migrants find that computer-mediated technologies are of help in maintaining closer contact with distant family members, this is by no means true of all groups, as the 'digital divide' means that the use of computer-mediated technology (Hamel, 2009) is not equally available worldwide and across social strata. The participants in the present study did not use computer communication to keep in touch with relatives in the sending country, and the telephone remains the main medium of communication, although text messages are also used for immediate communication thanks to the recent increase of mobile connection within Africa (Dowden, 2008).

Whether separated from the mother, the father, or from both, children's emotional difficulties in adapting to the separation and, later, in re-adapting to life together, will be more pronounced the longer the family remains split between (at least) two countries (D'Emilio *et al.*, 2007; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This clearly raises issues concerning the family reunion policies of the receiving countries and about the speed and ease they afford to those wishing to be reunited with loved ones.

## Migration theories, transnational studies and colonial legacies

Children's experiences of moving and settling in a new country need to be viewed within the wider theoretical context of migration patterns. Despite the fact that, as already discussed in the previous section, children's power to choose whether to migrate or remain is generally limited (although there are instances of under-age migrants travelling unaccompanied), the family's decision can only be understood as a result of the global forces and local dynamics that shape migration flows. These forces inevitably also have repercussions on the children of migrants, whether the young people migrate or remain in the sending country.

This section gives a brief overview of the main theories of migration, both from a macro (global, intra/inter-national) and micro (local communities, families and individuals) perspective. It also attempts to link together these theories as different theoretical approaches can be useful to explain specific phases or specific trends of what is a highly complex phenomenon. It then goes on to look at the links and practices that migrants entertain across borders once they have settled, at least for the short and medium term, in the receiving country.

It is now widely accepted (see Vertovec, 2009 Glick Schiller, 2008; Kleinshmidt, 2006; Levitt, 2001) that many migrants may not completely sever their ties with the sending country, even when they make the receiving country their new home. Furthermore, the transnational links and practices that migrants engage in often include children, whose wellbeing and achievements are the focus of many exchanges within the 'transnational social spaces' (Faist, 2000; Kleinschmidt, 2006), that migrant families are part of; moreover, as was clearly found in the present study, children play an important part in sustaining these ties, as they regularly engage in communication with relatives in the sending country.

A further topic explored in this section is the way in which the legacy of colonialism can still reverberate through time and inform the way in which people in ex-colonies perceive themselves and their country in relation to the industrialised countries of the North. The combined effect of the children's transnational links, of the popular narratives that have roots in the colonial legacy and in the ever-increasing availability of popular cultural products across borders helps to shape the way in which young migrants imagine countries, people and lives they often know only indirectly. The last part of the present section explores the literature which looks at 'imaginative geographies' and, in particular, at the imaginings and expectations of unknown places that young people may entertain.

### *Migration theories*

Different migration theories (see Castles and Miller, 2003; Massey *et al*, 1998; Zanfrini, 2007) have been put forward in order to explain the movement of people across international borders and to highlight the possible reasons why some (yet still comparatively few) individuals choose to move to a different country. 'Neoclassical economic theory', as outlined by Massey *et al* (1998) and by Portes and DeWind (2004), sees in concomitant global economic forces the principal instigator of migration, those which 'push' some individuals to leave their country of birth and those which 'pull' them towards industrialised areas of western nation-states where more jobs are available. According to this theory, in other words, countries that are experiencing job penury are naturally 'purged' of their surplus labour by economic forces which attract these same jobless people to countries which are experiencing economic expansion (see Castles, 2002; Bonifazi, 2007; Zanfrini, 2007).

However, the 'neoclassical economic theory' explanation of migration views migrants' choices in isolation, as each individual is seen as moving to improve his/her own chances of economic success in response to the closures and openings of opportunities created by 'push' and 'pull' forces. In contrast to this view, the 'new economics of migration' theory (see Massey *et al*, 1998; Portes and DeWind, 2004) argues that the decision to move is seldom an individual choice. Deciding to migrate is, in the majority of cases, part of a family's strategy to differentiate income and opportunities and diversify risk, as well as to provide a form of insurance in case of financial difficulty.

Wallerstein's (2004) 'world systems' perspective provides a wider, global dimension into which the decision is embedded and it is arguably the theory which more clearly shifts the dynamics of global economies from the single nation states to interconnected larger systems. As Wallerstein stresses, the contemporary capitalist world-economy comprises a wide geographic area defined *not* by political structures, religion, culture, etc., but by "[...] division of labor which is constituted within it." (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 23). Wallerstein (1976) also argues that it is impossible to look at most single systems (e.g. an economy, a nation-state, a firm, a family, a social class, etc.) as independent and self-sufficient. He posits that, as a consequence, only very small and isolated economies can be seen as independent systems, while most larger systems are 'worlds' that contain a multiplicity of cultures and which do not have an officially constituted single political structure of governance (Wallerstein, 1976; 2004).

Wallerstein's 'world systems' has a key role in highlighting how, despite the division into different nation-states, economies in a capitalist economy operate at a wider level than the single country. However, criticism of this theoretical framework has focused on the deterministic role that economic forces are seen to play within these systems (Berger, 1994) and on the lack of consideration for other agents of change, such as class struggle or interaction between nation-states. As Balibar (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988) points out, Wallerstein's world-economy is also the site for historical processes, and therefore needs to be seen as a collection of social units, as well as economic units, within which local forms of social conflict (economic but also religious, cultural and political) play out, something which, Balibar argues, Wallerstein's theory does not give enough relevance to (ibid.).

A 'world systems' point of view applied to analyse the processes of migration (Massey *et al*, 1998) reveals how the industrial development in the Western countries of the global North causes the South of the world to experience structural economic changes (e.g. changes in agricultural production) which, in turn, create the grounds for people's migration. Individuals with no secure employment and few hopes for upward mobility are, because of these global dynamics, more likely to migrate as a strategy for family risk diversification, whereby members of the same family differentiate sources of earning, thus ensuring against possible economic downturns (Stalker, 2000; Massey, 1990).

While global economic forces, together with families' risk diversification, can explain how a migration trend gets started, a further rationalization is needed to illustrate how, and why, migration flows become established and self-sustaining. Moving to settle in a new country is therefore the product of a dynamic combination of structural constraints and individual decisions. Massey (1990) terms 'cumulative causation' the process through which global economic forces, family strategies and individual agency combine to determine the likelihood of people's movement. However, the mechanisms through which the structural forces prepare the ground for individual choice need further explanation, as does the way in which migration often becomes a trend that can involve a relatively large number of people from particular areas of the world, such as the developing countries of the global South.

The concept of 'relative deprivation' (Stark and Taylor, 1989) can help to explain this trend by highlighting how the (perceived) successes of each individual migrant, which is reflected in the improved lifestyle of the families back in the sending country, causes those who do not have a family member abroad to feel comparatively deprived. As was also found by the present study, having a migrant in the family can lend a patina of status and prestige even to children, as they are at the receiving end of money and presents. A feeling of relative deprivation, along with the changes in values, tastes and cultural perception that migrants bring back to the sending country, can engender a 'culture of migration' (Massey *et al*. 1998; Kandel and Massey, 2002; de Haas, 2010). This is a dynamic that can make relocation to a 'First World' country almost a compulsory rite of passage for the young, often male, section of a community (Pœrrengaard, 1997; Jones and Kittisuksathit, 2003). When a culture of migration is established, going abroad to improve one's personal chances starts to be looked upon with favour, even to be expected, and those who show the necessary 'entrepreneurial' skills are rewarded with higher status and prestige within the sending community (de Haas, 2010; Ali, 2007).

Once migration is established, those who have left send, regularly or less regularly, money and goods to those who remain in the sending countries (Tiemoko, 2005; Gallina, 2004). Remittances perform several functions, including: being a duty to the members of the family 'abandoned' upon leaving (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989); being invested to set up a business, which can then be run by other members of the family, and which represents an increase in income as well as a safety net should they return; being put towards the repayment of a loan and/or the financial costs incurred by the family in order to cover the expense of a member's migration; being invested to buy land or build a house as an investment; and, lastly, they perform the important psychological function of sustaining the dream of being able to return, one day in the future (Addison, 2005; Mazzucato *et al.*, 2005; Kurien, 2008). In some cases, remittances go to finance the construction or restoration of public buildings (e.g. churches or schools), thus enhancing the migrant's prestige within the sending community as well as that of his or her family of origin (Kabki *et al,* 2004).

The constant flow of remittances from the destination country to the sending country takes the form of goods and money but also of ideas and practices, what Levitt (2001) terms 'social remittances'. These exchanges have the power to influence the life of non-migrants by bringing new material and social elements into their existing realities. Social remittances, in particular, can engender demand for different ways of relating, both in the public arena (e.g. demands for more 'democratic' forms of political participation or for more transparency in official dealings) and in the more 'private' sphere (e.g. demands for more equal division of housework or childcare within couples) (ibid.). The new mores emigrants bring back to the sending country can also reinforce the image of the West spread by the global media (Dolby, 2006). This can engender demands for change and improvement but also increase dissatisfaction with a way of life that is perceived as less 'modern', rewarding, or desirable (Mai, 2001; Pajo, 2007).

The view of life in the destination countries as more desirable can be further reinforced by the reality migrants portray of their life in the new country, a 'reality' that can be distorted or censored. It is not uncommon for migrants (actual, potential or former), in fact, to avoid exposing the difficulties and hardship many of them daily experience in the destination countries while, at the same time, over-emphasising the successes and rewards of migration (Thorsen, 2007). In this way they contribute to the perpetration of a 'mythical' picture of migrant life, the portrayal of a much more successful and trouble-free experience than they obtain in reality. This is what Sayad (2004) calls the 'collective lie', a mechanism which will be further discussed in a later section of the present chapter.

While 'world systems' theory, at a macro level, and the emergence of a culture of migration, at a local level, can offer a framework explaining why some decide to migrate, it cannot explain why others, the vast majority, choose not to leave. Faist (2000) explains this with the availability to individuals of social capital (or lack thereof). As defined by Bourdieu (1986), social capital is constituted by the network of people to whom individuals have access. The potential for information, financial help and practical aid this form of capital affords means that individuals with low social capital need to invest (financially and psychologically) very heavily in a migration project. The balance between costs and gains may make the option of leaving, for those who do not have access to the relevant social capital, ultimately unprofitable.

As well as practical and financial calculations, individuals also invest, in a migration project, their personal aspirations, hopes and dreams. As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) point out: “Hope is the single trait that cuts across at least the initial stages of all immigrations. The hope for ‘a better tomorrow’ is the mantra that almost all immigrants recite as they enter a new country” (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 122). Discourses centred on the desire for a better future, either for the individuals who migrate or for their offspring (ibid.), run through all types of migration, from the difficult choice made by those trying to flee poverty and conflict - although, as Bauman (1998) observes, this is a ‘luxury’ many cannot afford - to the ‘lifestyle’ migration of professionals or people seeking a slower pace of life (Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010).

Defying a simple causal explanation, the decision to stay or leave appears to be dictated by the combination of a series of financial, social and psychological factors. As Wacquant stresses neither structural necessity nor individual agency can, on its own, explain social dynamics and each term of this opposing pair reinforces the other; taken in isolation, each colludes “[...] in obfuscating the anthropological truth of human practice” (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 10). Moving to settle in a new country is a choice at the intersection between structural forces and individual agency, and neither element of this opposing pair can, on its own, suffice to give an informed view of migration.

Spurred by the need to find alternative destinations to Nigeria because of the downturn in the country’s economy during the 1980s (Altin, 2004), Ghana’s aspiring migrants were lured to Italy by demand for cheap labour which fuelled an upturn in the Italian economy during the same period (Einaudi, 2007). Inscribed in these macro-economic forces, however, are the ambitions and aspirations of individual migrants who, as the narratives of the young participants show, see in migration to a Western country a chance for social, as well as economic, improvement.

### *Migrants' transnational links and practices*

As previously emphasised, a 'world systems' perspective (Wallerstein, 2004) sets out the structural elements which lay the ground for people's movement between countries and highlights the necessary interconnectedness of these elements within a capitalist world economy. Meanwhile, 'relative deprivation theory' (Stark and Taylor, 1989) highlights the way in which migration, once established, connects individuals, goods and narratives across borders and thus sustains migration flows.

Once individuals decide to move to a new country, however, they often do so on the assumption that they will remain only for the time strictly necessary to achieve a particular goal (e.g. earning enough money to build a house; putting to one side the financial capital necessary to start a business in the sending country or to send children to a particular school/university, etc) and expect to go back as soon as this goal is reached (Hagelskamp *et al,* 2010). However, as Sayad (2004) notices, the dream of (permanently) returning that helps so many migrants survive the difficulties of life in a country that often looks down on them may prove to be the 'temporary that lasts' (p. 74) or, as other authors put it, it may prove to be a 'myth' (e.g. Vasta and Kandilige, 2010; Sinatti, 2011), a false but widespread expectation that, in some cases, will not be fulfilled.

Keeping social and symbolic capital flowing between sending and receiving countries can be of primary importance for migrants (but also non-migrants in the sending country), and transnational practices may even become more frequent the longer migrants remain in the receiving country (Portes and DeWind, 2004), as high expectations come up against the practical difficulties of life in the receiving country. The reasons why some migrants may end up remaining in the receiving country longer than expected are several: because gaining the targeted material assets is harder than they had anticipated (Sayad, 2004); because with time they may set up family in the receiving country and develop various social attachments (Constant and Massey, 2002); because they acquire lifestyles, tastes and attitudes that make them feel foreigners in their home country (Pajo, 2007; Ryan *et al.*, 2009); or a varying combination of all of these.

In some cases, migrants can end up gradually distancing themselves from those they left behind, in particular when they are having financial difficulties in the destination country and cannot provide the material help those back 'home' expect or demand, and a few can end up severing the ties with the sending community (Sayad, 2004). However, the majority of migrants work hard at maintaining close ties with the families and communities they left behind. To this end, a substantial number of labour migrants engage in transnational practices, helped by cheaper transport and phone calls, which have made keeping in touch relatively cheap and fast (Basch *et al.*, 1994; Castles, 2002; Mazzucato, 2008), and by the flow of information allowed by more recent forms of technology, such as satellite TV and the Internet (Vertovec, 2004; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002); the former, in particular, appears to be an important source of ideas for the young participants to the present study who were born in the receiving country. This allows migrants (at least those who possess cultural and symbolic capital) to remain up to date with political news and social changes in the country of origin and to be part of the sending country's civic and political fabric, even from a distance (Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2003; Faist, 2000; Vertovec, 2009).

As Basch *et al*. (1994) observe, the governments of sending countries often encourage the formation of transnational spaces, as migrants' loyalty can benefit them politically while migrants' remittances can bring much needed hard currency. Moreover, migrants' remittances allow those who leave to be part of the 'family' and of the community even when not physically present. Mansour Tall (2005) argues, moreover, that this spells the age of 'virtual proximity' for those migrants who can afford to keep close contact with the sending communities. Through these practices migrants can maintain and even increase their symbolic capital, as well as improve their family's status and prestige.

Criticism has been levelled at the idea of transnationalism. This has centred primarily on stressing the role of national borders in shaping migration flows and on the effect of national and international politics in defining the extent of migrants' enduring connections to sending and receiving countries (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). Further criticism also focuses on the extent to which transnationalism can be identified as a new phenomenon (the counter-argument being that it cannot) and on the lack of a clear definition for the term 'transnational' and 'transnationalism' (Kivisto, 2001) which, it is argued, can include too great a variety of practices to be of analytical value. This criticism reflects, as Vertovec (2009) notices, relevant points, which need to be borne in mind and addressed. However, they do not detract from the fundamental insight that most migrants maintain links to both sending and receiving country and sustain interactions within 'transnational social spaces' (Faist, 2000) which see also the contribution, as was apparent in the present research, of young migrants and of the young people born in the receiving country.

### *Post-colonial legacies*

The choice of destination for migration has traditionally been a country with which the sending nation-states have historical ties (Stalker, 2000; Massey *et al*, 1998), often ties which have their roots in the colonial past. In the past few decades, however, a reversal of previous policies of active recruitment in these destinations (e.g. the UK, Germany, France, the USA) coupled with the increase in job availability in non-traditional destinations (e.g. the southern-European countries) have meant a diversification of migration trajectories (Castles and Miller, 2003; Soysal, 1994; Zaiceva and Zimmerman, 2008).

For many migrants, in particular those who decide to move from former colonies to the country that once colonised them, the level of discrimination and racism encountered in the receiving country can be especially difficult to face, as they may feel a particular affinity to the Western country to which they move (Sayad, 2004; Du Bois, 2007) and whose language they often speak. In some cases, as was found in the present study, migration to a country that is not the former coloniser (and in which a different language is spoken) can be perceived as 'next best' option, and an intermediate step in a sequential configuration of improving destinations.

As Memmi argues, the colonized quickly understood that they would not advance in life unless they abandoned the original languages and adopted that of the colonizers, a process he describes as a 'linguistic drama' (Memmi, 1974, p. 152). This is expanded by Fanon's consideration that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (Fanon, 2008, p. 25). Indeed this is still the case, as in many of the ex-colonies of the world's South the way of life is deeply steeped in the ex-colonisers' culture as well as in the global cultural products of Western production (Said, 1993). The colonial powers may have left physically "[...] but they retained [their old colonies] not only as markets but as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually" (ibid., p. 27).

When they arrive in a Western country as (aspiring) workers, however, migrants can encounter discrimination and racism and may be quite shocked to find that the receiving society looks at them as threatening the local culture, taking advantage of the welfare system, as stealing jobs that should go to the locals and, in some cases, even as potential criminals (Branton and Dunaway, 2008). While these negative representations refer to all unskilled immigrants, sub-Saharan African migrants in a predominantly 'white' country cannot hide or disguise their otherness, as the colour of their skin identifies them immediately as 'alien'; as Fanon stated back in the 1960s, it is upon encountering a white person that black people come to perceive themselves as objects of discrimination (Fanon, 2008).

Bourdieu and Wacquant note how "cultural imperialism rests on the power to universalise particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognized as such" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, p. 41). This 'misrecognition', which is the process at the base of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1979b; 1990a), ensures that migrants know their place and also that they interiorise dominant discourses and accept them as normal, thus coming to look at their own cultural beliefs and practices as 'backward' and inferior (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). As Sayad (2004) observes, maintaining migrants in an inferior position is achieved by ensuring the 'depoliticization' of immigration, that is, by reducing social inequalities to a matter of cultural differences.

The interiorising of negative portrayals is not all-encompassing, however, and there are instances of migrants' awareness of the fundamental role they play in Western countries' economies and of a consequent recognition of the exploitation that many of them suffer[13]. The increased contact between different mores and lifestyles can originate hybrid (or 'creole') cultures (Hannerz, 1996; Sen, 2006; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007) which see Western products adapted to local customs and practices. Often hybrid cultures in Western countries start as the product of marginal youth groups' opposition to dominant cultures - in some cases only to be then 'metabolised' by mainstream cultural bodies (Andrews and Silk, 2010). In some cases, strategies of defiance, such as ridiculing and mimicry of the majority group, may be put into place by marginal youth, and 'code switching' (i.e. use of home language, of the language of the receiving country, or a 'street' language which mixes the two) can be used to convey belonging, inclusion and exclusion in specific situations (Eksner and Faulsitch Orellana, 2005). Nevertheless, the colonial discourses, which constructed the 'Other' as different (and subordinate), still reverberate through the interiorisation of these discourses on the part of the former colonial subjects, who have learnt to see themselves as the 'Other' (Hall, 2003). The process of 'othering' is, as Hall (1989) argues, essential in the definition of the self, identified as 'non-other', something which, in the encounter between majority population and minority groups of immigrant origin, can frame relationships of power where the 'Other' is (symbolically) expelled from the body of the nation and confined to the margins.

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[13] See the 1st of March 2010 migrants' strike in Europe and the migrants' 2006 economic boycott in the US (source: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/02/march-1-immigrants-protest Accessed on 11th February 2011)

Migrants often resort to enduring the social demotion they experience in the destination country (Fumanti, 2009), but his can have a strong impact on migrants' psychological wellbeing, as "migration is one of life's emergencies that exposes the individual who experiences it to a state of disorganization and requires a subsequent reorganization that is not always achieved." (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989, p. 14). However, the difficulties of migration can be somewhat mitigated by the individuals' knowledge that they can, precisely by way of their migrant status, gain standing in the sending community and increase their social capital and prestige by maintaining transnational links and practices (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007).

## Children's imaginings across borders

Practices that span national borders can be entertained at different levels. Some, such as political transnational practices, are the prerogative of a few individuals who have the necessary financial and symbolic capital (Portes, 2003). However, many 'ordinary' migrants, as also emerges from the present study, engage in small scale but significant practices that cross over two (or more) countries. These practices can take many forms, often present in a variety of combinations in most migrant households: phone conversations and computer-mediated contacts, sending of money and presents, exchange of photographs and home-movies, purchase of country-specific products (e.g. foodstuff, toiletries, etc.), viewing of satellite TV and of DVDs of films produced in the sending country, etc. (Dreby, 2010; Yeoh and Lam, 2006). These common, everyday practices, which conjure a 'banal' (routine, rather than celebratory) attachment to the nation (Billig, 1995), can inform the imaginings of children who are living in a different country from the country where their parents are, but also those of the children of migrants who are far from extended family and friends. Whether they are migrants themselves or not, children (as well as adults) are influenced, directly or indirectly, by transnational practices (Levitt, 2001; Levitt and Jaworksky, 2007) and by the cultural cross-pollination these practices can engender.

Most children who are left in the sending country have regular contacts with their parent(s) in the destination country and also, albeit with less frequency, talk to them when they are back on a visit (Yeoh and Lam, 2006). The children who have moved keep in touch with close relatives and friends they left behind. The children who were born in the destination country have frequent contacts with close relations in the country of origin of their parents (Penn and Lambert, 2009); sometimes they are taken there on visits, in most cases their parents go back 'home' regularly and, on returning, bring their children 'snippets' of it, in the form of food, clothes and memories. In all cases, the 'other' country's products, habits, beliefs and customs make up at least some part of their daily lives (Dreby, 2010). Since, moreover, building houses in the sending country is such a common practice for migrants (Kurien, 2008), children who are born of migrant parents in the country of settlement cannot but be aware of these 'roots' of brick and mortar which can take up a lot of their parents' time, money and preoccupation (Riccio, 2008).

All these factors mean that the children of migrants, whether they are in the country of origin or in that of destination, have direct and/or indirect links to several places at once. Within the limits set by their social circumstances, knowledge of (and an emotional link to) different places and mores gives children a wider array of elements that can compose the make-up of individuals' identities. As Christensen *et al* point out, "[...] identities are neither fixed nor given; they are not ascribed by belonging to a particular culture or living in a particular space. Rather, identities are achieved, negotiated, experimented with and challenged" (Christensen *et al.,* 2000, p. 141). Identities are, in other words, primarily relational.

The privileged site of the negotiation of identities is the transnational space allowed by migration, which offers a multitude of realities (actual or imagined) that individuals can inhabit at any one time. Said (1978) observes that the creation of 'the other' and of the spaces this other is imagined to inhabit is a strong element in the construction of personal and national identities, which come into being by opposition and difference (cf. Hall, 1993; Edensor, 2002; Bauman, 2001).

In the case of migrant children, the emotional closeness of these 'imaginative geographies' (Said, 1978) that are, at the same time, the site of memories and projects and the places where significant others live, is also invested with the potential for a different self, as the children can imagine a future when they will be part of these geographies. As such, they are incorporated into the repertoire of aspirations and hopes that the children entertain, and therefore become constitutive of the children's identity by identification and because of their commonalities with the children's lives, rather than by opposition (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b).

The way the children imagine the country where their parents are (or, in the case of the children of migrants, where their parents came from) can give us an idea of the elements which they choose in order to construct these imageries. As Appadurai notes:

> Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6)

The constitutive parts of young people's imaginings tell us what they regard as relevant and important, what are the 'mental pixels' used in the make-up of both positive and negative pictures. Moreover, as van Blerk and Ansell (2006) argue, the way in which children construct their imaginative geographies in relation to migration is linked to the way in which they experience the place they belong to. In other words, the way in which the imagined country is constructed gives us an indication of the way in which the lived country is experienced, as there is a comparative dynamic relation between imagining and perceiving.

As in Hall's reflections on Caribbean identity, migrant children's identity is "[...] 'framed' by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture" (Hall, 2003, p. 226). The identity of the migrant children who took part in the present study likewise appears to be the result of the dialogic relationship between these two vectors, the result of both identification with the receiving country's society and its values and habits and also with those of the sending communities; but it is also the product of the (real or perceived) differences with both sending and receiving countries' mores and a distancing from either. The composite nature of identity means that children also view their life in the receiving country on the basis of their social selves: as gendered beings, as having particular interests and tastes, as sons and daughters and as pupils (Sen, 2006). All of these factors play a part in shaping children's expectations and imaginings of what living in a new country will be like and, as a consequence of this influence, they can also affect young people's reactions to the lived experience of the previously imagined.

## Structure and agency: beyond the dichotomy

Young people's imaginings and expectations of life in a new country are the combined result of their personal histories and the socially constructed limitations of their positionality, which is classed, racialised, gendered, and age-specific. This section illustrates the theoretical framework that was useful in understanding how structural forces are embodied in individual, apparently unrestricted, everyday actions. To start with, it looks at the work of Pierre Bourdieu, as the conceptual tools he puts forward are the result of a conscious wish to shift the understanding of the workings of society beyond the structure/agency dichotomy. Bourdieu invites to modify and adapt his theoretical tools to different circumstances (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), since they are meant as 'working tools' and are not to be treated as unchangeable dogmas.

The concepts Bourdieu puts forward can be used to highlight the mechanisms of reproduction of dominant cultures in a variety of situations, but particularly so when different cultures come into contact, as is the case when individuals migrate. Through the processes which Bourdieu's work help to foreground, the binary opposition of structural constraint and human agency is revealed as a false opposition, as the socially constituted classificatory schemes for the representation of society tend to represent the structures of which they are a product (ibid.). Bourdieu's theoretical tools are particularly valuable in making sense of the mechanisms through which children are 'socialised' into having particular aspirations, interests and expectations; they also highlight how different 'socialisations' (which produce what Bourdieu calls *habitus*) can expose the arbitrary nature of these mechanisms, something which is, again, particularly evident when these different 'socialisations' come together (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The work of Abdelmalek Sayad is also explored, as he applied Bourdieu's insights to the analysis of migrants' discourses. His groundbreaking insights on Algerian migration to France resonate very powerfully with the research questions that are at the heart of the present project as Sayad stresses the importance of looking at migration as a continuous, dynamic process that spans across borders.

Finally, a section will be devoted to the several other works, from a variety of disciplines, which were fundamental in making sense of the data collected. The works of Mary Douglas and of Sjaak van der Geest on the symbolism of dirt and cleanliness are at the heart of this section, as well as studies on witchcraft and the evil which was a topic that appeared to intrigue several of the young participants. Moreover, the genesis of shared geographies 'territorialised fulfilment' (Pajo, 2007), which are a recurrent theme in the narratives of migrants from different backgrounds and in different receiving countries, will be illustrated and discussed.

### ***Forms of capital, habitus and field, symbolic violence: the work of Pierre Bourdieu***

Bourdieu's analytical framework (Bourdieu,1979a; 1979b; 1986; 1990a; 1990b; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) lays bare the societal constraints that limit and channel individuals' agency. It also traces the patterns of power relations in everyday life that allow for these limits to be perpetrated through institutional means but also through each person's actions and discourses. The concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1979a; 1990a; 1990b; Eagleton, 2007; Bottomley, 1992), in particular, is an invaluable tool for making sense of the 'circular' way in which different social *fields*, that is, the different social spaces ruled by specific norms or interests (e.g. academic, leisure, professional fields, etc.), generate behaviours that are perfectly adapted to maintaining and reinforcing the relations of power within them (cf. Foucault, 2002). At the same time, behaviours that may challenge their field's internal equilibrium are excluded or negatively sanctioned. In this way the *habitus* protects itself by maintaining and perpetrating the fields to which it is adapted (Bourdieu, 1979a; 1990b; Eagleton, 2007; Nash, 1990). Thus the *habitus* is, in Bourdieusian theory, the (literal) embodiment of a 'cultural arbitrary': the way in which the cultural systems, beliefs and values (that are 'arbitrary' since alternative systems, beliefs and values are always possible) are incarnated in individuals' specific tastes, accents, postures, etc. (Bourdieu, 1979a) so that they act as makers of distinction.

The embodiment of the cultural arbitrary in *habitus* is the reason why, as Bourdieu observes, some individuals appear to be perfectly adapted to particular situations, to fit in 'naturally' and to know precisely what (not) to do and say. Bourdieu (1990a) described this apparently instinctive adaptation provided by *habitus* as 'the feel for the game', and compared it to the 'natural' way in which expert players appear to know exactly how to respond to the challenges of a game, even though each game is different. However, as with players, the individuals' degree of proficiency can vary and Bourdieu notices how the socially constructed nature of the *habitus* becomes more evident when the *habitus* required by a particular field differs quite substantially from the one acquired originally.

The 'clash' of *habitus* developed in different contexts is precisely the situation in which many migrants find themselves, as they move to countries in which the 'structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1990b; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) required for making sense and interacting within society may be quite different from the ones learnt while growing up. The juxtaposition of differing *habitus* can bring the arbitrariness of cultural givens into sharp relief, as is demonstrated by the present study, in particular when children need to adapt to the requirements of institutional fields, such as that of education. A large part of the process defined as 'integrating', which is expected (often demanded) of migrants, consists precisely in adopting the new *habitus* and learning what they can and cannot expect and aspire to: that is, it consists of yielding to the dominant groups' 'symbolic violence' (cf. Žižek, 2008a).

The different *habitus* are, in fact, socially maintained and perpetrated through 'symbolic violence' (1979a; 1979b; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), a form of imposition that relies on 'misrecognition': it is hidden and camouflaged so as not to be recognized as violence, rendered 'natural' so that the victims themselves may play a part in perpetrating it. Thus the concept of *habitus* links to the Gramscian idea that the hegemonic powers of the dominant groups, far from being imposed by open constraints and violence, are perpetrated by persuasion (which passes through civil society); in this way, argues Gramsci, they acquire the consensus of the dominated (Buttigieg, 2005).

Bourdieu's theoretical framework provides another set of tools that can prove extremely useful in making sense of migrants' choices, both before and after moving. He highlights how individuals possess, at one time, several forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic), that is, the pool of resources to which each individual has access (Bourdieu, 1986) at any particular moment in time. These resources are unequally distributed, take time to be accumulated and can be increased, but also lost. Some of these forms of capital are more readily transferable than others, and economic capital, in particular, can move between borders quite easily and can be converted and used in most countries (although its relative value may decrease considerably through exchange rates). Social, cultural and symbolic capital, however, are closely tied to the requirements of the fields within which they were accumulated and can only seldom be moved from one country to another without risking their devaluation or even loss (Faist, 2000). These forms of capital are all essential to facilitate migration and subsequent settlement in a new country by reducing the costs involved and providing valuable knowledge and support.

Migrants' social capital is often spread between several countries. However, since social capital rests on the dimensions of obligations, reciprocity, and solidarity (Faist, 2000), which almost always require a two-way flow, migrants risk losing their social capital in the country of origin unless they are prepared (or able) to invest in maintaining it. Keeping in touch by communicating regularly, sending back remittances and gifts, and, generally, being as 'present' as possible even when absent, is an important strategy for the preservation of social capital, one to which children too are called to contribute.

Institutionally sanctioned cultural capital, like social capital, is not readily transferable, and many migrants experience difficulties in having their qualifications and skills recognised, in particular if they are location-specific and/or require fluency to be employed (e.g. teaching qualifications, law degrees, etc.). Children suffer from this too, and many of them arrive in the new country to find that the language barrier stops them from making full use of their previous knowledge and that the schools they attend may do little to valorise the skills they have learnt in a different context (Leonard, 2005). This may lead to a vicious circle of struggle which can result, for the children of migrants, in the accumulation of "[...] *negative symbolic capital* [reinforced by] the external signs of their body hexis that function as stigmata, along with proper name, accent, and also [...] place of residence" (Bourdieu *et al,* 1999, p. 185).

Symbolic capital is the form of capital that rests on reputation and other people's opinion (such as attributes of honour, authority and influence); it is gained on the basis of the combined social, cultural and economic capital held by an individual and his close connections, and it is compounded by the institutionalized sanctioning of these specific forms of capital (e.g. academic, professional or aristocratic titles). Symbolic capital perpetrates itself by wielding 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1979b), that is, the authority to impose and influence the relative weight of particular components of economic, social or cultural capital that have currency within society (and thus count towards symbolic capital). In this way, the holders of officially sanctioned symbolic capital (e.g. academic titles) have the power to shape what counts towards symbolic capital (e.g. education curriculums) and thus ensure the control and reproduction of cultural arbitraries (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This recalls Foucault's analysis of power and the ways in which it perpetrates itself not only through the use of force or coercion but also by producing discourses and forms of knowledge (ed. Rabinow, 1986) which are officially recognised.

Symbolic capital is perhaps the form of capital that is the hardest to transfer in the case of migration. The authority and power an individual may enjoy in the country of origin are often lost upon arrival in the receiving country. Upon arrival, in fact, migrants may find themselves at the very bottom of the social ladder, regardless of the background or status they had in the sending country (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Children are affected by the loss of status of their parents, but they can also experience a decrease in the symbolic power they held amongst their peers in the sending country and can also find themselves at the receiving end of symbolic violence, as several of the children in the present study demonstrate. Building a social network of friends in the new country can be a long process, in particular when the children's physical appearance is a 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963) which immediately identifies them as immigrants and therefore, according to widespread portrayals of immigration in many Western countries, as either 'poor and needy' or 'freeloading and lazy' (King and Mai, 2008).

Rooted in his activity as an ethnographer in colonial Algeria (Wacquant, 2006), Bourdieu's theoretical tools are of great value in the analysis of migrants' expectations and experiences, as his body of work offers a view of the (apparently) mundane ways in which dominant cultural arbitraries perpetrate themselves through individuals' every-day practices. Through these tools we can make sense of the dynamic and fluid manner in which practices are constantly re-negotiated, of the 'generative principle' of practice (Acciaioli, 1981) to which 'banal' acts obey (cf. Billig, 1995). This is a set of conceptual tools which are, as Wacquant asserts, "[...] driven by questions of field research centered on social transformation, cultural disjuncture, and the fissuring of consciousness" (Wacquant, 2004, p. 387), issues that are highly relevant in the case of migration.

The main criticism of Bourdieu's theoretical work concerns the fact that, while it explicitly aims to overcome the subject/object dichotomy, the concept of *habitus* suffers from a relapse into a form of 'sophisticated objectivism' (King, 2000), as the individual subjectivity and agency is trapped in the cage of structural determinism. Bourdieu (1990a) responds to this criticism by pointing out that these objections stem precisely from a rigidly dualistic way of reading his work, the same rigidity his work sets out to challenge. Bourdieu's 'practical theory' derives, as Wacquant (2004) reminds us, from the concrete needs of empirical research, and were developed as working tools to be adapted to the specificities of ever-different situations.

Bourdieu (in line with Mills, 1959) is highly critical of 'conspicuous theorizing' that has no connection to the concrete realities of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). As King (2000) points out, Bourdieu's work allows researchers to think 'with Bourdieu against Bourdieu' and to see that in the interplay between *habitus* and field the flexibility of his 'theoretical practice' becomes apparent, as individuals can transform their *habitus* to adapt it to the different fields, thus overcoming the strict determinism of the concept of *habitus* when taken in isolation. The interplay between *habitus* and changing field is, again, very relevant in the case of migration, as individuals need to adapt to changed circumstances.

### *Linking Bourdieu and migration: the work of Abdelmalek Sayad*

Bourdieu's theoretical tools are well suited to the analysis of the dynamics of migration; concepts such as those of field, *habitus,* forms of capital and symbolic violence can be shown to come into play at different stages of the migration process. A number of authors have used Bourdieu's theory to analyse and interpret the dynamics of migration (e.g. Bottomley, 1992; de Haas, 2010; Kelly and Lusis, 2006). In particular, a few studies explore the importance of the various forms of capital in order to make moving and settling more easy and less costly both in financial and emotional terms (e.g. Marshall and Foster, 2002; Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010).

The work that fully exploits Bourdieu's conceptual tools, in order to explore the ways in which migration impacts on individuals and communities, is that of Bourdieu's student Abdelmalek Sayad (Bourdieu, 2004). Sayad's 'The Suffering of the Immigrant' (2004) is a collection of articles and lectures that spans two decades, from 1975 to 1996, and that was published posthumously (with a preface by Bourdieu). In these writings Sayad explores the material and emotional difficulties that all migrants face, as *emigrants*, when they leave their country and communities, and as *immigrants*, while they (struggle to) settle in a new environment. Sayad notices how economic necessity can exercise its power only by being collectively 'misrecognised' (in Bourdieusian terms), that is, by hiding the many difficulties and disappointments migration too often entails. This brings echoes of Goffman's (1959) insights on the role of front stage and backstage 'performances' in which individuals engage, with the more public (front stage) presentation of the self 'purged' of the elements that could produce unfavourable impressions on others.

About Algerian migrants to France, Sayad observes how the mechanism of misrecognition has a 'collective' nature, as it affects individuals at different stages of migration: those who have emigrated, who carefully select the information they give to those who remain in the sending country; those who have returned to the sending country, who "[...] 'enchant' the memories they retain [...]" (Sayad, 2004: 27); and those who aspire to migrate and who project unrealistic expectations on the (potential) country of destination. It is this shared misrecognition that Sayad calls 'the collective lie', a lie which is made necessary also by the need to prove that the leaving of one's community (with the sense of 'betrayal' of this may engender) was worth it after all (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989).

A further very important insight of Sayad's work is the acknowledgement of the 'double absence' (and, at the same time, of the 'double presence') that most migrants experience (see also Losi, 2006); they belong to two countries while, at the same time, they may not feel fully members of either. He notices how often migrants tell themselves, and their close others, that they will only stay in the country of destination for a limited period of time, until they have fulfilled a particular (often financial) goal. In many cases this turns out to be a myth and thus, "torn between two 'times', between two countries and between two conditions, an entire community lives as though it were 'in transit'" (Sayad, 2004, p. 58). For some, as the present study demonstrates, this 'transitory' nature of migration can be traced even in the narratives of 'second generation migrants', as they shift their hopes and aspirations to yet another country.

Family migration is an indication of a more 'settled' type of migration, one that implies some kind of permanence, and this is the reason why, Sayad (2004) argues, it is a practice which identifies a more established type of emigration. It is a practice situated at the end stage of a history of migration that has slowly made leaving more acceptable to individuals and communities. From the point of view of the sending community, the migration of a family unit means a clear break on the part of the emigrants, a sign that return is unlikely or, at least, not likely in the short or medium term. On the other hand, for the destination country family migration represents a proof that the immigrants share a similar *habitus*, that their family structure is comparable to that of the country of destination and that they are therefore part of the same 'domestic morality' (ibid., p. 72). These are seen, according to Sayad, as the more 'assimilable' migrants, those whom the destination society perceives as 'compatible' and accepts more readily, provided that their familial pattern conforms to the nuclear family pattern of the Western norm.

While families are expected to integrate more readily, the receiving society's calls and demands for migrants' integration are, Sayad argues, empty calls, designed to 'depoliticize' migration by confining it to the moral sphere. Migrants who 'fail' to integrate, to adopt the mores and values of the receiving country, are seen as refusing to do so, as choosing to remain separate from the receiving society; as consequence of this view, migrants may be held responsible for the marginality they suffer (Triandafyllidou, 2000). Demanding integration, as Sayad fittingly points out, is to 'want what cannot be wanted'. "[It] is like wanting to forget, wanting to be natural or wanting to sleep", a mental state which can only be the consequence of other factors and not willed nor forced. Instead, Sayad argues, integration should be achieved as "[...] a *side effect* of actions undertaken for different purposes" (Sayad, 2004, p. 223, emphasis in the original), and thus integration can only be the result of (as opposed to the requisite for) the involvement of individuals in the political, economic and social life of the receiving country, and in having a stake in the societies into which they are asked to integrate.

## Further interpretive tools: anthropological insights

Young people who are about to migrate have great expectations of what this change will entail for them (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and may be very excited at the prospect of starting anew in a country that embodies their dreams of a 'better' future (Losi, 2006). However, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (2000) observe, understanding the processes and implications of migration also means looking into the 'social unconscious' and uncovering the hidden implications that lay beyond the immediate, literal meaning of words. The present section will deal with the literature that was approached, following the fieldwork, in order to make sense of the data collected. It is mostly works of anthropology that were found useful in understanding the symbolic aspects of specific recurrent discourses. The work of Mary Douglas (1966 and 1970) was especially valuable in disclosing the emblematic significance of the young participants' recurrent discourses about the 'dirt' and 'neatness' of Ghana and Italy, the two countries that form the geographical background of the study. Douglas's work was also very important in giving a social background to the theme of witchcraft that was introduced by some of the children.

Douglas argues that "[...] our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (Douglas, 1966, p. 37). The condemnation and rejection of 'dirt' are thus grounded in an ideal 'state' of being which needs to be protected from threats such as the possibility of destitution, failure and social exclusion. Van Der Geest (1998) situates in a Ghanaian context the moral and social importance of discourses on cleanliness and dirt. He argues that, in much of Ghana, the adjective 'neat' is synonymous with 'advanced' and with moral superiority, while its opposite, 'dirty', has implications of backwardness and lack of respect.

Douglas's work (1970) is also important in identifying the roles and relevance of witchcraft beliefs that were mentioned by several of the young participants in the present study. She argues that 'magicality' serves to exercise social control, and that it necessarily rests on shared consent: through beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery, societies make sure that the system which produces them is perpetrated and its social equilibrium is maintained. As such, "magicality is an instrument of mutual coercion [...]" (ibid., p. 157) through which individuals ensure that behaviour which deviates from the 'norm' is neutralised and the social hierarchies within communities perpetrated. Thus, in Douglas's analysis, 'magicality' serves as a means through which communities ensure conformity and defuse the potential negative effects of adversities and failure.

Douglas's insights are further extended by the work of van Dijk (1995), whose study on witchcraft practices in Malawi highlights the links between rural-urban migration and the difficulties faced by young emigrants, used to the city's lifestyle and values, in coming to terms with the mores of the sending villages. While Cormanoff and Cormanoff's (eds.,1993) idea of witchcraft is that of collective constructions which help communities deal with deep changes from a subsistence economy to a cash economy, van Dijk (1995) sees, in instances of witchcraft denunciations, a way for young men who have migrated to urban areas to keep at bay the demands for practical, emotional and financial help of the sending rural communities.

Rather than an attempt to make sense of modernity, accusations of witchcraft are, according to van Dijk, an intuitive strategy employed by 'urbanised' youth to come to terms with the representations and power relations of the villages of origin, and also a way for them to challenge the 'gerontocracy' prevalent in the areas of provenance and, as a consequence, shift the traditional power structure in their favour. The accusations of witchcraft Van Dijk encountered during his fieldwork, in fact, came mostly from young urban Born Again preachers and were directed towards older individuals living in the rural areas the preachers originally came from. Van Dijk observes how, for these young people, now used to the life and mores of the cities where they have settled, the village "[...] brings together in a dialectical way a world that entices but at the same time is experienced as threatening and dangerous, *a world that is partially known through occasional visits and contacts with relatives, but at the same time remains incomprehensible through its many esoteric rituals and forces*" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 185, my emphasis). Instances of this partial acquaintance with the place of origin of one's family and of similar difficulties in comprehending the different mores and belief systems can also be traced in the words of some of the young participants in the present study.

Stewart and Strathern (2004), highlight the different (and coexisting) contexts in which witchcraft accusation can occur: on the one hand those who cannot achieve the desired success or wealth can explain this 'failure' by accusing others of 'evil doings' which prevented success; on the other, those who manage to obtain a coveted prize (e.g. a visa, a car, a well-paid job, etc.) can be accused of having used esoteric means to attain it. Material gain is especially associated, in much of West Africa, with a water-spirit known as Mami Wata (also Mammy Water). This mermaid-like creature, which was one of the topics of conversations of the young participants in this study (see chapter 5), is seen as having foreign origins (Dewal, 1988) and is closely connected to material objects and wealth. She will provide prosperity in exchange for love (Meyer, 2004) but, in time, all gains made by resorting to Mami Wata's favours are destined to be lost.

The majority of Ghanaian migrants in Italy are Christian, with an increasing Pentecostal component (Riccio, 2008), and the life of the Ghanaian community appears to revolve around the numerous small churches and the church services. As Gifford (2004) notices, a substantial number of Ghanaian Charismatic churches focus on 'deliverance', the relief from difficulties that can be caused by envious others (often members of the extended family) casting, even unwittingly, the evil eye (Foster, 1972). These churches offer protection to their congregation against failure, and promise earthly rewards, such as financial improvement, honour and, in general, wealthier lifestyles for those who sow 'seeds', which usually take the form of money offerings to the church (Meyer, 1995; Gifford, 2004).

The emphasis on material gain, coupled with the promise of protection against the negative powers that may stop individual achievement, are elements that can resonate very powerfully with migrants engaged in everyday struggles to make ends meet (Jeannerat, 2009). Moreover, belonging to a church that spans several countries can make migrants feel part of a community (Glick Schiller, 2008) and being part of the wider congregation fosters and expands migrants' transnational connections (Levitt, 2007).

As Meyer (1998) observes, charismatic churches, such as the Pentecostal church, offer the individuals who belong to them a set of "[...] fixed orientation points and a well-delimited moral universe within globalization's unsettling flows" (Meyer, 1998, p. 751). Thus, being part of a particular church, and being a practicing and active member, can also help migrants to construct a social and personal (mental) image of themselves as law-abiding, god-fearing, active citizens, and to regain the sense of worth that can be shaken by the social demotion they may have experienced (Fumanti, 2009). Moreover, the moral universe which the churches represent for the diaspora is a transnational space within which rules, requirements and rewards are comparable and within which, consequently, social and cultural capital can be maintained, increased or 'cashed in' in case of need.

However, some migrants may find that settling in the receiving society may be too difficult and that, no matter how hard they try, they are confined at the bottom of the social ladder. At the same time, they may rule out a return to the sending country as this would be tantamount to taking a step down socially. A few studies (e.g. Mai, 2001; Pajo, 2007; Angelidou, 2008) reveal that migrants from different backgrounds and with different migratory trajectories share a similar idea about the world's countries. According to these spatially separate narratives, in fact, the world's nations are considered hierarchically, graded into patterns of desirability in relation to the opportunities for social and economic advantage they are supposed to offer, patterns which Pajo (2007) terms of 'territorialised fulfilment'. As Wallerstein observes, "classification and hierarchy are operations of naturalization *par excellence* or, more accurately, of projection of historical and social differences into the realm of an imaginary nature" (in Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988, p.56). This ranking of societies and nations, which assumes inequalities to be inherent to specific cultures or ethnicities (ibid.), is naturalised through a process of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1979b; 1990a) and thus comes to be shared even by those individuals and groups who are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

According to the (shared but unwritten) mapping of these 'geographies of fulfilment', some countries are intrinsically 'better' than others, and the sending country inevitably rates lower in the hierarchy than the receiving country (at least for economic migrants). A corollary of this view is that when migrants experience difficulties in settling in the receiving country (e.g. finding a job, finding good housing, having to face discrimination, etc.) these difficulties may be ascribed to the inferior position of the destination country in the 'global' hierarchy rather than to structural limits and political choices. As a consequence, the difficulties faced come to be perceived as problems that can be transcended by moving to a destination that is further up the global hierarchy (Mai, 2001; Pajo, 2007), a process that may keep migrants in a state of permanent (emotional) transition.

## Summary of the literature, gaps identified and research questions

This section summarises the literature introduced and highlights the gaps in knowledge that this study aims to address and which inform the research questions. The focus will here proceed in the opposite direction to the one followed during the review of the theoretical and the empirical literature, and it will zoom-in, going from the wide-lens view of migration's dynamics to the fine-grained detail of young people's experiences.

As Massey (1990) points out, migration is never caused by a single factor, but is rather the result of 'cumulative causation', of the combination of structural forces and individual contingencies. 'Push' and 'pull' dynamics, which are set in motion by a lack of job prospects in sending countries and the concomitant need for workers in receiving countries, pave the way for people's movement. However, the gradual, reciprocal balancing of these contrasting factors, with demand and offer eventually levelling, which is hypothesised by the 'neoclassical economic theory' (Massey *et al.* 1998) can never be fully achieved. The interconnectedness of the different regions of the world, outlined by 'world systems' theory (Wallerstein, 2004) means that different patterns of industrialisation and development are necessary to the capitalist economy, as profit requires monopoly of production, access to markets and access to resources. Parts of the world are thus caught at the 'periphery' of industrial development; they are the reservoir of cheap natural resources and manpower, which are exploited by the 'core' countries where the production is concentrated, and also markets for some of the goods manufactured by companies based in the core countries.

Explanations based purely on economic grounds do not, however, necessarily result in people's decision to move to  a new country in search of better opportunities elsewhere, and the numbers of those who migrate is always much inferior to the number of the people who, in similar economic conditions, do not leave (Faist, 2000). While structural changes pave the way for migration, social and cultural changes also need to take place in order to sustain this choice. As the' new economics' theory of migration (Masey *et al.* 1998) highlights, migration is, at least in its early stages, a decision often taken by the group rather than the individual, a form of 'insurance policy' that families undertake in order to maximise opportunities for income and reduce risk. As migration becomes more widespread within a particular community, non-migrant individuals and families may gain a perception of 'relative deprivation' (Stark and Taylor, 1989; Massey, 1990) as they cannot match the consumption patterns that are available to migrants. This can, in its turn, engender a 'culture of migration' (Massey *et al.,* 1998) with young adults feeling that leaving to find employment abroad is expected of them, and coming to see migration almost as a necessary rite of passage (Kandel and Massey, 2002).

Migrants' transnational practices contribute to foster both a perception of relative deprivation and the ensuing culture of migration. Historically, migrant groups have always tried to keep alive ties to the sending communities, but this has become even more widespread with the increased communication allowed by modern media and by the availability of cheaper and faster modes of transport (Levitt, 2001). Visits and remittances, the setting up of small businesses, the building of houses by migrants are amongst the practices that contribute to spread the myth of the successful emigrant (Sayad, 2004) by giving tangible visibility to his or her achievement and thus increasing the emigrant's 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). Remittances generally take the form of transfers of money and goods, but what Levitt (2001) terms 'social remittances' (new customs, beliefs, habits, etc.) also play a large part in changing the social fabric of the sending communities. Children are often involved in these transnational practices, both as the recipients of remittances and also because their wellbeing and education are a focus of concern for members of the family that may be scattered throughout a number of different countries (Faulstich Orellana, 2001). As Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) argue, the creation of 'familyhood' across borders is something that requires careful planning and a conscious effort, something to which young people may contribute, either voluntarily or as part of a familial 'duty'.

Existing sociological studies that relate to children in the context of migration are mainly concerned with the way in which young people adapt to the new country's mores, either as migrant children or as second generation migrants (e.g. Penn and Lambert, 2007; Pong and Hao, 2007; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). This is usually achieved by recourse to a series of measurable variables, such as school performance or language proficiency. However, quantifying 'integration' or 'acculturation' by using objective measurements can only give a very partial idea of the actual experiences of young people who move from a developing country to one of the countries of the industrialised world. Hopes, contentment and disappointment are, in fact, feelings and mental states that may only loosely correlate to the number of positive results in school assessments, or to the level of functional competence in the language of the receiving country (Faulstich Orellana, 2001). Many more variables concur to shape young people's experiences of migration, and only listening to children's own narratives can help us capture fully the complexities and contradictions of lived lives (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Very few studies, moreover, look at children who are left behind and, when they do, they focus on the children's ways of adapting to their parents' absence (e.g. Olwig, 1999; D'Emilio et *al*, 2007; Dreby, 2010) rather than as prospective migrants in their own right. Whether studies deal with children left behind, with migrant children or with children born in the receiving country, young people's own voices on what it means to be a (future) migrant, and what positive and negative aspects this holds for them, are often missing from the picture. As Faulstich Orellana (2001) observes, research assumes that adults are the only social actors and children and young people are given 'supporting actor' roles which need, in order to be defined, to be seen in the context of adults' experiences and motivations. There are, of course, important exceptions, such as Faulstich Orellana's (ibid.) research on the role of children in the process of family decision; Knörr's (2005 Ed.) edited book on young migrants and 'second generation' migrants, in which children's voices are very much at the core of the narrative; Dreby's (2010) work on the experiences of children left behind; and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco's (2001) enlightening work on the psychological aspects of young migrants' experiences of life in a new country. In all these cases, however, the literature focuses on children's adaptation to the situation (of being left behind, of moving, of being 'the other') as singular and self-standing segments of the children's experience. This results in a compartmentalisation of these experiences, as though they were not part of the same narrative. However, as Sayad (2004) points out, and as the work on transnational migrants exposes, the experiences of individuals who move across borders are never neatly partitioned, and emotional as well as material links exist between imagined (expected) lives and real countries and people. This qualitative study aims to provide precisely these narratives by adding the voices of children as they reflect on their own expectations and on their perceptions of life betwixt and between borders, offering a space where narratives from the 'before', the 'during' and the 'after' of moving and settling in a new country can be brought together in recognition that each (young) immigrant is also, at the same time an emigrant (Sayad, 2004) and that we cannot understand one segment of migration without understanding the other.

Aiming to put children's experiences centre-stage, therefore, this research sets out to contribute to the existing knowledge of migration and of its effects on the emotional and material lives of individuals by adding young people's specific points of view. Moreover, it aims to provide a comprehensive discussion by looking at migration from the different but connected perspective of young people that are at different stages of a migration process, in the awareness that only by looking at migration transnationally can children's experiences be fully understood.

### *Planned outcomes and research questions*

The study that is the object of this thesis aims to add to the available body of work on migration, explored in this chapter, by adding the voices of children, as they reflect on the implication of migration for their present lives and (possible) futures. More specifically, it endeavours to contribute to the on-going debate on the processes involved in international migration by:

- including the expectations and experiences of young people in relation to migration;
- furthering the argument in favour of children's active engagement in identifying their own needs and in defining policies and practices on all issues connected to young people's movements across borders;
- contributing to the understanding of transnational social spaces through the implementation of a multi-sited methodological focus, one that looks at the same phenomenon from different perspectives;
- adding young people's voices to a debate on migration which takes into account the emotional investments and costs of migration, and which considers the important role played by aspirations and ambitions in shaping the experience of settling in a new country;
- contributing to the existing debate on the specificities of research with young participants by providing a reflective account of the ethical and methodological issues encountered.

In order to achieve the outcomes outlined above, this study sets out to investigate the ways in which young people imagine life in a different country and how they assess their imaginings and expectations when they experience the realities of migration. The children of migrants live within transnational social fields, to which they contribute practically by maintaining links with, and/or by being emotionally connected to, significant others who live away from them. Consequently, this project adopts a 'multifocal' perspective, one which looks at migration from different angles and collects the experiences and points of view of children from three distinct groups: the children left behind by migrant parents; the children who migrated to join their parents in the destination country; the children of migrants who were born in the receiving country.

The research questions this study sets out to investigate are:

- How do children imagine a country they do not know directly but to which they have links through significant others?
- What role do these 'mediated' countries have in the children's expectations and ambitions for their future?
- How do young people assess their imaginings and expectations in the light of the encounter with reality?

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to illustrate how fieldwork with young participants was organised and to explore the methods used to gather the qualitative data that will be explored in detail throughout the subsequent chapters. It will also look in depth at the difficulties encountered, both expected and unexpected, and at the positive aspects of the different techniques employed: focus groups, child-led photography, and individual interviews. Research that looks at children's worlds and experiences needs to confront a series of ethical issues for which there is no straight-forward answer, but which must be carefully considered and confronted in order to gain a better perspective of the findings[14].

The chapter is divided into three sections. A first section briefly recapitulates the project's aims and describes the methods chosen for data collection and the reasons of this choice. It also illustrates the stages of the data collection, from obtaining ethics clearance to the practicalities involved in locating and selecting the sample, both in Ghana and in Italy.

A second section engages in a more analytical review of the data collection process. It examines the practical difficulties encountered during the fieldwork in both countries and also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the techniques chosen for the data collection, indicating, as well as the positive aspect of each, the important questions they aroused.

In the last section the implications of the issues explored are discussed in relation to research which involves young participants, and the use of photography as a data collection tool is also critically assessed. The imaginings and expectations the researcher brought into the fieldwork are also included in this section, to illustrate the way in which – despite the researcher's awareness – these assumptions at times coloured the approach to the participants and to the topic of the research.

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[14] An article on the methodological issues encountered was published in Edition 5 of ENQUIRE, the online PG journal at the School of Sociology and Social Policy of the University of Nottingham (see: Fassetta, G., 2010 'Without a Safety Net: Participatory Techniques in Research with Young Migrants' Available from: http://enquirenottingham.co.uk/index.php/enquirejournaleditions/edition5)

## Rationale for the choice of methods

As illustrated in the introductory section of this thesis, this project aims to explore the imaginings and experiences of Ghanaian children who have experienced migration to Italy, either by having migrated themselves to join their families, because they were born in Italy of migrant parents, or because they were left in Ghana in the care of kin as a consequence of parental migration. The data collection, therefore, involved three different groups: the children who were born in Ghana and are now living in Italy; the children who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents; and the children left behind in Ghana and expecting to join their parents/families in the (near) future. Fieldwork was, consequently, multi-sited: first I collected data in Italy, where the first two groups are located, and then in Ghana. The Italian phase of the data collection was carried out between October and December 2008, while the second phase took place in Ghana between March and May 2009.

The choice of methodology for this study is grounded on the appraisal of different epistemological standpoints, starting from the opposition between a deductive (the testing of hypothesis) and an inductive (the abstraction of empirically grounded observation) approach to the construction of knowledge (Bryman, 2008). The positivist paradigm, which proceeds in a deductive (top-down) fashion, applies procedures normally used in the natural sciences to the investigation of social phenomena. Some proponents of this paradigm argue that quantitative research is more rigorous and objective, attributes that derive mainly from the fact that this type of research is carried out in a controlled environment and that it is replicable (Pope and Mays, 1993).

The interpretivist paradigm is generally seen as the epistemological counterpart of positivism. Proceeding, as it does, in an inductive (bottom-up) fashion, it questions the possibility of applying to the study of the social world methodologies that are suited to the investigation of physical phenomena; it advocates, in their stead, a set of methodologies tailored to the complexities of human interactions and social institutions (Bryman, 2008). The two paradigms are generally associated, respectively, with quantitative and qualitative research designs. Resting on numerical data, quantitative research has for a long time been considered as an impartial and reliable source of knowledge, while qualitative research, based on textual accounts, has been hailed as a more accurate instrument to explore the intricacies of the social world. Both quantitative and qualitative research designs, however, also have their strong opponents. While quantitative research projects have been accused of flattening and distorting the complex nature of social interaction in a futile attempt to mimic 'real' (hard) sciences, quantitative research projects have been criticised as biased towards verification of the researcher's preconceived notions (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and dismissed as anecdotal and purely descriptive.

However, the 'positivist/quantitative/deductive' versus 'interpretivist/qualitative/ inductive' opposition has been shown by several authors as unsustainable (Pope and Mays, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 2006; de Haas, 2008; Bushin, 2009) and research designs increasingly contain a mixture of the two approaches, each chosen for the different but complementary points of view on social reality it can afford. While the collection of quantitative data is better suited to the exploration of the wider patterns of social phenomena and can give breadth to their study (Bushin, 2009), qualitative data, which rests on individuals' narratives to capture the complexities of social interaction and social practices, can add depth to the knowledge of their workings

(Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, there are instances where one specific approach is more suited to the needs of a research project, as was the case of this investigation.

Since the aim of this research is to explore features of young people's 'emotional landscapes', an inductive approach is considered more suited to capture the complex topography of these landscapes. As de Haas (2008) stresses, the choice of a particular research methodology needs first and foremost to be subordinated to the nature of the specific research question(s), and a qualitative design, which allows us to understand not only what individuals' experiences actually are but also how they are interpreted by those who go through them (Pope and Mays, 1995), offers a set of tools, geared to the collection of visual and textual rather than numerical data, which better respond to the nature of the research question(s) of this project.

While a number of existing studies into young migrants' modes of adaptation are based on a quantitative design (e.g. Penn and Lambert, 2009; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), and adopt a comparative perspective to gain an overview of the ways in which young people from different ethnic backgrounds adapt to the demands and mores of a new country, qualitative research can allow for more in-depth insights into individuals' perceptions of and motivations for migration. Although more contained in its scope, it can unveil patterns and structures than the more wide-ranging quantitative studies allow, and thus present us with a more fine-grained picture of the social phenomena studied (Bottomley, 1992).

Since the this investigation aims to construct a composite and in-depth view of emotionally loaded imaginings and experiences, it was felt that a qualitative approach, one based on spoken and visual narratives that are allowed to shift, mutate and develop over time, would be better suited to capturing the subtle nuances of young people's thoughts and feelings. On the basis of these considerations, I adopted a multiple-technique approach, as I decided that this choice would allow young people's narratives to evolve over a period of time (however limited), that it would allow each participant to find a space more akin to his or her relational style, and that it would help young people clarify their feelings and thoughts through interaction with others.

Many researchers (e.g. Langevang, 2007; Darbyshire, 2005; Greene and Hill, 2004), whose work is informed by the sociology of childhood paradigm, employ individual and group interviews coupled with non-traditional methods, such as drawings, role-play or photographs, as data gathering techniques that offer a better insight into children's cultures and experiences. Moreover, the use of participatory approaches allows for more active involvement of young people in the research (Kesby, 2007 and 2005; Punch, 2002; Young and Barrett, 2001) thus contributing to the empowerment of young participants.

Participatory techniques can also create a more pleasant, relaxed and informal atmosphere and so help to redress the power imbalance that is ingrained in most adult-child interactions. I chose to talk to the children first within focus groups, as I believed that this would be less threatening than meeting a unknown white adult one-to-one and that a group conversation would give me an insight into the children's social and public construction of the migratory discourse (Hennesy and Heary, 2004); at a later stage, I also interviewed the children individually, to allow for more personal experiences and points of view to emerge and thus integrate the responses coming from the focus groups (Mitchell, 2001).

Work by researchers such as Bushin (2007), Christensen and Prout (2004), Barker and Weller (2003) stresses the desirability of informing children of the purposes of the research and of its possible fallout, and indicates the importance of gaining young people's consent before starting data collection, as a way to empower the children and to value their choice. On our first meeting I therefore clearly told the children what they would be expected to do within the project and the purposes and possible outcomes of the research; I also distributed an information leaflet (Appendix 1) specifically drafted for the children with the help of my 14 year-old daughter so that content and language would be more appropriate (Barker and Weller, 2003) and asked for their verbal consent. In the course of the same meeting, the children were given letters of information for their parents and parental consent forms (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). Moreover, I told the young participants that they were to give their parents/carers the consent forms *only* if they were happy to take part in the study and that, were they to decide they did not want to take part in the study, they should feel free to throw away the letters and forms.

Amongst non-traditional methods, child-led photography is the technique that several authors (i.e. Clark-Ibáñez, 2007; Barker and Weller, 2003; Punch, 2002; Young and Barrett, 2001) regard as one that can be fun for the children, thus motivating them, and one that gives young participants time to analyse the variety of responses available and to make a selection on the basis of their relevance to them. After taking part in the focus groups, therefore, I gave each child a disposable camera and asked them to take some pictures over the space of a week. The children who had arrived recently in Italy were asked to photograph anything that they had found to be different (or similar) to what they imagined before leaving Ghana; the children who were born in Italy were asked to photograph anything that they believe to be different (or similar) between Italy and Ghana; the children left-behind in Ghana by migrating parents were asked to take pictures of all that they thought would be different in Italy, as well as of anything/anyone they would be sorry/happy to leave behind.

During the individual interviews, the children explained what their photographs depicted and the reasons why they had chosen particular subjects. Focusing on the pictures took some pressure off the children in the one-to-one situation while, at the same time, offering prompts for the conversation (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). I also felt that looking at the photographs within an individual interview setting would be more respectful of the children's privacy than asking them to share their pictures with peers.

While photography is only one of the many task-based techniques available, I felt it would be better suited than others to the age of the participants. Drawing, in fact, could have been perceived as too 'babyish' by some of the children, as well as being a technique that depends too heavily on the individual child's perception of his/her artistic abilities (Punch, 2002), while diaries and other procedures that rely on writing seemed too akin to school work, especially since some of the children are still struggling with spoken and written Italian (Barker and Weller, 2003) and therefore I judged them less appealing to young participants.

## Collecting the data: ethic clearance and fieldwork

Since the project involved accessing under-age participants (i.e. individuals under the age of 18) in order to obtain information that would be of a personal nature, and since this could have caused emotional distress, I needed to obtain ethics clearance from the University of Strathclyde ethics committee. Accessing the children through their schools, moreover, involved having to engage with a double line of gatekeepers to obtain their consent to proceed: the head teachers of the various schools and the parents of the children involved. Having successfully negotiated these steps, I then gathered the data using the techniques that I had identified as more suitable to the participants' interests as well as allowing me to access information that would be relevant to the aims and objectives of the research. The present section looks in detail at how ethics clearance, gatekeepers and then the participants were negotiated and at how the data was collected in the various schools.

### *Ethics clearance*

Since the project engaged with children *and* "[...] highly personal, intimate or other private or confidential information of a personal nature [...]" (University of Strathclyde, 2008, p. 12) was sought, I needed to obtain ethics approval from the University's appropriate body. I drafted a first version of the required form in March 2008 and subsequently re-drafted it several times to incorporate the Department's requirements and recommendations. The form was finally sent for approval at the end of August 2008. I received the committee approval in mid-September, but it was conditional to my presenting further documentation, which I had to obtain from official sources in Ghana and Italy. I finally received unconditional approval on the 22nd of October 2008 (see Appendix 4), only two or three days before the starting dates agreed with the Italian head-teachers.

Gaining the required ethics approval was a long and slow process, which involved several re-draftings of the ethics application in order to cover any possible occurrence that could harm or upset the participants and the researcher. While going through the process was necessary both for the physical and emotional safety of those involved as well as being an opportunity to consider very carefully all the passages required by the process in the light of their possible consequences, I felt that some of the details and explanations demanded were not suited to social enquiry of a qualitative nature. This type of research, in fact, relies on human responses and practical circumstances that are sometimes impossible to predict accurately in advance, as they are subject to a whole range of unforeseeable variables.

There is no doubt that research needs to be carried out within the highest ethical standards, and especially so when it involves vulnerable participants or aims to investigate issues of a personal and confidential nature. However, I argue that the standards required for ethics approval should be tailored to the nature and area of the research rather than follow an institution-wide homogeneity, in order to facilitate the process of obtaining clearance, but also to make it more practically useful to the researcher, a planning tool as well as a necessary procedure. The length and focus of an ethics approval process that does not distinguish amongst different types of research may also be detrimental to investigation in certain areas, as researchers may choose to avoid projects that involve vulnerable groups, precisely those groups who mostly benefit from having their voices heard.

### *Sample size and location of the fieldwork*

The Italian phase of the data collection was carried out first so that I could gain insights into the steps for accessing participants, and the advantages and pitfalls of the chosen techniques, in a familiar environment. Starting the data collection in Italy allowed me to gain confidence in my research skills and to fine-tune my methodology in order to approach the Ghanaian phase with a degree of experience. While substantial changes in the data collection process were not necessary, the insights gained from the Italian part of the fieldwork helped me to approach data collection in Ghana with greater confidence in, and practical experience of, the approach I had chosen. Furthermore, I believed that during fieldwork in Italy I would be able to make contacts with relations of potential participants in Ghana that I would then be able to use as a starting point for the second part of the fieldwork. As will be discussed later, this was not, regrettably, the case.

I decided on a sample size of around 15 children for each group; this meant accessing, for the Italian phase, a total of 30 children, divided as equally as possible between those who had migrated relatively recently (four years or less) and those who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents or had migrated when still very young and therefore had no memory of their life in

Ghana. This sample was deemed manageable within the time-limits of the research while still being large enough to allow for a wide range of responses. The age and gender balance of the participants was determined by the natural composition of the sample chosen. I approached the young people via the schools they attend in Italy as this would give me access to a greater number of children in the time available. The head-teachers of the schools were contacted first by letter (see Appendix 5), then by phone. I subsequently visited each of them personally in order to explain the aims of the research and its practicalities. I considered the option of meeting the children in a different setting (Bushin, 2007) outwith school hours, but discarded this option because of the greater possibility of a number of participants not turning up at the sessions, something that would have meant having to extend the data collection beyond the time available.

During the Italian phase of the fieldwork, I interviewed 28 children, of whom 15 were born in Ghana and 13 in Italy (or who had arrived as babies/toddlers)[15]. While I had approached both primary and secondary schools, the larger than expected number of Ghanaian children available in the chosen area meant that I had to make a choice in order to keep numbers to a manageable size. I decided, therefore, to limit the sample to children attending middle school, for two reasons: the age of this group (10-11 to 14-15 years of age) means that, on one hand, the children would be more likely to remember their life 'before and after' migration, and that, on the other, their number would be more concentrated in a few large schools, each collecting children from several primaries, thus cutting down the number of gatekeepers involved as well as in the number of trips necessary to access all the participants. All the potential participants the head-teachers had located were contacted a first time collectively in order or me to explain the project and to ask whether they were interested in taking part. On this occasion the children were also given information sheets and parental consent forms (see Appendixes 1, 2 and 3).

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[15] As will be discussed more in detail later, the data collected with one of the participants was discarded as it became apparent that the child was not comfortable about taking part in the study.

In Ghana I managed to access 14 children within the same age-bracket, again accessing them through the schools they attend (last year of Primary and Junior Secondary School). Finding the participants required much more time than in Italy and I came across many more difficulties than I had anticipated. This caused a few problems in the composition of the sample and meant having to do away with a first introductory meeting, issues that will be discussed more in detail in the next sections.

### *The fieldwork: Italy*

As mentioned above, I contacted a total of seventy-four primary and secondary head-teachers in two towns of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, in the north-east of Italy. I did so by sending a letter in which I explained the project (see Appendix 5), accompanied by a letter of presentation from my Strathclyde supervisors and by another one from the head-teacher of the institution that employs me, well-known in the area for offering free state-sponsored Italian language classes for adult immigrants. Following my letter, I contacted each school by telephone, in order to find out whether they had any Ghanaian children and if the head-teachers would agree to their schools taking part in the project. All but two head-teachers indicated that they would be happy to assist me and to allow me to access their Ghanaian pupils and their families. In most of the schools the head-teacher agreed to be the main referent for the research, while in a few I was referred to the teacher in charge of 'intercultural relations' (the *referente intercultura*).

I subsequently visited in person all the schools that had declared their availability and I illustrated in person to the head-teachers, or the '*referente intercultura*', the aims and practicalities of the project, answered any questions and provided additional details when required. During this visit I left a copy of the information material that I had drafted for parents and pupils, as well as the consent forms, so that they could be assessed by the head teachers and modified to meet the school's requirements if necessary. I also promised to draft and send each school an Italian translation of the main findings once the thesis is completed. On the basis of the information on Ghanaian pupils that I gathered during these visits, I selected seven middle schools that seemed particularly representative because of their large intake of Ghanaian children, and whose head-teachers had committed more enthusiastically to the project.

At the end of October 2008, I visited the schools again in order to meet the Ghanaian pupils, individually or in small groups, to explain the project, ask for their consent to take part, and distribute information material as well as parental consent forms. The number of institutions involved dropped to six when one of the schools decided to pull out due to other engagements, and was further reduced to five when one of the referents had to take long-term sickness leave. I distributed a total of 79 consent forms and 52 forms were returned signed. Once data collection was under way in most of the schools, however, I decided to leave out one more school because of the excessive number of requirements put in place by the head-teacher (i.e. accessing the children in the after-school club; meeting the children only individually as not to take too many out of a group at once; explaining the project to the after-school personnel and agreeing on a timetable with them). This meant that the Ghanaian children in this school could not be interviewed within the time limits set for this data collection phase. I was therefore left with four schools, a big drop from the number first approached, but which still managed to offer access to the sample that I had decided upon.

I held the focus group interviews during November 2008. I interviewed a total of seven groups, all of which were quite small, between three and five participants, numbers, however, not unprecedented in focus groups with children (Morgan *et al.* 2002; Kitzinger and Barbour, 2001). The composition of each group was determined by whether the children had arrived in Italy only recently (four years or less) or whether they were born in Italy or had arrived there when still very young (aged 4 or below). In some cases the children came from the same class or were also friends outside the school, while in others their acquaintance was only very loose. The focus groups were held in spare rooms (mainly labs) within the different schools and, as agreed with the head-teachers, lasted one school-period (50 minutes).

The first part of the allocated slot was taken up in reminding the children of the purpose and aims of the research, as well as the optional and informal nature of our conversation; I also made a point of stressing the fact that they could leave if they wanted, that there was no need to rigidly respect turns for speaking and that everyone, not just the adult, was welcome to ask questions and clarifications. The last part of the allotted time was used to distribute the disposable cameras, explain their purpose and use, and give out the related instructions leaflet that had been prepared to remind the children of the 'dos and donts' of photography etiquette (see Appendix 6). This left around 30/40 minutes for the actual focus group discussion, an amount of time that seemed to be generally sufficient to gather all the information required.

The children then had a week in which to take pictures of places, people or objects that they found to be the same or different in the two countries, Ghana and Italy. The cameras held a 27-exposure film and I told the children that they did not need to take all of them for the project, but that, if they wished, they could take some (about a half) of anything they wished. The cameras used were then collected and two sets of pictures were developed from each film: one for the child and one for the researcher.

I then interviewed each child individually on a further visit to the school. These interviews lasted between 15 and 40 minutes, depending on the number of pictures taken and on the willingness of each child to talk me through them. Before discussing the photographs, the children were given the opportunity to look through my set of pictures and to remove any that they were not happy to talk about or that they had not taken in relation to the project (Sime, 2008). At the end of each interview I also made a point to ask the children what they thought about the single activities they had been asked to do within the project (focus group, photography, and individual interview) in order to get some feedback on the techniques used (Hill, 2006).

Both the conversations in the focus groups and the individual interviews were audio-taped. On each occasion I reminded the children that I needed to record the conversations so that I could listen to them again later on, and asked their permission prior to switching on the digital voice-recorder. I also wrote some field-notes at the end of each session, recording how the interaction had been, how relaxed, tense or engaged the children had seemed, and my overall impressions.

### *The fieldwork: Ghana*

Accessing the participants in Ghana held more challenges than I had forecast. As I anticipated, I had thought that during the Italian phase of the fieldwork I would have been able to make contact with people who had children left behind. To this end I gave each child who had taken part in the project a letter to take home to his/her parents in which I was asking for contact numbers/addresses of any children left behind (see Appendix 7) the families may know. I had also contacted a person at the Ghana Education Services (part of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport) explaining my project in detail and asking for a list of schools that I could then have contacted before my departure. None of the people I tried to reach, however, came forward, and my contact at the Education Services told me that I needed to visit personally each school with a letter of endorsement from them in order to find out whether there were any children who could have taken part in my study. I therefore left for Ghana without any idea of how many participants, if any, I would be able to find and, more importantly, where these participants would be.

Once in Ghana, I did, however, manage to locate 14 children who had one or both parents in Italy and, as with the Italian phase of the fieldwork, I first interviewed them in groups, then gave them disposable cameras and a week in which to take photographs of anything in their everyday environment that they believed to be different in Italy, and concluded the data collection by talking to each child individually. The specific issues and setbacks, as well as the positive aspects encountered in both phases of the fieldwork will be discussed in the next section.

## The data collection: positive experiences and room for improvement

The data-gathering process was slowed down by several unexpected hiccups, linked to both the institutional requirements of the University of Strathclyde and of the schools involved and also with the trouble experienced by many of the Ghanaian families in Italy (and by quite a few of the children themselves) to stick to the deadlines provided. In Ghana the delays were caused by the difficulty in finding schools that had children that would fit the required sample and, most importantly, with gaining access to them. In this section I examine the different stages of the fieldwork in order to highlight the difficulties encountered and the positive experiences, and I also discuss what could have been approached differently and perhaps more effectively.

### *Collecting data in Italy*

Further delay in the start of the Italian phase of the fieldwork was caused by the difficulty in obtaining an appointment with very busy head-teachers in order to discuss the project, and in one particular case, as already touched upon earlier in this chapter, also by the number of requirements put in place in order to meet the children for the introductory presentation, to collect the families' consents, and generally for each step required by the fieldwork schedule. While these requirements had been formulated by a well-meaning head-teacher, keen for the children to miss as little school-time as possible, the whole process in this school ended up becoming so complicated and time-consuming that I was forced to drop the institution, which meant that a significant number of potential participants were left out of the project.

Considerable delay was also caused by the children forgetting to bring back the signed consent forms. Very few children remembered to do so by the first deadline set and, after having been reassured that the failure to bring back the signed form did not mean lack of willingness to take part in the research, I had to undertake several trips to each school to collect all the signed forms. Since in each school the children were from several different classes, I had to ask for the classroom assistant's help in collecting the forms, in order not to interrupt the lessons too often. I encountered exactly the same problem when the time to collect the cameras came, something which, too, required several reminders. In a number of instances, the class teachers seemed almost reassured by my struggle to gather the wanted material, as it was pointed out that I had come across a common problem, that of the recurrent break-down in communication between Ghanaian families and educational institutions.

The lack of communication between school and the family of Ghanaian pupils was something that was also remarked upon by teachers to whom I talked about my research in informal contexts. While this information on the difficulty of communication is mainly anecdotal and cannot be generalised, the fact that these complaints were made by several practitioners from different schools may indicate a disparity in the way in which Ghanaian parents and Italian teachers view the boundaries between family and school. However, while the parents may - or may not - be (fully) aware of the teachers' expectations regarding their involvement in the school's activities, the young participants (but also their class-mates) were left in no doubt of the disapproval their parents' 'absence' caused, as in two occasions the remarks were directed to me in a hushed voice but still quite publicly, in view of the full class.

### *Collecting data in Ghana*

On my first day in Ghana, I visited the Education Services and spoke personally to the official within the Department of Basic Education[16] that had been put in charge of helping me with my research. Through her I obtained a letter of introduction from the Director of the Department (see Appendix 8) that would give me access to public schools; she also suggested a list of schools where she believed I would be able to find children with migrant parents. Interestingly, this list, drawn in order of decreasing desirability, had at the top a couple of extremely expensive private schools that cater mainly to diplomats', bank managers' or company directors' offspring, and that are totally out of reach for the low-skilled or even unskilled migrants that I had in mind. Since I believe I had been clear about the background of the participants I was looking for, I wonder whether these very 'posh' schools were suggested because of the common over-estimation of migrants' economic success or by the desire of my contact for me to view institutions that are very prestigious and desirable.

I gradually managed to circumscribe my search to schools that were more likely to be attended by the participants I required (e.g. the more 'sought after' public institutions) and to distribute my letter of presentation (see Appendix 9), accompanied by a support letter from the Head of Department of Geography and Sociology of the University of Strathclyde (see Appendix

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[16] In Ghana, Compulsory Universal Basic Education consists of 11 years: 2 years of Kindergarten; 6 years of Primary School; 3 years of Junior High (Secondary) School

10) and the previously mentioned note from the Director of Basic Education. However, I was then confronted with the head teachers' reluctance to let me access the children since, as some of them quite openly pointed out, my being Italian and my wanting to talk about migration could have alarmed a few parents/carers, as some of them may not be in Italy 'legally'. This meant a series of refusals that left me, more than two weeks into my two-month stay, quite concerned about the possibility of success of my data collection.

A conversation with a further contact that had already done some data collection with a similar sample for her Masters project helped me considerably as, thanks to her suggestions, I contacted the head teachers of a few residential (boarding) schools: a likely place in which to find children who are left behind. Two head teachers said that they did have pupils in their schools that fitted my criteria and that they would be happy for me to access them and between the two schools I was able to make up the required sample. Gaining the parents/carers' consent was not possible since, according to the head teachers, being in a boarding school means that the majority of the children only go home during the holiday period and that, consequently, gaining parental consent for extra-curricular activities that are unplanned at the beginning of the school-year is practically unfeasible; therefore, the decision whether the children are to take part in any of these activities is left to the judgement and discretion of the head-teacher, to whom the children are entrusted and who has, therefore, duty of care.

Since both the schools are mixed in their intake (see Appendix 11), it had never occurred to me to check the gender of the participants before meeting them. I had opted to leave the sample to come together naturally, without forcing a balance, and I had assumed that, however unequal, the genders would both be represented in the sample. Nevertheless, I was quite surprised in discovering, upon meeting the last young participant, that they were all girls. I was assured by the head-teachers that this was a chance occurrence and that they had not made any selection that could have skewed the sample's gender balance. Because of the long time it had taken to locate the children and the intended use of multiple techniques (focus groups, photography, individual interviews) to gather the data, I was left with no time, after meeting the last girl, in which to attempt to integrate my sample with some male participants. As a consequence, the data I managed to collect is very specific to girls attending urban residential schools and therefore it can only give a very partial picture of the imaginings and expectations of children left-behind. However, some of the narratives that emerged during the conversations with the girls are reflected in those of the migrant children I accessed in Italy, both male and female; while the Ghanaian findings cannot be generalised because of the biased nature of the sample, the recurrence of certain themes in both the Ghanaian and the Italian findings, make it possible, I believe, to highlight some commonalities and to draw some shared conclusions.

A further observation needs to be made in relation to this part of the fieldwork, and it concerns the impact on both participants and gatekeepers of a white, adult, female researcher. While all of these are factors which cannot be 'neutralised' in any way, some questions remain about what effect this had on the people involved: whether they would have responded differently had any of these variables been different; whether one of the head-teachers would have still offered his office had the researcher been from another country/age group/gender; whether the participants would have responded in the same way. While it is not possible to have a clear answer to these questions, the implications of the researcher's background and demographic details need to be recalled and evaluated (Holt, 2004), in particular when, as was the case in the present study, the project requires data collection in a country where these details visibly declare the researcher's belonging to a more privileged part of the world.

## The participants:

The following tables list the pseudonyms chosen by the children and the age of the participants. For the migrant children (table 6) the language used in the course of the interviews is also given in addition. During the focus groups with this particular sample I used a mixture of languages, generally phrasing the questions in English (as all children understood it), while the children replied in the language of choice (English and/or Italian). While not ideal, this arrangement allowed for some degree of interaction amongst participants. All the children born in Italy were interviewed in Italian, while those left behind were all interviewed in English, and I personally 'simultaneously' translated the interviews (or the sections of the interviews) held in Italian while transcribing them.

Other details are made available for some of the samples, when they were part of the criteria for the creation of the sample itself (i.e. time spent in Italy for the migrant children and which parent had migrated to Italy for the children who were left behind). Further information was not specifically requested from the children as it was a requirement for ethical approval that children's privacy be safeguarded at all times; moreover, to dissipate concerns over the purposes of the research, I also stressed to all involved (young people, head-teachers and parents/carers) that the aim of the study was to find out the young people's own imaginings, expectations and experiences of Italy/Ghana, and that I would not collect any personal details beyond the children's biographical ones. Inevitably, the young participants disclosed more personal information in the course of the interviews and through the photographs they took. However, I do not include this information in the tables below as it was not part of the research's focus and I feel that, however interesting and revealing this information may be, it would be unethical to disclose it.

**Table 6: Children who migrated from Ghana to Italy**

| School | **Name** | **Age** | **Time in Italy** | **Interview language** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Roberto A.<br>Michela<br>Benedetta | 15<br>14<br>12 | 1 year<br>7 months<br>3 ½ years | Italian<br>English<br>Italian |
| B | Sarah A.<br>Jack<br>Rebecca A. | 12<br>12<br>13 | 4 years<br>3 ½ years<br>2 weeks | Italian<br>Italian<br>English |
| C | Rita<br>Slatan<br>Amauri<br>Chanel<br>Philly | 12<br>13<br>11<br>13<br>12 | 3 years<br>4 years<br>2 ½ years<br>4 years<br>2 years | Italian<br>Italian<br>Italian<br>Italian<br>Italian |
| D | Valeria<br>Robinson<br>Linelle<br>Michael | 12<br>12<br>15<br>13 | 2 ½ years<br>2 ½ years<br>4 years<br>6 months | Italian<br>Italian<br>Italian<br>English |

**Table 7: Children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents**

| **School** | **Name** | **Age** |
|---|---|---|
| A | Rachel | 12[17] |
| B | Jacqueline<br>Erica<br>Claire<br>Kate A. | 12<br>12<br>11<br>11 |
| C | Teresa<br>Jackson<br>Marty<br>Roberto B. | 13<br>11<br>12<br>14 |
| D | Anastasia<br>Barack<br>Christian<br>Federica | 12<br>12<br>11<br>12 |

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[17] Data collected from this participant was not included in the study, as it became apparent that she was not comfortable about taking part (see p.

**Table 8: Children left in Ghana by migrant parents**

| School: | Name | Age | Relation in Italy: |
|---|---|---|---|
| X | Sarah B. | 13 | Mother and father |
| | Georgiana | 14 | Mother |
| | Kate B. | 14 | Father |
| | Esther | 12 | Father |
| | Wendibel | 13 | Mother and father |
| | Millisent | 13 | Mother and father |
| | Cynthia | 15 | Father |
| | Rebecca B. | 15 | Father |
| | Presla | 11 | Mother |
| Y | Esmeralda | 14 | Step-father |
| | Gabriella | 13 | Father |
| | Chantal | 11 | Mother and father |
| | Judith | 10 | Mother |

## The techniques: focus groups, child-led photography and individual interviews

### *Focus groups*

I met the children in eleven focus groups in total, seven in Italy and four in Ghana. The conversation had a semi-structured nature, and I had prepared a list of points that I wanted to discuss (see Appendix 12). However, to avoid making the nature of the exchanges too formal I did not look at the schedule when the children were present (only using it as a reminder before the start of each focus group) and I let the conversation unfold as 'naturally' as possible in what was, of necessity, an unusual situation. In Ghana I was asked by the Director of Basic Education for the interview schedule prior to accessing the schools, so that he could have an idea of what the children would be invited to talk about (see Appendix 13). I also included this interview schedule in the documentation I presented to the head-teachers when I met them the first time. Again, in order not to make the exchange too formal, and potentially even more intimidating, I carefully avoided looking at the schedule during the interviews and used it only as a reminder of the main points to be touched upon, quickly consulting it before meeting each group.

The focus groups were successful and, although clearly puzzled and somewhat daunted by the novelty of the situation, all the children eventually joined in the conversation. Only occasionally, however, the groups experienced the type of participant interaction that is desirable in a focus group, and the exchanges often tended to be more akin to parallel interviews with each child taking turns to answer the facilitator's questions. While the other children's presence was still likely to have an effect on the participants' responses, interaction amongst them was not very easy to achieve and, when it was achieved, only seemed to last for a short time, with the facilitator almost invariably at the centre of the conversation. This is, as many authors have pointed out, a common issue in focus groups with children, part and parcel of the modality of communication between children and adults, and especially so when this takes place in a school setting where the IRF (Initiation, by the teacher, child's Response, teacher's Feedback) mode of communication is strongly prevalent (Mercer, 1995 and 2000).

This pattern of communication was particularly dominant when the groups consisted of children from different classes who did not know each other well, and also in the two groups where one of the participant's command of Italian was still quite rudimental and where translation into English (which I provided) or into Twi (provided by one of the children) had to be employed, a process which had, unsurprisingly, a stilting effect on the flow of the conversation. The children in Ghana all spoke English fluently enough not to require a translator and, despite the initial shyness, most of them contributed quite willingly to the conversation. In one of the two Ghanaian schools the fact that the interviews were held in the head-teacher's office (which he had kindly vacated to give me a quiet space) is likely to have contributed to the children's unease but, thankfully, only for the first few minutes of our exchange.

Generally the children seemed to enjoy the focus groups and, when asked to provide feedback on the techniques, all but two said that they had preferred chatting in a group as it was more fun and 'you can be with your friends', in accordance with what has been noted by other researchers (e.g. Hill, 2006). I made an effort to try to create a more relaxed atmosphere by starting the conversation with a little lesson in Twi (Ghana's lingua franca), in order to reverse the teacher-learner roles; I also allowed the children to choose freely their own seats and provided some (much appreciated) chocolates to share during the interview.

As described by other researchers using focus group interviews (Gibson, 2007; Hennesy and Heary, 2004; Kitzinger and Barbour, 2001), I needed to make a conscious effort to get every child to interact, as stronger personalities tended to dominate the group and to take over most of the conversation-time available. However, I also felt quite strongly that it was important to respect each child's individual style of interaction within a group situation and therefore I tried not to press unduly for participation, nor to repress enthusiastic contribution; I was also feeling safe in the knowledge that during the individual interviews space would be provided to offer each child's the opportunity to contribute his/her own input, a further advantage of combining focus groups and individual interviews (Mitchell, 2001). While I found that one school period slot agreed with the head-teachers was generally sufficient, it still meant having to hurry some of the groups through the last part of the interview and was in some cases slightly too short to allow for a more leisurely and relaxed pace.

In most of the schools the head-teachers engaged the classroom-assistants' help to collect the children from the different classes and to take them to the room where I was waiting for them. The need to fully inform and brief all involved in the research, including, in this case, the classroom assistants, was evident when it emerged that in one Italian school the classroom assistant had confused the word ‘sociologist’ with ‘psychologist’, thus probably unsettling the children who thought they were being ‘sheparded’ to a professional figure too often linked with trouble and stigma. This must have been particularly worrying for the one child in this particular school who was the only child born in Italy of Ghanaian parents (and consequently was to be interviewed on her own) and whom I overheard being told to wait in her classroom while the rest of the class went to the art lab, because the ‘psychologist’ wanted to speak to her. Overhearing this misguided instruction meant that I could attempt to clarify the situation to the child, explain again the aims of the conversation and give her some reassurance, but the interview was still met with an almost palpable degree of uneasiness which resulted in a string of yes/no responses, and was consequently kept as short as possible.

### *Child-led photography*

While several authors emphasise the use of child-led photography as a technique that increases motivation by being more fun, unusual and engaging, the fact that some children may actually resist taking pictures or even dislike the activity and attempt to avoid participation seems to be less thoroughly discussed, although some authors warn against a few drawbacks of this method (Langevang, 2007; Kesby, 2007). I consequently chose this technique in the conviction, perhaps a bit naïve, that it would almost ‘magically’ engage the children and which they would find enjoyable and over which they would have more direct control.

I had given the children one week in which to take the pictures, which is the average length of time indicated by other researchers (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007; Langevang, 2007) who used child-led photography. It took, however, the best part of two weeks and several reminders for the children in Italy to bring the cameras back; moreover, the photographs taken by a few of the children proved, once developed, to be a series of hurried stills taken over the space of a few minutes in the school's grounds, which I believe to signify a lack of interest in the proposed activity and the wish to finish it as quickly as possible just to appease me. This was quite a contrast with the reaction of the children in Ghana, who took, in most cases, the majority of the shots available, even though, since they were all living in the same environment, many were very similar views of the same locations. With only two exceptions, all the children, both in Italy and in Ghana, declared to have enjoyed taking the photographs when directly asked for feed-back. The two participants in Italy who admitted they had not particularly enjoyed taking the photographs said that it had felt like homework, something that they had forgotten to do as they had other activities that took up their spare time or that they had worried about because they had not known what to photograph, as the following extract illustrates[18]:

> GF: was it a burden?
> Amauri: yes, to tell you the truth it was a burden, but…
> GF: because it was something that you had to do?
> Amauri: no, because I didn't know what… which things to… which things to photograph
> GF: you couldn't think of anything?
> Amauri: no, and so I worried because it was time to take back the camera and I had all the pictures still to take… so I took them quickly…

This seems to confirm Christensen's point (cited in Hill, 2006) when he writes that young people perceive their free time as a precious commodity that they strive to maintain control over and which they resent being 'hijacked' by others.

While using child-led photography as one of the data-collection techniques in most cases did 'what it said on the tin' (namely, motivate the children by being 'fun', give them agency and allow the researcher a glimpse into otherwise inaccessible spaces outside the school), the amount of other people's input in the choice of subjects for the pictures was, I felt, much greater than much of the available literature implies. Several children mentioned asking for their parents' help in deciding what pictures to take (much in the same way as they would have done for homework), with one of the children mentioning having to behave well so as to be taken by his mother for a trip into the centre of town where he would be able to take more interesting pictures:

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[18] A list of the conventions used in transcribing the interviews is given in Appendix 15

> Slatan: My mum said 'Come on, be quiet so when we go out you will be able to take the photographs of what there isn't [in Ghana]"

Several others, moreover, pointed out pictures taken in order to appease siblings or friends asking to be portrayed or clamouring for a 'go' with the camera. Many children did not mention other people's interference, but it is plausible that a degree of outside input was more widespread than that directly reported, as a camera, especially when held by a child in close proximity to others, is a rather conspicuous instrument that will very likely attract attention.

An issue that seemed to arise in Italy, but not in Ghana, was also the 'coolness' of the instrument. Some of the Ghanaian children born or living in Italy have cameras in their mobile phones, or have their own digital cameras. The disposable cameras I used were therefore not always seen as objects that they were keen to be seen around with, as they were rather large and low-tech looking, and some of the children made this clear by the reception they gave to these rather unfashionable instruments. This did not happen in Ghana, however, where all the children seemed very keen to use the cameras and did not show any problems with their lack of 'style'.

There is, nevertheless, a more uncomfortable explanation to the difference between the responses of the children in Ghana and in Italy to the disposable cameras than the relative higher technological sophistication of the latter over the former. The Ghanaian children in Italy are striving every day to blend-in as much as possible in a largely white environment in which their blackness is a constant reminder of their 'otherness'. Holding a rather conspicuous plastic camera would mean for them to risk attracting (even more) unwanted and unwelcome attention, a risk that they were not all prepared to run to please a (however friendly) white Italian lady. This meant that many of the photographs the participants took in Italy were indoors, either in the home or at school, or were taken from the home looking out into the immediate neighbourhood, raising questions on whether the subjects for the photographs were chosen for their importance to the children or rather for their being 'safe' and hidden from other people's gaze.

To the girls in Ghana, on the other hand, who are living in an environment designed to enhance conformity and where potentially distracting objects such as mobile phones or cameras are not allowed, the possibility of standing out by taking pictures, even with a rather primitive instrument such as the one they were given was, instead, a very attractive proposition. However, the physical limits the Ghanaian participants encountered due to the impossibility of venturing outside the boundaries of the schools meant that their choice of subjects was very circumscribed.

The photographs taken by the participants during the Italian phase of their fieldwork were analysed thematically and the themes and subthemes can be found on Appendix 14. However, it was soon apparent that the images collected during the Ghanaian phase were all so similar in their subjects that an analysis of the emerging themes would reveal very little and was therefore abandoned. In the light of the limits outlined for the choice of the photographs' subjects in both Italy and Ghana, I decided not to use the images as data *per se* but rather to see them as a complement to the participants' narratives and also to employ them to illustrate, expand and back up the themes emerging from the interviews[19]. While constrained by the considerations discussed previously, the photographs still represented an invaluable support to the individual interviews as they aided and furthered the conversation, visually supported the young people's words and shifted the focus away from the participants during the individual interviews.

While not useful for the specific aims of the present research, however, the analysis of the photographs' themes and subthemes (see Appendix 14) could, in the future, be relevant in a separate study aimed at highlighting patterns of 'comfort zones' amongst young migrants and children of migrants. They could form a first indicator of the social spaces and circumstances in which children feel most free to expose themselves (with a camera), as well as give clues on the possible patterns in young participants' choices that may be caused by social and biographical differences.

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[19] To save space and to avoid the thesis becoming too bulky and heavy, the photographs taken by the participants and included in this thesis have been significantly reduced in size. However, in order to allow for a clearer view of the photographs, a CD-Rom containing the full-sized pictures is attached to this thesis.

### *Individual interviews*

After I had developed the films, I interviewed each child individually in order to gain an insight into what the subject of the pictures was meant to be (while sometimes obvious this was, by no means, always so), and also into the reason why the photographs were taken. In order to be able to link pictures and the child's explanation, I labelled each picture on the back with the child's made-up name, a code name for the school and a colour code to distinguish those belonging to the children born in Italy and those born in Ghana. I also numbered each child's pictures sequentially and made sure that I said the photograph's number aloud when referring to them during the interview, so that each picture could be identified and cross-referenced with the interview data for analysis.

While most of the children said that they had preferred meeting the researcher and talking in a group situation, one of the children declared that they had felt more comfortable on their own:

> GF: between the group meeting, being here on your own or taking the pictures…. which of these things was that… you found… most difficult… that you liked less?
> Christian: well… the first meeting
> G: the first meeting you didn't like?
> Christian: [shakes head]
> G: why? In the group…
> Christian: …because it's better if a person doesn't tell everyone his… problems…

The different preferences the participants may express reinforce the complementarity of the two techniques in their adapting to different relating styles and giving access to narratives of different natures (Mitchell, 2001). At the end of the individual interviews, the children were thanked for their help and 'paid' for their contribution in handfuls of chocolate coins.

## Discussion

Social research that involves young participants is a field of investigation fraught with ethical pitfalls that can make researchers feel they are in a no-win situation: their wish for free and unrestricted choice on the participants' part and for redressing power imbalance clashing with the need to keep children safe from harm by shielding them behind adults' authority. It is a very difficult balancing act, not always possible to achieve, but one that has to be attempted and accepted in its imperfection in order to offer some of the most marginal of the members of society the possibility to have their voice heard. The following section aims to explore the ethical issues raised by research with children through the experience gathered during this project and to raise a few points for further consideration.

### *Child protection and agency: an impossible balance?*

The view of childhood that characterises most Western countries stresses, quite understandably, the need to protect them and to shield them from possible harm by subjecting their being approached to parental consent. This, however, poses a series of questions about the very basis of children's participation, and raises some important ethical issues, namely: how can we be sure that the children's choice to take part in research reflects their wish and not their parents/carers/guardians'? Would most children feel that they are able to refuse to cooperate with the request of an adult simply by being reassured that they are free to do so? To what extent are children captive participants, and can this ever be otherwise?

Indeed these are not questions raised only by research with children, but issues that all research has to confront, in particular when access to participants has to be gained through gate-keepers. Research with children, however, amplifies these ethical dilemmas because of the clear subordinate positions of children to adults' (written) consent, which more openly exposes the fact that choosing whether or not to take part in research is not a real option for the majority of young participants (Sime, 2008). Even when, as in the case of the present project, they are clearly reassured that they are under no obligation to take part in the study and that they can drop out at any time without needing to justify their withdrawal, as researchers we need to take into consideration that children may simply go along with our request because compliance to an adult's demands is what is generally expected of them. The last word in a child's participation comes from the parents/carers/guardians' consent (or lack thereof), and this can mean the inclusion of unwilling participants as well as the exclusion of keen ones (cf. Mayall, 2000).

There is, clearly, no easy answer to the questions raised by the difficulties in reconciling children's protection and children's freedom of choice, and researchers need to be aware of these issues and to build them into their investigation's findings rather than relying on a few tricks of the trade that claim to bridge what can only be an unavoidable gap.

### *Reminding and pressurising: a fine line*

As I related earlier, I encountered considerable difficulty in getting the participants in the Italian phase of the fieldwork to bring back consent forms and cameras on time and therefore I needed to go back to the schools (and the classroom assistants needed to go back to each class) several times before all the material could be gathered. This, however, sat rather uneasily with the need to make sure that the children were not forced in any way into the research; the boundaries between reminding the children to bring back what they had forgotten and putting pressure on them to comply with an adult's requests were, in fact, very fuzzy indeed, and it was at times very hard to tell if these boundaries had been crossed. Again, while this is a difficulty that is certainly not limited only to research with children, it is, however, much harder to avoid in investigations involving young participants as it requires both them *and* their parents keeping to the deadlines, something that may put children under more pressure than adult participants who are usually in sole charge of the demands that are made of them.

In Ghana, as I explained earlier, the consent for the children to take part in the study was given by the head-teachers on the parents' behalf, because of the residential character of the schools. The children were clearly told during the first meeting that they were not under any obligation to take part and that they could refuse to answer any questions or leave at any time. However, it is questionable whether any of them would really have felt 'brave' enough to refuse to take part, or to leave in the middle of a conversation, if they felt like it. Did they really have any choice but to stay and take part? Did they really have the freedom to choose, no matter how eagerly and convincingly they were told that it was the case? As Langevang (2007) notes "When the research participants are young Africans and the researcher an adult European, unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched are intensified and need to be reflected upon during the research process" (p. 269). My being adult, white, Italian, coming to them through their head-teacher all would have influenced their decision to stay and, however happy all of them seemed to be about being offered the opportunity, the imbalance of power was still very present, and largely unresolved (Gallagher, 2008).

### *Child-led photography: a composite picture*

As already indicated, I chose to use child-led photography as one of the data-collection techniques, because of its being more fun and appropriate for young participants, a hands-on activity that I hoped would motivate them and in which they would enthusiastically take part and which would, of course, provide useful, multifaceted data. Once the cameras were collected and the pictures developed, however, I became aware that the data provided for a more complex point of view than I had bargained for.

I had tried to anticipate this, in retrospect rather naively, by giving the children a set of instructions where, amongst other practical tips, I stressed that the camera was theirs to use (see Appendix 6). I realised, however, when talking to the children about their pictures, that I was listening to other voices as well as that of the individual child's, and that I could only regard each picture as a 'choral' performance. In a few cases, the other voices that came through, while discussing the pictures with the children, were those of family and friends whom the children had asked for advice or to whom they had lent the camera (cf. Sime, 2008); in some other cases, while there was no mention of other people's involvement, I strongly felt that the children had striven to look at their world through the eyes of a white Italian adult female and to put my own voice, or their rendition of it, into their narratives (Westcott and Littleton, 2004).

As Goldstein (2007) states, all photographs 'lie', as "any photograph represents a choice by the photographer to depict one among an infinite number of moments" (p.72). Therefore a snapshot is never ‘simply’ an objective portrayal of reality, but always a subjective construal of it, however much it may pretend to be/be perceived as an impartial depiction. Moreover, when photography is used as a data collection technique by researchers looking into children’s experiences, it may also not be possible to know with absolute certainty who the author of a particular picture is, and therefore whose interpretation we are witnessing. As a consequence, photographs that are ‘made to order’ need to be regarded as co-constructed representations that may involve several points of view: that of the participants’ and possibly of other people’s that they come in contact with, but also the point of view of the researcher as anticipated by the participants themselves.

The variety of voices that can be conveyed through this technique, however, is proof of the great freedom that photography allows to children precisely for its being outside of the researcher’s control: it gives them freedom to weave into their narratives, if they so wish, those of others they are close to; photography also gives children a chance to shape their narratives so that they convey as much, or as little, about their personal experiences as they feel comfortable to disclose. Moreover, photography allows participants more scope for ‘resistance’, in exercising their agency by resisting the researcher’s requests of compliance (Kothari, 2001), something much harder to do in an interview environment. The film handed in by the child to whom I had been introduced as the ‘psychologist’, once developed, only offered a single picture, that of a blue sky with a scattering of white clouds, a solitary picture that I choose to interpret as the child’s attempt at distancing herself as much as she could from the research; I decided, as a consequence, not to interview the child a second time, in the awareness that, in interpreting the young participant’s feelings and intentions I was, unavoidably, exercising agency on her behalf.

## Analysing the data

The coding of the 51 conversations (focus groups and individual interviews) was time-consuming and, on occasions, even more frustrating than envisaged from my readings (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Basit, 2003; Dey, 1993). I decided to code the transcripts manually, since patterns started to emerge right from the very first stages of the data collection, as I transcribed in the evenings the conversations held with the young participants during the day. Data collection was carried out in Italy and Ghana and, consequently, a substantial amount of transcribing was done while I was in these two countries, but I had no access to coding software on my laptop. Software was, of course, available at the Department of Geography and Sociology of the University of Strathclyde, but by the time I arrived back from the field trips I had already transcribed two-thirds of my interviews and was well underway in the preliminary analysis of the data.

The process of analysis went through several stages, which were not linear but recurrent, as I was learning through the data and this inevitably fed-back into the previous attempts at analysing the transcripts. The transcription of the interviews in Italy also involved the concomitant translation from Italian to English of the conversations. As I transcribed, I also highlighted units of analysis (key-words and/or sentences) and made comments in the margin, remarking on interesting or unexpected points, commonalities or contradictions. After all the interviews were transcribed, I went back to each and started assigning codes to the units of analysis (see Appendix 16 for an example of a coded transcript[20]). I did this by listening again to the tapes while reading over the transcripts. This allowed me to take into account tone of voice, hesitations, stressing of words etc., elements that I felt needed to be considered during the analysis. At this stage interpretation was minimal, although some clear patterns were emerging, in particular when unexpected (e.g. witchcraft) or clearly identifiable attributes (e.g. 'neatness') were recurring with some regularity in the responses. As categories began to emerge, sections of the coded transcripts were copied and pasted into Word documents, one for each emerging category.

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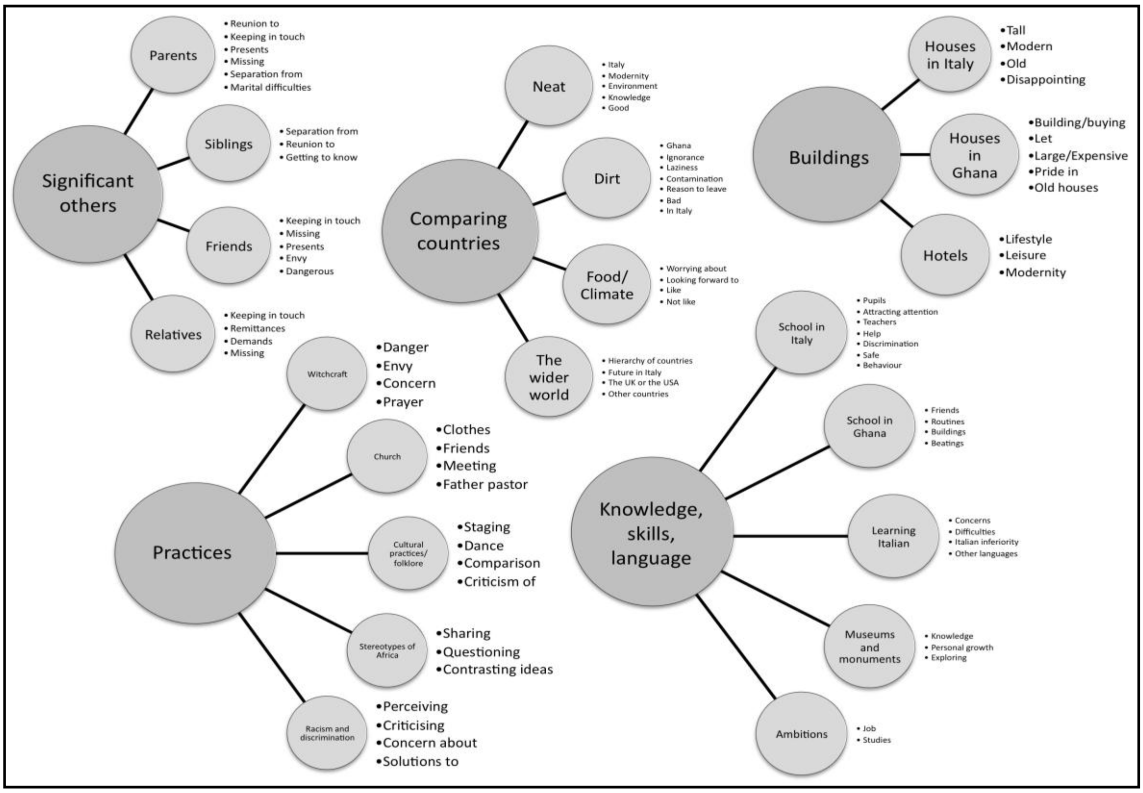
[20] The transcript in Appendix 16 was one of the very last to be coded, when I had a clearer idea of the emerging patterns. Chosen mainly because it is quite short, this is the transcript of an individual interview with one of the young people in Ghana and it was carried out in English.

During the initial part of the thematic analysis stage, I was dealing with 35 different categories (and as many Word documents), something I found quite difficult to manage in electronic format. I therefore printed out all the documents and manually annotated the hard copies, combining and shifting the coded extracts to reach a more manageable number of categories. This process lasted quite a long time and was perhaps the hardest of all. Towards the end of the coding process I discussed the categories I had identified with my supervisors, and this helped me in the process of reorganising them as well as starting to see the emerging themes. I finally managed to reduce the number of categories to a more manageable 21, which I then grouped into 5 main ones. Each main category became a folder containing a number of sub-category folders, each of which, in its turn, contained the coded extracts from the transcripts (see figure 4). The themes that informed the interpretation of the data, and around which the present thesis is organised, were found across categories and also, whenever possible, across the three separate samples of participants. An early example of thematic analysis of the emerging categories can be found in Appendix 17.

**Figure 4: Categories, sub-categories and codes**


Significant others
Parents
• Reunion to
• Keeping in touch
• Presents
• Missing
• Separation from
• Marital difficulties
Siblings
• Separation from
• Reunion to
• Getting to know
Friends
• Keeping in touch
• Missing
• Presents
• Envy
• Dangerous
Relatives
• Keeping in touch
• Remittances
• Demands
• Missing
Comparing countries
Neat
• Italy
• Modernity
• Environment
• Knowledge
• Good
Dirt
• Ghana
• Ignorance
• Laziness
• Contamination
• Reason to leave
• Bad
• In Italy
Food/ Climate
• Worrying about
• Looking forward to
• Like
• Not like
The wider world
• Hierarchy of countries
• Future in Italy
• The UK or the USA
• Other countries
Buildings
Houses in Italy
•Tall
•Modern
•Old
•Disappointing
Houses in Ghana
•Building/buying
•Let
•Large/Expensive
•Pride in
•Old houses
Hotels
•Lifestyle
•Leisure
•Modernity
Practices
Witchcraft
•Danger
•Envy
•Concern
•Prayer
Church
•Clothes
•Friends
•Meeting
•Father pastor
Cultural practices/ folklore
•Staging
•Dance
•Comparison
•Criticism of
Stereotypes of Africa
•Sharing
•Questioning
•Contrasting ideas
Racism and discrimination
•Perceiving
•Criticising
•Concern about
•Solutions to
Knowledge, skills, language
School in Italy
• Pupils
• Attracting attention
• Teachers
• Help
• Discrimination
• Safe
• Behaviour
School in Ghana
• Friends
• Routines
• Buildings
• Beatings
Learning Italian
• Concerns
• Difficulties
• Italian inferiority
• Other languages
Museums and monuments
• Knowledge
• Personal growth
• Exploring
Ambitions
• Job
• Studies

## Putting the 'outtakes' back in: the researcher's imaginings and expectations

Having set out to find out what Ghanaian children's 'imaginative geographies' of Italy and Ghana are, I realised, in listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts, that some other 'imaginings' were also woven through the emerging discourses. These were my own imaginative geographies of Ghana and West Africa, a geographical area about which I only knew very little before going there for the second phase of the data collection.

Having lived in Eritrea (East Africa) for a few years in the past, my idea of Ghana as an African country borrowed partly from this experience. However, I was aware that the physical aspects of the Ghana and Eritrea, as well as their socio-cultural milieu, would be rather different. This meant borrowing, although not consciously, from Western imaginings of sub-Saharan Africa and from documentaries, films and news, in order to make up my own expectations of Ghana.

In the absence of first-hand knowledge of the countries investigated, the researchers' imaginings can influence their studies by shaping the questions that are asked according to assumptions of which the researchers themselves may not be fully aware. Reflecting on the imaginative geographies I brought into my study, as well as the ways in which they had come to be, gave me a precious insight into how the imaginative geographies of the participants can be constructed. As Bourdieu (2003) argues, in fact, it is not desirable to maintain a pretence of 'neutrality' by keeping the researcher's personal experiences away from their study as each social scientist is "[...] encumbered by a past, his or her own past, and this social past, whatever it is, [...] is particularly burdensome and obtrusive when one is engaged in social science. [...]" (p. 291)

In this section I look at the ways in which my own experiences and beliefs, as an individual and as a researcher, entered my study. Sometimes these interferences shaped my expectations of what I should find, at other times they shaped my perception of the children. While they were always unplanned and never fully conscious, these interferences revealed themselves to me almost as they were happening, offering an insight into the interplay between preconceived beliefs and expectations, fruit of Western dominant narratives of Africa and the African 'Other' (Said, 1993), and the rational choice of outlook determined by my moral and political (in the wider sense) convictions in relation to migration issues.

When interviewing the children in Italy to find out how they assessed their expectations prior to leaving in the light of lived experience, I was influenced in my choice of questions by my own assumptions regarding their possible answers; these were, in their turn, shaped by my imaginings of what their previous experiences *might* have been. Having pictured the Ghanaian landscape as mainly dry and barren and the social landscape as one of poverty and deprivation, the first assumption I made when engaged in the following exchange was one that derived these imaginings:

> GF: what's the best thing when… ahm… you've only been here a few ah… two weeks, you said. What's the best thing that you found here?
> Rebecca: the best thing?
> GF: The thing that you think is wonderful. What is it?
> Rebecca: obviously, mhmm… water flowing every day!
> GF: yes…
> Sarah A.: ah! [the one] in the centre?
> Rebecca: yes! It's wonderful, it's wonderful

At the mention of water flowing every day I had automatically assumed that Rebecca was talking about having running water in the house, until Sarah's remark made me realise that she was referring to the town centre's ornamental fountain. This is recorded by my field notes for this focus group, where I registered that "I thought [the participant] was referring to water in the house: perhaps a sign of my own 'imaginary geographies' of Ghana?" (Fieldwork notes, 31st October 2008).

I also realised, even during the interviewing process, that I was 'othering' the young participants who were born in Italy and had always lived there on the grounds of their appearances, which visibly declare their belonging to a minority within Italian society. Despite being aware of the pitfalls my own preconceptions may lead me towards, and determined to avoid this happening, I still found myself referring to Ghana as 'back home' when talking to children I knew perfectly well had never even been there. The following extracts exemplify this, and also show my evident embarrassment:

> GF: sorry. So, this morning your dad called, on the phone. Do you too hear often from home… uh… home… sorry, from Ghana
> Barack: yes, my grandma, my uncle…

> GF: [so, you speak] a bit in Twi and a bit in English? And… do any of your relations back home speak Italian?
> Fely: yes… my father…
> Barack: but, what do you mean by 'back home'?
> GF: no, you're right, in Ghana. I got mixed up…

While the above extracts reflect the 'liminal' state in which views of 'the other' as belonging to a different space persist even when rationally challenged, there were also other ways in which the social and physical space of everyday experience was reflected in my interpretation of the children's narratives. I had been quite puzzled by the photographs of radiators that two of the children had taken, my Western-habituated eyes not seeing the obvious: there are no radiators in Ghana, there being no need for them, and the children (who had been asked to photograph similarities and differences between the two countries) had chosen these household elements to exemplify difference. The sudden realisation of my previous 'blindness' comes though the following exchange over the photograph Slatan had taken.

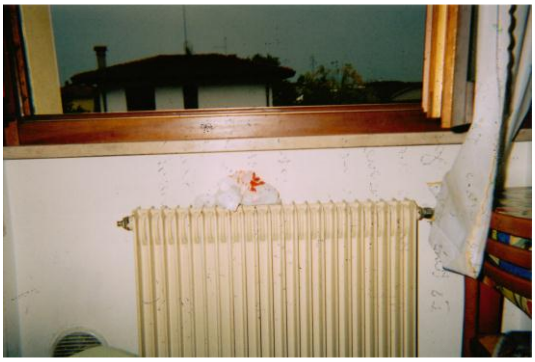


**Figure 5: Radiator**

GF: uhu… then the radiator…
Slatan: right, the radiator
GF: ok. Why did you choose to take this picture?
Slatan: because in Ghana there were not… these… and…
GF: it was not like this?
Slatan: there weren't… basically it was so hot that… it didn't….
GF: right! Of course! There aren't any radiators!
Slatan: no
GF: you know, I never thought about it! [laughs] See, my Italian head never thought that there are no radiators in Ghana, because they are not needed…
Slatan: that's right

Also revealing of how much the researcher's preconceived ideas can interfere with the data collection, however, is the following exchange between me and the first focus group with the children who were left behind in Ghana. I had asked them to tell me about what they were looking forward to doing as soon as they arrived in Italy, half consciously expecting the girls to talk about trips to clothes shops or to the cinema. None of them, however, mentioned this, thus taking me aback and even making me trying to 'tease out' the answer I was expecting. While this exchange still makes me rather uncomfortable, I also realised, on that occasion, that whatever my assumptions, the children had their own expectations and ideas of Italy, and that they would not be easily swayed by my preconceptions, even when momentarily humouring me:

> GF: What do you think you would like of an Italian city?
> Kate: their language and their work
> GF: right? And what would you like to do in an Italian city?
> Kate: I want to go around the city
> GF: and look at what?
> Kate: how the place is…
> GF: and how the clothes shops are? Window shopping?
> Kate: yes…
> GF: looking at the shops… yes

As the above words were being uttered, I was aware of what was going on: I was putting in Kate's mouth something that I thought she should be saying, convinced as I was (however unaware of it) that a young Ghanaian girl had to be looking forward to shopping in Italy. Of course, Kate had other ideas and, despite momentarily going along with my suggestion, quickly took the conversation back to the matters that were important to her and not to the researcher. Needless to say, I learnt from my mistakes and carefully avoided repeating them in the subsequent interviews.

## Summary

Children's vulnerability and society's responsibility to guarantee their safety and happiness, means that research into children's experiences and social worlds has to be filtered and vetoed by adults (Sime, 2008). While this is fundamental, in order to protect children from harm, it also means that young people cannot be totally free to decide whether or not they want to take part in research projects and that they may have to bow to adults' decisions over what is deemed 'good', 'best' or 'important' for them (Mayall, 2000). Even when, as researchers, we attempt to redress power imbalance by trying to aid children's agency as much as possible in the various research stages, by using participatory methods, by informing young people accurately and asking for their consent to take part, by asking and providing feedback, etc., the relationship between adults and children remains highly unequal (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Gallagher, 2008; Langevang, 2007; Holt, 2004). Attempts are made to involve children and young people in all the various stages of research, including planning and organising it (Kesby, 2007), but even in this case the imbalance of power can never fully be redressed as working with underage participants puts at least some limits on the extent of which they can be active and equal partners in projects that are ultimately initiated (and thus 'owned') by adults.

As was observed earlier, there can never be any guarantee that young participants are not taking part in a study because they feel they must comply with an adult's request or because they are made (however subtly) to comply by well-meaning parents and educators, nor can we be sure that children who would like to take part are prevented from doing so by similarly well-meaning adults (Sime, 2008). While power imbalance is an unavoidable issue in all research, studies which involve underage participants must take into account the need and duty to protect children by subordinating their participation to adults' approval. In the case of research conducted within educational institutions this can mean engaging with a number of gatekeepers (e.g. head-teachers, teachers, parents).

The same privileged powerful position that adults enjoy in Western contemporary society means that they can exert, simply by their adultness, pressures that they may not be fully aware of. The line between asking children for help and pressurising them into complying is very difficult to draw, as I hope my experience with the children's failure to return consent forms and cameras has shown. Knowing when this line is being crossed and stopping before it is crossed is, of course, part of a researcher's skills as well as of a person's judgement, but the fact that this line may, despite the best of intentions and careful consideration, be stepped over, should be kept at the forefront of any project that involves young participants (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008).

While there is an inevitable imbalance of power between adults and children that needs to be given full consideration, a careful choice of methods and techniques is still fundamental in order for young participants to be given at least an opportunity to find a space in which they feel as comfortable as possible (Kesby, 2005). Whereas focus groups and individual interviews will complement one another and ensure that all children get a chance to be heard in a context that better suits their individual styles of relating, child-led photography can allow young participants to choose their response away from the researcher's presence and unavoidable pressure. However, a child holding a camera will not easily pass unnoticed (and, of course, even more so when he/she is from a minority background) and the possibility that the pictures we are looking at may not be the child's choice, or that they may have been taken by other people (with or without the child's consent) need to be taken into consideration when analysing the data.

Asking participants to talk about their pictures, but (especially) giving them a chance, beforehand, to take away any pictures that they don't feel like discussing (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007), can help researchers gain a clearer understanding of the children's own points of view. Again, however, researchers need to be aware that, however much children may like taking the photographs, some of them may do so only because they do not feel able to refuse an adult's request and that their choice of subjects may reflect this. It is important that researchers acknowledge the issue of power imbalance rather than avoiding it or pretending that choosing a particular technique or a specific procedure will suffice to dissipate or even diminish it (Kothari, 2001; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). Children's agency can expresses itself in many, sometimes subtle, ways, which can go from active or passive resistance, to changing the researcher's agenda by hijacking the conversation and the research space, to taking part enthusiastically in the research.

# DATA CHAPTERS: INTRODUCTION

The following chapters illustrate and interpret the themes that emerged from analysis of the focus groups, the individual interviews and the photographs the children took. The threads that weave through the narratives of the children, both in Ghana and in Italy are construed and discussed on the basis of the relevant literature in the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology.

Of great significance to the interpretive process is the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose conceptual framework has provided the tools used to make sense of much of the data gathered. In particular, Bourdieu's 'twin' concepts of field and *habitus* (outlined in chapter 2 of the present thesis) have proved very useful in comprehending the ways in which the participants experience the cultural mores of the countries they encounter (directly or indirectly) through patterns of similarity or difference.

The analysis and interpretation of the data collected allowed the tracing of some of the difficulties that young people may face in reconciling different ways of meaning-making. Moreover, it disclosed the ways in which these same young people are able to move between these differences in order to carve spaces that are outside adults' control. As James and James (2004) observe, it is important to look at the extent to which children can influence the 'regulatory framing' of who they are and the constant tension between adults' requirements and children's active shaping of the spaces they inhabit. Far from being passively accepting of adults' rules and demands, children can push the boundaries of these rules, attempt to break them and use several strategies to 'slip through the cracks' of adults' demands[21]. As the data reveals, the children of migrants can play between different set of cultural norms in order to influence the frames of regulations set by adults; in this way they can acquire a degree of agency, albeit within the limits of the power that adults have over their lives (ibid.).

The data section is organised in three separate (but interlocking) chapters and each deals with a set of themes. These themes all reflect the ways in which the children construct their imaginings and understandings of the country they know indirectly and the ways in which the children who have direct experience of moving from one country to another assess their own experiences, thus exploring and unravelling the complex areas of investigation that were set out in the research questions. The three chapters are arranged in an 'expanding' order: from the more individualised imaginings of Italy held by the children and their evaluation of reality, to narratives which concern the wider (national and/or ethnic) community, to a more 'historicised' view of the consequences of colonial history and contemporary global culture on children's expectations and aspirations. The organisation of the chapters reflects a pragmatic need for linear exposition and readability and it should not be assumed that the three wider thematic groups are as clearly separated in the empirical data: often the themes will overlap, mix and fold back onto themselves, as the diffuse complexities of human lives which they aim to portray are wont to.

Chapter 4 looks at the children's individual and personal narratives of migration and explores what moving to and living in a different country means and entails for them, both as (potential) migrants and as children. It illustrates the imaginings, aspirations and worries of the children who were left behind by migrating parents in relation to what they think they will find once they move to join them; it examines the thoughts on moving and settling of the children who migrated to join their parents and thus went from imagined to lived; it looks at the imaginings of

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[21] A very recent example of this, which I came across while writing the final draft of this thesis, comes from an article that appeared on 'the Guardian' newspaper on the battles over skirt length in which schools and young female pupils engage (Barkham, 2011)

Ghana of the children who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents and at how and where they locate their future selves; it also explores the experiences of separation of family members, as they struggle to keep ties alive across borders, and the difficulties of getting to know each other again once the families are reunited.

Chapter 5 explores the children's narratives as members of the Ghanaian diaspora and in a more 'transnational perspective': how young people play a role in spreading and maintaining the 'collective lie' (Sayad, 2004) and how they are themselves caught between the myth and reality of migration. It also looks at how the children who have migrated negotiate their multiple belongings and at how they also (attempt to) use them instrumentally to defy adults' authority and rules.

Chapter 6 expands the view further to encompass the legacy of colonialism in shaping children's perception of the destination and the sending countries. It looks at the ways in which young people simultaneously buy into and try to challenge the Italian portrayals of Africa (and African immigrants) as an undifferentiated entity to be either resented or pitied, and at the ways in which they attempt to critique Italian superiority and challenge the stereotypes of Ghana and Africa.

What follows is the best possible attempt at 'mapping out' onto an imperfect, bi-dimensional media the multi-dimensional (social, physical, temporal, spatial, imaginative and emotional) narratives the children trusted me with. My main wish is to do them justice.

# CHAPTER 4. A CHANGE OF STATE

*"I told my grandmother 'I think Italy is beautiful…' She said 'Yes, it's beautiful. That's why we call it* abroad*'"*
*[Rebecca A., age 13. Two weeks in Italy]*

The present chapter starts by focussing on the theme that was, even while still conducting fieldwork, most striking for its sheer ubiquity and consistency: that of Italian 'neatness' as symbolic of the aspiration for a higher social status, to be achieved by moving to a country that holds a better position in the perceived global hierarchy. This discourse will be tracked through the various stages of the migration process: the pre-migration imaginings of the children left behind, the migrant children's experience of 'real' life in the previously imagined country, and the relocation of disappointed aspirations which seems to characterise the narratives of the children born in Italy.

As Bourdieu (1979a) argues, "All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice" (p. 468). The opposition between 'messy/tidy' and 'dirty/clean' which is so often used to characterise the country pairing 'Ghana/Italy' by the young Ghanaians interviewed, appears to be precisely part of shared perceptual schemes that are used to make sense of the two countries. I argue that this opposition refers to the children's perception of their (and their families') social position within Ghana and, after migration has taken place, within Italy. The adjective 'neat', so consistently associated with Italy by the children, has a moral and social connotation which refers to the higher status that Italy, as a Western country, is perceived to have when compared to

Ghana. I also argue that this assumed superiority is a legacy of colonial discourse, and reflects a shared perception by some strata of Ghanaian society which equates Europe (and 'the West') with progress, sophistication and respectability. As Bourdieu (1979a) observes, the antagonistic qualifiers clean/dirty, neat/messy, as well as the many others that make up the 'network of oppositions' (e.g. 'high/low, fine/coarse, etc), "[...] always derive their ideological strength from the fact that they refer back, more or less discreetly, to the most fundamental opposition within the social order: the opposition between the dominant and the dominated [...]" (p. 469)

The first part of the present chapter focuses on the set of oppositions neat/messy and clean/dirty that so powerfully emerged from the children's interviews and photographs. It looks at the moral connotations of these dichotomies and at the way in which they can offer a window on the children's perception of their status within sending and receiving societies. The second part of the chapter investigates the aspirations and worries of the children who were left behind and the migrant children's reflections on moving to and settling in a new country, including into the social space of the school. It looks at how transnational belongings shape the children's aspirations and expectations for the future. It also links this research to those of other investigators, to highlight international migrants' shared perception of a world hierarchy in which different countries come to embody different degrees of potential for self-realization and social promotion. Part four explores the children's experiences of separation from their parent(s), the emotional aspects of family reunification and the (not always straightforward) process of getting (re)acquainted; it also highlights the specific issues faced by migrant children when the parents experience marital difficulties.

## The social connotation of 'neat' and 'dirty'

As Fanon argues the colonizers hammered into the heads of the local populations the belief that "[...] if the colonist were to leave they would regress into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality" (Fanon, 2004, p. 149). Moreover, during the colonial period the colonizers' ways of life and cultures were introduced, replacing the native ones at the higher echelons of society, and trickling down to become those that the urban proletariat of the colonies (the local middle-class, to use Fanon's equation) would also aspire to. The various independence struggles of the past century have seen the vast majority of countries in the Global South achieve, at least formally, emancipation from the former colonial powers. However, the consequence of decades, sometimes centuries of domination by Western powers means that at least some of the stereotypes that see the former colonizers as more 'developed' and modern still live on, while the former colonized perceive their traditional ways of life as backward and a sign of 'underdevelopment'. Furthermore, as an effect of the globalisation of popular culture, people living in countries of what is known as the 'global South' daily consume cultural products that are manufactured in the industrialised countries and that are shaped by the richer countries' cultural and social standards (Said, 1994).

This myth of Euro-American modernity and prosperity is further confirmed by the joint construction of migration narratives that Sayad (2004) conceptualises as 'the collective lie'. As previously illustrated (see chapter 2), this term refers to the portrayal of migrants' success that migrants (potential, actual, former), as well as migrants' families and relations, constantly (re)create through their transnational discourses and practices. Migration affects not just those who leave, but also those who stay behind, and the stories migrants bring back during visits, the photographs, videos and phone calls, all contribute to non-migrants' imaginings of how their lives could be were they to move. The combination of these factors is likely to influence the aspirations and ambitions of young people living in the post-colonial countries, aspirations which feed the desire to move and for which the contemporary globalised economy and a faster and cheaper transport network provide terrain and means (Castles and Miller, 2003).

The following section begins to explore the issues set out by the research questions. It shows how children left behind imagine Italy, and shows which elements of this country they particularly look forward to. It also looks at how the children who are on the other side of the migration trajectory, having moved from Ghana to Italy, evaluate their expectations in relation to the reality they found.

### *"The houses there are very neat." Moving to improve social status*

Analysis of the data collected (focus groups and individual interview transcripts, as well as photographs taken by the children) reveals an unmissable, and somewhat unexpected, preoccupation of the children with 'neatness', both in Italy and in Ghana. The word 'neat,' which, as the children explained, encompasses both 'clean' and 'tidy', is the adjective that the children left behind invariably associated with Italy. Rather than physical features, such as buildings or people, the most significant and anticipated aspect of Italy is, according to the children, its being a 'neat' country, often cited in contrast to Ghana's dirt and general untidiness. This preoccupation with cleanliness and order is also echoed by the discourses of the children who migrated to join their parents in Italy, and photographs of dumping grounds in Ghana and recycling points or wheelie-bins in Italy confirm the children's preoccupation with cleanliness and dirt at both ends of this migration trajectory.

While Ghana's urban areas objectively do suffer from pollution, chaotic traffic and waste dumping, the insistence of the children left behind on Italian cleanliness and tidiness as the main focus of their imaginings and expectations seems, at first, rather puzzling. The extracts which follow come from focus groups and individual interviews with the children left behind in Ghana:

> GF: you've seen a picture once?
> Millisent: yes
> GF: and what did it look like? What did you think?
> Wendibel: it's... the house… the houses there are very neat
> GF: right
> Millisent: and their surroundings are clean…

> Sarah B.: and where she was standing… she's on the steps
> GF: yes?
> Georgiana: there's no dust or rubbish around
> Sarah B.: Yeah! Oh, it's clean
> Georgiana: it is very clean

While in both of the examples above the girls had seen photographs of their parents in Italy, having seen an image of the destination country seems not be a necessary pre-requisite for determining its superior 'cleanliness'. Gabriella had not seen any photographs of Italy at the time of our conversation, but this does not stop her from thinking that Italy would be clean and tidy, in explicit contrast to Ghana:

> GF: […] do you know anything [about Italy]?
> Gabriella: me, I think that that place is neat
> GF: right. What do you mean by neat?
> Gabriella: that place is clean…
> GF: ok
> Gabriella: here you see rubbish everywhere you go. *That* place is not dirty

I found a first indication of what this insistence on neatness may mean to the children, besides the literal desire for a cleaner and tidier environment, in anthropology. Douglas (1966) describes dirt as 'matter out of place' and consequently cleanliness as a restoring of order: soil on the ground is not dirty while on the table it is, and returning soil to where it rightly belongs will restore the order which had been upset. In a similar way, the children's insistence on Italian cleanliness and tidiness, as opposed to Ghanaian dirt and untidiness, could symbolise the disruption of familial order caused by migration, as well as the restoration of order engendered by the family's reunification.

Dirt has, as Douglas argues, a highly symbolic meaning, which is associated with moral purity and rectitude. Moreover, according to van der Geest (1998) the word 'neat' has, in Akan culture[22], an emblematic significance that can be conveyed by the following equivalence: "clean = beautiful = attractive = good = civilised = respectable"; conversely, "dirty = ugly = unattractive = nasty = bad = uncivilized = shameful = not respected" (p. 9). This link between 'clean' and 'civilized' that still appears to inform these categories is a legacy of colonial discourses, as the following adverts (circa 1890s) poignantly illustrate:

Figure 6 is omitted from the digital copy of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure depicts a black male. He is wearing feathers in his hair and a loincloth and is holding a spear. He is standing on a beach and holding a bar of soap that he seems to have found in a crate. The crate is beside him and appears to have been washed up on the sore from a shipwreck. The ship can be seen sinking in the background.

The captions in figure 6 read:

THE BIRTH OF CIVILIZATION: A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA
"The consumption of soap is a measure of the wealth, civilization, health and purity of the people"

**Figure 6: Advert for Pears' soap (UK) circa 1890s. Available from: http://wanphing.com/2009/02/21/soap-imperialism/ (Accessed on 19th April 2011)[23]**

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[22] Akan is the largest ethnic group in Ghana. About half of Ghana's population belongs to the Akan group (van der Geest, 2007).

[23] The inspiration for the use of Pears' soap and Fairy soap adverts (figures 3, 4 and 29) comes from a visit to the exibition "Dirt. The filthy reality of everyday life" which was on at the Wellcome Collection between the 24th of March and the 31st of August 2011.

Figure 7 is omitted from the digital copy of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure depicts a white officer, dressed in a white uniform and sporting a white handlebar moustache and white hair. He is washing his hands in what appears to be the interior of a ship. Smaller scenes are depicted around the margins of the main image. They portray ships, seaports and an indigenous man kneeling while receiving something (possibly a bar of soap) from a white man.

The captions in figure 7 read:

The first step towards lightening
**The White Man's Burden**
is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness
**Pears' Soap**
is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place – it is the ideal toilet soap.

**Figure 7: Advert for Pears' soap (UK) circa 1890s. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:1890sc_Pears_Soap_Ad.jpg (Accessed on 19th April 2011)**

This insight adds an additional dimension to the children's preoccupation with the cleanliness and tidiness of Italy as opposed to the perceived untidiness and dirt of Ghana, a dimension that belies an interpretation based exclusively on the literal meaning of these characteristics and points to the hope that moving to Italy will engender, as well as a restoration of familial order, a 'change of state': a progress from a lower social status to a higher and more 'respectable' one, ultimately a progress from poverty to wealth (Lott, 2002). Using this interpretation as a sounding board means that the children's words ring more clear and poignant:

> GF: what does it look like? What's attractive about it?
> Wendibel: everything about it. I already like the country so… I like everything about it
> GF: what's the best thing about it?
> Wendibel: the way… the education is, and… how they arrange their cities. They don't mess up houses, instead they are in order and they keep the country very clean

The cleanliness of Italy, contrasted to the dirtiness of Ghana, is not just a recurrent theme emerging from the interviews. Several of the children's photographs focus on these topics, such as the one by Esther:

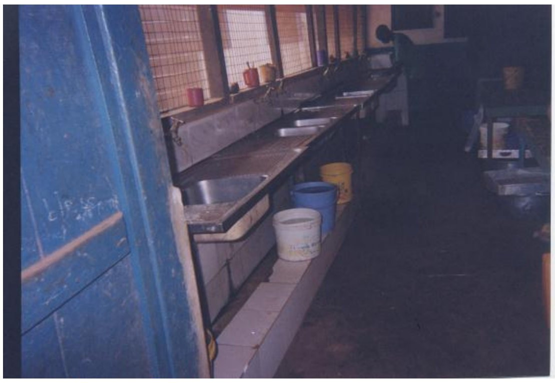

**Figure 8: Ghanaian school's scullery**

Esther:

"This the dining-hall, where we wash the plates. I took this picture because there it's not very neat and they don't wash the plates very well, the table-men. I think this would be very, very different in Italy, because they would do their work very fine… and neat"

The next pictures, on the same theme, were taken respectively by Georgiana and Wendibel, who commented on them as follows:

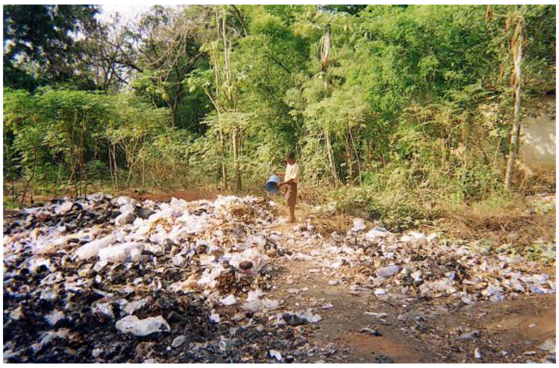

**Figure 9 Ghanaian rubbish disposal**

Georgiana:

"This is the reason why I want to leave the country. Me, I put the rubbish in my pocket or in my bag and then drop it in the nearest bin. But most of the Ghanaians are illiterate and they don't know about cleaning and so they put it anywhere, and that causes a lot of… malaria…"

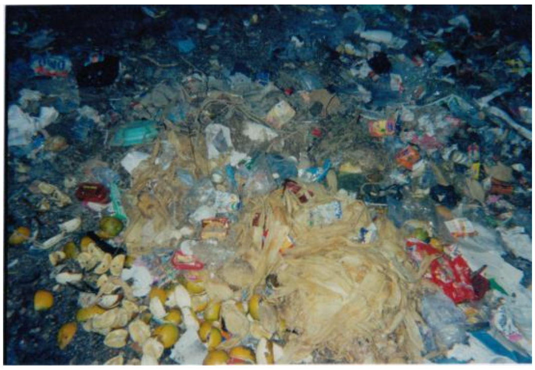

**Figure 10: Rubbish outside the school**

Wendibel:

"This is outside the school. People in Italy don't throw rubbish around because they are more… they are educated and… they take good care of the environment. "

It is interesting to notice how both Georgiana and Wendibel draw a causal link between illiteracy and dirt: implicitly, this also means a link between literacy (and, more generally, education) and cleanliness, and thus the two opposite pairs of adjectives (tidy/messy; clean/dirty) reveal, yet again, their symbolic nature. However, the moral connotations associated with lack/possession of cultural capital are here taken a step further: ignorance causes dirt that, in its turn, causes diseases and contamination.

As Douglas (1966: 37) stresses: "[...] our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications". Thus, the link between lack of education and pollution becomes clear: ignorance is an 'abomination', something that does not have a space in the desired order of society. Moreover, this link carries the implicit understanding that the illiterate are to be blamed for the pollution and illness they cause: symbolic violence appears here to be at work, hiding what are the consequences of structural inequalities behind explanations based on the presumed ineptitude and apathy, the personal and collective deficiencies, of the more disadvantaged section of the community.

The participants in Ghana did not seem particularly aware of the economic reasons that commonly appear to inform the adults' decision to migrate. Since migration is a costly process that requires financial and social capital (Faist, 2000), the children were generally from relatively comfortable backgrounds, their economic situation likely to be further enhanced by the remittances sent by their parents. The young participants in Ghana were all attending schools at the more desirable end of Ghanaian state education and therefore arguably living in a privileged social and educational environment. With the economic explanation not so prominent, the children's answer to the question 'why leave?' is consequently open to more essentially social and cultural connotations: by moving to a Western country their own social status, together with that of their families, would be improved. Living abroad would mean increased respect and higher social standing: a change of 'state': from 'messy' to 'neat'. The children's words thus appear to reflect social belonging and social aspirations which entail migration as a necessary corollary for their realisation.

The following extracts are comments to photographs that the children had taken of the school grounds and refer to some of the buildings within the school. [24]

> GF: yes. And this is a building that you like, yes?
> Kate B.: yes
> GF: and why do you like it?
> Kate B.: how the place is neat and how the building is…
> GF: is well looked after?[25]
> Kate B.: yes

> GF: do you think this [building] could be Italian?
> Georgiana: somehow, because the environment is very clean and neat, so it could be

As Bourdieu posits, "Even when it is in no way inspired by the conscious concern to stand aloof from working–class laxity, every petit-bourgeois profession of rigour, every eulogy of the clean, sober and neat, contains a tacit reference to uncleanness, in words or things, to intemperance or improvidence […]" (Bourdieu, 1979a p. 247). Similarly, the children words appear to express judgements which highlight their perceived belonging to a morally superior section of Ghanaian society, as well as their expectation that moving to Italy will mean finding more fertile ground for the full development of their social potential.

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[24] The photographs the children were referring to were not included to protect the anonymity of the schools

[25] I am aware that, on a few occasions, my questions were leading. Trying to sustain as relaxed an atmosphere as possible during focus groups and individual interviews, however, required maintaining the flow of conversation, which is in part achieved (alongside other means) by completing the interlocutors' sentences when they hesitate. The balance between intervening as little as possible and maintaining a 'normal' pace of conversation to put the participants at ease was not always an easy one to strike.

### *"I never thought I would see all this rubbish" The untidiness of reality*

For Ghanaian migrants, however, arriving in Italy means too often having to confront the exact opposite of the anticipated social advancement. Social demotion is what many migrants in fact experience (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001) with the increase in financial returns often obscured by a marginal role in a society, such as the Italian one, that is fast becoming more intolerant towards immigration[26]. For many migrant children the disappointment is bitter, as the following extract, from a focus group, demonstrates:

> GF: what would you tell [children who are waiting to come to Italy] in order for them to get ready?
> Benedetta: I would tell them not to come
> GF: you would tell them not to come…
> Benedetta: I want to go back myself!

Even though she has been in Italy for three and a half years, Benedetta is feeling that the reality did not live up to her pre-migratory expectations, and is disappointed enough to wish to say that she would like to go back to Ghana. The fact that she decided to express this wish publicly meant stressing the disappointment and sharing it with the other children but, also, with an Italian adult in the public setting of an Italian school: a highly symbolic gesture through which she challenges the receiving country.

Another girl, who had been in Italy only for two weeks at the time of the interview and therefore could remember quite well her expectations, laughs at her own naïveté:

> Rebecca A.: so when I come here, ah… I thought that... ah… my father was a bank manager or a doctor…
> All: [laugh]
> Rebecca A.: so when I come here I don't… ah…
> GF: it wasn't like that

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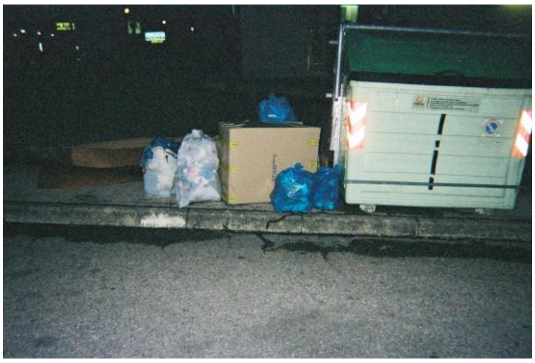
[26] See, for example, '*Operazione White Christmas*': in a small Italian town of the North of Italy, between November and December 2009 the police was asked to do door-to-door searches for undocumented migrants (De Riccardi, 2009). Also, see the '*Decreto Sicurezza*' law (ddl 733-bis), approved in February 2009, which, amongst several other restrictive provisions, establishes that 'illegal immigration' is a crime and also establishes the possibility to proceed to DNA checks to verify family reunification applications. As a further example, the *Circolare Ministeriale 8.01.2010* introduces a maximum quota of 30% of 'foreign' pupils in Italian classes (From: www.camera.it Accessed on 18/01/2010).

> Rebecca A.: yes, and when I come here I thought that the house was taaaall like… ah… twenty-storey building, so it was not like that
> GF: no? Were you disappointed?
> Rebecca A.: yes

The final exchange in the above extract suffers because of the researcher's leading question. However, body language and tone of voice of the young participant were, at least partly, the reason for this bias, as they conveyed disappointment quite clearly, but cannot be replicated in writing. The professional middle-class life Rebecca had dreamt for herself and her family was very different from the reality she found, and in admitting this openly she is, at the same time, mocking herself for having entertained hopes for a life that, she now realises clearly, is 'not for the likes of her' (Bourdieu, 1990a). Symbolic (interiorised) violence appears to be effectively at work to put her in the place in Italian society to which she 'belongs' as a visible minority and the child of unskilled labour immigrants.

Realising that their hopeful imaginings and expectations were often misplaced, the children notice that Italy has a not so 'neat' face, and hides also dirty or dangerous aspects. This is illustrated both in conversations and through the photographs taken:



Slatan:

"I never thought I would see all this rubbish like this. In Ghana we have bins, but we only put the rubbish out if they are full. When I opened this one, it was almost empty, but people had put stuff on the ground all the same."

**Figure 11: Italian rubbish disposal**

> Valeria: but I… I was sure that I would see nice things
> GF: yes? What were the nice things that you were expecting to see?
> Valeria: because my mum told me that everything was… clean… clean, not like Ghana. That… for example, there you can go out on your own until… you can come back when you want… but here you cannot go out on your own, you can't…
> GF: you must be careful… had mum told you about this too?
> Valeria: yes

Italy is found to be, when looked at from up close, not as clean and tidy as had been anticipated, as Slatan's pictures and comments illustrate. Even if the expected 'nice things' do materialise, there still is a dangerous and threatening side to the receiving country, as Valeria points out. The discomfort and conspicuousness felt by adult migrants, who may have difficulties in coming to terms with the different *habitus* required by life in Italy and are confused and unsure about what is expected of them and how they should behave, can make the receiving country appear fraught with dangers and 'traps'. This can generate a defensive attitude in adult migrants that can also result in excessive sheltering of their offspring, which, in turn, can isolate them and make them less likely to develop friendships and social networks outside the educational institutions (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

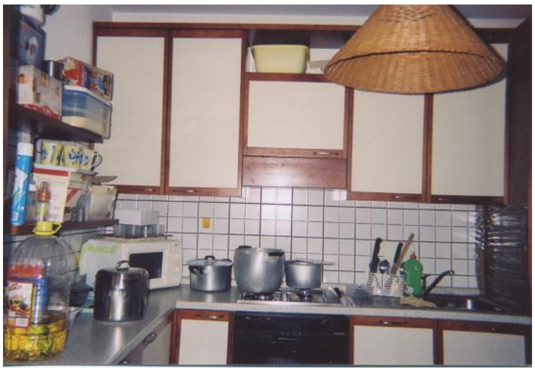
To the migrant children, Italy also proves to have a not so 'respectable' side, a side of crowded housing and joblessness, as these recently arrived children point out:

> GF: was it how you expected it?
> Roberto A.: [laughs] no!
> GF: No? What did you think…
> Roberto A.: it was different
> GF: what was different?
> Roberto A.: we thought that we would have only one house
> GF: right…
> Roberto A.: I mean, a… a house that belonged to us, something like this, with nobody else
> GF: I see…

> Linelle: well, I thought that here there was a lot of money on the streets, not like in Ghana were there isn't a lot of money… but when I came here I saw that… there are not many jobs…
> GF: right. Did you think life would be easier?
> Linelle: eh, yes. Yes

While Roberto was unpleasantly surprised on finding that his family had to live in a block of flats rather than the detached house he had expected, Linelle appears to have believed, prior to leaving, that the metaphorical notion of the 'streets paved with gold' would be, if not quite literally true, at least an indication of a life free of financial constraints and worries. While, with only two exceptions, all the children in Italy indicated that their parents were in some form of employment, the family's struggle to get to the end of the months on an unskilled labourer salary is something that Linelle had not expected to have to experience once in Italy.

While, in the vast majority of the interviews and the focus group conversations, the young migrants appeared to concentrate on the difficulties and the drawbacks of life in Italy, the photographs nevertheless portray material improvement, in particular in the standards of living conditions:

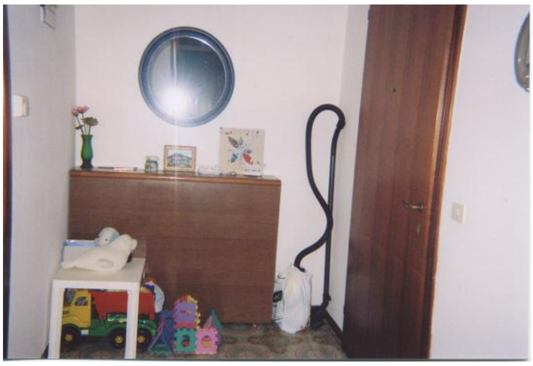


Slatan:

"This is my kitchen: the light, oil, bread… In Ghana there were kitchens, but not so many nice things.

**Figure 12: Kitchen in Italy**

While the 'outside' may be unpleasant and life far from easy, the home interior can provide a reassuring space, one where the pre-migratory aspiration for 'neatness' can be enacted and the associated moral standing upheld:



Valeria:

"This is where my brother plays. He's very tidy, he does not like making a mess. If he makes a mess he will tidy up.

**Figure 13: Play area in an Italian home**

Valeria's little brother is only a toddler, but she is keen to talk about his penchant for tidiness and his dislike of mess: a well-behaved little boy, quite unlike the young brother of two of the Italian-born participants:

> Kate: it's my brother….
> GF: you say that your mum would need…
> Kate: … who brings toys, crayons…
> Claire: he throws them on the ground
> Kate: that's right
> Claire: when he gets crossed he throws everything on the floor
> Kate: if he takes…
> GF: and mum has to work constantly
> Kate: …a glass and drinks, then he goes to get another one, etcetera etcetera

These sisters complained at length about the untidiness of their five-year-old brother, who would make their poor mother work very hard. However, their criticism also appears to aim, by contrast, to highlight their own tidiness and, by implication, the fact that they are well behaved and 'virtuous' girls.

## Thinking about the future, on both sides of the migration trajectory

Levitt (2001) argues that migrants do not just send home remittances in money or goods, but that an important effect of migration on the sending community is exercised by what she calls the 'social remittances' of migrants. With the term 'social remittances' Levitt (2001) refers to the flow of ideas and lifestyles that are acquired by those living and working abroad and which can be transferred back, thus sometimes altering individuals' or communities' attitudes and engendering demands for social change. Children are not immune to the flow of 'social remittances'; on the contrary, because of their close personal link to people living abroad, young people are often at the receiving end of these remittances, which can shape their expectations and dreams for the future that awaits them in the new country.

The social remittances that flow within transnational social spaces foster expectations and ambitions which have, of necessity, a social status connotation. As Bourdieu (1979a) argues, lifestyles are sign-systems that are socially qualified, and what comes to be defined as in good/bad taste, 'vulgar', appropriate, etc. is an indication of social status and belonging. The Ghanaian children waiting to join their parents in Italy express their desire to move to Italy as an opportunity to expand their 'cultural capital', while everything they will be sad to leave pertains to the more 'emotional' side of their selves: the people, the food, the weather, the elements that make one feel 'at home' (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989). To this more emotional and 'primordial' side belong also the worries they have about living in a different country; not practical difficulties, but more 'elemental' and essential ones, linked to the care and comfort of the familiar (ibid.)

The disappointment that often accompanies the encounter with the reality of the new country leaves vacant the space which had been filled by the expectations and the ambitions the children had learnt to cultivate, often for years. As they become part of the way in which the young people have come to perceive themselves, a trait of their identity, these ambitions cannot be simply abandoned when it becomes clear that they will not be easily fulfilled. They are, consequently, given a new target (Pajo, 2007 Mai, 2001), and new sites for the accomplishment of their social potential are found. Whether imagined or real, the possibility of moving again, to a place which is 'better still', keeps the dreams from having to implode and gives the children something to look forward to.

In this section I look at how the Ghanaian participants express their hopes and worries for their life in a new country and at how they find that the country where their expectations can be fulfilled appears to shift and move further away. I also strive to draw links to other studies which have found similar patterns (of expectation, disappointment, relocation) and so to inscribe the

Ghanaian children's experience within a shared, if unspoken, understanding of a hierarchical order of the world's countries.

### *"I may have a runny stomach." Anticipating life in Italy*

The children left behind did not seem to have any doubts about the superiority of Italian 'neatness' over Ghanaian 'messiness'. This is not to say that they do not identify people and places they would miss but that, despite this awareness, the desirability of moving seems never to be in question, whatever/whomever this means leaving behind. The following extract, from an individual interview, illustrates this point:

> GF: do you think you would miss X school if you went to Italy?
> Kate B.: I would miss it too much!
> GF: a lot?
> Kate B.: yes
> GF: would you still want to go or would you prefer not to go?
> Kate B.: I want to go
> GF: you want to go even though you think you would miss it very much?
> Kate B.: yes

In the following exchange, part of a focus group conversation, one of the children had just said that she would have been sad to leave Ghana, when the day finally came. Another participant appeared quite surprised by this, and asked Georgiana why she would be sad, a question I had not thought of asking, my assumption being that sadness would be a 'normal' response:

> Kate: why?
> GF: ah! Good question! Why [will you be sad]?
> Georgiana: because… ah… all my life I stayed in Ghana so… I'm going to really miss my country…
> GF: yes…
> Georgiana: that's all… but I'm happy that I'm going to change the environment

Only two of the children left behind made direct references to the possibility that, once in Italy, they may encounter discrimination on the basis of skin colour and, generally, they showed no awareness of the social disadvantage they may have to face once in Italy as a result of their immigrant condition. While it is possible that these worries were omitted so not to accuse my fellow Italians of racism, the surprise that the children who had migrated recollect at finding out about their families' true social position in Italy seems to confirm the fact that children are (one of) the recipients of a kind of 'sheltered narrative'. Migrants' selectivity about which aspects of their lives they allow to be known by those they leave behind, perhaps also coupled with a wish to protect children from harsher truths, means that prospective migrants are often unaware of the difficulties of settling in what is, in many cases, a hostile environment.

The girls in Ghana, however, did identify some issues they might encounter in adapting to the new country, but they focused primarily on worries about finding the language difficult, not liking the food, or adapting to the new climate. 13 year-old Sarah B. is one of the participants who appeared to be more conscious of the possibility that she may be the object of racism once in the new country:

> Sarah B.: maybe if I get… maybe if it's a school day and the children won't like me because I'm black or something like that
> GF: you think that there may be people that are racist
> Sarah B.: yes… I'd feel bad if people tease me because I'm black… I would feel bad… {…} And their… how they speak the language… it would be very difficult for me to learn

Together with racism, Sarah also raises the issues of not understanding the language, a difficulty that all the children were aware of. This is picked up by Cynthia, who in addition mentions weather and food as the aspects of Italy that she forecasts having trouble with:

> GF: and… but what do you think would be the most difficult thing… if you were to move to Italy, what would be the most difficult thing?
> Cynthia: the weather. The language and the weather. And the food

While the next exchange reveals both the researcher's bias about the universality of taste in food, it also highlights the symbolic relevance of food and language as essential components of a new country which can penetrate the body, thus becoming an integral part of the individual. The prospect of having to 'assimilate' new food and a new language (and, more generally, a new *habitus*) can be quite daunting and the potential pain this process of incorporation may cause is predicted by Georgiana in the short extract that follows:

> GF: anything else that may worry you?
> Sarah B.: the food they eat…
> GF: yes? Well, the food is nice…
> Georgiana: I may have a runny stomach

Language and food (and, to some extent, also climate) are important components of an individual's sense of identity and belonging (Losi, 2006; Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989) and the children's discourses need to be read, once again, on a more symbolic level. Their worries about finding Italian difficult to learn, not liking the food or having problems in adapting to the cold weather are standing for a deeper concern about settling into a different social and physical environment and for the risk of losing one's identity in the process.

Despite the worries, there are many aspects of life in Italy that the children were looking forward to. School features very prominently in their discourses, both for the possibilities of social advancement that education can offer but also (perhaps more so) for the social interaction with Italian children that it can afford. But the children's own envisioning of their future selves in the new environment paints a picture that, besides expectations for education and friendship, includes imaginings of a way of life in which culture, adventure and the excitement of the new seem to play an essential role. The following extracts were chosen because they are representative of the 'exploration' narratives that consistently run through the expectations of the young participants in Ghana:

> GF: what would be the first thing that you do, a part from saying hi to your mum and dad, giving them a hug?
> Wendibel: yes. I want them to introduce me to how Italy is and… the history of Italy… and…
> GF: right. And what do you think you would do on your first day in Italy?
> Wendibel: I would like to go to school there, straightaway

> GF: and what would be the first thing that you would want to do or… to see in Italy? Anything special that you would like to do?
> Gabriella: like, he should show me to the zoo…
> GF: you would like to go to the zoo?
> Gabriella: …the museum… places…
> GF: all these place. And… anything that you would like to do there?
> Gabriella: I would like to go to school there

> GF: yes? And… if you went to Italy, what would you like to do, or to see…?
> Esmeralda: I would like to see the beach
> GF: the beach?
> Esmeralda: yes. And the hotels
> GF: and what would you do at the beach?
> Esmeralda: I would like to swim and play
> GF: yes. What sort of games would you play on the beach?
> Esmeralda: ah… building a castle with sand

The children left behind cannot but look forward to the time when they will join their parents in a country that will afford them status and where they will be able to further their ambition for social advancement. Italy is modern, clean and tidy, has great schools and monuments and zoos. They see themselves in these surroundings, finally reunited with their families, and they see very little to spoil this picture. Hints of a doubt that all may not be so straightforward do come through: the language may be a barrier, the food may not be very nice, they may miss their friends and (extended) family. But it will be all worth it in the end, and all will be fine.

### *"I don't want to grow old here." Moving on to move up*

When deciding which country to migrate to, migrants often have to settle for the best option amongst those available to them. This may not be, as for many of the Ghanaian migrants in Italy, the country they would have chosen as an ideal destination, but one that was more accessible and/or where they could enjoy more support and practical help. However, it is always, in any case, a step 'up', a move from a country perceived as lower in the world hierarchy, to a higher one, since for migrants (prospective or actual) different countries come to hold different degrees of attraction as far as social advancement is concerned.

While 'abroad' is synonymous with 'better', there seem to be different scales of 'better' that different countries are seen to possess and which map out geographies of 'territorialised fulfilment' (Pajo, 2007). In her study of Albanian migration to Athens, Pajo came across a very similar narrative to the one that I collected from the Ghanaian children in Italy. Despite the many, important differences between the two studies, the idea that there is a world hierarchy, with different countries "[...] territorializing varying degrees of individual achievement" (ibid. p. 10) seems to be a common narrative. Like the Albanian adult migrants to Greece, the Ghanaian migrant children to Italy seemed to be very aware of this hierarchy and of the inferior position of Ghana within it. Their discourses on the 'neatness' of Italy, as opposed to the 'messiness' of Ghana, point in this direction: Italy has a higher status in the world's hierarchy of countries and moving there means moving up.

However, the failure to achieve the desired upward social mobility they were expecting can result in disappointment, sometimes quite bitter, with the country of settlement, which is simply 'not good enough'. For the Ghanaian children in Italy the inferior status of Italy is often symbolised by the 'uselessness' of the Italian language. The language to know is English, of course, the language of the former colonizers and also Ghana's official language:

> GF: what's there in America that is special? What's there that's nice? That makes you want to go there?
> Erica: because here in Italy, I mean… Italian cannot help you in the…
> GF: the language, you mean?
> Erica: yes, the language
> GF: right…
> Erica: in America you can go somewhere else and speak English
> GF: ok, sure, this is an advantage. And you said [you wanted to go] to London?
> Claire: to learn English

A 'greener grass' narrative is established that traps the children in the limbo of a 'double presence' that means, as a necessary counterpart, a 'double absence' (Sayad, 2004), a sense of belonging to two places that often simultaneously carries with it the uneasy possibility of belonging to neither. They have often developed strong ties to Italy, and their ties with Ghana too can be quite powerful. Despite (but also because of) these multiple belongings, the children aspire to being somewhere else, chasing the respect and lifestyle they could not get, not daring to go (back) to Ghana but also realising that a future in Italy is not very likely to deliver the improvement they (and their families) set out to achieve, no matter how hard they try. In Italy, they come to realise, there is to be no social advancement; on the contrary. Even though their homes may be nicer than they were in Ghana, their families may be financially better off and they may have more material possessions, they are 'immigrants' (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001), and no number of status-symbols can disguise the fact that the unskilled labour immigrant position is one of the lowest, and most precarious, positions in contemporary Italian society. Their photographs, however, capture these status symbols, the trappings of a lifestyle they can perform but that is not theirs to claim, at least as far as the receiving society is concerned.

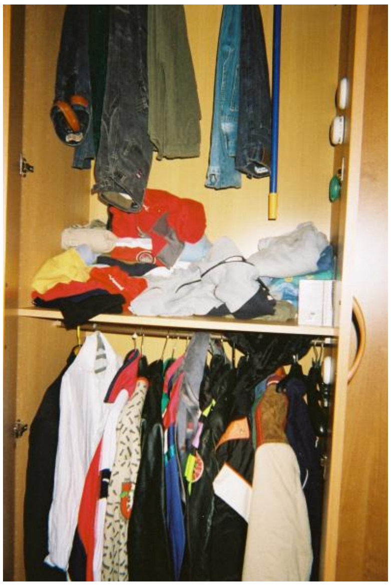


**Figure 14: Wardrobe in Italy**

Marty:

"This is my wardrobe. There's another section over here.
In Ghana clothes are not like this. Not always. Some people only have shorts and a T-shirt and they keep it on for days…"

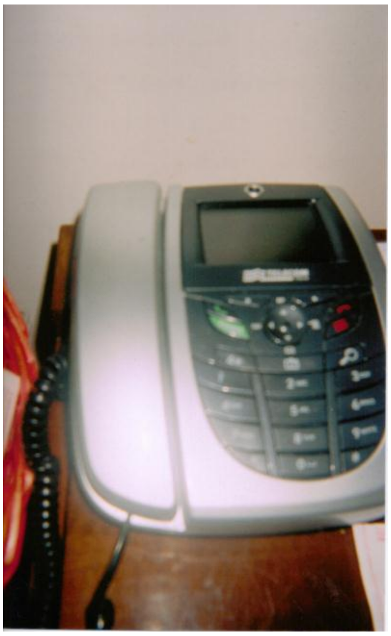


**Figure 15: Video-telephone in Italy**

Claire:

"This is my home phone. If someone has a phone like this, you can press a button and see the other person. But we don't know anyone with a phone like this"

While Marty's comments brings back the connection between Ghana and dirt (the T-shirt worn for days), Claire's underutilised video-phone can be read as a poignant metaphor for the untapped potential of frustrated ambitions that runs through so much of the narrative of the children in Italy.

The children do not formally reflect on the causal relationship between the difficulties they face and their migrant status, however, the disappointment with the failure of their (or their parents') pre-migratory expectations to be met is ever present. Nevertheless, going (back) to Ghana is not a possibility that any of the children consider. Again in parallel with Pajo's findings (2007), the shared perception of a hierarchy of world countries means also that going back would signify reverting from a higher status country to a lower status one. The only option to keep the dream of social advancement alive is, therefore, that of moving to one of the countries that are even higher up in the hierarchy. Though some mention other European countries such as Germany or the Netherlands, the countries that are sought after tend to be the Anglophone countries of past colonial links and of present cultural dominance, as the following exchanges show:

> Marty: I will go… to the United States and then when I have… when my mum will have made enough money… she will bring my siblings there and then we will live there
> GF: Ah, ok. So… in the United States?
> Marty: I don't want to stay
> Jackson: Me neither
> Marty: Even if here… I like it, I want to go to the United States
> Jackson: Me too
> Marty: I don't want… I don't want to grow old here
> GF: No?
> Jackson: Me neither

From Marty's words it is possible to see that the idea of a 'hierarchy' of countries, which has at its top the US, is not just something that runs through the children's narratives but is also shared by the adults. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice his hesitance in admitting a liking for Italy, a country in which he was not born, but where he arrived when he was still a baby. Italy is therefore, effectively, the only country he has ever known directly, but still his future lies somewhere else, a somewhere that holds new possibilities. This same idea is echoed in the next extract, again from a focus group with children who were born in Italy and who, apart from Jacqueline, had never, yet, been outside its borders:

> Erica: I want to go to America
> All: [laugh]
> Jacqueline: same here
> GF: and you? You too?
> Claire: to London
> GF: do you want to go to London?
> Claire: or to California

The fact that the timing of my interviews in Italy coincided with Obama's election as the new president of the United States, something the children were very keen to discuss with me, further confirmed their belief that the US is the place where anyone can be appreciated and, above all, respected, regardless of origin or skin colour. The difficulties the migrants encounter in Italy thus become territorialised: they are due to the nature of the country of arrival and can therefore be solved by shifting the destination further away, in time and space.

> GF: right, your uncle is there. And what does he say about the United States?
> Michael: he says it's good, yes… because a black man is president

Moving from Italy to the US means moving from these difficulties to the place of endless choice where a black man can even become the nation's president.

## Families apart. The emotional challenges of migration, separation and reunification

As Sayad (2004) theorises, migration historically progresses through three stages: during the first stage individuals, usually young men, move as part of a community's strategy of insuring its future survival; during this phase all the money earned, minus living expenses, is remitted back to the sending country. During the second stage, individuals start leaving as independent agents and gradually the migratory project becomes an individual endeavour which the migrants undertake for their own benefit and that of their closest relations; migrants keep most of their earnings and only send back small amounts at more or less regular intervals to close family members. The last phase of migration is characterised by the movement of whole families and by the birth in the receiving country of the so-called 'second generation'; the migrants' earnings go towards establishing life in the receiving countries or in business and/or house building for the migrants themselves (sometimes in the receiving country, more often in the sending country, as will be discussed more in depth in chapter 5) and only small amounts are occasionally (sometimes begrudgingly) destined to members of the extended family.

Migration from Ghana to Italy appears to be located within the third phase described by Sayad. Most adult migrants have either established a family in the receiving country or are expecting to be joined soon by the family they left behind. As the figures cited in chapter 1 show, the Ghanaian diaspora have moved overall into a more settled type of migration, and the most recent official figures available show that a very high percentage of permits to stay were given on family reunion grounds (see page 31). Consequently a high percentage of new arrivals from Ghana to Italy are either spouses or children of individual migrants who have managed to settle and fulfil the requisites towards the application of a visa for close members of the family.

While family reunion is an inevitable and substantially contributes to increase the number of migrants, being reunited is not always easy and it can be a very long process. As some of the participants reported in the previous chapter, it can take many years for the family to be back together in the destination country, and for some children this can appear as an event that will never happen. Even when it does eventually happen, family reunification is not always a straightforward and smooth process, but it requires 'familiarising' with individuals that are, in some cases, virtual strangers and getting used to living together (again) as a family unit.

In this section I look at how family-across-borders can become the 'norm' for many children and at how long-distance parenting and long-distance 'siblinghood' are negotiated. I also discuss some of the difficulties experienced by the children when they are finally reunited with their families, and the experience of migration of a 'parachute kid' (Zhou, 1998), that is a minor who moves abroad to stay with relatives in order to access a better educational system, who currently lives in Italy with her aunt and uncle's family while her parents are in Ghana. Finally, I will discuss the specific difficulties faced by the children of migrants when parents face marital difficulties and (threaten to) separate or divorce.

### *"Five, six, seven… nine years". Long separations and long-distance relationships*

Being away from one parent, sometimes both, for a very long time was the rule, rather than the exception, among the children who were left behind in Ghana. Most of the participants in the Ghanaian part of the fieldwork reported seeing their father and/or mother only occasionally and for short periods. Remembering how long their parent(s) had been away for was, for some, a tricky exercise, and answering my question on this could result, as is apparent in the extract below, in debates and calculations:

> GF: one thing I forgot to ask you: have your parents, or your mother, your father, been in Italy long?
> Sarah B.: yes
> Georgiana: yes, about eight years
> GF: about eight years?
> Sarah B.: ah… I think… I think five years
> GF: five years?
> Kate B.: five years
> GF: five years… and…
> Georgiana: [counts] five, six, seven… nine years
> GF: nine years?
> Sarah B.: she went to Libya in 2002… 2001 and 2002
> Georgiana: ah, actually for five years
> GF: [laughs]
> Sarah B.: she went to {…} before, so…
> GF: ah, she went somewhere else first, and then to Italy. Ok
> Sarah B.: I think she's been away six years
> Georgiana: yeah
> GF: ok…

Sarah B. and Georgiana are related, hence the joint reconstruction of the length of time Sarah's mother had been away. It is interesting to notice that Sarah's mother appeared to have first moved to Libya, then from there to Italy. I decided not to pursue this information any further, aware that this trajectory could have implications on the 'legal' status of Sarah's mother, a possibility that was beyond the scope of my research.

Having one parent in Italy does not necessarily mean that the financial difficulties are over, nor that the remaining parent is available for emotional or practical support, as is apparent in the following exchange:

> Rebecca B.: I was staying with my mother. At the time I want to pay my school fee and my mother went there and she'd go and collect the money. Sometimes my father would tell my mother that he don't have money so we should wait…
> [….]
> GF: right, ok. So, sometimes your mother goes there?
> Rebecca B.: yes
> GF: right, but now she's here?
> Rebecca B.: no, she's travelling. I don't know the day that she went
> GF: ok
> Rebecca B.: yesterday I went to call her, but she told me that she's not home, she's travelling
> GF: ok, I see. But… ah… normally where does she live? Here with you? Here in Ghana? Or… with your father?
> Rebecca B.: no, I don't know. My father told me that I should be a good student.
> GF: pardon? He…?
> Rebecca B.: my father. He told my mother that I should be a good student. My mother said {…} sometimes she can travel, so I should be a boarder.

Rebecca's family appears to be struggling financially and her father's migration still leaves her mother having trouble in keeping up with the payments for school fees. The lack of awareness of her mother's whereabouts, however, is unusual, and Rebecca reports on being in a boarding school because her mother needs to travel often. It is difficult to know what takes Rebecca's mother away and where, and the last part of the exchange show how the researcher's questions were becoming uncomfortable for the participant, who decided to change the subject to a more 'neutral' topic. The emphasis on doing well in school which Rebecca reports is characteristic of most migrant parents who attempt to supplement a lack of financial capital with an increase in other forms of capital, including cultural capital (Hever, 2010).

Being left behind means more than just being apart from one's parents. Brothers and sisters are born in the destination country, and the children left in the sending country are aware of siblings whom, however, they have never met in person.

> GF: right, so you meet… you'll get to meet your little brothers as well, yes? You said you've never seen them before… how old are they?
> Millisent: five… five years, and the younger brother is two years

Of course, the counterpart to this is that the children born in Italy have siblings in Ghana they have never met personally. This results in 'virtual' brotherhoods and sisterhoods performed through parental narratives, photographs and phone calls.

> Marty: apart from talking on the mobile and seeing old pictures of my siblings I don't know how they are
> GF: do you hear from your siblings, anyway? Do you ever talk to them?
> Marty: yes, on the phone

The lack of physical contact with those left behind can mean a loss of 'temporal coordination' (Dreby, 2010) and the consequent 'fossilisation' of significant others in time and space. Brothers and sisters, then, remain the children seen in photographs, even when it is clear that they must already be adults.

> Marty: I have…. let's see… three sisters… and two brothers
> GF: All [in Ghana]?
> Marty: Yes. Including me, three. Three brothers
> GF: Three males and two females…
> Marty: Yes
> GF: and how is it that you're here and they are there?
> Marty: I don't remember. My mum told me. I don't remember the reason anymore. Perhaps… […] because I was… I was the youngest one. Because the other ones were all autonomous, grown up

Despite the awareness that his brothers and sisters are older (as he believes they were left in the sending country, 11 years earlier, because they were 'grown up' at the time) and that he was taken to Italy when he was still a baby, 12 year-old Marty appears to think about his older brothers still as children:

> GF: so you'd like to go to Ghana for a visit?
> Marty: I would have fun, I would meet my brothers, I would teach them stuff, I would take games, I would explain, and they would play when I'm not there

Furthermore, they are people to whom he can teach things and bring presents, and he fantasises about meeting them as though they, not him, were the younger ones. While Marty talks often about his two brothers, his three sisters are never mentioned, their gender apparently making them even more 'un-familiar'.

### *"I thought that my dad was dead". Family reunion and the rebuilding of relationships*

As several children (both in Italy and in Ghana) pointed out, it can appear as though the family's separation will last indefinitely. However, many children do manage to be reunited with their migrant parent(s). The Italian National Institute of Statistics reports[27] that, at the 1st of January 2010, a total of 932 675 foreign minors were present in Italy, representing 22% of the total foreign population officially recorded. Of these, about 573 thousand were born in Italy, while the remaining 360 thousand had arrived on a family reunion visa. Despite the long wait and the many legal hurdles, being reunited with one's parents in Italy happens to many. However, the physical proximity that is finally made possible by the family reunion in the receiving country is not always the 'happy ending' to a difficult situation, as familial bonds can suffer from the prolonged time spent apart. In particular the children who were left when still quite young can feel quite detached from a parent they have not grown to know, as Linelle (now in Italy with her parents) recollects:

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[27] Data available from: www.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/non_calendario/20101012_00/

> GF: and who was here already, your dad?
> Linelle: yes, dad
> GF: and when you were in Ghana and your dad was in Italy, do you remember if he told you anything about Italy? Did he ever tell you whether it was nice, or not…
> Linelle: no, because… I was only a small girl when he came here. I was maybe three… I don't remember… so… I don't remember if he told me anything
> GF: but when he…
> Linelle: …but I thought that my dad was dead, because I did not know him
> GF: is that right? And when you came here and you saw him for the first time after a long time… but was he not coming to visit you in Ghana?
> Linelle: yes, he was coming, but I did not know he was my father [laughs]. He stayed for two months… no, two weeks and then came back to Italy
> GF: so you did not know who he was
> Linelle: yes. And I was also going to school, so…
> GF: and what did you think?
> Linelle: I went to school, then I came home around 3 o'clock, then I went to after-school classes, so I was home perhaps at 8 o'clock in the evening…

Getting re-acquainted with the other members of the family unit can take time, especially when, in the absence of one of the parents, someone else has taken on the role of caring for the child:

> GF: right, dad had come here before. For work
> Benedetta: yes before, when I was born. He wasn't…
> GF: right, a long time ago?
> Benedetta: I mean… I didn't even know who my dad was!
> GF: right. You didn't know him?
> Benedetta: well… when he came to Ghana, my mum was telling me that this was my dad and I would say "No *this* is my… *this* is my dad" and she "No, *this one*!" and me "No, *that* one!"
> GF: [laughs] who did you think your dad to be?
> Benedetta: my dad's brother
> GF: ah, your uncle. Right, because he was in Ghana and so you saw him all the time
> Benedetta: yes, because… I mean, he would buy me all the things I wanted…

It is interesting to note Benedetta's explanation about her 'mistaking' her uncle for her father: 'father' was the name she gave to the person who bought all that she wanted: the provider of material comfort and security and the person present in her everyday life.

Getting to know each other, once the family unit is together again, is not always a painless process. Although intergenerational conflict is quite common between (pre)adolescent children and their parents, the lack of familiarity and the emotional distance that being apart causes can further exacerbate clashes within the family:

> GF: and what did you think when you arrived?
> Linelle: the first day I got here… if you are Ghanaian the first day you get here… your father does everything you want… but, after two weeks he will not do anything anymore
> GF: right? [laughs] So the first few days he was very kind
> Linelle: yes, yes
> GF: and then? Was that it?
> Linelle: yes
> GF: and now?
> Linelle: he doesn't let me go out…

What makes Linelle's father's prohibitions harder to accept appears to be the fact that he was so lenient when they were first reunited, as though he had managed to 'trick' her into thinking he was nicer that he actually was. What could be a 'normal' father-daughter power-struggle becomes thus embedded in a narrative of migration, and the change from 'nice' to 'strict' takes on a universal and necessary transformation, one that other children waiting to undertake the same emotional journey need to be cautioned about.

### *"I always call her mum". 'Parachute kids' and family relationships*

While most children move to join one or both their parents in the destination country, some young people move without their families, sent to stay with friends or relations (in some cases also in boarding houses) in order to improve their chances for the future by being educated in a Western country. These children, called 'parachute kids' in the relevant studies (Zhou, 1998; Faulstich Orellana, *et al*. 2001), are sent to the West in order to increase their social and cultural capital, while their parents (and sometimes siblings) remain in the country of origin. As Zhou (1998) points out for the Chinese context, fostering children is not just a practice that involves transnational contacts, but is also quite common in the sending countries where these children originate. The practice of child-fostering was historically quite widespread in Ghana (Goody, 1982), and it is still a relatively common practice even though urbanisation and the increase of a familial organisation centred around the nuclear family has now reduced its extent (Kuyini *et al*, 2009).

One of the participants in the Italian phase of the fieldwork was a 'parachute kid', having been sent to Italy to live with her aunt's family while her parents and siblings remained in Ghana. She was only about five years old when she left Ghana to live with her aunt in Italy, but this was not the first time she had been away from her parents, as she reported living with a 'rich man' as a little girl in Ghana:

> GF: and who do you live with here?
> Anastasia: my aunt
> GF: with your aunt? And mum, dad?
> Anastasia: all in Ghana
> GF: all in Ghana? So you are here… why? Did they tell you?
> Anastasia: I don't know
> GF: they didn't tell you
> Anastasia: well, my aunt, right, when I was four, she had promised that she would come here. When she went, I went to live with another person, who was… like… I mean… he was a…. rich person…
> GF: mhm…
> Anastasia: my school was near him…So, rather than going to school I went there. I had a car just for myself
> Barack: wow, with a driver?
> Anastasia: yes
> Barack: God! Cool!

From what Anastasia says, it appears that she lived with her aunt in Ghana and, when her aunt left for Italy, for a while with an unrelated wealthy person. She then moved to Italy to join her aunt when she was about to start primary school (aged between five and six). Her parents are in Ghana and she reports regular conversations with them over the phone, a sign they still are in touch and concerned about their daughter's wellbeing and progress. While clearly aware that her parents are in Ghana, Anastasia's attachment appears to be to her primary caretakers: her aunt and her aunt's family. In the following extract she is commenting on one of the photographs she had taken for the research:

> Anastasia: this is my mum's shop
> GF: right!
> Anastasia: if you want one day I can take you

> […]
> GF: do your parents go to Ghana often?
> Anastasia: but I have my aunt here! My parents are there
> GF: I'm a bit confused now. So whose is the shop? Your aunt's?
> Anastasia: yes, it's my aunt's… uh… I always call her mum…

During the above exchange, Anastasia uses the familial term of endearment 'mum' to refer to her aunt. She appears, however, to judge this as a 'slip of the tongue', a mistake that she made because of the absentmindedness she often attributes to herself in the course of our conversation. She often remarked on her 'forgetfulness' and on the fact that she does not concentrate on what people are saying.

> GF: that is a lot [of relatives]! And do they all… do the majority live… outside Ghana or in Ghana?
> Anastasia: some are away
> GF: many?
> Anastasia: yes. But I have an uncle in Accra… two uncles
> GF: in Accra. And… where is your family from, originally?
> Anastasia: uh… my father… I don't know. Because he lived… he didn't live in Ghana, he lived in a different place… in Germany… I don't remember. On the other hand, my mother always lived there. She moved sometimes, but not far.
> GF: and where exactly does she live?
> Anastasia: I don't remember…
> GF: right. Listen…
> Anastasia: because when people talk to me I never pay attention
> GF: [laughs]
> Anastasia: I'm always thinking about something else

The absentmindedness she invokes appears to be an attempt at explaining (to me, but also to herself) the difficulties she has in keeping together her scattered family ties. Despite this, however, Anastasia seems quite settled in her foster family and also to possess a consistent amount of social and symbolic capital, being quite popular among other pupils in the school and also other children within the extended Ghanaian community. The stable and committed care she receives from her foster family appears to have made her into a confident and chatty young person who has a good record of educational achievement but who, however, feels quite scattered emotionally between the several ties she entertains in various countries.

## *"I would like for them to stay together". Migrant children and parental separation*

Family 'reunion' does not necessarily mean a reunited family, and separation between members of the nuclear family caused by difficulties between the parents appears to be quite common among the participants in the Italian part of the fieldwork. The strain on the parental couple brought on by prolonged time apart, economic hardship, changes in normative values and in the control exercised by the social context are among the many causes that contribute to increase the rate of marriage breakdowns in migrant couples (Frank and Wildsmith, 2005; Dreby, 2010). Even among the Ghanaian young participants, five out of the 27 children interviewed reported (the threat of) separation or divorce between their parents, a situation which can very easily mean renewed dispersal of the family members, as the following extract exemplifies:

> GF: and do you often get pictures from Ghana?
> Roberto B.: yes
> GF: only photographs or other things?
> Roberto B.: photographs… at least as far as I can remember… unless my father… I mean my… my father… if my father is not in Ghana… ah… he sends them to me from the States
> GF: photographs?
> Roberto B.: yes… and money. To my mum
> GF: so your dad is in the US?
> Roberto B.: yes, because they are divorced
> GF: and he lives in the US
> RobertoB.: yes

Parental separation can also result in the loss of contact with one side of the family, a situation that can be made more definite and all-encompassing by the geographical distance, as is the case for Erica:

> Erica: I don't know anything about my dad's side
> GF: right, you don't have any contacts with your dad's side?
> Erica: no, because my parents are divor… separated, so… my mum married another man, so I don't know anything about my dad's side… I only know that my granddad died a short while ago, and so…
> GF: but you are not in touch…
> Erica: …with my dad's family? No

It is not clear whether Erica is still in touch with her father, but I did not pursue this information further as it was not the focus of the research and I was determined to avoid as much as possible bringing up issues that could upset the participants.

Parental difficulties mean something more unsettling, for children in transnational families, than the already great emotional upheaval which is often caused in children's lives by the splitting apart of one's parents: it can also mean that one's future is thrown into disarray and that uncertainty may become the only certainty. Sarah A. had been left behind by her father when she was still a baby. To her, 'dad' was a man in a photograph, and moving to Italy had meant meeting him, to all intents and purposes, for the first time. Over the past four years she had slowly got to know him, and this was something she had been looking forward to as a 'child left behind', even though it had also meant enduring the sadness of leaving the extended family she had grown very close to:

> Sarah A.: well, when my dad said… my mum told me… the we would be coming there, to Italy, I was happy and a bit sad because I had to leave my school and then my grandparents, my relatives…
> GF: grandparents…
> Sarah A.: and then, well, I was feeling a bit sad and a bit happy because when I was born my dad left and I had never seen him
> GF: you had never seen him
> Sarah A.: I had only seen his picture… well, and then, when he came to Ghana I was still little and so when I came here… now I am older and I see him and I know him…
> GF: aha… yes?
> Sarah A.: …I am happy

The comfort of being with both her parents did not, however, last very long for Sarah. As her mother and father apparently struggle to remain together, Sarah's future appears to grow increasingly uncertain:

> GF: is that right? Everyone [wants to go] to America?
> Sarah A.: no, because mine… If it… if mum and dad, well, separate…
> GF: mhm…
> Sarah A.: I go to Ghana, I mean… with my mum
> GF: mhm…
> Sarah A.: but if they don't separate, they'll take me to America or somewhere
> GF: ah, yes?
> Sarah A.: to study English
> GF: and you? What do you think: would you like it?

> Sarah A.: yes, I would like it, but… my mother always wants to separate… [lowers voice] so I'm going to Ghana
> GF: pardon?
> Sarah A.: she wants to separate from my dad
> GF: yes?
> Sarah A.: then, I think I'll go to Ghana
> GF: right? And this, how… what do you think, would you like this? How would you feel?
> Sarah A.: well, I would like for them to stay together, and so the whole family would go there

Once more Sarah A. finds herself impotent in the face of adult's decisions, first the separation because of migration, now the possible splitting up of their parents which has the potential to shape her future in several very different ways. The difficulties the family are going through transpire quite plainly in this participant's words, but so do the sadness and the frustration of not having any control over the outcome. As Sarah quite clearly realises, parental separation also means moving again from the places and people she has become used to and a likely return to Ghana with her mother. The mention of a possible move of the whole family to the US signals the possibility that the difficulties the parents are experiencing may also be linked to practical everyday difficulties of life in Italy, so that, when incomprehension and frustration set in, the possibility of moving again to a 'better' country may seem a potential way out of these difficulties. Sarah is not in any doubt about what she would like: for the whole family to go to the US. This would mean being in the country of many migrants' dreams (the one at the apex of the unspoken 'world hierarchy') but it would also mean that the family she had only recently learnt to be part of would not again be scattered around the world; however, she is also aware that she has little say over the final outcome and that her dreams for the future have to be put on hold, once again awaiting adults' decisions.

## Summary

Migration theories set out to explain the mechanisms that cause people to move. Whether they see it as an individual endeavour that responds to push-and-pull market forces, as a family strategy of crisis management, as the result of global economic shifts, or as a combination of the above (Castles and Miller, 2003; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Massey *et al*, 1998) the economic factor is seen as playing a central role in the decision to migrate. While this is certainly true, and the wish to improve one's personal circumstances by moving to a country that can afford higher financial returns undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in the decision to migrate, several other factors influence this decision, as a number of studies demonstrates (e.g. Stark and Taylor, 1989; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Dreby, 2010; Pajo, 2007; Mai, 2001). A large part of the available research rests on data gathered by interviewing migrants who often rationalise their choices on economic and largely practical grounds, amongst which better opportunities for children's futures feature quite prominently (Faulstich Orellana *et al*, 2001). These often are, however, 'retroactive' rationalisations, from which the aspirations and dreams for social status are left out, as the disillusioning encounter with reality makes them now appear very naïve and far-fetched.

Children's narratives, unlikely to frame the choice to migrate in economic terms because of young people's lack of financial power, expose the more essentially social and cultural reasons behind migration. The children I interviewed, both in Ghana and in Italy, saw moving from one country to another as adventure, personal enrichment and social advancement, and this was more relevant to them than any material gain. The hope for social progression was conveyed through the young participants' insistence that Italy is 'neater' than Ghana, where by 'neater' the children meant physically cleaner but also, more importantly, a country enjoying the higher status and global authority that is associated with economic wealth.

However, as Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco poignantly observe, too often “[the] children of immigrants come to drink from the well of hope only to find it poisoned.” (2001, p. 122) The practical difficulties the children experience, such as their lack of fluency in Italian and the difficulty this fosters on their educational attainments, are often accompanied by the difficulty in being accepted by the majority peer group and by the consequent (perceived) marginalisation. Again the symbolic aspect of dirt was used by the participants to convey these difficulties, and Italy’s ‘dirty’ aspects are revealed to show a country that does not, after all, live up to the expectations for the social (and economic) improvement of pre-migration imaginings.

The consequent disappointment that young people almost invariably suffer when the social advancement they expected fails to materialise and they realise that they are trapped in the lower echelons of the society of adoption, does not necessarily mean an end to the dream but instead appears to result in a shift in its physical location. With only two exceptions, all the children of Ghanaian migrants living in Italy locate their future selves elsewhere, in the UK or, better still, in the US. The future, for these young people, is something ‘different’, something that holds promises but that is totally unrelated to the reality of their everyday lives.

The future the children contemplate can become even more fuzzy and precarious when the parents go through marital difficulties and/or through separation and divorce. Of course this is a hard time for any child, but for the children of migrants the emotional upheaval inevitable with the parting of the family can take on a further dimension, as it often means the relocation of one parent to a new destination (or perhaps back to the sending country) and, for the child, the possibility of having to move again, and once more not out of choice but because of adults’ decisions. While dreaming of moving to a different country in the future can be a way to withstand present difficulties by providing an (‘ideal’) escape route, the uncertainty caused by the splitting of the parental couple can mean for the children of migrants having to leave (again) the familiar and being (again) in a country far away from a significant other.

While this chapter dealt primarily with the children's imaginings of and views towards migration from a personal point of view, one circumscribed to the individual child or his/her family, the next section aims to broaden the picture to include the wider community, both in Italy and in Ghana. The expectations for, and the success and failure of, a migration project appear to be measured against the circle of acquaintances and the network of social connections that make up the communities to which the migrants belong: the sending community in the country of origin and the ethnic community in the receiving country. Of course, in many cases the two are not separate entities, but are part of a dynamic flow only partly influenced by national borders.

# CHAPTER 5. BELONGING TO MANY SPACES: THERE, HERE AND IN-BETWEEN

> *It's not as though [the demons] are aggressive. You go to them first, then they do what you ask them. Because… let's say someone… there are a lot of people who… usually they are in financial difficulties and they go to these satanic places.*
>
> *[Barack, age 12. Born in Italy]*

As discussed in the previous chapter, several elements combine in shaping and fostering the expectations and imaginings of the West held by non-migrants. The legacy of colonial discourse and the global spread of Western cultural values and ways of life that passes through the popular media are only part of the picture (Said, 1993). Migrants' success stories, real or fictitious (and any combination of the two), as well as the more concrete signs of prestige and wealth such as house-building, remittances and presents, which contribute to increase migrants' symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1979a, 1990a; Nash, 1990), all play a significant part in spreading the wish and will to leave (Sayad, 2004). Narratives cannot be readily contained by borders, and ideas, lifestyles and beliefs travel between countries, thus contributing to shape desires and aspirations even in those who do not leave (Pœrrengaard, 1997; Levitt, 2001).

Ambitions and expectations also have a relative nature: they are often the result of a comparative process which has, as term of reference, the wider community of which the individual (and his/her family) are part (Stark and Taylor, 1989). Success and failure are, in turn, measured against these ambitions and expectations, and the baggage of imaginings and hopes that migrants leave with determine in no small part the ways in which they will evaluate their experiences. However, migrants have several yard-sticks against which achievement or disappointment can be gauged: the sending community, the receiving society, the ethnic community, all of these offer a relative measure of individual attainment, as do all the potential communities to which migrants *could* belong (if only they had settled in a different country, if only they had enough money to resettle, if only they moved to the community where another member of the family/a friend lives, etc.). Individuals and families can therefore perceive their experience as a failure when measured against expectations or when viewing it through the receiving society's eyes, but as a success in relation to others in the sending country, or others within the same ethnic community. The shades and possibilities are many, and transnational social spaces are the stages on which all of these shades can be performed, often at the same time.

The children of Ghanaian migrants share this multifocal view of their (and their families') social standing and, while in many cases they are directly involved in the maintenance of an image of success, they are also direct witnesses to the difficulties of reality, and are able to articulate the contradictions between life as lived and life as portrayed. Although generally not aware of the causes of the discrepancies between expectations and the 'lived' that they experience, the children are, nevertheless, conscious that their kin in Ghana often make unrealistic demands (for money or presents) of their families in Italy, and that these demands are based on distorted imaginings of what the actual situation is.

Demands are made that have a material focus, but claims can also be made of young people's affections and loyalty, something that appears to be felt in particular by the 'second generation' migrants. As a consequence, the children born in Italy show a degree of ambivalence towards the country their parents came from: the demands it has of them are perceived as legitimate and natural but, at the same time, as threatening and unsettling. The young people react to this with varying degrees of acceptance and contestation, often at the same time.

Having access to different set of cultural mores, however, also carries with it a potential for choice, however limited by socially constructed constraint. The children of migrants can engage in the restructuring of their understanding of reality by comparing, selecting and combining different elements of the cultural frameworks they have access to and by employing them as alternative modes of social relation. This allows young people a degree of leeway through which they can challenge adults' authority, evade grown-ups' requests and rules and impose their own agenda.

The first section of the present chapter looks at the ways in which the symbolic capital (i.e. the social recognition, prestige and respect) that migrants cannot readily transfer to the receiving community can, nevertheless, still be maintained and accumulated through remittances and house building, and at the role this plays in children's lives. It also explores the ways in which the children manage to negotiate the fragility and contradictions of their migrant status in the eyes of those they left behind, but also in the light of their own expectations.

The second section looks at how the children born in Italy make sense of Ghana and of the demands Ghana makes of them, through their parents and communities, as well as through significant others they may have never met in person, but who are still very much a presence in their lives. Moreover, it highlights how at times young people play with the cultural norms and expectations in order to challenge the authority of the community's adults and to elude their demands.

## The 'collective lie'

As Mai (2001) - building on Pœrrengaard (1997) - observes, migration is a 'potential state of being' through which an individual may pass during his/her lifetime, whether this potential results in the individual moving or not. It is possible that a number of the Ghanaian children who are left behind will not, after all, join their parent(s) in Italy, either because of financial difficulties or because of the lengthy procedures for family reunion visas and the many bureaucratic requirements they have to meet. Regardless of whether they will physically relocate, however, the children that are left behind are indeed potential migrants. Invariably the young participants in the Ghanaian part of the fieldwork believed that they will one day move to Italy and, consequently, could envision their future selves within the (imagined) context of a country that was, while still unknown, emotionally quite close to them.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the children expect to leave their country in the belief that moving will mean stepping up the social ladder and fulfilling their ambitions for personal growth and increased knowledge. Even when they are aware that not everything will go smoothly, the forecast benefits far surpass, in the potential migrants' unwritten balance-sheet, the expected drawbacks; migration to a 'First World' country will make them more respectable and respected, despite the difficulties they may anticipate.

The following section will examine how the children are caught up in the 'collective lie' (Sayad, 2004) and how they contribute to perpetrating it while at the same time feeling the need to challenge it. It will also explore how the dream of migrating and gaining access to success and status is perceived as both precious and fragile, a chance for improvement that, in some cases, needs to be protected from the potential 'poison' of other people's envy.

### *"It's the ones who come up here [to Italy] who get a bit of money to build beautiful houses". Houses and symbolic capital*

In common with many other migrant groups, Ghanaians in Italy invest much of what they earn in the construction of houses back in the sending country. While the building of a house may generally make sense as a financial investment, in the case of the Ghanaian migrants this is a strategy that does not appear to be always the most worthwhile from a strictly economic point of view. The often unfinished houses that emigrants build and which dot much of the Ghanaian landscape are very often large and rather ostentatious, as it can be also inferred from the focus group conversations with the children who were born in Italy, such as the one that follows:

> Kate A.: there are nice houses, in some places
> Jacqueline: that's right
> Kate A.: like, we have a villa… Inside it's massive. There's a massive living room and so… my brother… my two brothers… used to play football in it

Kate told me later that she had never seen pictures of the inside of her family's house in Ghana. The 'playing football' measuring unit was something her parents had told her and her siblings to convey the size of the house, and this has clearly struck a chord in Kate's imagination.

Big houses in Ghana featured in all the conversations with the children of migrants who were born in Italy, sometimes as a proof that Ghana is not as poor and destitute as it is thought to be by people in the West, although its more 'positive' aspects are the result of the effort of migrants like their own parents:

> GF: what would [Italian children arriving in Ghana] think, in your opinion?
> Teresa: that we are poor, that it's not like Italy
> Marty: …and that the houses are different
> Jackson: but houses there are nicer than here!
> Teresa: well, if *we* build them
> Jackson: that's right

Of course, by exploiting the advantage of being paid in a hard currency and because of the cheaper cost of labour in Ghana, migrants can afford to build houses in their hometowns that will not go unnoticed, houses that most ordinary Ghanaians cannot afford. As Kurien (2008) observes: "The building of a large and showy house is […] of high priority [for migrants] since it is the most visible indicator of the change in status of the family and will stand as a permanent emblem of their success" (p. 196). Again, the children who were born in Italy are aware of the advantages of their families' migrant status when it comes to getting more 'value for money', and the size of the houses their parents build is invariably remarked upon. The extracts below are from a focus group with migrant children and an individual interview with an Italian-born participant respectively, but the topic discussed is quite similar:

> Jack: I mean… do you know why they are building homes that are a bit… because those who come to Italy… they have more money, they're richer
> Sarah A.: mine… mine…
> Jack: Be quiet! I'm speaking
> GF: that's ok… let him finish then we hear…
> Jack: that's why they build houses like that, because… before there weren't houses like that. So it's the ones who come up here [to Italy] who get a bit of money to build beautiful houses

> GF: and how are these houses?
> Roberto B.: my father built a house that is a bit too big. It's on two floors. My mother's [house] is on one floor, but it's a bit too large. Let's say it's the size of this school, more or less
> GF: goodness! And… but…
> Roberto B.: well, because over there people… going from here to there one is rich, so one manages to build big houses
> GF: right, because life there is less expensive?
> Roberto B.: yes, right

Migrants' newly built houses are sometimes left empty but, more often, they are let to kin or friends:

> GF: and do you have any idea of why they are building this house?
> Teresa: yes…
> GF: what are their plans?
> Teresa: well… to… help their relations who can sleep there when… there are, like, problems… and… they built… I… I don't know why they built it but I know the reason why they built it
> GF: yes?
> Teresa: like… if there's any problem and a guest comes, we can put them up

This, however, does not protect the family's investment, as the extremes of tropical weather or the lack of due care by guests or tenants can mean that the buildings get damaged and sometimes fall in disrepair, as the families of Italian born Marty and Jacqueline experienced:

> Marty: because then when it rains it rains heavily, even though it rains seldom. Like, it rains rarely, but… those few times it's powerful, the rain…
> GF: it chucks it
> Marty: …it can damage roofs
> GF: oh!
> M: yes, it's like… it's like hailstones, but rain-drops. A power-rain, like
> GF: a super-rain!

> Marty: that floods the house a bit. A bit like a deluge, something like that
> GF: it happens? Right! I see…
> Marty: once… that's what happened in my house in Ghana
> GF: were you there or did they tell you?
> Marty: they told me

> Jacqueline: …at the time mum wanted to build the house, because she'd already built it, but then the rain came, a real deluge… I have seen pictures: the house was flooded with water, a wall had come down, the house… everything had been destroyed…
> GF: so did dad have to go there to fix it?
> Jacqueline: at the time my parents were separated
> GF: right
> Jacqueline: so, we went and started all over again. And… we left the house looking beautiful…
> GF: but now…
> Jacqueline: but now it's not anymore. So we are building another house… because… it's not… we had built a balcony and it was destroyed. Now they are building another one, but this got destroyed too…
> GF: who destroyed it?
> Jacqueline: well, that man. Because we'd let the house, and these people poured water on the balcony, and they shouldn't have
> GF: uh!
> Jacqueline: and so… everything was destroyed. The bathroom too was destroyed
> GF: so these people who were renting the house caused all this damage?
> Jacqueline: yes

Even though building a house which then remains empty, underused or that may be damaged by careless tenants may not always be a sound financial investment, there are other, equally important reasons which mean that most migrants will, as soon as they are able to, build a house in the sending country. Building a house has an important symbolic role: it is the visual and tangible proof to the sending community that the migrant still belongs with them, that one may have left but not forsaken the people and the country of origin. House building also has a more 'psychological' function: it keeps alive the hope, often the illusion, that migration will be temporary, and that the migrant will one day go 'back home', that his/her sacrifice will be worth it in the end (Zanfrini, 2007).

A large and expensive looking building is, moreover, a visible sign of success and will contribute to increase the migrant's symbolic capital. As Bourdieu (1990b) points out: "[…] symbolic capital is credit, but in the broadest sense, a kind of advance, a credence, that only the group's beliefs can grant those who give it the best symbolic and material guarantees […]" (p.

120). As such, constructing a large and impressive building makes good sense as an investment because, even though it may not give immediate financial returns, it ensures the prestige and credibility which can be cashed in if/when needed, since "[...] the exhibition of symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in material terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital" (ibid.)

Often caught in an inferior position in Italy by a migrant status that affords them very little, or no, social and symbolic capital, migrants concentrate on building on their existing resources in the community of origin. In this way, migrants' house-building can act as a sort of insurance policy, which can be relied on in times of need, as well as representing an emotional link to the sending country and, moreover, an investment of cash.

It is therefore not surprising that almost the totality of all children of migrants in Italy report that their parent(s) are building a house in Ghana, in some cases two, and that houses and buildings make up a large proportion of the children's narratives but also of the photographs, such as the following one, by recently arrived Michael:

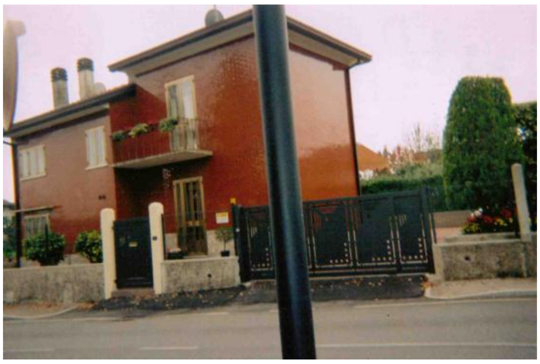


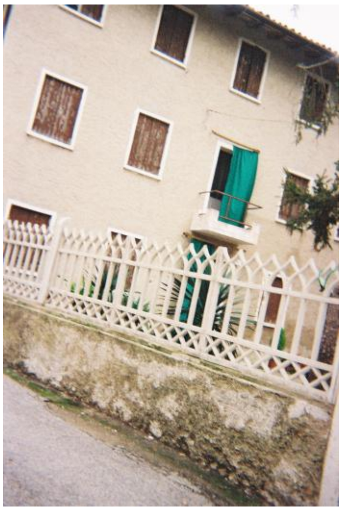
**Figure 16: Italian building**

Michael:

"A man that has a lot of money can build a house like this one in Ghana. People get a lot of money if they come here in Italy for a job and then go back to Ghana and build that"

It is interesting to notice how Michael's choice of this building as exemplary of a rich person's house reflects the link between 'neatness' and respectability already examined in a previous chapter. While by no means a 'poor' house by Italian standards, Italian middle-class eyes would see it as a typical working class dwelling: the aluminium fittings, the tiled façade, the paved outdoor area speak of practicality and durability over the 'authenticity' and 'character' favoured by wealthier Italians. Bourdieu (1979a) notices how "[...] the working classes, reduced to 'essential' good and virtues, demand cleanness and practicality [...]" (p. 247) whereas the middle classes can afford to look for 'warmth', cosiness, fashion or originality. Its being large, clean and orderly proves to Michael that this is a house for a virtuous (and respectable) person, and one which migrants would want to display in Ghana to increase their status and reputation.

In contrast to this stands another building, photographed by the same young participant:



Michael:

"This house looks like my grandmother's house in Ghana. [Hers] is a smaller house, but the colour reminded me of my grandmother's. It's not a nice house..."

**Figure 17: Old Italian building**

Michael had taken this picture, he explained, to show me something he was surprised to find when he first had arrived, only a few months earlier. Italy was not supposed to have old and crumbling corners. Italy was not supposed to look like Ghana, it was meant to be modern, clean and shiny, like the previous house he'd photographed. While this is also the fruit of my request to photograph anything that was similar, as well different, between the two countries, Michael was also quite clear about the fact that finding similarities had been a let-down: what was similar was hardship and shabbiness, and these had had no place in his expectations.

### *"In Ghana buildings like this would not be flats, they would be hotels…" Hotels as status symbols*

When asked about what they found particularly surprising, in a positive way, when they arrived in Italy, many of the migrant children talked about the buildings. While they sometimes mentioned buildings that were old and unattractive, most of the time the emphasis was put on how Italian houses, in particular modern blocks of flats, are 'beautiful'. The measure of this 'beautifulness' was given often by comparison with hotels. Seven distinct participants mentioned hotels as a 'measuring tape' of aesthetic desirability in a building. This was not limited to the young people who had migrated from Ghana to Italy, but was a theme also picked up by one of the children left behind and by three of the children born in Italy. The recurrence of this comparison is too frequent to be a chance occurrence, and I argue that it symbolises an imagined life-style of sophistication and worldliness to which the children seem to aspire.

The following extract comes from a conversation with one of the children left behind. Esmeralda was looking forward to going to Italy to join her stepfather. She expected that she would be joining him without her mother, in all likelihood to improve her opportunities for education and/or a job. She was very much looking forward to this eventuality but, when asked what specifically she was looking forward to, her answer was primarily about holidays and, within this frame, hotels were brought in:

> Esmeralda: I would like to see the hotels
> GF: really? Where your stepfather is, are there many hotels?
> Esmeralda: yes
> GF: yes? Are they nice?
> Esmeralda: yes

Had the above been the only mention of a hotel, I would probably not have noticed it. However, in analysing the data, I realised that there was a noticeable pattern involving hotels, one which I had trouble making sense of. The extracts below are from conversations with the participants who had migrated from Ghana to Italy. They are comments on the photographs the children had taken:

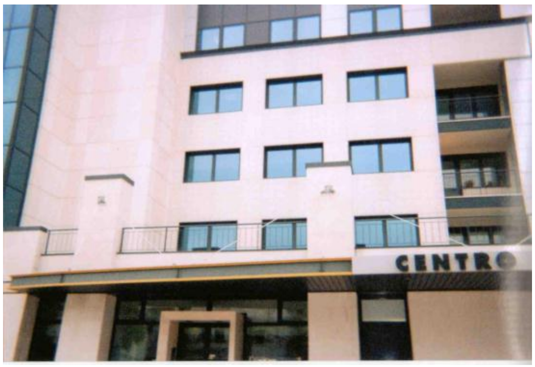


**Figure 18: In Ghana this could be a hotel**

Michael: because this picture… in Ghana… it's a hotel. You have a hotel like this in Ghana
GF: is this a hotel?
Michael: yes
GF: here, in Italy?
Michael: no… it's a house
GF: a house? Ah, ok. Ah… so this looks like a hotel in Ghana?
Michael: yes
GF: and what do you think of this type of houses, do you like them?
Michael: yeah, I like them, I really like them
GF: why?
Michael: because they are beautiful

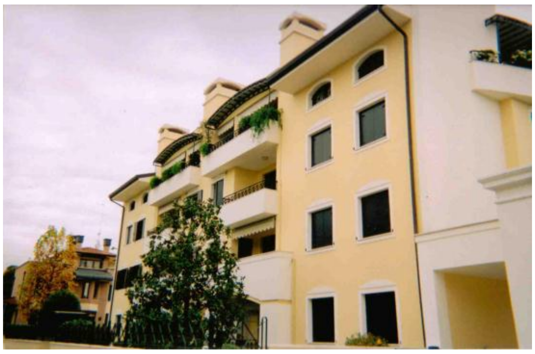


**Figure 19: This too could be a hotel**

Rita: this could be one of the hotels that they build this year in Ghana, because…
GF: this is not a hotel, though?
Rita: no, it's a house
GF: a private house
Rita: but in Ghana it could be a hotel
GF: right
[…]
Rita: in Ghana this year they are building nicer houses. So there are many nice houses in Ghana. Some of them look like hotels… they are very nice. There are swimming pools…

As Bourdieu (1979a) theorises, taste is embedded in particular *habitus* and people's likes/dislikes are a way to distinguish oneself, to affirm belonging to a specific group and/or to distance oneself from other groups. Hotels are associated with the twin luxuries of money and leisure time and are, therefore, symbols of the middle class lifestyle to which the children seem to aspire. This emphasis on hotels and on Italian houses being as 'luxurious' as hotels appears to be closely associated with the ambition to travel and to visit monuments and museums which was discussed already in chapter 4: the children are 'performing' their belonging to a section of Ghanaian society which is characterised by its possession of a particular cultural and symbolic capital; migrating means accruing the financial capital that will make it possible to belong fully to this section of Ghanaian society.

One of the children who had arrived in Italy as a very young child, also took a photograph of an Italian house and described it by using a hotel as a point of reference:

> Federica: because in Ghana buildings like this would not be flats, they would be hotels…
> GF: right. I see… when you say building like this, what do you refer to? Height? What in particular?
> Federica: not height… ah… the size, the way it's laid out…
> GF: right. I see. So if this was in Ghana this would be a hotel?
> Federica: yes

Since 12 year-old Federica had left Ghana for Italy when she was four, and had not been back since, it is highly unlikely that the similarity between Italian houses and Ghanaian hotels was something she had noticed as a young girl and was now recollecting. It is more likely that this similarity was remarked upon by someone else in her family or community and that she was passing on to me what is a form of 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1979a) that informs adults' as well as children's discourses.

The participants who were born in Italy too had something to say about hotels. In this case it was hotels in Ghana, cited as one of the attractions of the country. In this first extract, Erica was reporting talking about Ghana with a cousin of hers that had recently moved to Italy to live:

> Erica: my cousin said also that there is a beautiful park, but I don't know where. And he also says that the hotels are nice

Clearly Erica's cousin had felt that these were topics that would interest Erica (and possibly any other people who were present at the time of the exchange). Earlier on in our conversation she had reported her cousin talking about an area in Accra where a great number of fruit-bats congregate; now it was parks and hotels. These are clearly all bits of information meant to engage the attention of an audience and the choice is telling: they are natural curiosities (the bats) and positive elements (the parks and the hotels). While the first is meant to entertain because of its unusual (for Italy) appeal, the other two draw attention to the cosmopolitan aspects of Accra and to the parts of it that more closely resemble the Italian urban environment to which Erica's cousin had recently moved, thus publicly displaying that it is something he is already familiar with.

Ghanaian hotels are mentioned as a source of attraction also by Italian born Jacqueline, who, when asked to tell me something she believed my own children would have liked, put hotels at the top of the list:

> GF: you were a star, right? Good… and then, anything else? Are there, in your opinion, things that my children will like a lot, in Ghana?
> Jacqueline: uh! Hotels

Italian-born Kate, meanwhile, decided that on her list of improvements for Italy she would put parks, which she would make prettier, and also hotels and shopping centres, which she would make cheaper:

> GF: and if you had this magic wand, after you've sorted out Ghana… in Italy, what would you do [to improve it]?
> Kate: in Italy… I don't know, but… ah… especially parks… I would make them into beautiful places. And shopping centres… a place… right… hotels… I would make them cheaper… I would make everything cheaper, right

Kate appears to be aware that these places, ever so close and visible, are still largely out of bounds for unskilled labour migrants on a salary which is often barely enough to feed, house and clothe the family. Cheaper hotels and shopping centres would mean that she, and her family, would be able to access these places more frequently than they can currently afford to: be part of the scene, rather than outside looking in.

### *"You have fun and so you don't want me to come too". When the 'truth' sounds like a 'lie'*

Big houses feed the myth of successful migration, which is further supported by remittances (in money or goods) and by the expansive lifestyle of those who return for visits. Consequently, it is quite difficult to have an alternative narrative believed, as the participants report. Their claims that life in Italy is not as easy as it is thought to be, or that financial success is not so readily available, are often dismissed by those in the sending community as an attempt by migrants to keep others from sharing in their 'fun'. When I asked the participants what advice they would give to Ghanaian young people waiting to join their parents in Italy, the most common response from the children who had recently moved to Italy was a cautionary one:

> GF: How could children get ready [for life in Italy]?
> Roberto A.: they mustn't think that the people here are rich
> GF: no?
> Roberto A.: I mean… in Ghana they tell me "You are rich" because I have two aunts in Austria, and others in London too, and also here [in Italy]… and they tell me that we are lucky, we are rich and this kind of stuff… [laughs] and it's not like that
> Benedetta: yes! They *always* think that!

Both Roberto A. and Benedetta feel that knowing about the difficulties and hardship of migrant life should be something that those waiting to migrate should be aware of. While this cautioning tells a lot about the participants' own disillusionment in finding out that life was not as easy as they had expected, it also reveals how this widespread expectation appears to have taken on a 'life of its own'. The children are aware, in fact, that they may not be believed if they try to caution people against thinking that life as a migrant may be difficult, and that the truth may be misunderstood for an attempt not to share their good fortune, as Chanel recollects:

> GF: what would you tell children who are in Ghana and are waiting to come to Italy?
> Chanel: I will tell them not to come, to stay in Ghana
> GF: but… you know… do they have a choice?
> Chanel: but they would tell you "You're having a great time there and you don't want me to come too" Like, a friend of mine wants to live here…
> GF: she wants to come here?
> Chanel: yes. She says, "You have fun and so you don't want me to come too"

Chanel's friend's assertion about the unwillingness to share in the 'fun' bears close links to the idea of 'luck' as a limited good, as a zero sum-game in which one person's gain is another person's loss, as will be discussed in the next section. Chanel's complaints about the difficulties she and her family have to endure are then perceived as an attempt to keep her friend away, in order not to risk having to share the good fortune that living in Italy is thought to provide.

Big houses, the sending of presents and money, largesse upon visiting, all contribute to reinforce the widespread belief that people who migrate have 'made it', that they are now free of financial worries and that they have the means, and the duty, to provide for those that are left behind. As a consequence, migrants are often the target of demands for money and presents by immediate, sometimes also extended, family back in Ghana, and children are not immune from this pressure. Several of the young participants in Italy, in fact, complained about being used as a mediator for requests of money or goods, as the following extracts demonstrate:

> GF: what do they [family back in Ghana] ask you? Do they ever ask you when you're going back?
> Erica: yes, my grandma always
> Jacqueline: mine too, but… no, my granddad, especially, asks for money. First thing. First thing he does.
> GF: do they ask you?
> Jacqueline: yes, because he's too scared of my mum

> Marty: and then my siblings think that I'm so big. They say "Buy me a car! Bring me a mobile!"
> Jackson: but they're joking
> Marty: no, not really. They torment my mother too. They tell her: "I want a mobile, one of those that takes pictures… with Bluetooth…" I tell them "But how do you know that Bluetooth exists?"
> Teresa: that's right! That's what I was about to ask you!

It is interesting to notice, in the second exchange, the surprise that the participants, born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, express at the idea that young people (in this case siblings) in Ghana may know about technological innovations. This demonstrates a view of Ghana (and Africa) that reflects a belief in the backwardness of the country, a discourse that echoes very closely the stereotypical view of Africa that still informs Western ideas of the continent and that will be discussed more in detail in chapter 6.

It is very difficult to break the vicious circle of the 'collective lie' (Sayad, 2004) that runs through discourses on migration. For actual migrants, admitting hardship and poverty would be tantamount to admitting to being a failure: when so many went (and still go) to great lengths to show that they are successful, failing to conform to this image could be attributed to the individual's incapability and ineptitude. Moreover, the difficulties that migrants experience in the country of settlement can often be faced only with the comfort of knowing that, if not in the receiving community, at least in the community of origin they are seen as successful. Unskilled labour migrants may be on the very bottom rung of Italian society, they may experience discrimination and abuse in their everyday lives, but at least in the communities they came from they are respected, and their symbolic capital is maintained, even increased.

Being able to send gifts and money home ensures that the migrant fulfils his/her moral duty to care for those he had to leave behind. It also, however, creates bonds of obligation and reciprocity (Faist, 2000) they can draw on in order to enjoy practical support back in Ghana. This may go towards the care of the children they left behind (over and above the money they send for their necessities) but also the running of errands and looking after business to which the migrant cannot attend in person. This can benefit the social standing of the children who are left behind too; they can acquire, within the peer community, considerable symbolic capital, as Sarah A. recollects:

> Sarah A.: you see, because in Ghana, right, all my friends in my class… we had a group and I was their…
> Jack: boss
> Sarah A.: boss. Why? Because my dad was in Italy, so I had money.
> GF: ah!
> Sarah A.: All they asked for I could give them... and then… I mean… mum helped me to give money to those of my classmates that haven't got money, practically
> GF: when you were in Ghana…
> Sarah A.: so I was the boss, I had everything, I had money, I bought them everything they wanted at break-time. We went around in a group and we could buy everything… also… with boys too
> Jack: Uh!

As this extract shows, the power and prestige that the gift affords can work to the advantage of the children left behind, who can capitalise on their family's special position within the local community, something that may go a little way to making up for the emotional difficulties and the practical drawbacks of prolonged periods of separation from parents and, sometimes, also siblings.

The symbolic power available to the children because of migration to a Western country is also evident in the extract below. 12-year-old Erica was born in Italy, but had also spent a year in Ghana with her mother a few years previously. During this period she was sent to school, and this is how she reports on her experience:

> Erica: when I went to Ghana I went to school
> GF: really?
> Erica: yes… I was little. But… they didn't make me do anything because… I mean… I had arrived from Italy so everyone loved me, everyone wanted to be with me
> GF is that right? [laughs] you were famous!
> Erica: yes

The privilege accorded to her by her emigrant status meant to Erica being let off the obligation to do schoolwork and being popular with other children, in quite stark opposition to the experience of being an immigrant arriving in an Italian school, as illustrated in the previous chapter. Enjoying the advantages and popularity that derived from being associated with Italy appears to have made Erica more positively inclined towards Ghana than the other Italian-born participant who had similarly spent some time in their parents' country of origin. Jacqueline too had been in Ghana when she was two years old and then again for a few months more recently, but with a rather different outcome. In the following extract the exchange between the two girls reveals the differences between their experiences:

> Jacqueline: I went last year
> GF: and how did you feel?
> Jacqueline: well, I didn't feel at ease
> GF: no?
> Jacqueline: no. Well, also when I was two I didn't feel at ease
> GF: you even remember that time?

> Jacqueline: yes: I fainted!
> GF: really?
> Jacqueline: eh, it was hunger
> GF: hunger? Did you not eat?
> Jacqueline: no…
> Erica: she didn't like it
> GF: you didn't like it
> Jacqueline: no
> Erica: I like listening about Ghana
> GF: do they speak about it at home?
> Erica: yes, when I hear people speaking about Ghana, I'm happy

The discrepancy between the two encounters with Ghana is probably due to a variety of causes that are not just reducible to the single variable of being popular and enjoying attention, such as differences in age, geographical location or familial circumstances; however, from the girls' stories, it appears that while Erica had a direct experience of 'being' in the country, taking part in the life of the community, Jacqueline had been kept in the house and sheltered. As a consequence, she could not help but feel Ghana as 'foreign', unpleasantly so, and even something to be rejected (as the refusal to eat Ghanaian food testifies to); conversely, Erica's greater immersion in Ghanaian life appears to have left her with a much easier and more harmonious relationship with her parents' sending country.

### *"If any of your friends are witches they can plan bad things". Protecting the dream from 'the evil eye'*

As argued in the previous section, gaining the respect and admiration of people in the sending communities may make the sacrifices that come with migration easier to cope with. However, other people's admiration is sometimes to be monitored, as it may carry with it the dangers of envy. Envy is a treacherous emotion, one which cannot be controlled or overcome: the envious cannot help desiring what another has and, in doing so, may spoil another's luck by casting the 'evil eye', however unwittingly. The resulting negative influence may not always be conscious and planned, but can be as fatal to those on the receiving end of it as the deliberate malignant spell.

As Foster (1972) observes, "in considerable measure, envy exists only because man [sic] feels that there are insufficient quantities of the good things in life – however he may define "good" things - for everyone to have all he [sic] wishes " (p.168). Consequently, one person's gain is another person's loss, and the negative feelings generated by this 'zero-sum game' attitude to the chances for improvement may harm the envied by spoiling his/her opportunities for good fortune. Some of the pastoral work of Ghanaian Charismatic Pentecostal churches is built largely on these concerns, as individuals refer to church ministers in order to counteract the negative powers that prevent them from obtaining visas to work abroad (Gifford, 2004).

I had come across, in my interviews with the children who had migrated to join their parents, a few young participants who said that they had not known they were due to leave for Italy until the day they were to move or, in one occasion, until just a few hours before catching the flight to Italy. Moreover, a couple of the migrant children also mentioned that, while they were aware that they would be leaving soon, they were told by their parents not to talk about this with anyone but the closest family. The following extracts, from the interviews with the children who had recently migrated from Ghana to Italy, illustrate this:

> GF: do you not remember when they told you "Look… now you're going to Italy"… do you remember?
> Linelle: but nobody told me. And the day, that day when I had to come here… I went to school. I didn't know that I had to come here
> GF: oh…
> Linelle: ah… they called me at school to tell me that I had to go home and get ready to come to Italy
> GF: goodness! And how did you… how were you feeling? A bit of a shock?
> Linelle: yes, because I didn't know anything

> GF: why did you not say anything?
> Benedetta: only to… ah… a friend of mine
> GF: ah, right… So you did not say anything to anybody?
> Benedetta: because my mum told me to keep my mouth shut

This need for secrecy a few of the children reported rather puzzled me. However, at first I put down this lack of information to parents' and relatives' desire to shelter the children from the stress and disappointments of waiting for an occurrence they knew may take a long time to materialise and also from the worries associated with having to undergo such a big change. While the need to protect the children may indeed be part of the reason why some of them were not informed that they would be leaving soon, I also realised, talking to the children left behind, that there is a further reason why young people may be kept in the dark, or asked not to talk about the fact that they are soon to leave to join their parents. As the following extract demonstrates, the imminent (or likely) departure may be kept secret out of concern over envy and the evil eye, and the consequent possibility that others' malevolent feelings may cause misfortune and even jeopardise the whole migration project:

> GF: Ah… do you think that you will go to Italy? Was it not you who said that your father is coming for you?
> Sarah B.: yes, he said he will be coming for me
> GF: and did you ever tell your friends that you may be going away?
> Sarah B.: no
> GF: no? Why not? Why do you keep it secret?
> Sarah B.: because… ah… it's not everything… like… it's in your family that you have to say it out. Me, I believe that, if you have somewhere to go, like you have to go to abroad or somewhere like Italy, and you tell your friends, sometimes they can get jealous of you. Maybe some of them… maybe there are some sprits standing somewhere, they can hear you. And maybe sometimes you don't know, if any of your friends are witches they can plan bad things {…}
> GF: ah, ok. So you keep it quiet
> Sarah B.: yes

The fact that the children avoid telling even their good friends that they are leaving for fear that envy may cause the evil eye and so spoil their chances of migrating, is indicative of both the desirability of migration in these children's lives (something that others can covet, dangerously so) but also of the fragility of the dream to have the family reunited, a wish that sometimes can seem as though it will never come true, as the following exchanges with migrant children testify:

> GF: yes? Who told you? How did they tell you?
> Valeria: my mum, she called me… when I was little, she kept saying that… shortly I would be coming to her… I didn't believe her, and…
> GF: really? Was your mum already here?
> Valeria: yes, my mum had been here for three years
> GF: right
> Valeria: so I didn't believe it anymore and when… when the moment came I was happy

> GF: and… before you left Ghana… do you remember when they told you that you were leaving? …do you remember who told you, when that was… how they told you…
> Robinson: yes
> GF: how long before [leaving] was it?
> Robinson: two days
> GF: two days before? Did you not know anything before that? Had they not told you that maybe…
> Robinson: before they had told me that maybe they would take me… but maybe not…
> GF: it was not sure
> Robinson: that's right

> Rebecca A.: my mother was coming to Ghana and said that she would be coming to take me to Italy, so my papers were not yet ready, my visa… when you want to come to Italy you go to the Italian Embassy and get the visa… so, my visa was not yet ready, so my mother went back to Italy and that left just me, but I was not happy that… ah… only me was coming to Italy [by plane]. I don't know anybody, so… My mother said 'Don't worry, God will bring you to Italy' I said 'That's ok'. But when my mother told me that I was coming to Italy I was happy…

These three participants all went through a seesaw of anticipation and disappointment, several times. Rebecca A., in particular, had her mother coming to take her to Italy, only to have to leave her behind once more as the necessary papers were not ready. Rebecca later in the interview also told me how she was trembling when she was boarding the flight to Italy, understandably very frightened at the prospect of having to face such an unknown situation totally on her own.

It is, however, not at all uncommon for the trip to have to be postponed several times because of the very large number of family reunion requests that are filed with the Italian embassy in Accra. The numbers are so high that, at the time of my visit, the application procedures had been suspended, as I noted in my fieldwork notes on the day after my arrival in Ghana:

> I went to the Italian Embassy where I registered as a temporary resident. The Embassy's member of staff who collected my form also told me that they have thousands of applications for family reunion and that, had they the personnel to do it, they could get through tens of thousands just in one year. The applications for family reunion are now closed because of the large backlog they are trying to deal with.
>
> [Fieldwork notes, 10th March 2009]

Moreover, the requirements of the Italian law for income and housing are very hard for many migrants to meet, in particular as some of them may be working - at least for part of the time - in the informal sector (i.e. in undeclared, unregulated and untaxed occupations that offer no labour protection), and often in highly insecure jobs with short term contracts; the consequent swings between hope and disappointment can be very frustrating and upsetting for all involved, but in particular for the children waiting to be reunited with their parent(s) and to embark on a new life.

## Making sense of Ghana

The children of migrants are actively engaged in trying to negotiate the differences between the two (or more) countries they share social and emotional ties with. They need to balance what the communities they belong to, and with whom they identify, expect and demand of them while, at the same time, taking some elements from each and combining them to make the most of their transnational belongings. While this is particularly true for the children who have migrated from Ghana to Italy and who have direct experience of the different *habitus* each country fosters, for the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents the challenge seems to be that of being Ghanaian in Italy (but also Italian in Ghana) without letting either country 'reclaim' them completely. The themes of witchcraft and evil eye acquire, in this context, the role of a distancing device, one adopted to keep at bay the demands of a country, Ghana, that the children perceive at the same time as close and as alien.

This section looks at the theme of witchcraft that emerged during the interviews with young people who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents as part of the ambivalence experienced by the children of migrants towards their parents' country of origin. It highlights how the fear of the evil spirits that are meant to inhabit Ghana symbolises the children's concern with their belonging and their worry that their parents' country may 'repossess' them. Furthermore, it explores the difficulties of keeping alive emotional links to relations and places that they do not know personally but to whom they feel (or are expected to feel) a special attachment.

### *"Some people don't believe in these things". Witchcraft and the confusing side of Ghana*

As noted previously, a few of the children who were left behind in Ghana by migrant parents talked in a rather open and matter of fact manner about the possibility of a 'witch' casting the evil eye thus jeopardizing their chances for migration. However, the way in which the children who were interviewed in Italy broached the subject of witchcraft was a lot more ambivalent and circumspect, showing these children's awareness of the cultural differences which could have made me (an Italian adult) question the topic. Interestingly, and also tellingly, it was the children who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents who appeared extremely keen to discuss the subject of evil forces, and in two out of the three focus groups with the children of this cohort the discussion was, at some point, shifted in the direction of the occult. This theme was also picked up in three of the subsequent individual interviews with the same sample of children, demonstrating the concern and fascination this subject raises in the young people who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents.

I was quite unprepared for this topic to be brought up, although I was aware that, two years prior to my research, there had been an instance of severe maltreatment[28] of a minor who had been accused of witchcraft by a Ghanaian couple, and that the young people were likely to have heard about it. The guarded way in which the participants born in Italy broached the subject was quite telling. We had been discussing visits to Ghana, and one of the children had just told me that he thought his little brother would get very bored there:

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[28] The incident took place in the same area in which the fieldwork was carried out and the minor was subsequently removed from the couple and entrusted to a foster family. At this time I was teaching Italian in the adult evening classes and both my colleagues and I were struck by the way in which even some of our young and educated Ghanaian students appeared to blame the minor and to accept witchcraft explanations for the couple's behaviour.

> GF: [...] and would you get bored, do you think, in Ghana?
> Jackson: no, in Ghana I wouldn't even want to go out
> GF: why?
> Jackson: not even to go out. No... because I do not feel like going out
> Teresa: I am scared about spells
> Jackson: right
> GF: ...of what?
> Jackson: spells
> Teresa: spells
> GF: what spells?
> Jackson: eh, you don't understand because you are white. You don't understand...
> Marty: white has nothing to do with it, it's that she doesn't understand our language
> Jackson: true

As the extract above clearly shows, the children are highly aware of the fact that we may speaking different 'languages' and that I, an Italian adult, may not understand, or may even be dismissive of, their beliefs and concerns. While, of course, during the interviews we all spoke the Italian they had been learning from a very young age, the assertion that I would not be able to understand their 'language' shows awareness of the cultural differences between my background and theirs, differences which could result in my misunderstanding or (worse still) in my ridiculing, their worries. Later in the same focus group interview, one of the children again stressed this possibility:

> GF: tell me about these spells
> Teresa: ...well, some people don't believe in these things...

It is interesting to notice how Teresa tries to neutralise her sentence by using the words 'some people'. By generalising the subject of her sentence she was able to express her concern that I may not take her seriously while, at the same time, testing my reaction to what she (and the other children in the focus group) were saying. This demonstrates further that the topic of witchcraft preoccupied the children enough to feel the need to talk about it despite the risk of incurring my disbelief or even the possibility that I could make fun of their accounts.

While they started talking about witchcraft in this apologetic fashion, trying to see their stories through my (presumed) sceptical eyes, the children quickly got carried away by their narration and the powerful emotions it evokes. In all the instances when the topic came up, the children talked at length about the issues of witchcraft and the evil eye, issues that appear to both alarm and fascinate some of them quite considerably. In a few cases, the topic was returned to even during the individual interviews, as is the case with Teresa:

> GF: and… tell me what the best thing about Ghana is, according to you
> Teresa: I don't know
> GF: can you not think of anything?
> Teresa: no
> GF: no? ….and anything *not* nice, then?
> Teresa: witchcraft
> GF: right?
> Teresa: I'm scared to death
> GF: and if you could… if you were to become… let's see… queen of Ghana, or president of Ghana… what would you change? Is there something you would change?
> Teresa: make witchcraft go away, of course!

As we can see, 13 year old, Italian-born Teresa struggles to find something of Ghana that she could relate to me as a positive aspect of the country. However, she does not hesitate for a second when asked to tell me about something negative, something that she would change if she could, and that something is witchcraft. I argue that behind this 'fear' for the occult forces of Ghana hides the ambivalent relationship of young people to a country which they have learnt (through the process which Bourdieu terms 'symbolic violence') to see as backward and dangerous, a country that, however, they are at the same time expected to love and respect.

The stories of witchcraft and sorcery[29] that the children recount are a mixture of hearsay that circulates within the Ghanaian community in Italy, which they hear from their parents, and which they also gather from the storylines of Ghanaian or Nigerian films, which are often centred on these themes (Meyer, 2006). The Ghanaian children in Italy appear to watch these films quite often and they also seem to take at face value the reality they represent. As the girls born in Italy pointed out in one of the focus groups, witchcraft in Ghana is real, and they cited the films they watch in order to prove this:

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[29] Although often conflated, the terms witchcraft and sorcery have different meanings. Witchcraft is the expression of a malign power that is embodied in the 'witch' and that can even be exercised unintentionally, as in the case of the evil eye; sorcery implies the use of magical crafts and/or knowledge and is intentional. The distinction between the

> GF: and are the witches not like the ones here?
> Erica: no
> Kate A.: no
> Jacqueline: no, that is an actual spirit
> Erica: …true witchcraft, I mean…
> Kate A.: no, because in a film…
> Erica: I mean, they are real spirits who…
> Jacqueline: no, because in our country they are real spirits
> Claire: yes. My mum was cheated by a… by one of these…
> Kate A.: of these… I mean, because in a film, we saw that a person went to a witch… a male witch, because she wanted to kill her own son. So, every time the son met a girl… and the girl got pregnant of this man…
> Claire: yes
> Kate A.: the girl died with the child, always!
> Erica: and she was earning money
> GF: …right…

The above extract contains a reference to two sources of information about witchcraft that the young people have: the films and also the adults, as one of the mothers appears to have related a story in which she was the victim of one such experience. This leaves the girls in no doubt: witchcraft is real in 'their' country, even though it may not be in Italy (what is, in this instance 'my' country, the country of the possibly sceptical researcher). The two geographical spaces are seen as run by different 'regulating forces', and the different *habitus* shaping social interaction is not directly transferrable from one to the other.

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two, however, is not always clear-cut and the terms are often used as synonymous, in particular when translated. (Stewart and Strathern, 2004)

### *"When you go to Ghana you'll see what they'll do to you". The dangers of being 'reclaimed'*

Ghana can appear, to the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, a rather confusing and contradictory country. On the one hand, they often hear their parents talk in a positive and nostalgic manner about the country they left: it is the place in which their parents have built the big houses that prove their family's success (and consequently their own success) and where they are therefore envied and respected; it is also the country where their close relations still live and with whom they communicate on a (more or less) regular basis. On the other hand, however, if their parents left this place they appear to long for, there must have been a reason: there must have been something there that threatened them, there must be still something there that they cannot quite grasp but which must be somehow hostile. The parents' recounting of routine beatings and threats to children, which will be discussed in chapter 6, adds to the perception of a hostile side of Ghana, in particular when it is coupled with the possibility of 'transnational disciplining' (Faulstich Orellana *et al*, 2001), the threat to send unruly or non appreciative children (back) to Ghana to improve their moral education. In the following extract Teresa reveals how Ghana is used by her mother to convey the idea that in Italy life for young people is (too) easy and that not enough is required of them. The link between witchcraft and punishment comes out clearly through her words:

> GF: and where did you see this [witchcraft]?
> Marty: I saw it on a video
> Teresa: Me too, so I said to my mum "Do they really exists?" she said "Yes, they really exist" then they tell you [puts on a spooky voice] "You'll go in the woods…" Like, "When you go to Ghana you'll se what they'll do to you" "You'll have to work there, otherwise they… they'll… they'll hit you"
> Jackson: but these people…
> Teresa: Like, in school, in school, right, when you do something they take those little sticks…
> Marty: they hold you… two strong kids, three, four strong kids, and they whip you

Anthropological studies root the basis of contemporary African witchcraft beliefs in the attempt by rural communities to come to terms with the disruption brought to 'traditional' ways of living by a cash economy, with its emphasis on accumulation and individual gain (e.g. eds. Cormanoff and Cormanoff, 1993). Against this background, the recourse to witchcraft accusations is explained as a heuristic device to which communities turn in order to make sense of a modernity that is not quite understood. However, as discussed earlier in the literature review, van Dijk (1995) notices how witchcraft accusations can also be a way for young, urbanised individuals, to 'exorcise' the demands made of them by those they left behind in the rural areas of provenance. Moreover, through accusations of witchcraft they can dispute the traditional structure, one that is only partially known to them and that remains difficult to reconcile with their urban upbringing. In this way they can shift the power imbalance in their favour and avoid having to submit to the rules of the village, rules according to which, as young individuals, they must bow to the will of the elders.

I argue that van Dijk's insight can also be applied to make sense of the way in which the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents talk and feel about witchcraft in Ghana, a country which evokes ambivalent feelings in them and which they perceive at the same time as close and unfamiliar. These children, born of Ghanaian parents in a provincial Italian town, appear to struggle to understand the world their parents came from and of which they feel, to varying degrees, part. In parallel to van Dijk's (1995) study of urban youth in Malawi, the children born in Italy are fully engaged in a social and material environment that they perceive to be very different from that they have learnt to associate with Ghana or Africa. Talking about the threats posed by witchcraft can therefore be interpreted as a way for the Ghanaian children born in Italy to distance themselves emotionally from a country towards which they feel both close and far removed.

Ghana makes demands of the 'second generation' children in many ways: through their relatives in Ghana who ask for love and visits; through their parents at home who ask them to share their feelings for the community and the country they left; through the discrimination or the racism they encounter in Italy, which can make them feel as though they do not belong. The commitment that this entails can sometimes be felt like an imposition, and the extract which follows illustrates the difficulties that some of the participants born in Italy reported encountering when having to make their 'duty' call to their grandparents:

> Kate A.: I don't know what to say, when I speak to them [on the phone]
> Jacqueline: same here!
> Claire: yes, ah… I know Italian better than Ghanaian and therefore I… some words I don't know and I don't know how to say it
> Jacqueline: yes, and they ask you questions… to which you don't know what to reply
> GF: like? What questions?
> Erica: my grandma asks me when I go there… to see them… all the time
> Jacqueline: so does mine! Mine too… [laughs]

Bringing up the 'dangerous' and obscure part of Ghana offers the children a way to 'exorcise' the country's demands of them and to distance themselves from the possibility that it may claim them 'back'. The children are aware that the country they were born into still sees (sometimes treats them) as aliens, however Italian they may feel[30]; they are aware that they are expected, by their parents and by the Ghanaian community in Italy, to feel love and loyalty for the country their mother and father came from and now often deeply miss; they are aware that their parents hope one day to move back and that this hope often takes the concrete form of a house towards which the family's finances and efforts are directed. As Levitt (2009) points out, "the second generation is situated between a variety of different, often competing generational, ideological, and moral reference points, including those of their parents, their grandparents, and their own real and imagined perspectives about their multiple homelands" (p. 1238). I argue that, while there may be advantages to this multiplicity and to the freedom of 'being' it can afford, the cultural and social practices of their parents' sending country can be perceived as both familiar and strange. Invoking the threat of witchcraft authorises a ‘rejection’ of Ghana on objective grounds, rather than on subjective (and affective) ones: as Teresa stressed during our interview (see p. 199), she does not want to go to Ghana because Ghana is potentially dangerous. As a consequence her loyalty to her parents’ community of provenance (and to that where many of her close relatives live) does not need to come into question.

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[30] In order to receive Italian citizenship, children born in Italy of foreign parents must wait until they are 18 years old, the age at which they can apply for naturalisation if they have resided in Italy without interruptions. They need to make the request for citizenship before the age of 19.

## Lives in-between

The children of migrants and the migrant children are raised within transnational social fields and, as argued in chapter 4, they learn to interact within ‘transnational emotional fields’ which are partly physically experienced and partly built on and through the links with significant others (parents, relatives, friends and communities), links that span two or more countries. As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco observe “When would-be immigrants see television images and hear first-hand accounts of life abroad, they begin to imagine a better future in another social setting. [...] The search for a better standard of living is an enduring motivation among immigrants [...]” (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 22). The social and financial advancement migrants seek, however, can also be seen as greedy and selfish pursuit of material gain and, as such, it can incur moral condemnation, which may even result in bad luck and potential loss of achievement. This section looks at how the children express the danger of being tempted by lust for material gain through the symbolism of the West African spirit ‘Mami Water’. It also looks at how the children negotiate Italian and Ghanaian linguistic and cultural practices and at how they can actively challenge others people’s requests and assumptions by playing the different set of practices one against the other.

### *"She's the queen of the spirits". Material gain and greed*

As pointed out in the previous section, the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents see witchcraft and evil spirits as a distinctly African and Asian phenomenon. In Italy, they assured me, these spirits do not exist. However, one particular spirit was pointed out as being able to travel and to reach other continents: it is the spirit called 'Mami Wata' (or, alternatively, 'Mami Water'), a mermaid-like creature who, as the children emphasised, could swim even to Italy. A phenomenon widely traceable in many countries of Central and Western Africa, Mami Wata is said to be a seductive creature that lives in a cave full of riches at the bottom of the sea. She can be summoned by (or she can lure) those wishing to obtain material wealth quickly, and she will grant their desires but always at a high social cost. The men and women who partake of Mami Wata's favours by 'marrying' her, in fact, will do so at the expense of their future relationships. She is a very jealous spirit and will not let her 'spouses' marry or have children and her capricious nature will result in her followers ending up destitute (Meyer, 2008; Meyer, 2004). A group of Italian born participants explained her powers in the following exchange:

> GF: so these things don't exist in Italy then? These spirits, these…
> Jackson: no, no, I don't think so. I don't think so
> Teresa: it depends on the people who come
> Jackson: but in the whole of Africa… even in Asia there are
> GF: right. Sorry, Teresa, what were you saying? I didn't catch it
> Teresa: it depends if… a person… like… one of the spirits who are in Africa comes here…
> GF: right
> Teresa: like… I heard a story that… I don't know if it's true
> Marty: across the water. It's called Mami Wata
> Jackson: it's true
> Marty: she's the queen… she's the queen of the spirits
> Jackson: no, that one… she's a mermaid, Mami Wata
> Marty: eh, right
> Teresa: right!

The mention of Asia is not accidental. The more widely available depictions of this spirit are based on a 19th century European lithography, which circulated throughout West Africa;

portrays a Samoan snake charmer (pictured below), whose Asian features and attire are reproduced in the shrines to Mami Wata that are found in Ghana.

Figure 20 is omitted from the digital copy of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure depicts a dark-skinned female figure. She has black curly hair and wears colourful clothes and a pair of large gold earrings. She has a snake wrapped around her shoulders and arms while another one appears to be climbing on the front of her dress. A smaller picture shows another woman with similar clothing charming four snakes with a flute-like musical instrument.

**Figure 20: Mami Wata - Available from: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mami_Wata_poster.png (accessed on 17th November 2010)**

A hybrid spirit which belongs to land and water, Mami Wata's multiple nature is also evident from her name, which borrows from the English even though it refers to a local supernatural entity. According to Drewal, in fact, "the term [Mami Water] mediates between Africans and those from overseas and represents Africans' attempts at understanding or constructing meaning from their encounters with overseas strangers" (Drewal, 1988, p.160). The seductive power of this foreigner can persuade people to waste their money and fortune (Meyer, 2004): she is the personification of the 'evil' power of consumerism and of the temptations of material possessions. It is therefore not surprising that the children believe that this particular spirit can cross borders and that she could swim to Italy, a place where migrants' buying power is often quite modest but where temptations are ubiquitous and occasions for wasteful behaviour abound.

However powerful the temptations of Mami Wata (or of the other spirits which may try the moral strength of individuals) prayer can be a powerful tool to keep these temptations at bay and at to ensure a praiseworthy conduct. As Meyer observes, "[…] only through prayer may commodities cease to act as `fetishes' which threaten the personal integrity and identity of their owners" (Meyer, 1998, p. 751). While witchcraft and the evil eye are threatening potentialities in the children's daily lives, these threats can always be neutralised by prayer, in particular by collective devotion, as the following exchange illustrates:

> Jackson: no, listen! When you go to Ghana, right, if you find a person, right, er… you must… well, you must always go to church because some Ghanaian, right, are… some… are also witches, right, so be careful when you go
> GF: so if I go to church, I'll be fine
> Jackson: yes. Or… but, do you have… buy yourself a cross… er… a [mimes a crucifix hanging from his neck]
> GF: a crucifix?
> Marty: yes
> Jackson: but some of those witches are very strong, you know
> GF: and do you ever think that it may not be true all this?
> Jackson: but it's not a legend, that's for real, you know
> Teresa: I believe in these things…
> GF: and in Italy you feel safe?
> Marty: yes, my mum told me that two people who… that between two people who pray there's also God
> GF: right, I see. So… two is better. Two people together is better
> Marty: yes, even more
> GF: if there's a lot of people…
> Marty: he doesn't stand a chance, he'll end up badly
> Jackson: perhaps if there are… three hundred people, right… Like I saw a film…

The communal prayers Jackson refers to are a practice which is quite common among some Pentecostal churches in Ghana, where 'prayer camps' are organised to identify and exorcise evil spirits (Gifford, 2004).

Witches and demons can enter one's life also via people one knows and trusts, such as family members and friends. This means that nobody can be trusted, as a potential threat could be hiding in all people. It also means, for those accused of witchcraft, running the risk of being socially excluded, as happened to the 'friend' that Italian-born Jacqueline and Erica are discussing in the following extract:

> Jacqueline: there was a friend of mine who… her grandma was a witch and… she gave her this power, right? And one day we heard
> Erica: when I heard this thing, I was scared because she was my friend, she came to my house

> Jacqueline: me too!
> Erica: I was scared of her
> Jacqueline: she came to my house too! I too was… but now she doesn't have this power anymore because a minister prayed for her

Fortunately for Erica and Jacqueline's friend, the power of prayer was, in her case, enough to counteract the evil power she had inherited from her grandmother, and to restore her social place amongst her peers.

The protective power of prayer is, in the case of witchcraft, a way to maintain control over negative forces and to keep at bay the evil eye, in other words, it is a way to have some control over one's destiny, in particular when structural forces, against which the individual feels powerless, cause concern and anxiety. At the same time, however, belonging to a religious community ensures the maintenance of the moral standing, both of the self and of the group, something which is particularly important when settling in a new country, as observed by Fumanti when he notes that "[…] encapsulation within the church provides the protective environment needed to survive in a foreign land" (Fumanti, 2009, p. 9).

Church services and the various activities that revolve around the church constitute a space where the Ghanaian community can come together and in which the symbolic capital of the individual migrant, often depreciated within Italian society, can regain its value. Moreover, within the physical and moral framework that their churches offer, migrants are able to regard themselves as virtuous and worthy individuals (Fumanti, 2009) and thus resist the negative image that the receiving society projects of them. Consequently, the church service is often the linchpin around which the life of the community revolves and which allows a collective, and convivial, identity to be (re)produced. A substantial number of photographs from the children who had migrated as well as the children who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, had as subjects the traditional food and clothes that characterise church gatherings:

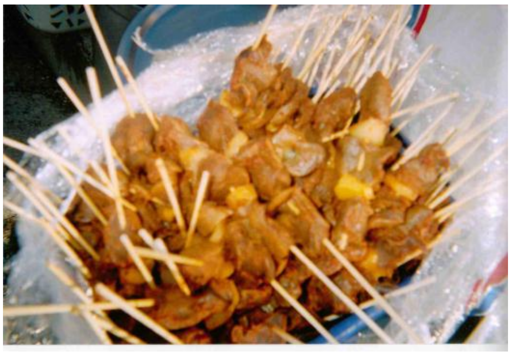

Figure 21: Ghanaian dish

Christian:

"These are Ghanaian kebabs. If the church service ends late, there will be something to eat. Everyone brings something."

Much of Ghanaian migrant social life appears to centre on church services and formal community gatherings. There are several 'Ghana Nationals Associations' in Italy, which are grouped in the COGNAI[31] consortium, as well as a large number of churches, the majority of them of the Charismatic Pentecostal form of Christianity. Charismatic churches are quite prominent in the Ghanaian diaspora and seem to attract membership because of their 'global' scope, which means that migrants can feel part of a wider community of Ghanaians all over the world, but also for their emphasis on the opportunity for 'legitimate' financial success and morally approved material gain which are available to the believers (Gifford, 2004). Thus, in a world of high uncertainty, where structural changes severely limit individual agency, the potential that the Charismatic churches offer can represent a way to exercise some form of (at least perceived) control over one's future; by praying and believing one becomes active in attempting to shape his/her fate, rather than passively resigned to powerlessness. The following picture, taken by Italian-born Christian, portrays a 'testimonial' during a Pentecostal service:

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[31] Council of Ghana Nationals Associations in Italy

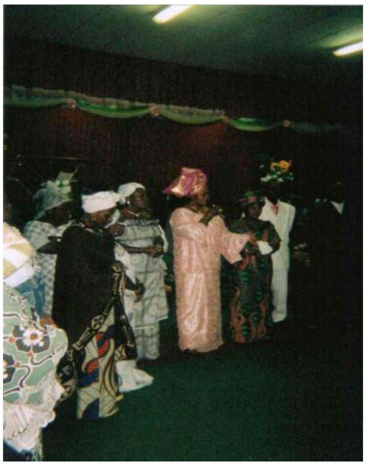

**Figure 22: Church service**

Christian:

"This lady was telling her story to everyone in church. She was in a very bad car accident, but she was not hurt. So she was giving thanks for this…"

However, from the children's interviews churchgoing emerges as a predominantly social occasion. As well as the services, the church can offer a space for gathering, a Sunday school, and sometimes also after-school activities for children. In church the community gets together, everyone dresses in their finest clothes, shares food and catches up with friends and acquaintances. Symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1979a and 1979b; 1990a) is displayed and built upon; social ties are maintained and expanded. The receiving country, with the humiliations it can inflict, can be left outside while the community basks in the respectability and virtue accorded to it by the devotion and morals so often lacking in the majority population (Fumanti, 2009).

The opportunity for dressing up offered by going to church was the subject of several of the photographs. Unsurprisingly, the children wanted to have some pictures of themselves looking their best, and the Sunday service offered precisely such an opportunity. The following exchange centred around one such photograph, but the image is not included to preserve the anonymity of the participant:

> GF: do people dress like this every day?
> Rita: no, not every day
> GF: when?
> Rita: for special occasions in church
> GF: and how often do you go to church?
> Rita: three times a week
> GF: and do you always dress up when you go?

> Rita: no, on a Wednesday and a Friday I don't dress up, but on a Sunday I do

Four of the Italian born participants, moreover, reported that their fathers serve as ministers in one of the several small centres of Pentecostal worship in the town where they reside, a position which awards social recognition and standing within the community:

> Jacqueline: no, because, like, my father is a minister… and yours too, right?
> GF: wait, so… your father is a minister, you mean he's a… what is he, a pastor?
> Jacqueline: yes
> Kate A.: yes
> GF: yes? Of which church?
> Jacqueline: N. L.
> GF: N. L… and yours too?
> Kate A.: no, P.
> GF: right, P… So your [fathers] are… are both… ministers?
> Kate A.: yes

As Gifford remarks about Ghana "the establishment of a 'Christian' church has become the shortest route to raise oneself above the poverty line" (Gifford, 2004, p. 192). He observes that, in Ghana, being a pastor is a profession that can offer a good standard of living as well as the prestige which comes from holding a white-collar job. This can also be applied to the Ghanaians of the diaspora, in particular those living in places where there is a high concentration of fellow-nationals, and it is therefore not very surprising that a (relatively) high proportion of the participants in my study report having a father in the ministerial profession.

### *"I pretended not to understand". Constructing hybrid spaces*

The attitude of the children born in Italy towards these community gatherings and, more generally, towards all the outward symbols of ethnic belonging, appears to be one of carefully balanced ambiguity. Clothes, food and, generally, Ghanaian folklore are met with a mixture of loyalty and distancing, as trappings of a way of life in which they feel at the same time actors and spectators. The following snippet from a focus group conversation shows the distancing device used by Italian born Kate A., who speaks about 'they' when talking about Ghanaians. Her assertion that Ghanaian clothes are beautiful quickly meets with Jacqueline's objection:

> Kate A.: I mean, there are also other… I was watching videos of songs sung by Ghanaians and I see that their cars are gorgeous… They have beautiful clothes…
> GF: is that so?
> Jacqueline: well, the clothes are better here… here in Italy, actually

Tastes in food are also deeply symbolic of the acceptance (or distancing) from forms of belonging that are assumed on the basis of birth or bloodline. This is not, of course, to say that individuals cannot express likes and dislikes for different foodstuffs, but the strong feelings expressed by Jackson towards what is West Africa's staple food appears to signal a deeper form of detachment:

> GF: ah, I understand, [fufu] is a kind of mashed potato, but it's like…
> Marty: and you eat it with your hands
> GF: is it nice?
> Jackson: no, I don't like it, it's disgusting, God! It must be a year since I last ate it!

A considerable number of the photographs taken by the children who were born in Italy portray Ghanaian food and community gatherings, traditional clothes and hairdos, wall hangings and woodcarvings. The fact that only very few such photographs came from the children who had migrated recently to join their parents, could point to a more objectified and detached look at Ghanaian 'culture' on the part of the children who were born in Italy. However, it could also signify that the 'second generation' children were more able to look at their surrounding through, at least partially, my outsider gaze and were therefore portraying the 'exotic' aspects of Ghana, perhaps the ones that they expected I would find more interesting. In many cases, while depicting these aspects of folklore and tradition for my 'education' (often upon parental suggestion), the children born in Italy also distance themselves from them by remarking that they don't remember the name of an item, or by implicitly criticising it, as in the following comments by Italian born Federica and Barack:

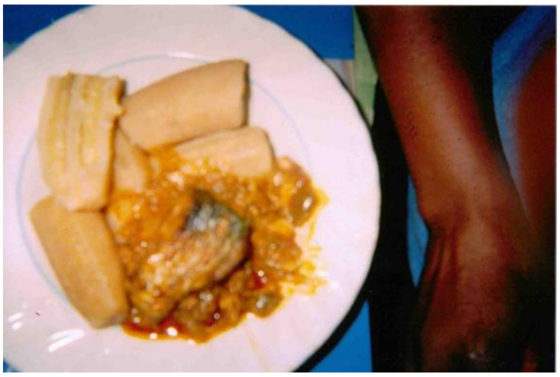

Figure 23: Ghanaian dish

Federica:

"This is a Ghanaian food. It's a sort of banana, but it does not turn yellow, it stays green, and it's cooked in sauce and with meat. My mum says it's nice… I think it's spicy"

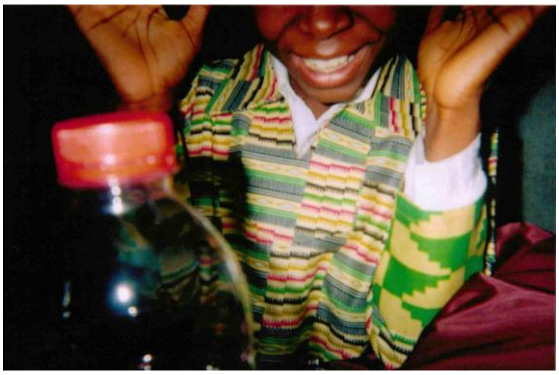

Figure 24: Kente cloth

Barack:

"This is my friend. He's wearing a shirt made with Ghanaian cloth…. I don't know what it's called…"

The food and cloth are here depicted for their exotic appeal but in a detached manner, and the children are quick to convey that, while aware of their unusual character for an Italian person and of their importance in the Ghanaian community, these elements only have a marginal interest for them.

Vertovec (2004) observes that for migrants "Aspects of life 'here' and life 'there' […] are constantly monitored and perceived as complementary aspects of a single space of existence" (p. 975). While this may not be true for all migrants in all situations, the increase in transnational practices as a consequence of the expansion of communication tools and lower costs of travel, means that many migrants see themselves (and the various forms of capital they have access to) in a continuum between sending country and country of destination. On the whole, children take part in their families' transnational practices only indirectly, as it is generally too expensive for a labour migrant to travel to and from Ghana with the whole family. Nevertheless, all the children in Italy report having regular contact with Ghana, whether they were born there or not. Ghana is part of their everyday life and of their everyday practice, and while some aspects (clothes, food, rituals) may not be so relevant to them, others are:

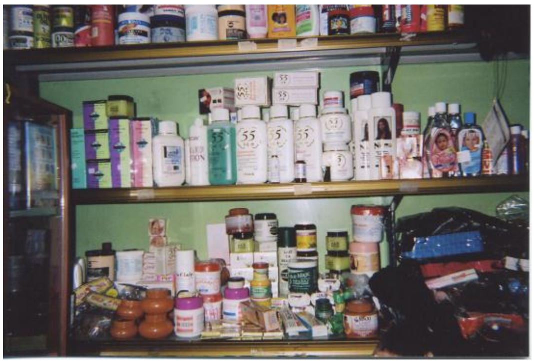
**Figure 25: Ghanaian shop in Italy**

Anastasia:

"These are the creams to make your skin fairer. [...] I use this one. It has a nice smell, it makes your skin soft and it makes you lighter… only I haven't put it on in the past few days… This is all stuff that comes from Ghana

The young migrants engage in the different cultural practices of the country of origin of their family and of the country (or countries) of settlement. But they also inhabit the 'intersection' between some, or all, of these practices and can embrace and/or refuse different parts of them, in different combinations at different times.

However, moving between these spaces is not always a straightforward exercise, and sometimes it can have unexpected consequences, as Sarah A. reports:

Sarah A.

"I took this picture to show the hairdo. I saw that Italians don't plait their hair, while Ghanaians do. So one day I got my mum to plait the hair of one of my friends from school. She didn't keep them on for long because she was allergic to it. Her scalp became all red… only African people can plait their hair"

**Figure 26: Braided hair**

The attempt to give Sarah's friend an 'African' hairdo had ended with the friend's scalp becoming sore from the pulling, something that, tellingly, Sarah actually put down to an 'allergic' reaction associated with her friend not being African. In this reading, 'Africanness' and 'Europeanness' are inscribed in the body and crossing from one to the other may even cause (physical) pain. This echoes the words of other participants which are similarly associating the crossing of cultural practices with potential pain and illness, as when Italian born Jacqueline recounts fainting in Ghana because of her dislike of the food (see page 193), or Georgiana's concern about the possibility of getting a 'runny stomach' once she arrives in Italy and eats Italian food (see page 153).

The common thread which underlies the concern with (possible) threats to the body by adopting social practices that one perceives as 'other', highlights a symbolic preoccupation with the crossing of social boundaries. As Douglas (1970) argues, the body is always conceived of as an image of society and "[...] bodily control is an expression of social control [...]" (p. 78). Loss of bodily control, therefore, can be symptomatic of a loss of control over one's social life, something to which the children's observations about pain and illness appear to point to and which appears to be the result of the 'crossing over' of different practices.

However, at the intersection between their double belonging, to Italy and Ghana, is also the space in which the children are able to resist and challenge adults' authority or restrictions, and to exercise a degree of autonomy, as the following extract illustrates:

> Anastasia: One day we were in church and... it was [my friend's] birthday. The priest did not know this, and we were chatting and the people behind us were saying 'stop chatting!' but we did not care, right...
> GF: and...?
> Anastasia: ...and the priest called us. She went first, because I said 'you go first', and then he called me... I went quiet and... seen that he was speaking in English I pretended not to understand... I said 'Sorry, but I don't understand English' and he sent us out, thanks to my intervention
> GF: [laughs] to your cunning?
> Anastasia: yes
> GF: is the priest strict?
> Anastasia: no! They are all very nice. Only that... they talk a lot

It is interesting to notice how playing on the language difference lets the girls get away with talking through a boring service ('they talk a lot') and share in some fun amongst friends at the minister's expense. By pretending she cannot understand English, thus exploiting her 'Italianness', Anastasia manages to create a zone in which the young people are able to bend and shift adults' rules and thus affirm and strengthen the social bonds amongst peers.

The following exchange similarly shows how the participant and her friends are able to exercise a degree of agency over adults' requirements by playing between the differences in Ghanaian and Italian climate:

> GF: yesterday someone was telling me that girls in Ghana do not wear jeans
> Linelle: right, well… it depends on the church. When we go to the Pentecostal church, we cannot wear jeans in church… I don't know why… but I wear them. Because here I cannot wear just skirts, because [in Italy] it's cold.

We can see, from the example above, how this girl manages to get away with wearing 'forbidden' denim jeans in church by claiming that the weather in Italy is too cold for other forms of clothing. It is interesting to notice how, in both these examples, the children manage to challenge adult's rules by playing on their own dual belonging and how they can exercise a degree of agency precisely by exploiting the 'disjuncture' between different cultural practices.

## Summary

Most of the children who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents talked at length about the houses their families are building in Ghana. The majority of them live in rented accommodation in Italy, while the family's finances are destined to the construction of large buildings in the sending country, buildings that sometimes remain empty and, often, suffer structurally from lack of proper maintenance. The widespread practice of house construction in the families' country of origin cannot be explained only as a financial investment, but also fulfils an important symbolic purpose (Zanfrini, 2007). Migrants' house building is the visual proof of the migrants' wish to return and, therefore, of their attachment to the sending community (Sayad, 2004); constructing a house testifies to the migrants' success in the sending country and proves that their 'sacrifice' (and that of all the loved ones they left behind) was not in vain (ibid.). The size and appearance of the building also denotes the migrants' 'good taste' which becomes the visual indicator of (the 'distinction') of their social status (Bourdieu, 1979a).

All of these functions of house-building count towards the accumulation of symbolic capital by the adult migrants: it increases their prestige and honour, guarantees they are trusted and respected in the sending country and allows them to draw on this trust in case of need (Bourdieu, 1990b). As for other forms of capital, symbolic capital can be enjoyed by all the components of the nuclear family (and in some cases by the extended family too) and therefore house building also increases the children's status within their community at large, and amongst their peers in particular. As a consequence, the young participants were very keen to talk, during the interviews, about the size and luxury of homes in Ghana most of them had never seen, but which could still afford them a degree of status both to other children's eyes and to mine.

While Ghana is the stage upon which success is enacted (Goffman, 1959), it can also be, at the same time, a place of danger and of obscure forces. Divided between the concurrent narratives of Ghana as a sunny, happy and rich country and as a dark, threatening, poor land, the children born in Italy appear to feel the need to distance themselves from their parent's homeland. Their parents' house building, their families in Ghana demanding their presence, the Italian narratives of Africa as poor and needy, which they also come to share, seem to contribute to their feeling both pulled towards it and scared of it. The children's concern about witchcraft and evil spirits which they see as haunting Africa, appears to fulfil the need to put some emotional distance between their Italian lives and Ghana, while still enjoying from afar the positive results of their parents' financial investments and of the networking to which the young people too contribute substantially (Faulstich Orellana *et al,* 2001).

Living within transnational families can, however, also give the children room to play between different 'cultural arbitraries', and to exercise a degree of agency by 'weaving' in and out of these arbitraries in order to bend unpleasant rules or to avoid boring duties. As Bourdieu and Passeron observe, the imposition of a cultural arbitrary is more likely to be uncovered in its discretionary nature if "[...] the cultural arbitrary of the group or class undergoing [a Pedagogic Action] is remote from the cultural arbitrary which the PA inculcates" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 15).

The term 'pedagogic action', as used by here by the two authors, encompasses all forms of education, both formal and informal. The term 'cultural arbitrary' is used to denote the dominant culture, which the PA inculcates as 'natural' and self-evident while it is in fact the result of the selection and imposition (through 'symbolic violence') of the cultural traits, belief systems and values of the dominant group or class which are arbitrarily chosen. As a consequence, I argue that migrant children, who move (often *are made to* move) between two cultural arbitraries that can be quite different, are in the best position to glimpse the 'un-natural' nature of the cultural givens. This allows young people to question these arbitraries and, in some cases, also to challenge them (and, at the same time, the adults who impose them) in order to create hybrid spaces that are better suited to their specific interests and needs. The ways in which the wider social narratives and practices come to shape the expectations, the experiences of migration and the view of the children's roles within the receiving society will be further explored in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 6: "THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS": MIGRANT CHILDREN BETWEEN COLONIAL LEGACY AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

> *I would make the people in Ghana a bit rich, not… very poor… because there, there is a lot… a bit of poverty… not very much, because… I think that the majority is rich… I think…*
>
> *[Kate, age 11. Born in Italy]*

As illustrated in chapter 4, the Ghanaian children who were left behind by migrant parents imagine Italy as a cleaner, more modern, intrinsically 'better' place than Ghana. Basch et al (1994) notice how (potential) migrants hold "[…] the deeply ingrained cultural belief, a residue of colonial experience, that what comes from the outside is usually best […]" (p. 124). Not only is what comes from 'outside' perceived as better by the Ghanaian young participants, but the whole of the Western world is often believed to be the place in which improvement and (axiomatically) progression will be possible.

How this view of European (Western) superiority still influences young people's perception of their own country and of the West, after three generations of independent rule in Ghana, can be explained through the use of Bourdeiu's theoretical tools, specifically through the concepts of 'symbolic capital', 'symbolic power' and 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1990a and 1990b; 1979b; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) already outlined in chapter 2.

This chapter widens again the focus of the thesis and attempt to encompass the wider social processes that ensure the reproduction of cultural stereotypes, as well as the ways in which different cultural practices come together within the social world of the school and how this encounter is experienced by young migrants. The chapter illustrates ways in which the Ghanaian school system still contributes to replicate, fifty years after independence, a view of Europe and the West as culturally more advanced and to give a reified view of local culture, reducing it to its most folkloric aspects. It also looks at how symbolic violence ensures that the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents come to share dominant discourses on 'Africa' and 'African-ness'; furthermore, it explores the way in which, precisely because of their multiple belonging, the children of migrants can challenge and criticise aspects of the dominant culture of the receiving country and at the ways in which they attempt to defy and resist the stereotypes that are forced upon them.

## Ghana's school system and the colonizer's culture

Chapter 1, where the Ghanaian school system was discussed, illustrated the role of schools as the most important loci of transmission of socially valued cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Moreover, as the main setting of socialisation, schools play a key part in children's lives and in shaping the way in which they come to make sense of their 'selves' and their social environment. It is first of all through the Ghanaian school system, I argue, that the colonialist discourse about the superiority of Western culture(s) and lifestyles is reproduced and passed on from one generation to the next.

The following section explores the way in which Ghanaian children (both those left behind and those born in Italy) construct narratives of Ghana and Ghanaian culture, and looks at how the social environment fosters and shapes these narratives. It also gives an insight into the ways in which these young people's milieu is reflected in their expectations, dreams and ambitions in relation to migration.

### *"This is our culture". The Ghanaian school system and colonial legacy*

As outlined in chapter 1, the roots of formal educational institutions in what was known as the 'Gold Coast' were set up in the 17th century by Portuguese missionaries in order to convert the local population to Christianity, and they were attended, in all likelihood, by a very small cohort of boys (Graham, 1971). With independence, the newly born Ghanaian nation inherited an educational apparatus whose roots nested deep into the colonial and missionary history of the area (Graham, 1971). As a consequence, important elements of Ghanaian schools' origins and heritage, such as the portraits and statues of the school's founders, still take pride of place in some of the schools' grounds, a daily reminder to the children that the basis of their education is to be found in the will and power of these foreign men (the gendered noun is deliberate).

Even when the school has no such imagery, the old colonizers' language is the institutionalized vehicle, which conveys the knowledge (the cultural capital) the pupils are amassing in the hope of gaining a better place in life. The names of the founders are sometimes passed on by the school staff and remembered by the children; more often they are forgotten, but their images have looked upon the lives of young Ghanaians for generations, and still do. The following exchanges illustrate how the Ghanaian participants come across the 'foreign' roots of their education. They refer to photographs of the school grounds that the participants were discussing, but the images themselves are omitted as they would make the institution easily recognisable.

> GF: I know who this is, this is the man who built the school, I've seen him before [in other photographs]… and he is… do you know where he is from?
> Georgiana: no. I think he's a foreigner
> GF: he was a foreigner?
> Georgiana: …a Canadian?

> Esmeralda: this is the man that built the school
> GF: ah, ok, this is the man who built the school… do you think an Italian school will look like [this] school?
> Esmeralda: yes, because this man is not a Ghanaian
> GF: is he not a Ghanaian?
> Esmeralda: no, so I think…
> GF: do you know where… what his name is?
> Esmeralda: [says name]
> GF: I'll have to find out where he was from. It's not Italian…
> Esmeralda: they say he's from… I think Britain or {another} country

Coming across the images of these 'foreigners' whose authority and vision are at the basis of their school's existence cannot but have an influence on how the children view their education and its place in the wider dimension of 'official' culture. 'Abroad' is where the roots of their education lie, something which is reinforced by the imposition not to use their mother tongues in school (English being the medium of instruction in Ghanaian schools and universities). The participants in one of the focus groups with migrant children in Italy remarked on how the failure to speak the 'right' language could even result in corporal punishment:

> Valeria: they hit you
> Linelle: also when you chatted in class
> Valeria: when you chatted in class and you spoke your own language and you didn't speak the language that you must speak in school, they hit you

Very tellingly, the girls refer to 'their own' language, most likely Twi, and to the language 'you must speak in school', which undoubtedly denotes English. Being caught speaking the mother tongue is therefore not only frowned upon but also beaten out of the children in Ghanaian schools, as they are taught that formal and recognised knowledge - the cultural capital that can also be counted towards an increase in symbolic capital - is the one that passes through the language of the former colonisers.

Not only is it the education the foreign men brought to Ghana that has this officially recognised value, but also the buildings themselves, built by foreigners, can become associated with the modernity and progress of the West. The following extract comes from a one-to-one interview with one of the children who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents. He had spent some time in Ghana when he was still quite a young child and in this part of our conversation he was asked to give me some information about Ghana; in this particular part of the conversation, he was cautioning me about the state of Ghanaian toilets. The extract reveals this child's idea that schools in Ghana were built by whites and that this made them automatically 'better' and superior to other, 'non-white' parts of the country:

> Roberto B.: well, it depends on where one goes, because toilets… are not exactly the same as Italian ones
> GF: ah
> Roberto B.: they're a bit disgusting!
> GF: right?
> Roberto B.: because there are… like… they don't flush
> GF: in schools too?
> Roberto B.: no, not in schools. In school there are toilets, because schools are built by whites, usually

This view of Ghanaian culture as equivalent to the immobile and objectified transmission of folklore is still present in the daily lives of the children left behind. When asked to take photographs of anything they think they would not find in Italy, or that they will miss, the children left behind produced a number of photographs of posters depicting celebrations and people dressed in traditional outfits. In their comments to these photographs, the children were quite adamant: they depict Ghanaian 'culture':

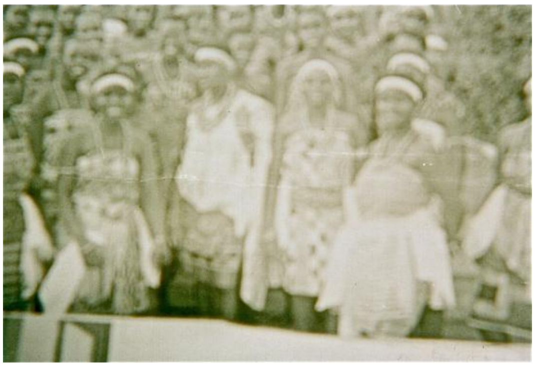

**Figure 27: Ghanaian 'culture'**

Cynthia:

"This is our culture"

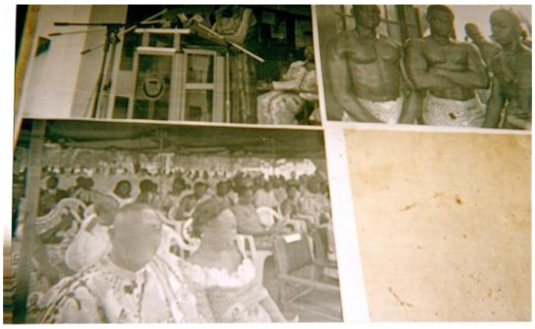

**Figure 28: The culture in the school**

Rebecca B.

"[These photographs] are all about the culture in this school"

Dancing seems to be perceived as an important component of what the children refer to as 'culture'. Traditional dances are taught in many Ghanaian schools (Coe, 2005) and the children clearly think of them as one of the highest expressions of 'Ghanaian-ness'. In the following extract, I had asked one of the girls to suggest something which my own children, soon due to visit me in Ghana, could find interesting:

> GF: ah… what do you think [my children] will like best of all? What's the best thing? What do you think they'll enjoy most?
> Esther: madam, our culture
> GF: your culture? What about your culture? Which part of your culture?
> Esther: our dancing

Indeed, it is also very likely that dancing represent a time of fun and enjoyment in schools that are, otherwise, quite strict and where beatings are still fairly commonplace, and it is possible that the children's keenness on this activity is due also in part to its more joyous character. However, as the following extract demonstrates, the idea that dancing is (with language) an essential part of culture also comes through in the way in which the children left behind imagine Italy and Italian culture, extending to these imaginings the categories of culture learnt in Ghanaian schools:

> Rebecca B.: me I want to stay [in Italy] for the culture, then I will know how to speak their…
> GF: language?
> Rebecca B.: language and their…
> GF: right, you would have to learn the language, yes.
> Cynthia: and dance
> GF: and dance?
> Cynthia: yes
> Rebecca B.: yes, the culture

> GF: are you good at dancing?
> Rebecca B.: yes, the culture about dancing. We like it

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), the education system tends to reproduce the social divisions through the mechanisms of self-perpetuation, in a self-perpetrating closed circuit (e.g. schooling gives access to more prestigious jobs and, consequently, admission to the official institutions with the power to influence which titles have higher value and, as a result, offer entry to more prestigious jobs). Similarly, symbolic capital that can be accumulated through officially sanctioned cultural capital in Ghanaian schools rests, to this day, on the Western standards of colonial and missionary origin.

## Incorporating into the receiving society: language and school

The children left behind show awareness of the fundamental role that language will have in the new social environment when (if) they move to Italy. As discussed in chapter 4, for the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents and the migrant children, language again plays an important role: it symbolises their 'alien' status and, at the same time, it offers them a way out, as Italian can crystallise discontent while English can represent opportunity. As we saw, by (potentially) moving to an English speaking country they can gain the status they deserve and find the place where they belong. Indeed, the fact that English, Ghana's official language, the language many of them were taught in schools before leaving and which is widely used within their community, is a language that enjoys a high status amongst Italian society, challenges Italian superiority, even though indirectly.

However, Italian is still the language the children need to speak to interact with other people in Italy and, more importantly, to make friends and become part of the social environment

(Zuppiroli, 2008; Penn and Lambert, 2007). In the schools they attend, most children receive (or have received) some linguistic support, and the Italian education system makes provision for a professional figure (the 'cultural and linguistic mediator') and gives some time allocation to linguistic support. However, the provision for the support of immigrant children in Italian schools is still sparse, generally short term, and does not receive sufficient financial backing (Balboni, 2008); consequently, the integration of many migrant children within the Italian school system is often left to the organisational skills of individual institutions and to the chance availability of the necessary human resources (e.g. English speaking teachers).

The present section looks at the ways in which migrant children discuss their experiences of the first days/weeks in Italian schools. It looks at how the reality of a new language impacted on them and at how they coped with the first few days in the new educational environment. It examines how the children evaluate their experience in relation to adult support and, most importantly, to Italian children's reception and social integration within the peer group. Finally, it explores the ways in which the young participants negotiate the different *habitus* required for 'being a pupil' within the field of education in Italy and in Ghana and at how they evaluate the practices associated with each country's educational system.

### *"I said I'm not going to school anymore" Language differences and the impact of the new*

While most of the children said that they were aware, before leaving, that in Italy people would be speaking a different language, it appears that this knowledge was a highly abstract one and that the reality of an unknown language they could not understand took many of them by surprise even before arriving, while still in transit between the two countries:

> Amauri: on the plane, right
> GF: yes?
> Amauri: they were speaking Italian
> GF: right
> Amauri: it seem… it seemed to me so odd that I told myself in my mind that I would never ever understand Italian
> GF: yes?
> Amauri: because it seemed very strange
> Philly: it's so difficult!
> GF: right?
> Rita: it's difficult to understand Italian

It's important to notice that, even though Rita (who had been in the country for two years) appeared to be able to efficiently use Italian for communication in a social context, she clearly still remembered the difficulties encountered when she first arrived. With this experience still fresh in her mind, she chose to use the present tense to relate it, thus, at the same time, also turning her remark into a general statement of truth.

Not understanding the language had also some very practical (but fortunately not serious) repercussions for one of the migrant children, and Chanel recollects not understanding the fire-fighters who had been called to put out a fire she had caused accidentally:

> Chanel: here I… I didn't know how to cook potatoes, there was nobody at home [laughs] I saw that there were, like, potatoes in the fridge, so I went "Go on, I'll try". There was oil and I put it in and I went to see a film, I arrive… and it was all burnt
> GF: oh, dear…
> Chanel: [laughing] they called the fire-brigade
> GF: right…
> Chanel: but they spoke a different language and I didn't understand a thing
> GF: where was this?
> Chanel: here in XX
> GF: so you'd just arrived?
> Chanel: yes. And I didn't know how to cook chips […]

The children who had migrated to Italy were very keen to discuss the issue of language and, more generally, of school as the locus where language is first encountered and where it matters most for social exchange and acceptance. The first few days in the new schools were, for the vast majority of the migrant children, very difficult. Not being able to communicate in Italian, not understanding what was happening and what they were expected to do, attracting unwelcome attention because of their skin colour and because of their hair, were all instances of frustration that the migrant children remembered vividly:

> Rita: the first day in school they were making fun of me
> GF: yes?
> Rita: yes
> GF How was school, how did you find school?
> Rita: I arrived… hi, hi, what's your name, what's your name
> GF: in Italian?
> Rita: yes, and me [switches to English] "What are they saying!" …and the English teacher "They are saying… they are asking for your name" and I said "What?"
> GF: the teacher spoke…
> Rita: than someone comes: "*Ciao bella*!"
> All: [laugh]
> Rita: I don't understand a thing. I said [switches to English] "Leave me alone" and they carried on "*Ciao bella*!"
> GF: was this a child or…?
> Rita: a girl that was in my class

Rita's most vivid memory of her first day in school is of the attention she was receiving coupled with the difficulty in understanding what the fuss was about, as she did not comprehend the language, a combination of factors that appears to have made her feel confused and upset, wishing only to be 'left alone'. This was clearly a common feeling, one that was remarked upon by a number of migrant children.

Robinson, who was, at the time of our conversation, using Italian for social exchanges with no evident effort, recollects the hard work required when he still did not understand the new language. He does not report being distressed, during this first day, but the fact that the teacher decided to send for his father points to the possibility that he was also upset, as well as 'tired':

> Robinson: for me… even if… they were asking me something I could express myself… with gestures…
> GF: so you managed anyhow
> Robinson: yes, a bit
> GF: how was it, however, all day in school without understanding?
> Robinson: the first day in school? It was very, very tiring
> GF: right?
> Robinson: I mean… My father had to come to collect me straight away because I couldn't understand a thing, so they went to call him
> GF: they went to call him?
> Robinson: yes

Philly too remembers, in the following extract from one of the focus groups, those first few days in school as difficult, left on her own to guess what was required of her:

> GF: but do you remember the first days, when you couldn't understand?
> Philly: [laughs] yes, yes
> G: how was it?
> Philly: when the… the… teacher was saying something… it annoyed me, 'I don't understand anything!' when [the other children] got up, I said… ah… the teacher said 'Get up!' and I was… when I saw that others…
> G: were getting up
> Philly: yes, I got up too [laughs]
> GF: was it difficult?
> Philly: yes, yes.
> GF: when you got home, what did you tell your parents?
> Philly: I said I'm not going to school anymore. My dad said 'Go, go, then you'll understand Italian… we too, when we got here it was like this, it was difficult, but you are… you are little, don't think about it and so you'll understand Italian… ah…'
> GF: now it's better, right?
> Philly: a bit

Philly reports being upset enough not to want to go to school anymore. It is interesting to notice the reported response from her father, who told her of the adults' own confusion when first faced with the unknown language and asks her 'not to think about it' and wait. At the time of the interview Philly's use of Italian in a social situation still came across as uncertain. She was now repeating a school year, not having been deemed able to move forward with the rest of the class because of her language difficulties.

From the following extract the frustration of the young participant at not understanding and not being 'left alone' emerges, an overwhelming emotion that sparked a chain-reaction of behavioural issues, costing the child several days of suspension from school:

> Jack: yes. When I arrived I was at… at the XY school… I don't know if you know it…
> GF: I do
> Jack: when I started school the teachers were bothering me a bit and so when I was near them I was… kicking them too
> GF: the teachers?
> Jack: yes
> GF: uh!
> Jack: and then I stayed home… I went to the head… teacher
> GF: the head-teacher
> Jack: and… I stayed home for two weeks
> GF: but why did you do this?
> Jack: ah, they were bothering me!
> GF: why were they bothering you?
> Jack: they never left me alone

A bit older and more in control of her emotions, the following girl, who had only been in Italy for two weeks at the time of this interview, describes her ongoing struggle with language in school, and the trust both her and her mother put in divine help to see them through everyday practical difficulties.

> Rebecca A.: in my class… I don't understand the language, so everyday they insult me, but I don't care…
> GF: very good
> Rebecca A.: I know that God…
> GF: you need to be strong
> Rebecca A.: yes! So they laugh at me… so I don't care. My mother says that "When God permits I will understand the language"

Rebecca's conviction that she is being daily insulted may be due more to perception than an accurate description of her school environment, but it is, in any case, a clear indication of the feeling of hostility this participant experiences.

Another newly arrived participant, facing similar (perceptions of) discrimination and racism, had a rather different solution to the difficulties he was experiencing in finding a space within Italian society. In Italy for just six months, Michael still appeared not to feel comfortable in using Italian to communicate in a social situation, and therefore the individual interview was conducted in English. As Michael was quite keen to point out, he was happy to be in Italy and did not want to go back. However, he also mentioned having trouble with 'naughty' friends and finding it hard to fit in. Moreover, the 13 year old appeared to have been often reminded of the necessity to keep a low profile, not to be (even more) conspicuous, as this could result in him being deported. In the following extract Michael was initially talking about the US, but then switched to Italy:

> Michael: [my uncle] says it's nice and beautiful. Because… in America you can do everything you like… and here, if you {…} they will send you back to Ghana
> GF: pardon?
> Michael: here if you joke… fight… shout… they can send you to Ghana

The promise for endless possibilities that America holds for migrants is here put in sharp contrast to Italian intolerance of young aliens' boisterous activities. Faced with the need to try to stand out as little as possible, Michael cannot avoid imagining a place in Italy where he would be just one amongst others, free to do what he wants without attracting attention and disapproval (and potential punishment), a bit of Ghana in Italy:

> GF: right. I see… and say… if you had special powers, and you could do magic, what would you change of Italy to make it better? Anything that you would change? People, places, objects…
> Michael: [laughs] I would change places and people
> GF: right? People, places or both?
> Michael: both
> GF: how would you make them better?
> Michael: [laughs] I would go to some of the villages and I would build a lot of houses and I would send the black people to stay there. The black villages…
> GF: pardon?
> Michael: black villages [laughs]
> GF: right! So you would have villages just for black people?
> Michael: yes
> GF: and where are all the white people?
> Michael: [laughs] white people can stay here [laughs]
> GF: [laughs] so you would have special places with only black people, but in Italy, right?
> Michael: yes

The frequent laughter which intersperses the extract, signals Michael's intention to show his is awareness of the unlikely nature of his suggestions. However, the fact that he still chooses to express a desire for what is, after all, a segregated life, shows in powerful manner the difficulty he is experiencing in finding a space within Italian society. The solution is to fantasise a place in Italy where he would be able once again to 'disappear'. In this 'fantastic' village, the benefits of life in Italy would be coupled with the benefits of living in a space where the 'feel for the game', the knowledge of the appropriate way to act and react within the specific fields (Bourdieu, 1990a) he had acquired while growing up in Ghana would once more be effective.

## *"I was born in Ghana, so I'm used to Ghana". Different ways of being a pupil: a matter of* **habitus**

The vast majority of the participants, either the young people who were left behind, those who migrated to join their families and those who were born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, are aware of the differences between the school systems of the two countries. In particular, several participants remarked upon the different attitudes and legal guarantees in relation to corporal punishment as a form of educational strategy. In two of the focus groups held in Ghana, the issue of 'lashing' in school came up, a theme that was then brought up again in the following one-to-one conversations. To some of the young participants the idea that corporal punishment is illegal in Italian schools appeared to be a rather puzzling notion:

> GF: what do you know about… what else do you know about Italian schools? What do you think you would have to do in an Italian school?
> Chantal: like… you respect everybody that you see
> Gabriella: like, your seniors…
> Chantal: you don't have to be rude to people, you have to be friendly
> GF: right
> Gabriella: you have to be neat
> GF: right
> Gabriella: you don't have to talk in the class
> Chantal: would the teachers lash… just lash… the… the teachers, do they lash[32]?
> GF: lash… what do you mean, hit?
> Chantal: yes, flog the children
> GF: no. They are not allowed. If they did they would lose their jobs. It's not possible
> Chantal: so what if a child does something bad…
> Gabriella: …something bad and…
> Chantal: and you beat…
> GF: no you don't. You can't
> Gabriella: uh!
> Chantal: [laughs]

It is interesting to notice how, to my initial question, two of the girls started by replying according to the moral code stressed within the Ghanaian school system: the need to 'respect [one's] seniors', of being polite, neat, etc. However, the fact that, eventually, the issue of

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[32] The consistent use by the young girls' of the term 'lash' to refer to corporal punishment in school was puzzling. This term is usually connected, in British English, to the use of a whip, and it could be speculated that it remains in Ghanaian English as a legacy of the slave trade.

'lashing' was (tentatively) brought up, points to the participants' awareness of the difference in educational practices between Ghana and Italy, a perplexing rumour they were asking me to (dis)confirm.

Prior to leaving, the young participants appear to have some information about what 'pupilhood' entails in the country of destination. The somewhat perplexing picture they piece together through this information portrays a familiar field (that of the educational institution) in which, however, a different *habitus* is required. While the distinct way of being a pupil in Italy clearly intrigues them and makes up a large part of their imaginings of the destination country, the practices through which 'teacherhood' and 'pupilhood' are enacted in Italy can be the source of considerations on the arbitrariness of cultural standards. Different educational practices rest on different ontological premises regarding the nature of 'children', of which the young participants are also aware, as illustrated by Gabriella later on in our conversation:

> GF: and do you like the idea that a teacher cannot hit children in school?
> Gabriella: I'm not sure
> GF: you're not sure? Why are you not sure?
> Gabriella: because some children are… like… when they do something bad you have to let them know that what they did is wrong, because it's… like they say 'you spare the rod, you spoil the child'. So you have to lash the child, so the child will know that she or he made a mistake, that's why you lash him. In Ghana… me, I was born in Ghana so, like, I'm used to Ghana, so they lash me, so, you know… I know… as far as I am lashed, that I did something wrong

Gabriella's view appears to rest on a Dionysian understanding of children, which sees young people as inherently 'bad' and needing to be protected from themselves until such time when maturity and adulthood mean they are capable of self-regulating behaviour (eds. Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). It is an idea clearly at odds with the Apollonian view of children as innocent and in need of protection from the world that has characterised the Western idea of childhood in relatively recent times (Ansell, 2005).

### *"I saw something that is not good for me". Moving and adapting to new* **habitus**

For the children who have migrated, however, the difference between the ways of being a pupil in the two countries is a lived, first-hand experience. The fine balance between dissimilar *habitus* that migrant youth need to negotiate comes through very clearly in the words of Rebecca A., who had been in Italy for only two weeks at the time of our conversation. In her words we find an acute awareness of the differences between the requirements of being a pupil in Ghana and in Italy, as well as her difficulty in reconciling the positive and negative aspects of the Italian *habitus:*

> GF: and while you were waiting to come to Italy, did you look at any pictures or did you talk to anyone about Italy, so that you would be prepared for it?
> Rebecca A.: I told my grandmother. My grandmother said that 'Rebecca, when you go to Italy be a good child' [...]
> GF: yes
> Rebecca A.: yes...So [grandma said] 'The white people, they don't lash you in Italy. So, when you go, be a good girl'. When the teacher is teaching... I saw something that is not good for me: when the teacher is teaching the children are playing! In Ghana we don't do that. In Ghana when the teacher is teaching and you play, the teacher will use the cane to beat you. But in Italy you don't use the cane
> GF: no, we don't
> Rebecca A.: and it's good, but in Ghana they can beat you on your hand and... it's not good. So in Italy it's good, but the one thing I don't like is when the teacher is teaching and the children are playing. It's not good

While appreciating the lack of corporal punishment, Rebecca is shocked by the poor discipline of Italian children. The two issues are clearly connected 'conceptually', although Rebecca avoids making this link openly, perhaps because she is trying not to sound too critical of the practices of what she still feels is a 'host' country. However, she points out that the lack of discipline she witnesses is 'not good for her', the danger of contagion always present because of the inherent lack of self-control of children (James and James, 2004). Similarly, the conversation that she reports having with her grandmother before leaving offers a series of insights: aware that in Italy her granddaughter would not be beaten for misbehaving, she recommends her to 'be a good girl' and avoid the temptation to misbehave, since the adult regulatory intervention will not be enforced by beatings.

A similar point was also expressed collectively during one of the focus groups with children who had migrated from Ghana to Italy. The children had explained the different ways to physically punish children that are used in Ghanaian schools, and had then split over the desirability/efficacy of one system over the other:

> Linelle: but they do it to make you learn
> GF: and do you think that you learn like that?
> Robinson: yes. They say that… hitting children… then… afterwards they pay more attention in class…
> GF: and do you think it works?
> Robinson: yes, it works fine
> Valeria: [laughs] but it hurts
> Linelle: here Italian children… some of them do not have any respect for their teachers. In Ghana you must respect all teachers

It is interesting to notice how Robinson grounds his intervention in a general and quite impersonal frame by noting that 'they say' that hitting children improves their attention. Like Rebecca before, these migrant children appear to live a contradiction when considering the two educational systems, at once appreciating the lack of corporal punishment in Italian schools and, at the same time, believing that hitting children can be an effective (and necessary) pedagogical practice.

### *"They use old ways still". Ghanaian and Western education styles in comparison*

For the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, the differences in *habitus* required by the field of education in the two countries is mediated by parental recollections and descriptions. Several of the participants in this group focussed on the practice, widespread in Ghana, of cutting schoolgirls' hair very short. The Italian born children had trouble understanding the purpose of this practice, a custom threatening enough to be indicated, by the girls in the group, as a reason for never wanting to go to Ghana (to live):

> Kate A.: the girls have their hair cut, I mean…
> GF: the… girls?
> Jacqueline: yes, the girls who go to school
> GF: ah, yes?
> Kate A.: that's why I don't want to go
> Jacqueline: they say it's because…
> Claire: that's why I don't want
> Jacqueline: [laughs] me neither, me neither

The girls agreed that the risk of having their hair cut short was a good enough reason not to go to Ghana. While clearly understandable, the strong dislike of this practice appears to imply more than just an actual 'aesthetic' concern. During a separate interview, one of the male participants reported a direct experience of the Ghanaian school system as he had been to school in Ghana, for a few months, while there on an extended visit. Like the girls quoted above, he too appears to be rather struck by the practice of making schoolgirls wear their hair very short, and puzzled enough by this 'strange' custom to feel the need to ask his mother for an explanation:

> Roberto B.: …it's the [short] hair
> GF: right, I remember you telling me before
> Roberto B.: it's something… it's over the top
> GF: I don't remember why, though… what's the reason for it?
> Roberto B.: I asked my mum to explain it to me, but it wasn't very clear. My mum made a list that was 50 metres long, so… I said, forget it. However, from what I think I understood, it's that all girls need to cut their hair: one, because it's hot in the school; two, to keep everyone safe because of the lice that go around…
> GF: right, for hygiene
> Roberto B.: and three… you know… in the old schools, boys and girls would be separated… since in Ghana they did not think this to be very fair, they had the girls cut their hair too

It is interesting to notice that Roberto could not find a straightforward explanation for the practice of cutting girls' hair. His mother too (to whom he had put the question) could not come up with a specific reason for what appears to be a ritual for which there are several partial explanations but no clear rationale. As Butler posits, "The effect of gender is produced though the stylization of the body" (Butler, 2003, p. 46) and gender is performed through the ways in which the body acts and appears. The cutting of Ghanaian schoolgirls' hair appears to be aimed at regulating the girls' gendered performance, rather than directed to any specific practical function. Cutting female hair short allows for institutional control over the girls' constructions of femininity and sexuality that are thus symbolically denied to them while in close proximity with male peers in the school environment. Roberto shows himself to be intuitively aware of this symbolic aspect of this practice, when he refers the hypothesis (which he also reports as his mother's) that the imposition of short hair is linked to a policy of 'equal opportunities' that leads to a homogenization of physical appearances by standardising characteristics associated with masculinity.

Later on in the conversation, Roberto also touched upon the subject of corporal punishment in Ghanaian schools. I had asked him to give me advice that I could pass on to my own children, who were going to join me in Ghana for a visit during my stay there. I had not specified the amount of time they would be spending in the country (two weeks) and he at first assumed that my children might attend school while in Ghana (an assumption that was, in all likelihood, based on his own experience):

> Roberto B.: well… if they were to go to school they should behave as well as they can because there they hit you as well… they use…
> GF: right?
> Roberto B.: yes, they use… old ways still. And…
> GF: and do you think… sorry, did you get any idea about this? Is it a good thing?
> Roberto B.: uh…
> GF: what do you say?
> Roberto B.: it's not very good. However, sometimes they are a bit right because… Ghanaian youngsters are… a bit nasty

The distinction between Ghanaian and Italian discipline practices takes on, in Roberto's words, the form of a temporal lag, with Ghanaian school still using 'old ways'; however, it also entails a qualitative differentiation of pupils, with Ghanaian children deserving beatings because of their presumed 'nastiness'. These considerations appear to reflect the boy's difficulty in getting to grips with the specific ways of being within a Ghanaian educational institution and reveal a comparative view of the two countries in which the hierarchal superiority of the West plays a large role. The differences between Ghanaian and Italian *habitus* are thus imputed to variations between social and individual moral traits, with Ghana seen as having lesser standards on both accounts.

All the children who moved to Italy to join their parents focused primarily on their experiences in the school environment when asked to talk about their first weeks in Italy. While most young people mentioned having difficulties when newly arrived because of language barriers and of having to try to integrate within an already existing network of peers, the overall impression I received from talking to them is that, after the initial struggle, the school comes to be perceived as a 'safe zone', in particular in comparison to a more hostile 'outside'. In the following extract Slatan was telling me what had disappointed him upon his arrival in Italy:

> Slatan: it was the first house
> GF: was it not nice?
> Slatan: no
> GF: you didn't like it?
> Slatan: no, I didn't like it
> GF: were you disappointed?
> Slatan: yep
> GF: right
> Slatan: then, I mean… near [this house] there was a person whom… when I started going to school I started getting to know better
> GF: uh, so at first you didn't know…
> Slatan: I didn't know anyone
> GF: and what was this like?
> Slatan: very, very hard

School is clearly the place where children can get to know other people (both children and adults) and to feel less isolated. The social nature of schools means that they can offer an important source of friendship and companionship, as well as the help and care of empathetic teachers, as Slatan stresses later on in the same conversation:

> GF: ok. And… the first… the first days in school, how were they? How did you feel? Do you remember?
> Slatan: [silence]
> GF: do you not remember?
> Slatan: only one friend talked to me, then on the second day I started to get to know them better…
> GF: right. And did the teachers help you?
> Slatan: yes. Especially one teacher… she helped me a lot!
> FG: right? Ok. She was nice?
> Slatan: yep

> GF: what did she help you with?
> Slatan: ah… subjects… then… subjects… She was saying… 'Relax, here you have new mates, they will not do anything to you…'
> GF: and how did she say that, in English?
> Slatan: no, in Italian, but… I didn't understand… I said… I kept saying 'yes, yes'

Since he did not understand Italian, the words Slatan reports may not be what the teacher actually said to him on those first days of school, but they are what he 'remembers' her saying. He was putting into words his perception of the teacher, 'translating' her tone of voice, her body language and, generally, the concern and empathy she clearly was managing to convey.

The teacher Slatan referred to in the above extract had helped the whole class to create a 'Star Wars' poster in which the characters had been replaced by pictures of the pupils. Slatan had been allowed to take the poster home at the end of the school year and had taken a picture of it for me (the photograph is omitted to preserve the anonymity of the participant). He was clearly very proud of this piece of work:

> Slatan: and this [poster] is when we did 'Star Wars', when we did a film that…
> GF: in school?
> Slatan: yes, in primary. In year five[33]. And basically we did all the characters
> GF: ah!
> Slatan: these were characters that we made
> GF: what do you mean you made them? Are these not the real ones?
> Slatan: no, these are us
> GF: ah! True! You know, I hadn't realized! How nice!
> Slatan: yes
> GF: …how did you do it?
> Slatan: ah it was Miss… my Italian teacher who did it
> GF: and which one are you?
> Slatan: I'm this one here with… all my class-mates
> GF: how nice!
> Slatan: yes
> GF: are you keeping it as a memento?
> Slatan: yes. So I… can show it to my own children, when I am older

The fact that he was the subject of this poster, as part of the class-group, and also that he had been involved in putting together this joint project, with the help of an understanding teacher, appears to have made Slatan feel the symbolic importance of the final product enough to plan to show it to his own children some time in the future. Since the poster was now two years old, I think I can safely hypothesise that Slatan's enthusiasm was more than just a keen interest for a novelty. The poster was seen by this child as the tangible embodiment of his 'belonging', the symbol of his being an active part of a socially defined group, that of an Italian class: in this resided the landmark position it appears to have in Slatan's life. This bears out the proposition, put forward by Abdelmalek Sayad (2004), that integration can only be achieved as a 'side effect'. Rather than something that can be imposed or demanded, real integration is the by-product of sharing common goals with other members of a group (a school class, a workplace, an organisation, etc.) and of being actively involved in achieving these goals on equal terms with the rest of the group. One such moment, for Slatan, had been the production of the 'Star Wars' poster.

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[33] Final year of Italian primary school

The social character of the educational institution means that the migrant children can feel part of a community of learners; this, in turn, makes the children perceive this particular 'field' as more familiar and thus safer: a place where, after the inevitable confusion of the first weeks or months, they know what is expected of them, where they have a defined role and where they are part of a social network comprising both children and adults. The 'safety' of this field is often related by the children in juxtaposition to the 'outside', the receiving society at large, a social space in which they may feel hostility and sometimes experience discrimination and racism.

> GF: is there something… or maybe there isn't, you'll decide… I mean… if you had… powers, magical ones, would there be something that you would change about Italy?
> Amauri: yes!
> GF: of the place where you live? Yes? What would you change?
> Amauri: the… racists
> GF: racist people?
> Amauri: yes
> GF: are there many?
> Amauri: yes
> GF: yes? In school too? Or more outside? Or both?
> Amauri: more outside than in school
> GF: right? And in school, how is it? How are the…
> Amauri: no, in school I am very happy

Not all the children, however, found that the teachers gave them the understanding and support they needed and some of the participants feel that not enough allowances were being made for the specific difficulties they face, as Chanel points out:

> GF: …if you could be the Minister of Education and decide 'for the children who are arriving we need…' is there anything?
> Chanel: that the Italian teachers must have a bit… a bit of patience with those who arrive, because they don't… I mean not everyone has studied in Africa, so they must be a bit patient and teach them the time-tables… etcetera
> GF: right, so, a bit more… what were the teachers like instead?
> Chanel: well, it's not as if… they… they have time for you, like… for example if in class I don't know some stuff, it's not as if the teacher is so patient…
> GF: right… what does she do?
> Chanel: like, she gives work to the rest and I am still sitting there doing nothing and then she gives me a four [fail mark]

Chanel's remarks highlights the difficulties faced by the children in a school system, such as the Italian one, that has very patchy provision for the incorporation of foreign pupils. As Rusconi (2010) points out, there is a lack of national regulations and financial support [34] for the integration of migrant children in schools. The responsibility for this provision is left to the Local Authorities and the individual schools and a small budget is allocated to this end. While aiming to give each institution the freedom to tailor the provision for foreign pupils to the specific needs of the local situation, the lack of compulsory minimum standards and, most importantly, of a systematic program for the monitoring and evaluation of practices means that the quantity (and quality) of the resources invested depends on the sensitivities and priorities of head-teachers and teachers (ibid.). In some cases, the lack of adequate resources can deprive the children of the help they need not just to learn but also to be able to communicate, to feel less isolated and scared, in particular during the first few weeks and months in a new school and a new environment. Roberto A. was lucky enough to have some support during his first months in Italy, and he's quick to recognise this:

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[34] Guidelines are outlined in the Ministerial Circular of March 2006, which gives 'indications' on the role of linguistic and cultural mediators and gives the local authorities practical responsibility over their organisation.

> GF: and… ah… listen. If you could say… to someone who is in charge, what is the thing that can best help children who, like you, arrive and don't know Italian… what helped you more or what could they have done and they did not do?
> Roberto A.: they would send me out to learn Italian with this teacher…
> GF: and was this good or did you mind going out?
> Roberto A.: I liked it a lot
> GF: right?
> Roberto A.: yes, because I had never met someone who spoke English like this… An Italian who could speak like this
> GF: she spoke really well?
> Roberto A.: yes

The lack of support some migrant children experience can result in great frustration and feeling of isolation, with consequences for their well-being and consequent behaviour. The following extract is quite lengthy, but I believe that the young participant makes here a series of interesting points which deserve to be carefully analysed:

> GF: and… when you arrived, how did you find people?
> Jack: ah… when I was in primary… I did not like the teachers at all
> GF: why not? What would you recommend teachers do to help children who arrive from other countries?
> Jack: they have to help children
> GF: and what would they have to do to help them?
> Jack: they would have to try to understand what the child's situation is… if… he doesn't want to learn… or wants to learn…
> GF: what were your teachers doing wrong?
> Jack: they were a bit strict, I think
> GF: too strict?
> Jack: I think
> GF: did they tell you off?
> Jack: a bit
> GF: why did they tell you off?
> Jack: I don't know
> GF: no reason?
> Jack: yes, they had reasons… I used to… for example, I don't know if I was behaving badly… I did some naughty things
> GF: did you do naughty things?
> Jack: yes
> GF: why?
> Jack: uh…
> GF: do you remember?
> Jack: [silence]
> GF: did you speak Italian when you came?
> Jack: no, but after about a month I understood it
> GF: and how did you communicate with your classmates?
> Jack: I was fine with my mates
> GF: right, no problems?
> Jack: no
> GF: and how did you communicate?
> Jack: there was a Ghanaian girl in my class, so… we would speak Ghanaian and she would tell them what I had said
> GF: and was this useful?
> Jack: yes
> GF: and the teachers, a part from being strict, did they not help you?

> Jack: a bit, they did. But they would always tell me to try to do on my own…
> GF: and you?
> Jack: and I did not understand a thing… almost

Having arrived in Italy almost four years before our meeting, Jack is a 12-year-old boy who had serious issues during the first months in school. He had told me before (in the course of a focus group interview, see p. 231) that he had been suspended from school for kicking a teacher. In this passage he refers again to this episode as to the 'naughty things' he did during what appears to have been a very difficult time for him. Despite the fact that Jack does not make a direct link between the difficulties of having to learn how to interact in the social environment of an Italian school (the new *habitus*) and the frustration he must have felt, he appears to think that his behaviour was somewhat justified. While admitting to having done something 'wrong' he nonetheless does not sound at all apologetic or contrite. He feels that the teachers had not understood 'the child's situation' and his difficulties, and were pressing him to deliver what he was not in a position to deliver: independent and autonomous engagement in the school activities at a time when he was at his most dependent and vulnerable. He needed help, and help had not been forthcoming: he got frustrated and angry and some of this frustration and anger are still with him, even though his life has moved on.

This is not meant as a criticism of Jack's teachers who, in all likelihood, would have helped him more had they had the organisational space and the human resources necessary to spend more individualised time with him. As highlighted before, however, Italian teachers are still largely unprepared for the (relatively recent) steep increase in the numbers of foreign pupils in their schools and the policies that aim to address the concrete difficulties they may face are still not systematically implemented or adequately supported[35].

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[35] An attempt to resolve the problems relating to the integration of foreign pupils faced by many schools was made by the Italian government with the introduction of a Ministerial note (8th January 2009). This note sets the maximum number of foreign pupils per class to a 30% of the total. While there can be exceptions that can increase this maximum (e.g. pupils born in Italy of foreign parents whose Italian is fluent), this rule clearly has many dubious consequences for the pupils who live in an area with a high density of immigrant families.

Interestingly, Jack also notes that he had faced no problems in interacting with the other pupils, and that the presence of another Ghanaian child in the class had helped him to bridge the linguistic gap, effectively acting also as a cultural translator. Peer-to-peer help was something that several of the migrant children had stressed as a helpful way of 'slipping into' the new *habitus* more easily. As Lev Vygotsky (in Mercer, 2000; Schaffer, 1996 and 2004) theorised, the social construction of knowledge happens through interaction with more expert others. These do not necessarily have to be adults, but can also be more knowledgeable peers, and to be helped and assisted by other children was a recurrent suggestion made by several of the young participants. Well-planned 'buddy' programmes have been shown to be very effective in promoting a foreign pupil's inclusion and in fostering understanding of different cultural practices in majority children (Bainsky *et al.* 2010). However, no such co-operative learning strategies had (yet) been implemented by any of the Italian schools involved in the research.

### *"Everywhere would be more beautiful than this". 'Social remittances' and global imagining*

Living in an environment which has its *raison d'être* and its cultural roots in the colonial rulers' vision cannot but have an influence on the way these children perceive the West and on the way they see themselves and their school as the fruit of white, (largely) men's ideas and might. The schools which the Ghanaian children left behind attend, but also those which were attended by several of the children who migrated to Italy and/or by their parents, therefore still foster, at least to some extent, a view of Europe that is equated with modernity and progress. The following extracts illustrate this point quite poignantly, since none of the children involved in the conversations had any first-hand experience of Italy:

> Esther: there will be supermarkets there, filling stations, shops…
> GF: and what about traffic? There's a lot of traffic in Accra…
> Esther: I don't think there will be much traffic in Italy
> GF: not as much as here? Why?
> Esther: because there are many roads there, they constructed roads there
> GF: pardon?
> Esther: there are many roads there

The same picture of Italy as a place of modern skyscrapers, highways and cars is echoed in the next example, which Chantal also attempts at summarising in one short sentence: 'that place is nice':

> GF: What do you think [Italy] looks like?
> Chantal: I think it's big… it's huge…
> Gabriella: it has a lot of storey buildings
> Chantal: …buildings…
> GF: a lot of high buildings?
> All: yes
> Chantal: and that place is nice
> Esmeralda: and a lot of cars

For one of the children left behind, Italy may even be a place where villages, and the backwardness their old building symbolise, may not even exist…

> GF: and are you thinking about big houses, small houses…
> Wendibel: yes, big houses, multi-storey buildings
> GF: tall buildings… And do you think they will be new buildings or old buildings?
> Wendibel: ok, maybe old buildings […] if you go to the village… or are there no villages there?
> GF: yes, there are villages
> Wendibel: ok. Maybe if you go to the villages you can see some old houses

It is not therefore surprising that the participants in Italy, who have seen that there are old and run-down buildings in Italian towns, expressed surprise at finding that Italy could not offer the modern and fashionable buildings they expected, as discussed in chapter 4.

Several authors have pointed out (Appadurai 1996; Bauman, 2001, 1998; Hall, 1989 and 1993) how, in the current age of global interconnectedness and ease of transport and communication, it is not possible to keep talking about separate cultures. The 'global ecumene' is now the site of cultural mélange and 'creolization' (Hannerz, 1996) and identities are ever-changing, adapting through contact with others, whether direct or indirect. While this view of hybrid cultures as the result of varying doses of cultural 'ingredients', which individuals and communities combine in different ways, does indeed reflect the fluidity and interconnectedness of today's 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000), I argue that the relative balance of power of the world's cultural systems has a very strong influence on the overall composition of these 'recipes'.

As Levitt (2001) and Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) point out, the fluid social spaces created by transnational practices are occupied by migrants but also by non-migrants. Even the lives of those who do not move, in fact, are transformed by the flow of people and money, but also by what Levitt (2001) terms 'social remittances', the practices, ideas, customs and regulations, which flow from the receiving countries to the sending countries. The Ghanaian children left behind, moreover, acquire their knowledge, and cultural capital, within the colonial legacy that still seeps through the English language they must speak in school and through the social mores upheld and validated by the official educational institutions they attend. Their everyday lives are steeped in the Western popular culture which reaches out to them daily through the media (Stalker, 2000; Dolby, 2006; Sefa Dei, 2004) and it is therefore not surprising that Western cultures and systems of reference influence the way they see the world and the hierarchy of countries within it.

The following extract from one of the focus groups with the children left behind was quite difficult, at first, to 'unravel'. The young participant living in Ghana, but expecting to join her father in Italy soon, appears to extend her television-mediated knowledge of America to her idea of Italian houses and cities:

> GF: do you have any idea what they look like, the houses there? The cities there?
> Rebecca B.: yes… I like it because… sometimes, if there would be an American Life, from Italy, you see the house, the clean houses inside. You see the children's house and the father and mother's house, because the place that the toilet is there is beautiful […]

Rebecca mentions ‘American Life’, and draws a link from this to the way she imagines an Italian house and its interior (in particular the bathroom, to which she refers as ‘the place that the toilet is there’). This puzzling link may be due to the child’s viewing of a TV series called ‘This American Life’ or perhaps from watching a Christian American TV channel called ‘American Life Network’. Unfortunately, the source of Rebecca’s comment cannot now be established with certainty. However, her idea that a link exists between American and Italian homes demonstrates how Italy is assimilated into a larger category, the Western view that passes through the media. In this category, houses are beautiful and clean and, implicitly, wealthier. From the unspoken, often implied, comparison between their experienced world and the imagined worlds ‘out there’, Ghana emerges as lacking, not good enough, even deficient, as the following extracts of conversations with the young participants in Ghana illustrate quite clearly:

> GF: nice building… do you think an Italian church would look like that?
> Cynthia: yes, but it would be bigger than this

> Georgiana: yes. And… they [Italian children] don’t take pictures like this
> GF: what do you think they take pictures like?
> Georgiana: on… sceneries… ah… attractive places, not something like…
> GF: oh, it’s quite an attractive building, this. Do you not like it?
> Georgiana: I like it, but… an Italian girl would do better than this

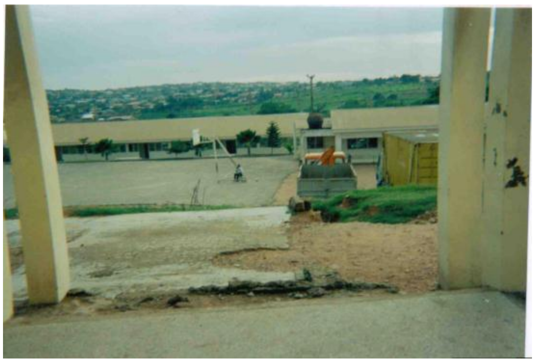

**Figure 29: The school compound**

GF: and what’s this?
Chantal: the compound
GF: the school compound. Do you think an Italian school would look like that?
Chantal: no
GF: what do you think would be different?
Chantal: it would be more beautiful
GF: right. The compound would be more beautiful. And what would be more beautiful? Show me here
Chantal: everywhere would be more beautiful than this

The abundance of comparatives (bigger than; better than; more beautiful than) illustrates the inevitable connection between the two countries which the children make. Implicitly (but also unsurprisingly as the nature of the project itself encouraged such comparison) one country acts as a system of reference for the other, with Ghana representing the imperfect and inadequate reality of everyday life, while Italy takes on the (inevitable) favourable qualities of anticipated possibilities.

## Symbolic violence and sharing the dominant narratives

As Hall (1989) observes, identity "[...] is partly the relationship between you and the Other. Only when there is an Other can you know who you are. To discover that fact is to discover and unlock the whole enormous history of nationalism and of racism. Racism is a structure of discourse and representation that tries to expel the Other symbolically – blot it out, put it over there in the Third World, at the margin." (p.23) The Ghanaian children who have migrated to Italy find themselves in the position of being this Other and of experiencing the marginalisation Hall describes. This is done through constant acts of symbolic violence, which the children do not recognise as such and to which they too may contribute. Their physical appearance means that they have no way of hiding the fact that they do not conform to what contemporary Italian society considers a 'normal' Italian. The 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963) they carry is thus immediately visible and of this they are intensely aware. The way the children talk about contacts with the majority population is interspersed with experiences of being the object of excessive curiosity and, to the other extreme, of being deprived of 'social recognition' (ibid.)

The present section looks at the ways in which the children recount the symbolic violence they experience but also at the ways in which they buy into the image of the 'African' the majority society paints of them. It then explores the children's attempts at actively challenging the idea of Italian 'superiority' and how they try to construct alternative narratives of Ghana and Africa.

### *"What sort of language are you speaking?" Markers of difference and the 'poisoned mirror'*

Moving to Italy means, for Ghanaian children, coming into contact with a society in which they are immediately identified as the 'other'. The setting for their new, exciting lives, which they had fantasised about before leaving, is revealed as a background against which elements of their own appearance and behaviour suddenly come to be uncomfortably conspicuous as a result of their difference from the recognised 'norm'. Their blackness, their accents, their foods, their tastes in clothes and hair-styles, everything that they took for granted while in Ghana, is now noticed, sometimes stared at, often attracting unwanted attention:

> GF: and how were you feeling? How were you feeling on the first day at school in Italy?
> Amauri: I was scared
> Chanel: they were annoying me
> GF: they were annoying you, why?
> Chanel: because it seems as if you've just fallen off a tree!
> Philly: Yes!
> GF: yes? And what about you?
> Rita: me too
> Chanel: and then the hair! They would come and pull my hair[do]: "how did you do it!"
> Philly: yes...
> GF: really?
> Slatan: They didn't do it to me... they said that I had.... they said that I had curly hair
> GF: right...

> Amauri: outside it's fine, but ah... there are also... for example the... ah... the... in our building there's... there's an old person who is always at us because we are... coloured
> GF: really?
> Amauri: yes
> GF: and what does she do to you? What does she say?
> Amauri: as soon as we greet her she tells us off... so my... my mother told us to... not to greet her

The telling hesitance before Amauri adds ‘coloured’ is significant, coming as it does from one of the children who had more successfully managed to integrate within his peer group thanks to his football skills (the pseudonym he chose for himself is the name of a famous Brazilian footballer) and who was quite keen to stress how happy and comfortable he is in Italy. His ‘colouredness’, however, is still enough to make him feel different and unwelcome in unavoidable everyday encounters.

In some instances the young people’s difference (perhaps coupled with their youth and the bad reputation that teenagers have, irrespectively of their skin colour) can appear threatening and provoke people’s anxieties:

> Linelle: there’s a lady who lives near us, at home. When she opens the door… if she sees that there is someone arriving, she closes…
> Robinson: straight away
> Linelle: straight away
> GF: does she go back in?
> Linelle: eh! She’s scared of Ghanaians
> Robinson: of foreigners

while in some other cases the ‘stigma’ (Goffman, 1963) of their blackness can result in ‘social denial’:

> GF: How did you find people were?
> Robinson: well, some were kind. But I thought that… they were… they would be all the same… that… let’s say they’re not all kind, but… some are cruel
> GF: cruel?
> Valeria: some when you say ‘hi’ don’t even answer back
> GF: really? People you know?
> Valeria: uh?
> GF: people you know?
> Robinson: yes. Sometimes even people…

> GF: what about you, what did you expect?
> Michela: I was expecting just… ah… white peoples, they are friendly, and they… they like everyone, but… some of them… don’t like the visitors and some of them do like the visitors
> GF: so you found a bit… mixed, yes? Some people are nice and friendly, some people are not so friendly. And what do the friendly people do?
> Michela: they talk to you, and as for the ones who are not friendly, maybe it’s like… maybe a black person is coming they… ah… they don’t like to talk to you…

Michela talks about 'the visitors' and the term carries a provisional quality with it: immigrants are not part of the receiving society, they are temporarily passing and will leave soon. Partly this view stems from the migrants' 'myth of return' (Anwar, 1979), the idea that they will go back as soon as they've managed to reach a set goal; partly it is the view conveyed by the media and the public discourse about migrants everywhere in the most recent immigration countries: they are coming because we need them (or, for some, because they need our welfare system) but they will be going back. The reality of settled migration appears to be accepted only very slowly (Penn and Lambert, 2009) when not explicitly rejected for ideological purposes[36].

For many of the people in Italy, moreover, all black people are 'Africans', the difference amongst the great number of countries and ethnicities within a huge continent, homogenised into one all-encompassing category. The children who live in Italy come to see themselves as 'African' too, but it is the Italian gaze that defines their 'African-ness', a gaze which holds up to them what Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) term 'the poisoned mirror', the negative reflection that the dominant culture sends back to young migrants and which can result in marginalization and exclusion. It is interesting to notice how, in the following example, the children use the term 'African' to refer to themselves:

> GF: ok. And the worst thing?
> Chanel: in Ghana?
> GF: no, here
> Chanel: here? That not all Italians respect Africans

> Sarah A.: …Miss, you know something? There are some teachers that they don't… they don't like Africans
> GF: right
> Sarah A.: they hate them

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[36] According to the Italian daily La Repubblica, on the 12th of April 2011 the Northern League Party's spokesperson, Umberto Bossi, declared that all immigrants should be sent 'back home' (Available from: http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2011/04/12/news/immigrazione_alfano_brutta_pagina-14838486/)

In contrast to the common use of the term ‘African’ by the Ghanaian children living in Italy, the young participants in Ghana did not feel the need to use any qualifier to talk about themselves, their identity not yet defined by geographical belongings. However, sometimes other people’s gaze can ‘objectify’ the children’s ‘subjectivity’ even from afar, through the encounter of significant others with racism or discrimination that is reported back on visits or phone conversations. In the following extract from an individual interview with one of the children left behind, the girl interviewed reports hearing about the possibility of coming across discrimination once in Italy. She gives as her source of information her own mother, who appears to have been hurt enough, by the racism she encountered, to feel the need to prepare her daughter for the possibility that she too may come across racism once in Italy:

> GF: yes… what do you think would be something not very nice? Does your mum ever tell you about something not very nice in Italy?
> Georgiana: probably the way they act to foreigners
> GF: are some people… does she find that some people are not nice? What… did she tell you what they do?
> Georgiana: they sometimes tease her or something
> GF: really?
> Georgiana: tease her skin… the ‘black woman’, because of that. That would be not nice for me
> GF: sure

By preparing her, I argue, the mother was both venting her outrage at being treated with contempt because of her ‘otherness’ and, at the same time, trying to reduce the pain that racist remarks may one day cause to her own daughter.

### *"They live more or less like in ancient times". Symbolic violence and the 'evolutionary view' of the word's countries*

Several of the children living in Italy talk about their country of origin (or that of their parents) using the generalizations and clichés of Western imaginings of 'Africa'. They talk about speaking 'African' or 'Ghanaian' although there are over 50 official languages spoken in Ghana alone, and speak about 'Africans' when referring to people of Ghanaian origin. This brings echoes of what Du Bois observed back in 1903, when he introduced the idea of 'double consciousness', a state of being which he describes as "[...] a peculiar sensation, [the] sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 2007 p. 8).

The children who have migrated more recently are aware, however, that this is something imposed on them by the new society of which they are part and whose 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) they can identify and, in small ways, also challenge:

> Rita: [in Ghana] you have fun and you can... I mean... you have friends, it's not like here that, like, if in your class someone decides I'm not staying with this girl...
> Chanel: that's it, that's it
> Rita: there, I mean, in class we are all... we are all the same
> Chanel: we are all together, you can speak Ghanaian, you can do as you please {...} you can do as you please

The young participants make here a clear link between being a visible minority and the limits to freedom this entails for the children of migrants. By contrast, as Chanel points out, in Ghana you can speak Ghanaian and are free to do as you please, as looking 'the same' as everyone else protects you from (this type) of discrimination. While skin colour is the focus of the previous extract, standing out because of the language spoken is the focus of the next fragment of conversation:

> Linelle: in our class T. and I speak in Ghanaian. Everyone… everyone stares at us and then they say 'But what sort of language are you speaking? Look, here we speak Italian, right!" [laughs]
> GF: oh, dear [laughs]
> Linelle: [laughs]
> GF: so when you want to say something secret to T…
> Linelle: right… we speak… we always speak Ghanaian

In both these examples, however, the participants appear to be critical of their peer prejudice and discrimination, enough to feel the need to actively denounce it in the 'public' setting of a conversation with an Italian adult. Their close links to two (sometimes more) countries makes the children of migrants particularly aware of the relative nature of the *habitus* and of the arbitrariness of the cultural givens.

While none of the children spoke disparagingly about Ghana and they all appeared to feel loyalty towards their parents' country of origin, the Italian-born participants seem more likely to employ stereotypes common in 'First World' narratives of the 'Third World' when talking about Africa. In Western imagery, Africa is often the continent of circular mud huts, fierce animals and large expanses of grassy plains, the thirsty continent where people need to walk for miles to draw water from a river. It is a form of 'Africanism' that dates back centuries but still lives on in the West's imaginative geographies (Said, 1978; 1994), as exemplified by the following fragment from Hergè's "Tin Tin in the Congo" (2005), first published in 1931:

Figure 30 is omitted from the digital copy of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure depicts an African village. There are some round huts amongst trees. All around the village are black people, wearing loincloths and drawn with exaggerated lips, engaged in various activities. Two people are sitting in front of a hut that has a sign saying 'CAFE' above the door. Two others are taking a photograph with a camera. Another villager is worshipping effigies of Tin Tin and his dog.

**Figure 30: Tin Tin in the Congo (Hergè, 1931)**

While mud huts and savannah certainly represent one side of the continent's reality, none of the migrant children come from such a background. All of them (or their parents) come from the larger urban areas of Ghana and all are from relatively wealthy familial backgrounds, as poorer individuals or dwellers from remote villages too often lack the financial and the social capital necessary to migrate (Faist, 2000). In Ghana's urban areas water comes from communal pipes, water street vendors, and domestic taps (Abraham *et al.* 2007). But this young man, born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, felt he needed to stage for me pictures of 'authentic' Africa:

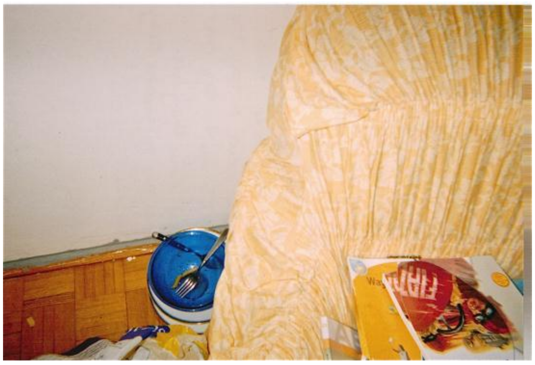

**Figure 31: Washing the dishes**

Roberto B.: yes, me and my cousin … we put the plates on the floor to show what we do when we need to clean the plates in Africa, we put them all around…
GF: on the floor?
Roberto B.: yes. And then there is only one water to wash everything, which is something really…ugh…
GF: and the water is… it's tap water, right?
Roberto B.: it comes from the river… they take it from the river
GF: but, I mean… there are taps in the homes…
Roberto B.: it depends. If you're rich, yes… if you're not rich, then no. Everyone goes to the river…

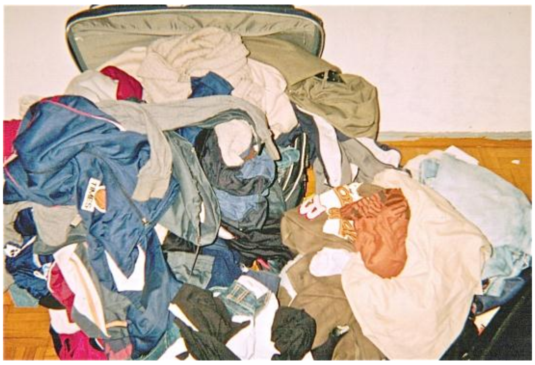

**Figure 32: 'African' room**

GF: what did you photograph here? Why a suitcase? Do you keep your clothes in a suitcase?
Roberto B.: no, I have a wardrobe, but my cousin and I, since we wanted to take some African pictures, we threw everything in there
GF: [laughs] oh, dear me! And did you tidy up afterwards?
Roberto B.: yes, otherwise my mum would have got angry
GF: [laughs]
Roberto B.: well, in African rooms it's a mess…
GF: so it's a bit untidy, you're saying? That's why?
Roberto B.: yes… especially families. Since we couldn't take an African family… we decided…

It is interesting to notice how Roberto B. feels the need to conjure up an 'African' family. Clearly his own family does not, in Roberto's mind, fit this label. Born in Italy, he does not live in an African family (and, by implication, not even a Ghanaian one). An African family lives in Africa and, his pictures and comments imply, is backward and untidy. While reproducing a Western stereotype, Roberto B. appears also to implicitly challenge the researcher's assumption that he would have access to an African family: he does not, and therefore he had to stage one.

The children born in Italy portray Africa as messy, dirty and poor, in line with the West's widespread imaginings of the continent which, once again, echo the colonial discourses which equalled 'whiteness' with 'cleanliness' and 'blackness' with 'dirt', something which can be reverted by gaining access to 'developed' countries' ways, as the following 1890s US advert for Fairy soap illustrates:

Figure 33 is omitted from the digital copy of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure depicts two young children of roughly the same age and size. One is black and wearing torn, grubby clothes and no shoes. The other is a white, blond boy wearing a pristine gingham outfit trimmed with lace. One of his socks is scrunched up and the laces of one of his shoes are undone, arguably to prove he's an active, 'normal' child. As well as the racial difference, the social class difference is clearly stressed. The white boy is holding a bar of Fairy soap.

The caption in figure 33 reads:

"Why doesn't your mamma wash you with Fairy Soap?"

**Figure 33: Advert for Fairy soap (US) circa 1890s. Available from: http://www.fairiesworld.com/pixs2/fairy-soap/Fairbanks-Fairy-Soap.jpg (Accessed on 19th April, 2011)**

In accordance with an 'evolutionary' view of the world's countries and cultures (Jahoda, 1997), different peoples are seen to be simply at a different level of 'development' along a linear progression which views Western countries as the more advanced and the ultimate 'destination' towards which all other countries are heading. The idea that non-Western countries are simply lagging 'behind', in a temporal sense, and that the West's way of life is the one they will eventually reach, forms part of everyday discourses in Italy which even pro-immigration activists often buy into. A quick web search immediately wielded several websites where the paradigm of Africa as lagging behind in time is used. The first example comes from the Italian Co-op website and gives advice to new mothers on how to get their babies to sleep through the night:

> "Moreover, in some populations [of Africa and Asia] the habit of sharing the bed with one's family, as was the case here about 50 years ago, is still present, as it's the habit of living with grandparents, uncles and aunties who help and support mothers in their new experience."
>
> [From: http://bimbiealimentazione.e-coop.it/notizie/il-sonno-nel-primo-anno - Own translation. Accessed on 24/11/2010]

The second example comes from a blog whose declared intention is to "[...] show that there are different options from the dominant ones, different ways of thinking and seeing the world". One of the contributors, in writing about a trip to Senegal when volunteering for a health awareness program, describes the following:

> And then the smiles... the children's smiles ...everywhere there are happy and smiling children, children who, as here 50 or 100 years ago, play happily with a deflated football or an old bottle, children who come towards you joyous and surprised [...] obedient children (the likes of which cannot be found here anymore).
>
> [http://tatzebaubab.splinder.com - Own translation. Accessed on 24/11/2010]

Roberto B., the same young participant who had taken the photographs illustrated above, appears to share precisely the 'evolutionary' view so widespread in Italian dominant discourses, as can be seen by the following exchange, while conversing about the difference in house style between Italy and Ghana:

> Roberto B.: It's not like here were everyone, more or less...lives in their own home...
> GF: so, I see, there are these big houses were people live together...
> Roberto B.: ...they live more or less like in ancient times there

As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) point out, symbolic violence works precisely because its nature is hidden behind a veneer of normality and common sense. Only through this hidden imposition can it become part of the shared view of life and thus maintain the 'cultural arbitrary' which favours the dominant groups. As those who are the victims of symbolic violence too come to share the idea that the dominant narratives are the only possible ones and to see them as necessary and natural, they contribute to the perpetration and reproduction of such narratives. In this way the dominated take part, unwillingly and unwittingly, in the production and reproduction of the relationships of power which keep them in the dominated position.

## Resisting the dominant view and constructing alternative narratives

While sharing in the dominant portrayal of Africa as a poor, backward country, which is so common in narratives of the continent in the West, the children of migrants are also in the position to see the 'arbitrary' nature of these narratives and can challenge them. As Bourdieu (1990b; 1990a; 1979a) argues, *habitus* is perfectly adapted to specific fields and this means that individuals can choose, without being aware of doing it, the best course of action in any particular situation. This is what Bourdieu describes as 'the feel for the game', the (seemingly) innate capacity to (re)act to a stimulus by producing the required response. This harnesses agency while, at the same time, hiding the structural constraints that limit individual action.

However, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) observe, those who are socialised into a *habitus* that is quite different from the one they subsequently share (as is the case of children moving from Ghana to Italy) can more easily see the subjective nature of the cultural arbitrary. The following section highlights how the unmasking of arbitrariness of the cultural givens can lead to a (however veiled) challenging of the dominant mores and also to attempts at redressing the imbalance of power that hides behind 'innocent' stereotypes.

### *"They take dogs as their children". Resisting and challenging the dominant ways*

Despite the fact that, as was shown, the children can come to share the stereotypes imposed on them by the dominant narratives which portray Ghana (Africa) as backward and undeveloped, and Italy (Europe an the West) as modern and developed, it would be a mistake to think that the Ghanaian children always accept Italy and Italian mores in an uncritical and unchallenging way. While this is, as argued previously, often the case, the children also actively challenge some aspects of Italian lifestyle and also question the morality of some of these aspects. The abstract below highlights this critical view of Italian ways. Having only recently arrived in Italy from Ghana, and thus being very much 'in between' different *habitus*, Rebecca A. had a privileged comparative perspective over the two countries, one that sees Italian ways as morally problematic:

> GF: right. And… was there anything, when you arrived, that made you think 'oh, I don't like this!'
> Rebecca A.: ah. In Ghana or in Italy?
> GF: in Italy
> Rebecca A.: in Italy… Ah… in Ghana dogs… we don't like them. In Ghana we don't like dogs, but in Italy you like dogs
> GF: yes, people like them for pets
> Rebecca A.: yes! So… they take dogs as their children
> GF: right. Lots of people do that
> Rebecca A.: yes, so, when I saw it, I thought… 'No!' I told my mother that this is not good, that God said that we should bear children, but when you don't bear children then you take a dog as your child…
> GF: right, I see
> Rebecca A.: so, when I saw that I was thinking… that's not right
> GF: ok…
> Rebecca A.: yes. So I asked my mother and my mother said that in Ghana we are different and the white peoples are also different…

It is also interesting to notice how Rebecca's disapproval of the Italian treatment of dogs as child substitutes met with her mother's relativistic position, one that appears accepting, even though not approving, of the practices Rebecca is objecting to.

A similar 'cultural relativistic' point of view is expressed in the following exchange which took place in one of the schools in Ghana. The children and I had been discussing the fact that children cannot be hit or caned by teachers, a common enough occurrence in Ghana (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Esmeralda had been told by her father that in Italy teachers cannot discipline children by physically punishing them:

> GF: and what do you think would be a… not so good thing. Do you know anything that is not good about Italy? Has your stepfather ever told you about something that is not nice about Italy?
> Esmeralda: like… the thing I don't like about Italy is that they don't lash the children when they do wrong things
> GF: ah, ok. You don't like that they don't get… lashed when they do something wrong… why? Why do you not like that? [37]
> Esmeralda: because… if you lash the child… ah… the next time, when the child does anything bad, she realises that… ah… the teacher lashed her [before], so she won't do it again

It is clear from the exchange above that Esmeralda had been told that in Italy children are not beaten in school, reflected on the difference of the two practices and still felt free to criticise the Italian one as being less efficient.

However, not all children in Ghana believe in the need for corporal punishment, on the contrary, as the following extract demonstrates, some of them are looking forward to moving to Italy precisely because, amongst other advantages, they will not have to endure beatings anymore. In the following extract, Georgiana and I were discussing her home arrangement. As a pupil at a boarding school, she had to go home to her carer (her aunt) only during the school holidays:

> Georgiana: sometimes it is boring. The shouting… I learnt that a white is not allowed to beat a child, but in Ghana it can be beaten when he just wants, so it's not… there is not much
> GF: even you get beaten? You're a big girl, you don't get beaten anymore, do you?
> Georgiana: I still get beaten
> GF: right?
> Georgiana: people… my auntie used to beat me

---

[37] It is also interesting to notice, here, my own hesitance to use the term 'lash' in this context, a term that clearly has different cultural connotations for me and Esmeralda.

> GF: oh! Even now that you're a big girl?
> Georgiana: that is why I want to leave the country, so that I can go to a freedom country, that {…}
> GF: and who told you that… ah… was it your mum who told you that you cannot beat children in Italy?
> Georgiana: yes, she said… over there you can't even try to raise your hand over a small… even a one year old child

What is particularly interesting to notice here is the fact that, as in the previous extract, Italian ways of disciplining children appear to be a topic of conversation between the children left behind and their parents in Italy. However, rather than being critical of the lack of 'proper' discipline, in this case it appears that Georgiana's mother was in some way trying to console her for the fact that she was not there to protect and look after her by painting a future of 'freedom' in the new country.

While for some of the children left behind, the parents' migration provides them with the financial capital to gain some symbolic power within their social environment, for some others, as D'Emilio (2007), Dreby (2007) and Pail (1995) point out, the absence of one or, worse, both parents can signify being exposed to bullying and mistreatment both by those who are fostering them and by peers or others within their community. According to these studies, this is particularly likely in the eventuality that the parents may find it difficult to keep sending money for the offspring they had to leave behind.

### *"Before there was winter". Shared memories and reconstructing imaginings of Ghana*

Whether they have memories of the Ghana they knew directly before leaving to join their parent(s) in Italy or they share their parent's memories, the children of Ghanaian origin living in Italy appear to hold rather conflicting ideas of Ghana. Moving from Ghana was a necessity, something that had to be done because the country did not allow for social progress and financial improvement, a place their parents left in order to advance the children's future prospects, to offer them a better life. Consequently it is a poor country, a country which allows no hope for improvement of one's status. The extracts from focus groups which follow show how the young participants are aware of the role that concern over their own future has played in their parents' decision to leave Ghana:

> GF: and… tell me something… why do you think your parents came to Italy?
> Chanel: to find work
> Rita: yes, to try to find money
> Chanel: no, to find work, to help us…
> GF: to help you?
> Rita: yes
> Philly: yes
> GF: you children?
> All: yes

> GF: why did your parents come to Italy, in your opinion…
> Teresa: I think to find work
> GF: Right. Any other reasons?
> Jackson: mine didn't
> Marty: I have one [puts his hand up]
> GF: no, no, tell us, tell us. You don't need to… Tell me, Marty
> Marty: no, right, my mum told me she came here because… to find work, to have money and to send it to my brothers

> GF: …ok. Ah. And… tell me something… In your opinion, why did your… parents move here?
> Rebecca A.: my father came here for work, because in Ghana he didn't have… anything to do…
> GF: right…
> Rebecca A.: so he decided to come here

However, Ghana is also the locus of fond memories, the place where community is still important, where people are welcoming and care for each other. This view, coming from the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents who in most cases do not have direct knowledge of Ghana, shows that there are family and community narratives in which positive aspects of Ghanaian society are highlighted and passed on to the new generations.

> Marty: and also [in Ghana] they ask you for little money and sometimes they even do not ask for it at all [to fix a television]
> Jackson: and here, instead, they do
> Teresa: because… I don't know why…
> Marty: because there they are practically all related and so they make each other presents

Marty's curious idea that in Ghana everyone is 'practically' related is his understanding of the community sense that he gathers from the adults' narratives. When hearing adults recount on trips to Ghana or recall memories of the past, the community of origin and the extended family that populates these stories must appear as one and the same thing, a general closeness which extends to everyone in the country.

> GF: then… people [in Ghana]… what are they like?
> Barack: well…
> Federica: people…
> GF: same as Italians?
> Federica: no…
> Barack: what do you mean, like Italians?
> GF: I mean the people, the way they behave…
> Federica: they are more welcoming than Italians
> Anastasia: more welcoming
> Barack: yes

Barack's puzzlement about my question on whether Ghanaian people are 'like Italians' stems from his momentary assumption that I may refer to physical aspect. The mix-up having been clarified, the rest of the group talk about Ghanaians' friendliness, something of which Ghanaians (both in Ghana and abroad) pride themselves and which constitutes a 'national trait' they are keen to foster. The same topic comes through the words of Roberto B., in the following extract from an individual interview:

> GF: I mean… stuff you think that… I don't know… that may surprise me, or…
> Roberto B.: people
> GF: right?
> Roberto B.: like, old ladies are very nice in Ghana
> GF: right? Nice… in what way?
> Roberto B.: I mean. They… usually when you visit them, they are not happy if they do not give you a present
> GF: right?
> Roberto B.: yes

Roberto's kind old Ghanaian ladies bring to mind the Italian ladies discussed by Linelle and Robinson (see p. 252) who appear to be scared and disapproving of young 'foreigners'. It is likely that, as a child and also as a migrant temporarily back in the sending country, Roberto was the object of attention and pampering from the adult females he met. This is remembered in sharp contrast to the indifference and disapproval the children report as a common attitude of Italian women towards them.

As well as a country of generous, welcoming people, Ghana is also the arena where migrants can enact their success and assert their symbolic capital, the place where their big houses are (as explored in chapter 5). It is also the glittery place of West African movies, of family and friends whose voices are close and familiar even though their faces may not be. It is the country to which the children's parents (often fathers) travel regularly and from which they get presents of sweets and dresses. And it is also, at least for some, the object of parental longing:

> GF: so your mum has family here. This must be nice… does your mum ever say she would like to go back to Ghana?
> Christian: yes
> GF: would she like to go back for a visit or to… or to live there?
> Christian: to live there
> GF: right?
> Christian: yes, she misses it a lot

> GF: What do [your parents] intend to do? Do you know?
> Jacqueline: well… Go back to Ghana, I think [low voice]
> GF: yes? Did they ever talk to you about this? Did they ever say it's a possibility?
> Jacqueline: yes, they've already told me. They keep on telling me, constantly…
> GF: yes? To get you used to the idea?
> Jacqueline: yes
> GF: and you? What do you say?
> Erica: my parents too want to go back to Ghana… well, I don't know…

Constantly reminded that they may one day be taken to live in Ghana, Jacqueline and Erica live in the precarious situation of not knowing where they will be in the future, at the same time not being able to 'put down roots' in Italy, a country they are reminded they may have to leave. Both girls had mentioned marital difficulties, which may be part of the reason why the parents are keen to get them used to the idea that they may have to move to Ghana (as discussed in chapter 4). Whether these are speculations and musings of a couple in distress or real concrete plans, for both Erica and Jacqueline this means that the future is a highly uncertain place.

The children are immersed in the Ghanaian community and in the nostalgic narratives it keeps alive; reconciling the two faces of Ghana, the place to leave and the place longed for, can be very hard, something which leaves the children puzzled and confused. As a consequence, the 'Ghana' that emerges from the interviews can be at the same time poor and rich, dangerous and safe, welcoming and hostile. A way around this contradiction seems, for the children, to refer to a 'before', a time when Ghana was poor and unsafe, probably the time when their parents made the decision to leave. Its necessary corollary is the 'now' of glitzy and worldly Ghana, the country one can be proud to claim as one's own background. The extract that follows comes from a focus group in which children born in Italy were asked to describe the country of origin of their parents. Only one of them had previously been to Ghana:

> Erica: but now Ghana isn't… poor as it was before
> Jacqueline: no, no, it's not as poor as it was before
> Claire: before it was very poor
> Jacqueline: now, streets… houses are gorgeo… are beautiful
> Erica: they make films, and we watch them…
> Kate A.: yes
> Erica: I mean they are beautiful!
> Jacqueline: I mean! God!
> Erica: I say but… is this Ghana?! It's impossible, because when I was there, I mean, it wasn't like that!
> Jacqueline: exactly!
> Kate A.: I mean, there are also other… I was watching videos of songs by Ghanaians and I see that their cars are gorgeous… They have beautiful clothes…
> Jacqueline: that's right
> GF: right?
> Claire: yes, they have {…} houses…
> Jacqueline: well, clothes are better here… here in Italy, actually
> Claire: …and servants…

Erica, having been to Ghana not long before this interview, cannot reconcile the images she sees in films and her memories of the place. However, she appears not to question the fact that the Ghana portrayed in the films is real, but to believe that this must be how the country is 'now', in an 'absolute' present into which all other images of Ghana (even the ones she witnessed first-hand) disappear.

The research itself appears also to have been the trigger for family conversations about Ghanaian lifestyle, as the children born in Italy were asked to take pictures of anything that they believed would be different or the same in Italy and Ghana:

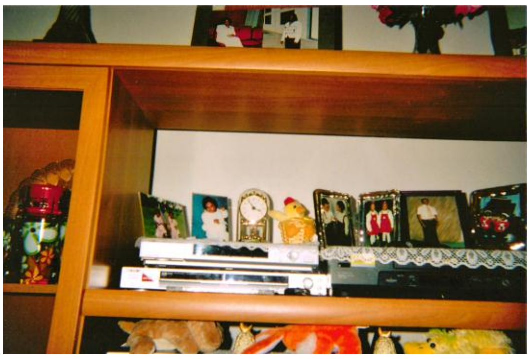

**Figure 34: Living room in Italy**

Claire:

"I took this picture because they are all things that can be found in Ghana too. My parents tell me that everything we have can be found in Ghana too"

While Italian-born Claire did not mention discussing the choice of subject with her parents, it is clear from her words that such a conversation took place and that the parents were keen to make sure their daughter's idea of Ghana was a positive one by stressing the similarities rather than the differences with Italy, at the same time also indirectly challenging the Italian researcher's (potential) idea of Ghana as a backward and deprived place.

Caught between contrasting narratives of the country of origin of their parents, the Ghana of 'before and after' can, in the children's imagining, even be a place that defies seasons and weather, however unlikely this may seem to others, and however much it may be challenged:

> GF: is there no winter [in Ghana]?
> Barack: no
> Federica: before there was
> GF: before there was winter?
> Federica: yes
> GF: yes?
> Christian: [whispers mockingly] before, before…
> Federica: [retaliates] before, before, before
> GF: and now there isn't? Is it always hot?
> Federica: yes

Born in Italy, Federica has no way to know first-hand what the weather is like in Ghana. Her idea that 'before' there was winter is then constructed from other people's accounts, the construction of a country that has changed so much in recent years that even the weather is not as bad as it used to be. I argue that in this fissure between the 'before' of poverty and toil and the 'now' of wealth and luxury of Ghanaian society we can glimpse an attempt by the children of Ghanaian migrants to resolve the contradiction between the way in which they perceive themselves and the way they are seen, between the image of their selves as reflected by their parents' and their communities' narratives and that of the 'poisoned mirror' of Italian eyes.

## Summary

Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule, back in 1957. However, the legacy of colonialism is far from over, and the idea of European superiority still lives on, perpetrated and reproduced daily also within an education system that has its origins in the structures that were set up during colonial times and by the missions. As Bourdieu and Passeron observe, in a social formation, a specific pedagogic action (amongst all possible pedagogic actions) is put in a dominant position by the power relations between the groups or classes that make up that particular social formation. This pedagogic action will be "[...] the one which most fully, though always indirectly, corresponds to the objective interests (material, symbolic, and [...] pedagogic) of the dominant groups or classes, both by its mode of imposition and by its delimitation of what and on whom, it imposes" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 7) This arbitrary choice is perpetrated through symbolic violence, by disguising the power relations it supports and reproduces, thus 'normalising' them so that they become 'invisible', and therefore unquestionable.

The Ghanaian school system plays an important part in replicating discourses of European (and Western) superiority: the media of instruction used in many schools is the language of the British rulers, the schools were often founded during colonial times and were modelled on the British educational system. Many upper-middle class Ghanaians send their children to the UK for further education and many prominent members of the Ghanaian ruling class have, at some point in their educational careers, been alumni in UK institutions (British Council, 2007), including the current president of Ghana, Prof. Atta Mills, who completed his postgraduate studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Onto this stratum of colonial origin is also grafted the portrayal of the West which passes through the popular cultural products (e. g. Western films, reality shows, music, musical videos) that are widely available on Ghanaian television and from shops and street vendors and which are regularly consumed by a large proportion of the country's youth. This is further reinforced by migrants' narratives and practices and by the 'collective lie' many of them contribute to perpetrate. It is not surprising, therefore, that Ghanaian children view Europe and the USA, their cultural products and lifestyles, as superior to Ghana and its mores, and that they are something to aspire to.

Once the children move to Italy and encounter the reality which lies underneath the idealized West of their imaginings, they have to come to terms with the fact that they are seen as different and often, in their difference, as inferior. This inferiority is conveyed to them through the symbolic violence of discrimination and suspicion they can detect in looks and insults, but sometimes also in playful banter. It also passes through the assimilation of Ghana into the greater category of 'Africa' and from the discourses of poverty, famine, dependence, passivity that are often associated with the African continent. All this cannot but confirm what the children already knew: Ghana is not as good as the West and they, as Ghanaian, share this inferiority.

During the initial period of migration, the children appear to be more aware of the relative and highly arbitrary cultural discourses and practices that characterise the two countries. They express surprise but also criticism of the way Italians perceive them and of some Italian mores that they see as morally weaker, such as the lack of respect in school settings, or the excessive doting over pets. This clear perception of the discretional character of cultural constructions appears to be less present in the children who were born in Italy, their Italian upbringing meaning that they share the dominant discourses and reproduce a 'symbolic violence' that, because of its hidden nature, they cannot recognise.

However, the young participants do not simply passively accept the inferior view of Ghana and Africa which is common amongst Italians, and, even when they partially buy into the depiction of Africa as the poor, suffering land of unfortunate peoples, they look for positive elements to be added to this portrayal. They are aware that their parents, and other adults in the Ghanaian communities they are part of, miss Ghana and that, even though they left it, they often reminisce about its culture, people and lifestyle, comparing it favourably with Italy. The children then construct a twin narrative about Ghana, one which reproduces the symbolic violence of Italian contempt and one which, at the same time, exalts the superiority of real or presumed differences. It is in the process of putting together contrasting narratives, and in the spaces that are found betwixt and between them, that the children can actively shape and display a fluid and composite image that defies the constraints of both Italian and Ghanaian expectations of them.

# CHAPTER 7. A RESEARCH IN PERSPECTIVE

This doctoral research set out to investigate how Ghanaian children left behind by migrant parents imagine Italy, the country where their parents are, and how they expect their lives to change should they, too, move to Italy to be reunited with their parents. It also explored the way in which the children who have migrated evaluate their pre-migration imaginings and expectations once they have encountered reality, and how they think the 'real' Italy compares to the imagined one. Finally, it explored the ways in which young people born in Italy of Ghanaian parents imagine Ghana and life there, and what role they expect the different countries will play in their future lives.

This concluding chapter starts with an overview of the thesis, which briefly outlines the background and the topics that emerged from the study. The following sub-sections bring back the narratives to the three groups of participants that took part in the study. Without losing awareness of the fact that the three groups of participants are three separate (albeit connected) samples, and consequently without assuming a necessary continuity between the different narratives, the summary follows a before-during-after pattern to frame the findings. It therefore starts with the pre-migration discourses of the young girls who were left in Ghana by migrant parents, looks at the encounter with the new country and the new social fabric of the young people who recently migrated, and concludes with the narratives of Ghana and the hopes for the future of the children who were born in Italy.

The third part of the chapter deals with the ethical dilemmas that research with underage participants entails and which were arguably some of the major challenges raised by the project. Ethical and practical quandaries confront the majority of researchers engaged in social investigation, however, these issues become more evident when researching young people, since the unavoidable imbalance of power between adults and children increases the contrast even further, thus making them stand out in sharper relief.

Following the ethical and methodological issues confronted by this research, the chapter highlights the specific contribution the study gives to the understanding of the ways in which young people make sense of migration, whether as a future project or as an actual experience. The possible practical implications of the project are subsequently outlined, focusing in particular on the need to include children's perspectives in all areas of policy-making which impact on their present wellbeing and their future prospects. The concluding section illustrates the questions this study opens up for further research and the areas that would benefit from further inquiry.

## A story of the human variety

Research into people's experiences, worries and ambitions defies any 'neat' and simple explanation, as social researchers deal with the 'human variety' (Mills, 1959). The diversity that characterises human relations, however, does not mean that research cannot identify common patterns. Since the structures of the *habitus* are the embodiment of a cumulative exposure to certain social conditions, then an analysis of subjective dispositions can reveal the objective underlying structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In Mill's words, social research looks "[...] for the meanings of what you come upon, for what may be interpreted as a visible token of something else that is not visible" (Mills, 1959: 245)

Within individuals' agency the frame imposed by structural constraints can be discerned, as in the case of the narratives that emerged during the focus groups and the individual interviews of this study, as well as from the photographs taken by the young participants. By moving beyond the immediate, literal meanings, I have endeavoured to uncover the structural patterns into which these meanings are embedded and to reveal them as the point of convergence of historical and biographical trajectories (Mills, 1959). Moreover, I have attempted to give a 'geographical' dimension to this picture, specifically, the trans-national dimension of the children's social narratives, constructed as they are between countries and cultures.

### *Children left behind*

The Ghanaian girls who were left behind by migrant parents associate Italy primarily with the attributes 'clean' and 'tidy'. As argued in the data chapters, postulations of Italian cleanliness and tidiness can be seen, through the lenses afforded by the works of anthropology, not simply as mere descriptions of the physical aspects of the country, but also as signifiers of virtue, respectability and modernity. The 'signified' are thus (presumed) moral attributes, which do not represent exclusively the young participants' personal understanding of Italy, but a more general view of the 'West'. This view is shaped by the concurrent forces of the echoes of colonial discourses, which still reverberate through Ghanaian society, and of the depictions spread by contemporary global media. The imaginings these forces sketch are then further reinforced by the narratives of migration that are shared between family members and amongst the wider community across borders.

The children left behind judge Italian 'neatness' against its opposite: Ghanaian messiness and dirt. As Douglas notes, "Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained." (Douglas, 1966, p. 41), and thus dirt is abhorred as a disturbance to an ideal arrangement. The young participants' denunciation of Ghanaian dirt and messiness consequently reveals their wish to protect from contamination a status that is considered valuable: a social standing that sets them apart from the ignorant and dirty (and from the poor) and which will be safely theirs once they move to the clean European country where their parents are. The girls feel that this status is out of their reach as long as they remain in Ghana, because of Ghanaians' untidiness and of the ignorance (the uncouthness which is the fruit of deprivation) they directly associate with messy habits.

Italy, on the other hand, represents the country where life, for the children left behind, will finally be as it should be: they will be reunited with their parent(s) and fully live the respected and respectable lifestyle they aspire to. They look forward to being part of the fabric of the new society: making friends, going to school, getting to know the history and the culture of the new country. Their narratives clearly spell out ambitions and aspirations for non-material goods: education, knowledge, travel (or, at least, these are the aspirations that a group of Ghanaian girls wish to disclose to an Italian adult woman who sits in their head-teacher's office).

The girls do also show fleeting feelings of uncertainty, a hint of realisation that perhaps not everything will run smoothly: it may take time to get used to the strange language, or the food and weather may make them ill, at least at first. They appear, however, to have little awareness of the fact that, in the receiving country, they may find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder, that they may get discriminated against or that they may attract attention and even outright racism. Again, this could be the picture that is painted for the benefit of the white researcher, but it may also indicate that the children are shielded from the harsher truths of life in the West: that they, together with the wider sending community, only get a partial depiction of what being a labour immigrant in Italy really entails. One of the girls was aware of the possibility of encountering racism and discrimination, but for all the rest there seems to be no doubt: they very much want to move to Italy and, after the initial adjustment, they will fit in.

The index of the high desirability that moving to the West has for a section of Ghanaian society is illustrated by the need for secrecy about the likelihood of migration that was expressed by one of the girls left behind (but also by the children who had recently migrated to Italy).

Migrating appears to have the status of a precious commodity, to be a good, in short supply, that others can be envious of, since it is expected to mean an almost certain change for the better. The jealousy this good fortune can provoke in others who are not as 'lucky' carries the danger that the migration project may be jeopardised by the evil eye or by witchcraft, two possible consequences of envy. As such, moving to Italy is seen as a 'luxury' that needs to be treasured and protected from others' jealous desires and from the threats they can pose.

### *Migrant children*

The children who have migrated from Ghana to join their parents in Italy agree, with very few exceptions, on one point: Italy is not as they expected it. The symbolism of cleanliness and dirt returns, but this time to the effect that Italy is not as clean as they had imagined it: it has dirty corners, and hides crumbling old houses. In some ways it is not so different from Ghana. Indeed, the children point also to positive aspects: there are tall private buildings that look like hotels back in Ghana, even though these 'hotel-looking' buildings are not, usually, the ones they live in. Some children have living rooms that are filled with nice objects, they go to church services and wear nice clothes; they have phones, and TVs and computer games. But their fellow-pupils can be cruel or unhelpful, adults appear to be wary of them or even to dislike them and, at least in the initial period, not understanding the language or what is expected of them can be very upsetting and frustrating. But, most painfully, they come to appreciate that there is little respect for the children of immigrant workers, indeed that often they have to endure contempt and discrimination.

Having expectations disappointed means that the children are able to see through the 'collective lie' (Sayad, 2004) that perpetrates the myth of the successful migrant and that still appears to inform the expectations of the close relations and the friends they left back in Ghana. However, they are also aware that they cannot do much to dispel this myth. Simply telling people that not everything in Europe is as good, or as easy, as it is made out to be can lead to disbelief. It may even, in some cases, bring accusations of selfishness, of lying in order not to share their good fortune. Ironically, it appears that by denying the fact that migration automatically means wealth and social progress, they end up confirming its desirability as a life-changing opportunity.

The difficulties faced by the migrant children, however, appear to be less linked to lack (or shortage) of financial assets or material goods, but more essentially linked to the low social status they occupy in the receiving society. The reality of this is imposed on them by the daily occurrences of discrimination they encounter, sometimes even by instances of open racism. These instances are, unsurprisingly, stronger during the first period, when not knowing the language and the rules that govern social interaction, coupled with the (real or perceived) prejudice they meet, leave the children bewildered and saddened. Time appears to soften the rougher edges of these difficulties, as children pick up a *habitus* that allows them to re-orient and to generate practices that conform to the expectations of the receiving society. However, a general feeling of anxiety, an enduring uneasiness, appears to underlie most of their recounts of life in Italy, even by children who have been in Italy for up to four years (the maximum set for this particular sample).

School seems to be a field of contrasting experiences for the migrant children. On one hand it is a place where most of the young people seem to feel (relatively) ‘safe’: they are part of a clearly defined social group (that of ‘the pupils’) and, as such, they have a clear role and rules to follow. These roles and rules are the same for them and other pupils and, while it may take them a while to understand exactly what is expected of them, once this becomes clear, the predictability of ‘classroom’ routines and interactions can become reassuring.

On the other hand, however, the difficulties young migrants face in understanding the language, and in adapting to the different ways of being a pupil in Italian schools, can make them feel very isolated and frustrated. The help they would like from their peers is not always forthcoming; their visible 'otherness' can trigger curiosity and attract unwelcome attention; 'fitting into' an already existing network of social relations can be very hard. All of these factors can leave the children feeling marginalised or discriminated against. Moreover, the lack of time (and, as some of the children remarked, also of 'patience') on the part of Italian teachers, who often do not have (enough) appropriate support and resources, means that the children can feel that demands are made of them which they have no way, at least in the first months, to meet.

Being reunited with their migrant parent(s) is something the children left behind are looking forward to. When this finally happens, getting used to living together as a family (again) may not be an entirely straightforward process. The young people, in fact, report instances of parenting they found too strict, as parents may struggle to understand the social conventions of the receiving society, to cope with a moral code they perceive as too permissive and to manage family and work without the support of a network of relations. This can create tensions between parents and children, but also between the parents. Instances of difficulties between the parents are conveyed by a few of the children, and, for them, the newly-reconstituted family unit can feel a bit volatile. This cannot but compound young people's feeling of precariousness and lack of control over the way in which their future will shape. Some children appear to feel that their lives are, once again, 'untidy'.

Links to Ghana are kept alive through frequent phone conversations with relatives back in the sending countries, and contacts with members of the diaspora in other Italian towns and in different countries were also mentioned. Services in one of the several local Ghanaian churches, moreover, represent a moment when migrants congregate, when they can network and keep in touch with friends and family who live in the same area and also feel part of a community of God-fearing, law-abiding and respectable people, however lowly their status in the receiving country may be.

The young migrants appear very much to live between countries, and this also gives them the opportunity, when the occasion arises, to 'play' different cultural practices off against each other in order to challenge or bypass adults' rules. In this way they can shape their social worlds in ways that defy straightforward belonging or exclusive feelings of loyalty, and that are simply the ones they choose for themselves. Moreover, for some migrant children, in particular those who have moved to Italy more recently, having a first-hand experience of two countries means being able to see through the arbitrariness of specific practices, and also being able to question the purpose or the 'morality' of some of the receiving country's mores and conventions.

### *Children born in the receiving country*

Ghana appears to enter the lives of the children born in Italy of migrant parents in several ways. Twi, Ghana's 'lingua franca', appears to be spoken, to some degree, by most of the Italian-born children. They need to be able to understand the language in order to communicate with their relatives back in Ghana, something that all the young people seem to do more or less regularly. Ghanaian food sits alongside Italian food in the children's kitchens, and many wear, on occasions, the Ghanaian traditional dresses or shirts. Several shops catering for the community are available in the area that was the geographical setting of the research and the children report shopping there for food ingredients, creams, and hair extensions. Furthermore, cloth, artefacts, clothes, foodstuff, toiletries, technological equipment, etc. appear to regularly cross borders in either direction, whenever parents or family friends travel to and from Ghana.

Moreover, the children born in Italy report that their parents are in the process of building a house back in Ghana. These houses appear to be large and rather grand structures, and the young people are very keen to talk about them. Building a large house in the country of origin appears to be a well-documented practice amongst many other migrant groups and Ghanaian migrants in Italy fit a pattern that is no doubt a shared one. With three exceptions, none of the children seems to believe that their parents are building these houses because they plan to return to Ghana, and only one mentions the new house being let. Mostly, the children talk about houses that are at various stages of construction, often left empty, at times also suffering from lack of proper maintenance.

The houses are therefore not only a financial or 'strategic' investment for the future, but also perform several symbolic functions at the same time. Since houses are built in stages, and the construction can take several years, the functions these building absolve vary in importance and in the priority they have for the migrants at the different stages of migration. House-building is, at the same time, an investment of hard-earned money that takes advantage of favourable exchange rates. They represent an insurance for the future in case the migration project comes to an end and, for any reason, the family needs (or wants) to return. However, house-building also appears to be a visible and tangible proof of the migrants' success, and a way of gaining 'symbolic capital' within the sending community. The respect, honour and admiration these houses bring can thus expand the migrants' social capital and make up for the lack of status they may experience in the receiving country. The children are party to this too, and the keenness to talk about these houses appears to be inspired by the need to impress and to prove, to the Italian researcher and to the other Ghanaian children present, that (whatever their current status in the receiving country) their families are successful and well thought of back in Ghana.

The image of Ghana held by the children born in Italy, however, is somewhat confused, and also confusing to them. On the one hand Ghana is the country where their nice houses are, where the relatives (sometimes siblings) that they speak to on the phone live. It is the place where their parents go more or less regularly, and from which they bring back food and clothes. It is also the country about which adults, their parents in particular, speak fondly and which is the backdrop to films and programs they watch via satellite or on DVD. Ghana is, therefore, part of an 'emotional transnational space', a space known only (or mainly) indirectly, but that is still perceived as very close due to the emotional links it carries. On the other hand, however, Ghana is Africa: the vast geographical entity that is spoken about in the Italian media and in public discourse, time and again, either as an object of pity (the poor, backward place) or of resentment (the place from which people come to take advantage of the Italian welfare system and to steal jobs).

Making sense of this Janus-faced Ghana is not always easy for the young people. Some start looking at themselves 'through the eyes of others' (Du Bois, 2007) and come to share the broad generalisations of the receiving country, speaking of 'Africa' when referring to Ghana, and sharing the narratives about the backwardness and misery of this huge geographical entity. This can be emotionally divisive for the children, who feel at the same time the need to be loyal to the country of origin of their parents, but also somewhat embarrassed and apologetic about its deficiencies and 'primitivism'. A need to distance themselves from the perceived archaic forces that operate in Ghana appears to be at the origin of the wish, by 'second generation' migrant children particularly, to talk about Ghana's witchcraft. The subject was thus brought up several times, with a clear mixture of fear and fascination that seems to parallel their trepidation and attraction with the country itself.

Ghana is talked about, by several of the children of Ghanaian migrants in Italy, in highly contradictory terms. On the one hand the 'symbolic violence' that is exercised by the receiving country's dominant discourses (misrecognised and perceived as self-evident), means that they too, as was just pointed out, come to think of Ghana as a poor, backward country to be pitied. On the other hand, the family's and communities' narratives and, above all, the images of Ghana they see on satellite TV and in Ghanaian films conjure up a totally different image, one that portrays the country of origin of their families as a welcoming, modern and glamorous place.

These two images of Ghana appear to co-exist in the children's imaginings and the resulting contradiction is resolved with recourse to a temporal divide: there was a 'before' in which Ghana was poor, dirty and backward, and there is a 'now', where Ghana is an 'updated' version of itself, displaying also wealthy, successful, sophisticated characteristics. In this way, the children can resolve the contradiction, explain their parents' decision to leave (situated in the 'before') and also feel some pride for the place of origin of their families. This also allows them to construct narratives that, while not directly challenging the dominant discourses, still manage to create an alternative image of Ghana to which their 'Italian' selves can relate.

## Methodological insights

As a novice researcher I approached social enquiry with a quasi-positivist idea of what the process would entail and of how the results would look as an end-product of this process, a process which I believed would follow a clearly defined path and bring forth findings in a straightforward manner. Research manuals and articles, in which everything appears to go according to plans, helped to increase this perception: all that needed to be done was to gather the right ingredients and then follow the recipe for the end result to be flawless. As a consequence, I felt that the infinite variables of human interaction could (had to) be neatly managed, and the realisation that I was not in total control over the responses of fellow human beings (at all stages of research) created, at first, quite a lot of anxiety. I realised, then, that there are no 'tried and tested' techniques that automatically produce 'pure' results, ones that are filtered of the 'impurities' of human relations, and that social inquiry is, by its nature, more complex, more difficult and more rewarding than a simple causal sequence of procedures.

Already in 1959, C. Wright Mills warned against '[...] the fetishism of method and technique" (Mills, 1959: 246) and invited researchers to be their own methodologists and theorists. This was an invitation that resonates well with the empirical reality of the present study, in particular since the research aimed to engage young participants in an active role, and to leave them as free as possible to take part or not in the process. As was argued in chapter 3, it was soon apparent that there are no 'magic recipes' which automatically guarantee that the power imbalance of a research project is redressed, nor ensure that young participants do not feel, in one way or another, that they must take part in a study. Theoretical and methodological flexibility is necessary in order to avoid rigid schemes that risk leaving the researcher in much the same situation as the man in a joke who, one night, was searching for a lost key under a street lamp. When asked by a passer-by whether that was the spot where he had dropped the key, the man replied that indeed it was not, but that the portion of ground lit by the street lamp was the only place where he could actually look for it (Žižek, 2008b).

As noted earlier, the issues which underpin research and which defy the use of a set of standard tools, stand out more clearly when the participants are underage and, consequently, considered 'vulnerable', that is, potentially open to physical or emotional harm. The 'invulnerable' adult researcher needs to guarantee that the participants are protected, and that they have engaged in the research process freely. These two needs are, of course, not mutually exclusive, but they can be difficult to reconcile, as a number of gatekeepers who ensure the children's safety can, at the same time, effectively limit their freedom to choose.

Even though it cannot guarantee results that are rid of all the complexities of human interaction, the use of a multiple-technique approach can ensure that most (not all) participants find a medium that better suits their particular tastes or modes of relating. As the present research shows, young people reacted differently to the various techniques and, while there were children who found the one-to-one setting more conducive and disliked the forced intimacy of the group conversations, the majority agreed that focus groups were more fun than individual interviews.

With two exceptions, all the participants in the present study said they had enjoyed (or had not minded) taking the photographs, confirming other researchers' views on the use of child-led photography as a 'fun' way to collect the data (e.g. Punch, 2002; Barker and Weller, 2003; Dodman, 2003; Darbyshire *et al.,* 2005; Sime, 2008). However, the researcher has little control over the environment and the circumstances in which the children take the photographs (and this can be perceived as a frustrating limit of this data-collection technique), but this is precisely what makes child-led photography truly emancipating for young participants; away from the direct gaze of the adult, they can exercise greater choice and, ultimately, gain some agency in the research process.

Nevertheless, while there are plenty of studies into the use of participant photography as a data collecting technique (ibid.), there appears to be very little debate on the way in which this technique may, because of its 'invasive' character, shape the data. Rather than reflecting the children's interests, in fact, young participants' photographs may more accurately represent the subjects they feel more at ease with photographing because they are 'safer', or more 'picturesque', and the photographs may be taken in places where the participants feel they attract less attention, rather than places that hold particular significance in other respects. This is not necessarily a negative or meaningless outcome, but these possibilities need to be considered and acknowledged by researchers when analysing visual data; if not, they risk looking for the key exclusively in the light of the street lamp.

## Adding to the picture, answering the questions

As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) point out, the expectations and imaginings of children that are left behind by migrant parents are inevitably shaped by their perceptions of the countries their parents have moved to. This is a composite mental picture that is constructed through the images young people see (in particular photographs) but also through the money and goods their parents send, as well as the 'social remittances' (Levitt, 2001), that is the narratives of different lifestyles, that parents bring back when visiting or pass on during the regular phone conversations. The echoes of colonial discourse (Said, 1993; Fanon, 2004; Du Bois, 2007), which still inform much of the officially sanctioned social and symbolic capital, perpetrate the idea of European (Western) superiority. The children's imaginings and expectations are, consequently, both of literal and aspirational improvement. As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) posit, "when would-be immigrants see television images and hear first-hand accounts of life abroad, they begin to imagine a better future in another social setting. [...]" (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 22). This is not just true for adults but also for children who, as this study shows, envisage moving to a European country as a route to upward mobility. Rather than dreams of material improvement, the children's expectations are of personal growth, with exploration and increased knowledge at the centre of their anticipation. The (apparent) lack of concern for the possible difficulties they may face and the general ignorance of the discrimination and social demotion they may experience once they finally move to join their parents, are a sign both of the sheltered narrative of which those left behind are the recipients (Sayad, 2004), and also of the boundless hopes and dreams that the prospect of moving can afford.

As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) observe, however, the stories of the young people who move to join their parents in the new country are almost invariably stories of disappointment. Many of the children in my study who had moved from Ghana to Italy talk about disenchantment and frustration at the lives they are now living. While their photographs concentrate on objects which demonstrate a level of material improvement, their narratives are almost invariably denunciations of discrimination, racism or lack of support. School can represent a 'safe haven', a place where children can feel secure in the common routines and the predictability of knowing what is required of them (Sayad, 2004). However, school is also the place where their being visibly different from the majority is more difficult to come to terms with, and the attention or contempt they sometimes attract from peers or teachers appears to be particularly hurtful. This perception of the self can lead to what Du Bois (2007) terms 'double consciousness', a perception of the self simultaneously subjective and objectified, a self that is 'othered' by the reflection seen in the eyes of the majority group.

For many migrants the experience of being the 'Other' is accompanied by a fracture in the "[...] continuity between the past Me and the present Me; the *emigrant* Me and the *immigrant* Me' (Ricca, 2008, p. 85. Own translation, emphasis in the original). As a consequence, young people may find themselves living in separate spheres, that of the home and the ethnic community, and that of the school and the wider society. The findings of this study confirm this contradiction, with many of the young Ghanaians living in Italy caught between the 'before' of their imagining and the 'after' of everyday experience, two sides of one's life that can be very difficult, at times impossible, to reconcile. Appearing too close to Ghana and Ghanaian practices could, in fact, call into question the children's allegiance to Italy, while being 'too Italian' may query their loyalty to their 'roots' in the eyes of their family and of the ethnic community. However, the findings also illustrate how, far from passively adapting to the 'new' practices and values or faithfully holding on to the 'old' ones, young people can also find ways to move between them, to exploit any differences and gaps to get around adults' demands or rules.

Studies into so-called 'second generation migrants' (e.g. Penn and Lambert, 2009; Crul, 2003; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) explore the ways in which children born in the receiving country negotiate the difference between the cultural norms and values of their family and ethnic communities on one hand, and, on the other, those of the receiving country. Most of these studies, however, focus on measurable variables such as language fluency, school performance, or patterns of friendship, in order to distinguish between different ways of adapting to the receiving society. Some authors divide the broad category 'adaptation' into a variety of different configurations, such as 'segmented assimilation' (Crul, 2003) or 'consonant/dissonant/selective acculturation' (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). While all of these patterns can offer a broad categorisation of possible outcomes, the more 'messy' dimensions of the quotidian engagement with different cultural narratives can be seen in the results discussed in this thesis. Children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents weave in and out of different narratives and perceptions of the two countries, constantly shifting between them and the overlapping spaces they share. While they may come to share the Italian majority's stereotypical view of Ghana and Africa, and even reproduce it, they show awareness of the arbitrary nature of these stereotypes and also come to question them.

Regardless of their position on the migration trajectory, it is clear that the Ghanaian children live within a web of connections that crosses national borders. It is a network made of tangible exchanges (the presents, the photographs, the clothes and the foods) and of social practices (the visits, the phone calls, the conversations). This study adds to this by highlighting also the mental spaces of emotional relevance: the hopes, imaginings, ambitions, affection and memories. I argue that the children of Ghanaian migrants live within 'transnational emotional spaces', spaces which include the sending and receiving countries, but also all the other places where uncles, aunts, friends and cousins live, as well as the places they hope to move to in the future, the places where the dream of social advancement will finally come true.

This study builds on Pajo's (2007) work on Albanian (adult) migrants to Greece, and the author's reference to the geographies of 'territorialised fulfilment' this group appears to share, a (tacit) hierarchical view of the world countries. According to these geographies, different nation-states hold different degrees of desirability in relation to the fulfilment of individual's dreams for social advancement they come to embody. These narratives (that are sometimes more akin to 'mythologies') can also be found in further studies done with other migrant groups (cf. Mai, 2001, on Albanian migrants to Italy or Angelidou, 2008, on Bulgarian migrants to Greece). The fact that the young Ghanaian participants in the research project discussed here appear to share a similar hierarchical taxonomy of the world's countries (i.e. one according to which, while Italy is better than Ghana, the UK is better than Italy, but the US is the best of all) seems to point to a recurring pattern of classification that is shared amongst unskilled migrants. The ways in which the (perceived) hierarchy of countries comes to be established, the channels through which it spreads, and the role it plays in individuals' decision to migrate need, however, to be looked at specifically by further research.

Coming back to the research questions, I can now summarise the research findings as follows (for this purpose I shall combine the first two original questions):

- How do children imagine a country they do not know directly but to which they have links through significant others, and what role do these 'mediated' countries have in the children's expectations and ambitions for their future?

The data collected shows that the children left behind by Ghanaian unskilled labour migrants imagine Italy (and the West) as a country that is inherently better than Ghana, a country they expect to be 'clean' and 'tidy', in opposition to the 'dirt' and 'messiness' of Ghana. Following Douglas (1966), Bourdieu (1979a) and van der Geest (1998), I argue that these adjectives have a highly symbolic meaning and that the opposition between these adjectival pairs needs to be read as an opposition between the (imagined) modernity of Italy and the (perceived) backwardness of

Ghana. The children left behind invariably look forward to moving to Italy, to be with their parents, but also to experience the social promotion that they expect to be the consequence of moving to a more 'respectable' country. The vast majority of the young prospective migrants are not aware of the possibility of facing racism or discrimination, and none of them appear to expect that moving to Italy may entail social demotion, even if it leads to a relative improvement in material terms.

The children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents share these narratives and a similar set of oppositions, but contact (direct or indirect) with Ghana, and the fact that Ghana is the stage where their family's social advancement is played out (Goffman, 1959), means that they can also challenge the stereotypical views of the two countries that is shared by the majority population. This also allows the children to exploit the differences in linguistic or cultural practices to advance their interests and needs as young people, often to contrast demands and rules set out by adults. However, some of the children come to share the dominant narratives, in particular those who are born in the receiving country. They describe Africa (a term often used as synonymous with Ghana) as 'messy', backward and, ultimately, inferior, an image that coexists with its opposite, and that arises contrasting feelings. Africa comes to be perceived, at the same time, as the happy, sunny country of parental (and ethnic community) nostalgic memories and narratives, but also the threatening and obscure place of witchcraft and the evil eye. It is a place that has only a marginal role in the children's ambitions for the future, however large this role may be in their everyday lives. Strikingly, the vast majority of the young people born in Italy, in fact, wish to move to the UK or the US one day, to settle in one of the countries that are at the top of the world's hierarchy, and those that hold more potential in the shared geographies of 'territorialised fulfilment' (Pajo, 2008).

- How do young people assess their imaginings and expectations in the light of the encounter with reality?

The data shows that Ghanaian children who have migrated to Italy are almost invariably disappointed by the reality they encounter. Although for some moving does mean better housing and more material possessions (which are the subject of many of the photographs taken by the participants), the young people's narratives almost invariably relate frequent episodes of real or perceived discrimination, sometimes even blatant racism. The imaginings and expectations held before leaving Ghana are looked upon as naïve, often as unrealistic, at least as far as this specific destination is concerned. The children are vaguely aware of the power of the 'collective lie' (Sayad, 2004) as they experience the demands of siblings, friends or relatives still back in Ghana. However, the power of this 'lie' is such that trying to challenge it appears to obtain the opposite effect, as the children are not believed, or are accused of not wanting to share their good fortune.

School features prominently in migrant children's experiences, as it is the main 'gateway' into the receiving country's social fabric. As such, school is both the place where the young people feel their being (seen as) different more acutely, in particular during the first weeks and months, but where many of them also feel safer, as they have a clearly defined role within this social space, a role which they share with their peers irrespective of their background. Language plays a large part in their initial difficulties, and the frustration of being unable to understand comes through very powerfully in the children's reflections. What also emerges from many of the interviews is the disappointment of migrant children at not being helped (enough) by their peers, something which many of them appear to have expected prior to leaving. The first few months are very difficult for young people moving to join their parent(s) in a new country. The difficulties they encounter in adapting to the new *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) are made even more acute, for some of the children, by the emotional complexities of getting re-acquainted with a parent (or parents) they have not seen for many years.

## Implication for the theoretical model used

This study contributes to the understanding of migration dynamics and processes on three levels: it pays attention to the complex psycho-cultural processes at work in a migration project without which research risks missing an important aspect of the immigrant experience (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001); it brings the voices of children and their own imaginings, expectations, worries and dreams into the debate about migration. Finally, it demonstrates the relevance of Bourdieu's concepts of field, *habitus* and symbolic violence (as well as the different forms of capital) in making sense of the experiences of young migrants.

The present study pays attention to the socio-cultural aspects of migration from the perspective of young people, and to the emotional implications of moving. It does so by listening to the children's own voices in order to understand how much (and what) they personally 'invest' in the migration process, how they cope with the difficulties they encounter and how they actively attempt to redress them. As a consequence, it adds young people's perspectives in a debate on migration that is, of necessity, political, since it pertains to the policies and regulations (e.g. regulation of migration flows, family reunion policies, citizenship rights, etc.) of which, too often, young people are the silent and powerless objects (Mayall, 2000).

Most of all, however, the present study adopts a new perspective in these issues: one which looks at young people's migration from a transnational point of view, grounded on the insight that each immigrant is, at the same time, an emigrant, and each emigrant is also an immigrant (Sayad, 2004). The transnational perspective adopted by the study results in a much greater understanding of the narratives of the young participants. None of the expectations, experiences or evaluations collected from the three groups of participants (the children left behind, the migrant children, the children born in Italy), in fact, could have been fully understood without the others. Although some studies have made use of a transnational perspective, the present research is the first to attempt to look at children and migration by taking into account the fact that young people's understanding of migration, and the experience they have of the receiving country, start *before* the moment of actual physical movement.

While there are a number of studies that look at how the different forms of capital favour the movement of people across borders (see the discussion regarding Bourdieu's theoretical tools in chapter 2), the use of the Bourdieusian concepts of *habitus* and field are less commonly employed within migration literature. Moreover, I am not aware of any other studies that use these interpretive tools specifically in order to explore the ways in which young migrants adapt and make sense of the 'cultural arbitrary' of the receiving country. This study attempts to redress this scarcity and to argue that Bourdieu's conceptual tools can be used very effectively when thinking about migration in general, and children and migration in particular.

As Reay (2004) points out, Bourdieu himself never turned his conceptual tools to the study of some of the most common forms of division and exclusion, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. However, the *habitus* is a concept devised primarily to analyse dominance by prevailing groups (ibid.). As such, these concepts are particularly useful when investigating the understandings and relations that migration engenders. As Bourdieu and Wacquant observe, "[...] when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). To carry this metaphor further, the movement of people between countries that have very different 'cultural arbitraries' means a change, sometimes quite significant, of the 'water'. Consequently, what was taken for granted becomes suddenly conspicuous, while the new may appear quite strange and perplexing, a combination that can cause confusion and even anxiety and frustration.

Migrant children appear to react to these feelings with a range of different reactions which go from the anger of the boy who kicked his teacher to the quiet acceptance of the children who try to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. For all, however, the contrast between cultural arbitraries means feeling insecure and precarious. While some, more empathetic, Italian children and adults (also in their roles as pupils and teachers) may perceive this insecurity and confusion and try to help overcome them, others, the majority, appear to expect young migrants to quickly 'adapt' to what *they* believe is natural and obvious: their own water.

## Policy implications

This study had an exploratory and descriptive focus and was not directly policy-oriented. As a consequence, it did not aim to formulate clearly defined, practical suggestions towards guidelines or strategies. However, there are some broad areas of policy-concern that the present research relates to, and to which it may bring a contribution. This contribution involves, on one side, the broader issue of children's participation in policymaking, and, on the other, the pragmatic insights gained from the methodological element of the research.

The transition from one country to another, from the language and *habitus* absorbed since birth to (radically) different ones, almost invariably creates confusion, insecurity and doubts. While it is not possible to completely eliminate the difficulties associated with migration, it is certainly possible to reduce the frustration and sense of isolation that children experience. This requires, however, a substantial investment of financial and human resources, as well as appropriate training and monitoring. Young migrants themselves are the best placed to identify practices that are helpful in smoothing the passage between different school systems, thus also easing processes of socialisation. As Lansdown (2005) notices, article 5 of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child provides a rationale for the engagement of children according to their "evolving capacities", and this should be taken into account by policymakers in all countries (both sending and receiving migrant children). Policy needs to be informed by young people's assessment of their own changing and evolving needs and implemented through strategies based on children's suggestions and insights. As stressed previously, the present study did not directly aim to highlight areas for policies. Nevertheless, in the course of the data collection some important issues emerged which would improve the educational and social experiences of young (perspective) migrants both in Italy and in Ghana.

The practice of research has taught me the need to maintain openness and to be prepared to shift perspective and welcome the unexpected. Doing social research is of necessity going into uncharted territory, as responses cannot be predicted in advance or may turn our best predictions on their heads. Even when they conform to our expectations, the reality of people's lives, thoughts and experiences is always richer and more complex than we can ever envisage. The time and (relatively) leisurely pace that a doctoral research project allows may not always be available for other academic research, but the richness of participants' responses needs to be respected and fully appreciated, so that what are potentially very personal and emotional narratives do not get lost in the pressure for practical outcomes.

## A safe place

The young migrants who had just arrived in Italy were stressing quite forcefully their desire to have a regular space in which to talk about their experiences of 'before' and 'after' migration. A similar need was also stated by the children born in Italy of Ghanaian parents, as they remarked on the benefits of being free to share their thoughts and experiences during the focus groups. It was apparent that the young participants were feeling the need to talk about their experiences as migrants and as children living within different 'webs of significance' (Geertz, 1973), a space that was not otherwise readily available. The benefits come from realising that other children share the same anxieties, surprises, frustrations, ambitions and concerns. Too often these feelings are lived in isolation, and it is easy for each individual child to think that they are exclusive to him/herself or, worse, due to his/her own failings.

Creating a space for immigrant children to talk about the difficulties they experience can be a first step in realising that the issues each of them faces are shared and acceptable, and the school would be the ideal space for it. This space could be built into areas of the Italian curriculum such as citizenship education, geography, foreign language teaching, to benefit both immigrant children and majority children by expanding their horizons and providing material for reflecting on languages. While some schools do attempt to incorporate the experiences of immigrant children into their teaching, the constraint of the syllabus and the lack of material or support can dramatically limit what teachers are able to do. Policies geared towards building this into the curriculum, as well as the availability of material to facilitate this kind of exchange, would help both immigrant and majority children to make the most of the potential represented by the different languages, practices, values and skills that are available in most Italian classrooms.

A further practical suggestion that was made by the children in this research and which could be incorporated into school practices, relates to the benefits of peer support. This would entail the creation of more systematically organised spaces, times and materials tailored towards collaborative learning. Without delegating teaching and responsibility to the pupils, this could constitute a form of 'scaffolding' (in Mercer, 2000; Schaffer, 1996 and 2004) which could benefit all children, irrespective of their ethnic and/or social background. Language, geography, civic education, art or history are only some of the areas where pair or team work could enrich all participants while at the same time minimising immigrant children's sense of isolation and frustration. As for the previous point, these are areas in which some teachers already do excellent work, often through the use of information technologies[38]. Too often, however, this depends on the sensitivity and the know-how of individual teachers and head-teachers, while in most cases the lack of adequate funding and training, as well as the demands of a highly demanding syllabus, mean that projects aimed at the exchange and sharing of human resources, knowledge and skills have to be abandoned or side-lined.

A further point that needs to be highlighted in relation to the possible policy implications of this study relates to the some of the disciplinary practices used in Ghanaian schools. Several of the children remarked on the common practice of 'lashing' pupils in order to suppress or modify undesired behaviour. While this research does not wish to deprecate practices on the grounds that they are at odds with accepted Western ones, corporal punishment should and needs to be challenged wherever and whenever it is practiced. A recommendation in this sense, based on the relevant finding of this study, can feed into the existing academic debate in which several Ghanaian researchers are engaged (e.g. Akyeampong and Lewin, 2002; Agbenyega, 2006) and also link to the recommendations of the UN's Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children[39], highlighted by the General Comment made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child of 2006. As the Committee comments: "Given the widespread traditional acceptance of corporal punishment, prohibition on its own will not achieve the necessary change in attitudes and practice" (CRC, 2006); as a consequence, the first steps towards eradicating caning and beatings within schools will necessarily need to be the raising of awareness of the children's right to protection (as set out by UN Convention for the Rights of the Child) and of alternative, non-violent strategies to ensure collaborative behaviour that may be efficiently and productively employed in a school context.

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[38] See, as an example of good practice: http://www.radiomigranti.it/

[39] http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/

## Directions for future research

This section illustrates the issues that were touched upon by the present study and which, it is felt, would benefit from further research. They concern methodological, empirical and theoretical aspects of research that looks at young people in relation to migration and are approached in order of relevance for the present study.

One major concern of the present research was the difficulty of accessing male participants among the young people left behind in Ghana. While, as explained in the methodology chapter, this was totally unintended (and also unexpected, since the school accessed had a slightly higher intake of male pupils) it is clear that the imaginings and expectations expressed by young female participants left behind may not be representative also of the anticipations and worries of young males who are left in the care of kin by migrant parents. The participants who had migrated to Italy, and who had previously been left behind, were a mixture of male and female children and the fact that they voiced similar concerns to those of the girls in Ghana appears to indicate that the discourses over cleanliness and neatness are shared by both groups. However, further research would be essential to highlight the extent to which both boys and girls left behind share imaginings and expectations in relation to the country where their parents are and where they expect to be in the future.

Following from this, a further area of potential investigation concerns the gender and order of birth of the children who are left in the sending country by migrant parents, an issue regarding which there appears to be no systematic research available. Whether (as the difficulties experienced in finding male participants for the present study appear to suggest) females are left behind more often than males would be an issue worthy of investigation. Additionally, investigating whether the children who are left in the care of kin are more often the first born or the youngest in the family, or whether there is any different pattern for the care of boys and girls that are left behind (i.e. whether one gender group is more likely to be enrolled at a boarding school than the other), could be a useful foundation for future research that concerns children and migration, as well as to inform policies (both in sending and receiving countries) that can address the specific issues these children may face.

Some of the themes that the present research explored relate discourses and practices that appear to be widely shared by migrants in very different geographical settings. The recurrence of these themes in this, as well as other studies, suggests that they would benefit from further investigation, in order to ascertain to what degree they are shared by migrants. The first of these issues concerns the (imagined) cleanliness and tidiness which is seen as a necessary attribute of destination countries. The Ghanaian girls' insistence on the cleanliness and tidiness of Italy finds corresponding similarities in the discourses of other migrants in very different situations, as was observed in chapter 4. The fact that moral connotations of cleanliness and tidiness appear to be shared within different migrant trajectories could indicate that it is a narrative that is common amongst migrants who move from developing countries to more industrialised areas of the world.

A second issue that appears to have great relevance for migrants beyond the young participants that took part in this project is that of house-building in the country of origin and the extent of the psychological and social purposes this practice serves. It cannot be a coincidence that migrants very often feel the need to build a home in the country of origin, even though in many cases it is a (large) home that is destined to remain unused by the migrants themselves. Of course, the houses the migrants build represent a financial investment and a place to return to in the future, but they also contribute to the accumulation of social and symbolic capital in the country of origin and within the migrant community. Moreover, they represent an 'umbilical cord' between the migrants and the sending country: a monument to their 'sacrifice' and the concrete proof that, despite having left, they continue to be part of the sending community.

A further area that would benefit from additional investigation concerns a methodological challenge the present study encountered. The increasing use of visual techniques for data collection, and of photography in particular, means that there is an urgent need to fully understand the ethical and practical implications of the use of cameras (or video cameras) by children, and particularly children from visible minority backgrounds. The fact that young people may look conspicuous when holding a camera and that, as a consequence, they may not feel comfortable taking photographs or videos in some places/occasions, may strongly influence the number of photographs the participants take and, above all, the subjects they choose. This is an issue that has already been highlighted by researchers (Langevang, 2007). However, a study that addresses precisely these limitations and attempts to clarify how much, and in what ways, the use of visual techniques may influence the data collected would help to gain a clearer perspective regarding the advantages and disadvantages of these particular techniques and to highlight their effective potential beyond a 'trend'.

Lastly, an area of further potential investigation concerns the use of some of Bourdieu's theoretical tools in research into migration. As the present study demonstrates, Bourdieu's concepts can prove useful for all studies that aim at uncovering the social dynamics and the power relations between majority and minority groups. However, there is a need to explore in more depth the different ways in which these tools can be exploited in order to reveal the mechanisms and processes that moving between countries can set in motion. In other words, more research is needed to confirm (or indeed disprove) the usefulness of the concepts of field and *habitus* in uncovering processes of migrant adaptation and also resistance to different cultural givens.

The relevance of field and *habitus* would also need to be explored from a transnational perspective that takes into account of the ways in which *habitus* changes as it travels to and from different countries on the back of 'social remittances' (Levitt, 1998). As Bourdieu himself argues, the *habitus* changes the fields while, at the same time, the fields shape the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990a). The ways in which this 'mutual influencing' happens within transnational social spaces need to be investigated, as do the patterns of accumulation of symbolic capital across borders and the effects of symbolic violence on migrants, be they actual, potential or second generation.

## Conclusion

The global forces of modern capitalist societies lay the ground for labour migration by changing the economic dynamics in developing countries and by attracting cheap labour (made available by these changes) to the industrialised countries of the North. Though very much an ever-changing scenario, this pattern nevertheless lays the grounds for individual and group movements within and across borders. The resulting migration trend then becomes self-sustaining, and can gain momentum in such proportions as to make it impossible for national governments to have complete control over the resulting flows, despite laws and regulations, or even the building of walls.

While not all migrants remain in regular touch with the sending community, the available research shows that a considerable proportion maintains contacts with family and friends they left behind as well as with the sending country in general (its politics, events, cultural products, etc.). This involves regular contacts between migrants and the non-migrants in the country of origin, but also a connection with the 'ethnic' community in the country of settlement and with the wider diaspora. These links are kept alive by regular (or less regular) visits, phone calls and text messages and the swapping of photographs and home videos. Satellite TV and home computers can also be important tools to gather information and keep up with the news from the sending country. The frequency and patterns of these links are changeable, and they usually become weaker with time, and their strength also waxes and wanes according to contingent situations and specific life events.

The children of migrants are involved in most of the above practices, both as part of the family but also independently and, as the present study has shown, they play a very important part in maintaining links between people living in different countries. On both sides of the migration trajectory between Ghana and Italy, the young participants in this study appear to be actively part of these transnational spaces. The presence of close family members in 'the other' country (or countries), as well as the material investments their families make (such as house-building) and the flow of goods across borders, mean that the children have emotional ties to both countries.

In close (mediated) contact with two, often more, countries, migrant children and the children of migrants are frequently at the centre of a network of relationships that spans borders, a transnational 'emotional space' they contribute towards maintaining and shaping, and to which they are bound by their relationships with others, by memories and aspirations. This space has physical qualities and moral connotations which overlap and whose relevance and weight in the children's lives ebbs and flows according to changing experiences and shifting understandings.

Inevitably, the children of migrants are affected by migration, materially and emotionally. Whether it represents a potential future and the opportunity for advancement, a dream come true or a bitter disappointment, the weight of contrasting expectations or the freedom of available choices, young people share in the migratory experience. Including children's perspectives in the debate on migration is the only way to gain an understanding of the dynamics and effects of movement across borders that reflects society in its entirety. Young people can add their voices to the conversation, thus contributing to improve everyone's present, and everyone's future. But we must be willing to listen.

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Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat): http://en.istat.it/

Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (Miur): http://www.istruzione.it/web/hub/home

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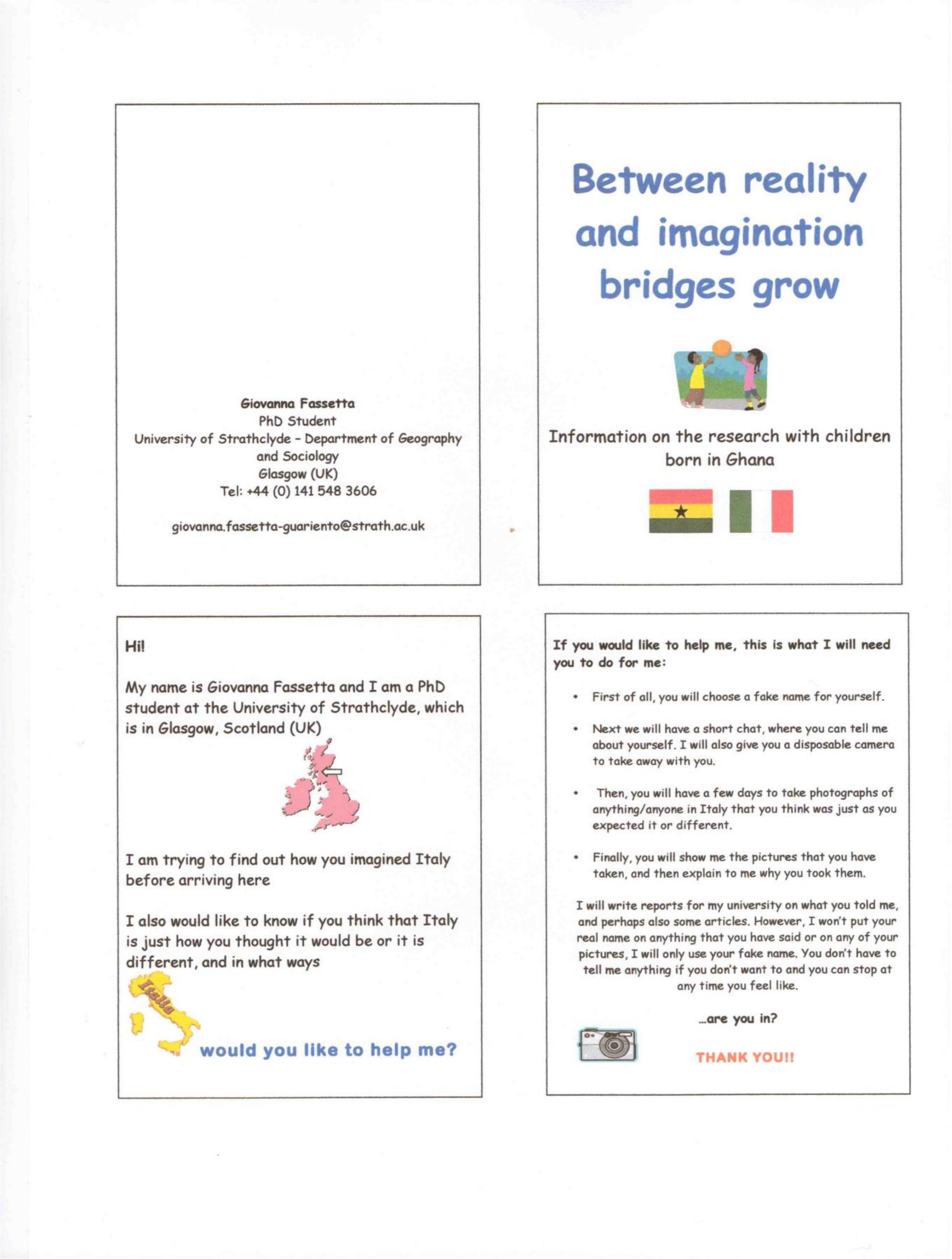
Unicef. Convention on the Rights of the Child: http://www.unicef.org/crc/

# Appendixes

## Appendix 1: Information leaflet for the young participants



**Giovanna Fassetta**
PhD Student
University of Strathclyde - Department of Geography and Sociology
Glasgow (UK)
Tel: +44 (0) 141 548 3606

giovanna.fassetta-guariento@strath.ac.uk

# Between reality and imagination bridges grow

Information on the research with children born in Ghana

**Hi!**

My name is Giovanna Fassetta and I am a PhD student at the University of Strathclyde, which is in Glasgow, Scotland (UK)

I am trying to find out how you imagined Italy before arriving here

I also would like to know if you think that Italy is just how you thought it would be or it is different, and in what ways

**would you like to help me?**

**If you would like to help me, this is what I will need you to do for me:**

- First of all, you will choose a fake name for yourself.
- Next we will have a short chat, where you can tell me about yourself. I will also give you a disposable camera to take away with you.
- Then, you will have a few days to take photographs of anything/anyone in Italy that you think was just as you expected it or different.
- Finally, you will show me the pictures that you have taken, and then explain to me why you took them.

I will write reports for my university on what you told me, and perhaps also some articles. However, I won't put your real name on anything that you have said or on any of your pictures, I will only use your fake name. You don't have to tell me anything if you don't want to and you can stop at any time you feel like.

**...are you in?**

**THANK YOU!!**

## Appendix 2: Information for the participants' parents/carers

Giovanna Fassetta
University of Strathclyde
Department of Geography and Sociology
Glasgow
G1 1XN
Tel. 0044 (0)141 5483606
gio.vanna@tiscali.co.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Giovanna Fassetta and I am a full time teacher of Italian as a second language to foreigners at the Centro Territoriale Permanente (CTP) of Pordenone (Italy). I am currently on study leave in order to work towards a PhD at the Department of Geography and Sociology, University of Strathclyde (Glasgow, UK).

I am interested in researching Ghanaian children whose parents (one or both) have migrated to Italy and who are expecting to join them there in the future. I would like to find out how they imagine Italy before leaving Ghana, what they are looking forward to finding and what they are concerned or curious about.

To research this, I am planning to spend a little time with your child in his/her school in order to:

- collect some personal information on your child (name, age, time in Italy);
- give your child a disposable camera or ask him her to draw a picture for me (he/she will keep a copy of any photographs taken);
- Look at photographs/pictures with your child and discuss what he/she has portrayed and why.

All my conversations with the children will be recorded and the recordings will be transcribed for analysis. At the end of the research all recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

I can assure you that anything your child will chose to tell me will be kept confidential and anonymous at all times and that no personal data will be disclosed. The children will choose a pseudonym and only that will appear in the study and on any material that should be published. Deciding to allow your child to join the project is entirely up to you and you or your child can decide to withdraw your consent at any time and without having to give any reason for your decision.

I will make sure that your child does not miss any important lessons (all together I will need to talk to each child for less than a couple of hours) and that he/she is safe and happy at all times.

If you agree to your child taking part in the research, please fill-in the attached consent form and give it to your child to take back to his/her teacher.

I thank you in advance for your help.

Date: _______________

Kindest regards,
Giovanna Fassetta

## Appendix 3: Consent form for parents/carers

I ____________________ ______________________, parent/carer of the
(name and surname of parent of carer)

child ______________________ ______________________,
(name and surname of child)

who is a pupil at ____________________________________________
(name of school)

in _______________________________________________, give my
(name of town)

consent to my child's participation in the research on Ghanaian children's

imaginings of Italy undertaken by Mrs Giovanna Fassetta, PhD student

at the University of Strathclyde (UK).

In consenting I understand and agree to the following:

- any information given by my child will remain confidential and anonymous

- my child can withdraw from the study at any time, with no need to offer any justification for the withdrawal

- I can request that my child's data is withdrawn from the study at any time with no need to offer any justification for the withdrawal

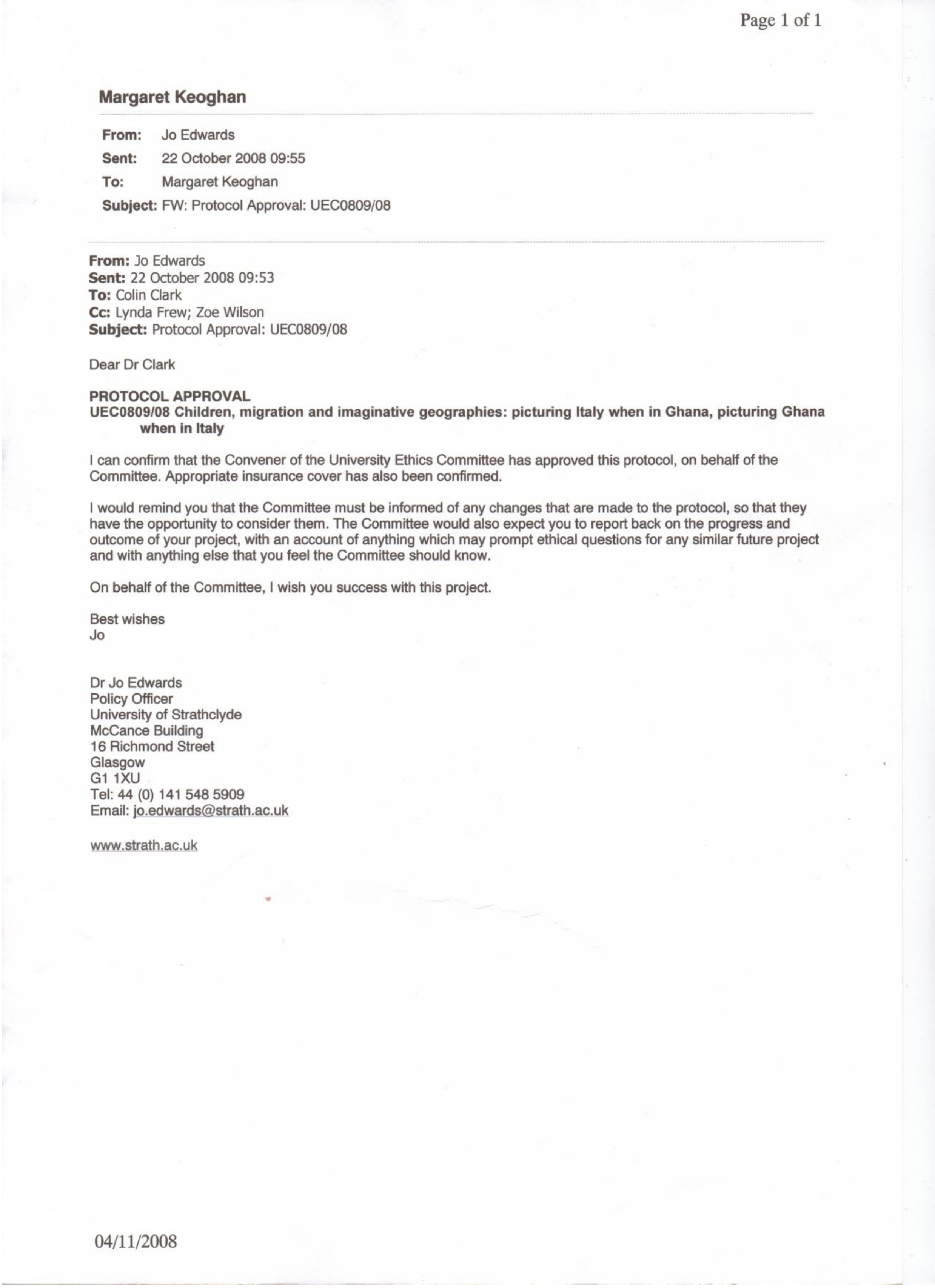
- I understand that my child will be able to refuse to answer questions that he/she is not comfortable with

- I give permission for the researcher to hold the data given for this and any future study

Date ___________________

Signed __________________________________________

# Appendix 4: Ethics approval



**Margaret Keoghan**

**From:** Jo Edwards
**Sent:** 22 October 2008 09:55
**To:** Margaret Keoghan
**Subject:** FW: Protocol Approval: UEC0809/08

**From:** Jo Edwards
**Sent:** 22 October 2008 09:53
**To:** Colin Clark
**Cc:** Lynda Frew; Zoe Wilson
**Subject:** Protocol Approval: UEC0809/08

Dear Dr Clark

**PROTOCOL APPROVAL**
**UEC0809/08 Children, migration and imaginative geographies: picturing Italy when in Ghana, picturing Ghana when in Italy**

I can confirm that the Convener of the University Ethics Committee has approved this protocol, on behalf of the Committee. Appropriate insurance cover has also been confirmed.

I would remind you that the Committee must be informed of any changes that are made to the protocol, so that they have the opportunity to consider them. The Committee would also expect you to report back on the progress and outcome of your project, with an account of anything which may prompt ethical questions for any similar future project and with anything else that you feel the Committee should know.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you success with this project.

Best wishes
Jo

Dr Jo Edwards
Policy Officer
University of Strathclyde
McCance Building
16 Richmond Street
Glasgow
G1 1XU
Tel: 44 (0) 141 548 5909
Email: jo.edwards@strath.ac.uk

www.strath.ac.uk

## Appendix 5: Letter for Italian head-teachers

Giovanna Fassetta
University of Strathclyde
Department of Geography and Sociology
Glasgow
G1 1XN
Tel. 0044 (0)141 5483606
gio.vanna@tiscali.co.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Giovanna Fassetta and I am a full time teacher of Italian as a second language to foreigners at the Centro Territoriale Permanente (CTP) of Pordenone (Italy). I am currently on study leave in order to work towards a PhD at the Department of Geography and Sociology of the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow, UK).

I am interested in researching the imaginative geographies of Ghanaian children who have experienced their parents' (one or both) migration to Italy. I would like to know how they imagine Italy, how they feel about the possibility of having to move there and what their expectations and concerns are.

I am therefore looking to get in touch with children (girls and boys) who fulfil the following criteria:

- Ghanaian nationals
- aged between 10 and 15
- one or both parents living in Italy

I would be very grateful if you could help me get in touch with these children through your institution. It will then be my care to ensure the children's anonymity at all times and to limit the amount of time each participant will spend in the research to a maximum of two school periods in order not to detract unnecessarily from their school work. Under no circumstance will the identity of the children or the school be made public and I will not ask them for their parent(s)' address or any contact reference.

Please find enclosed a letter of presentation from the Head of the Department of Geography and Sociology, Dr Rogerson.

Thank you for your time and support

With kindest regards,
Giovanna Fassetta

## Appendix 6: Information on camera use

### How to use the camera

- This camera is yours only to use!

- Please, take a picture of anything which you found to be different from what you expected before arriving in Italy, or anything which is exactly as you expected it: objects, people, places, etc. Take at least 15 pictures for me

- I will be back in a week to collect the camera and have the pictures developed. After that, we'll meet once again to look at the pictures together

- Remember to ask for permission before taking pictures of people from close-by. Don't take a picture if anyone says they don't want you to!

- If you use the camera in school, make sure not to disrupt the lessons!

- Keep the camera away from the sun and the rain

**Have fun!**

## Appendix 7: Letter asking for contacts in Ghana

**Giovanna Fassetta**
PhD student
University of Strathclyde
Department of Geography and Sociology
50, Richmond St
Glasgow G1 1XN
United Kingdom

Dear Sir/Madam

First of all I would like to thank you for allowing me to talk to your child about his/her views of Ghana and Italy. What the children told me was very interesting and I had a lovely time talking to them.

The conversations I had with your child and many other Ghanaian children in the XX province was the first part of a study that will also take me to Ghana next March, for about two and a half months. There I am hoping to talk to children or young people who have a family in Italy, to find out how they imagine Italy and its towns, people, countryside, lifestyle, etc.

I'm writing to you to ask you if you know any child or young person (between the ages of 10 and 16) who is in Ghana and has his/her parents in Italy. I would be very happy to talk to this child when I go to Ghana in March. I would contact the people who look after him/her and, with their carer's permission, visit the child to talk a bit about his/her ideas of Italy. As I did with the children here in Italy, I would also give the children in Ghana a disposable camera so that they can take some pictures for me. Once developed, I would look through these pictures with the young people, and talk about the photographs for a little while. I would also, on my return, let you have a copy of any of the pictures that the children would be happy for me to give you.

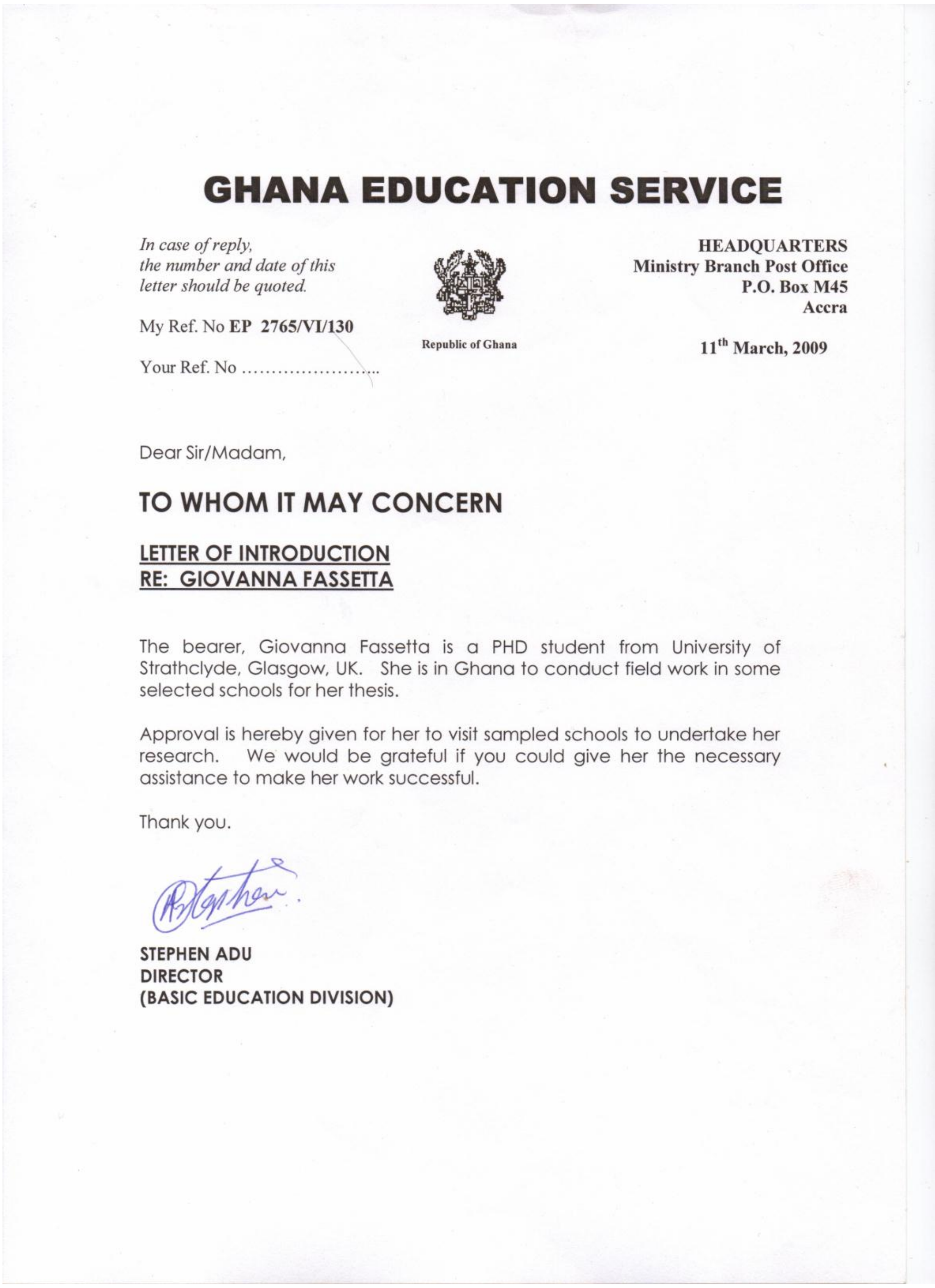
If you can put me in touch with children in Ghana who can help me with my study, will you let me know by ringing me on my mobile or at home? I will call you back immediately so that you don't need to spend any money. My mobile number is 3405062395 and my home number is 0427 790703. Alternatively you can write to me at the following email address: gio.vanna@tiscali.co.uk.

With many thanks and my best regards,

Giovanna Fassetta

date:

## Appendix 8: Letter from Head of Basic Education, Ghana



**GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE**

Republic of Ghana

**HEADQUARTERS**
**Ministry Branch Post Office**
**P.O. Box M45**
**Accra**

*In case of reply,*
*the number and date of this*
*letter should be quoted.*

My Ref. No **EP 2765/VI/130**

Your Ref. No …………………..

**11th March, 2009**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**
**RE: GIOVANNA FASSETTA**

The bearer, Giovanna Fassetta is a PHD student from University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK. She is in Ghana to conduct field work in some selected schools for her thesis.

Approval is hereby given for her to visit sampled schools to undertake her research. We would be grateful if you could give her the necessary assistance to make her work successful.

Thank you.

**STEPHEN ADU**
**DIRECTOR**
**(BASIC EDUCATION DIVISION)**

## Appendix 9: Letter for Ghanaian head-teachers

Giovanna Fassetta
University of Strathclyde
Department of Geography and Sociology
Graham Hills Building
50, Richmond St
Glasgow G1 1XN

mobile number (Ghana): 0541164062

email: giovanna.fassetta-guariento@strath.ac.uk

Glasgow, 8th March 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Giovanna Fassetta and I am a full-time teacher of Italian as a second language at the Centro Territoriale Permanente (CTP) of Pordenone, in Italy. I am currently on study leave in order to work towards a PhD at the Department of Geography and Sociology of the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow, UK).

I am interested in researching the imaginings and expectations of Ghanaian children who have experienced their parents' migration to Italy. I would like to know how they envisage Italy (the country, the people, everyday life there, etc) and also how they feel about the possibility of having to move to join their families, what their expectations and concerns are, what they believe they would miss should they migrate themselves and what they might be keen to leave behind.

I am therefore looking to get in touch with children of both genders who fulfil the following criteria:

- are Ghanaian nationals
- are between 10 and 15 years of age
- have one or both parents living in Italy

I would be very grateful if you could help me get in touch with these children through your institution.

The data collection in Ghanaian schools is the part of the fieldwork that I started in October 2008 in Italy. I have already interviewed Ghanaian children in Italian schools who have recently joined their families, to collect their before-and-after impressions, and also children born in Italy by Ghanaian parents, to investigate their imaginings of Ghana. As for the Italian part of the project, I am planning to interview the children in your school a first time, either individually or in small groups. I will then ask them to take pictures with disposable cameras (which I shall provide) of anything in their lives they believe to be different in Italy and that they might miss/not miss should they move there themselves. Finally I would talk to the children one more time to let them explain to me what their pictures are meant to portray in order to avoid misinterpreting them. Should the use of cameras be against the school's rules, or should you think this technique not appropriate for your pupils, however, I will collect the necessary data only through interviews. My conversations with the children would be audio-recorded, transcribed for analysis and the recordings will subsequently be destroyed. All data will be kept in a password protected computer and, when used in my thesis or any publication, both the school's and the children's anonymity will be ensured at all times.

It will be my care to limit the amount of time each participant will spend talking to me to a maximum of 90 minutes in total in order not to detract unnecessarily from their school work. **Under no circumstance will the identity of the school or that of the participants be made public and I shall not ask the children for either their own or their parents' address nor for any other contact details.** The present research project has received unconditional approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

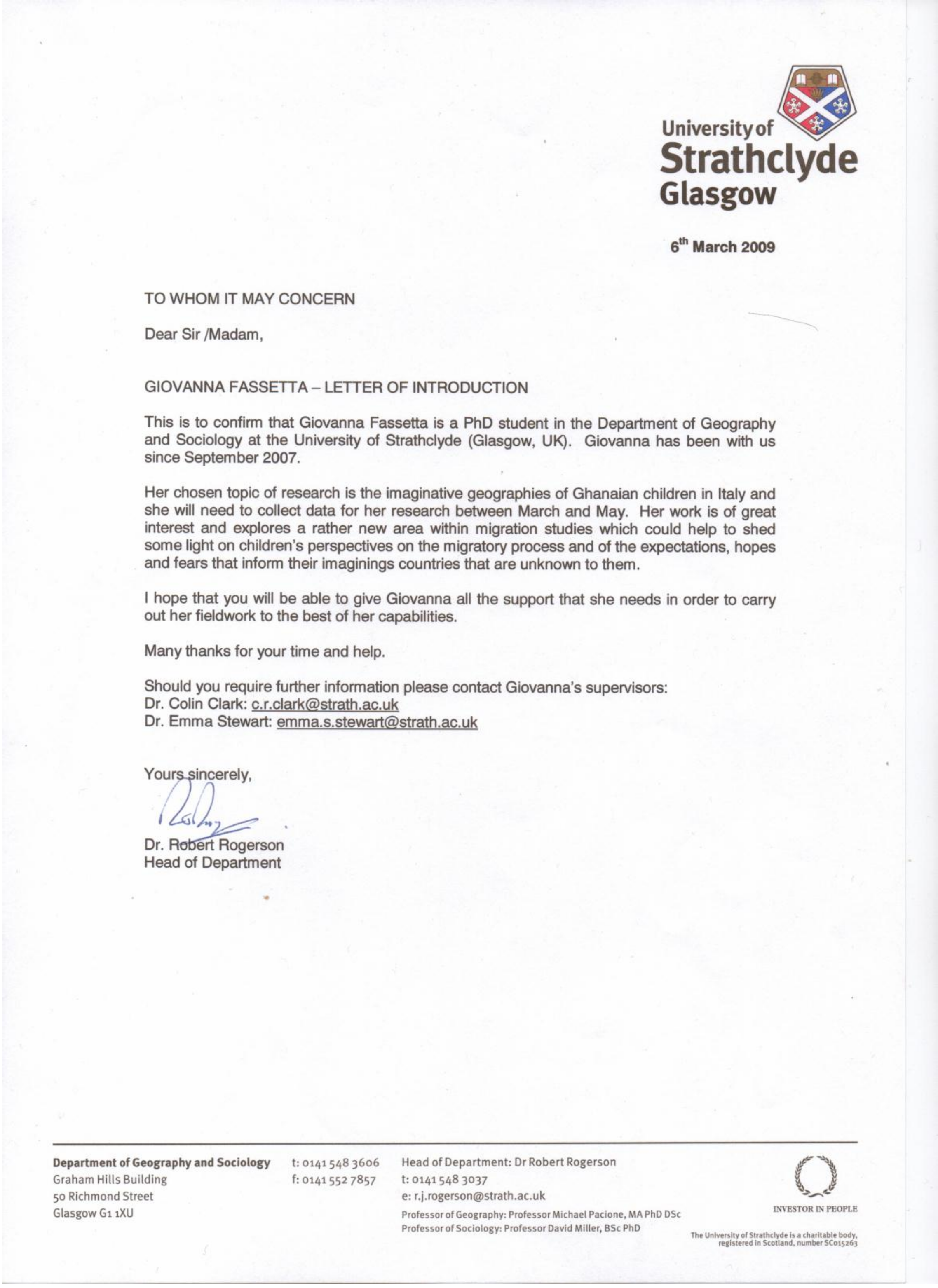
Please find enclosed a copy of a letter of presentation from the Head of the Department of Geography and Sociology, Dr Robert Rogerson, a copy of a letter of introduction from the Ghana Education Services (who have endorsed the project) and a copy of the interview schedule.

I thank you for your time and support,

Kindest regards,

Giovanna Fassetta

# Appendix 10: Letter of introduction from Head of Department



University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

**6th March 2009**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir /Madam,

GIOVANNA FASSETTA – LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

This is to confirm that Giovanna Fassetta is a PhD student in the Department of Geography and Sociology at the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow, UK). Giovanna has been with us since September 2007.

Her chosen topic of research is the imaginative geographies of Ghanaian children in Italy and she will need to collect data for her research between March and May. Her work is of great interest and explores a rather new area within migration studies which could help to shed some light on children's perspectives on the migratory process and of the expectations, hopes and fears that inform their imaginings countries that are unknown to them.

I hope that you will be able to give Giovanna all the support that she needs in order to carry out her fieldwork to the best of her capabilities.

Many thanks for your time and help.

Should you require further information please contact Giovanna's supervisors:
Dr. Colin Clark: c.r.clark@strath.ac.uk
Dr. Emma Stewart: emma.s.stewart@strath.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Robert Rogerson
Head of Department

**Department of Geography and Sociology**
Graham Hills Building
50 Richmond Street
Glasgow G1 1XU

t: 0141 548 3606
f: 0141 552 7857

Head of Department: Dr Robert Rogerson
t: 0141 548 3037
e: r.j.rogerson@strath.ac.uk
Professor of Geography: Professor Michael Pacione, MA PhD DSc
Professor of Sociology: Professor David Miller, BSc PhD

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The University of Strathclyde is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, number SC015263

## Appendix 11: Pupil intake of Ghanaian schools involved

### School Year 2008/2009:

- **School X:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Primary: | boys: 960 | girls: 900 |
| Junior Secondary: | boys: 472 | girls: 461 |

- **School Y:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Primary: | boys: 111 | girls: 69 |
| Junior Secondary: | boys: 97 | girls: 64 |

# Appendix 12: Example of interview schedule – Italy

## Focus Groups - CHILDREN BORN IN GHANA

### 1. BACKGROUND

- Why do you think your parents came to Italy?
- Have they been in Italy long?
- Did you arrive with your parents or did you come after them?
    - (Who did you stay while you were waiting to come?)
    - (Did you come on your own or did someone come to get you?)
- Do you have siblings here? What about in Ghana?

### 2. BEFORE LEAVING

- Do you remember when they told you that you would be leaving?
- How did you feel about the idea of moving?
- What were you looking forward to?
- Did anything worry you?
- How did you think Italy would be like?
- How did you come to this idea?

### 3. ARRIVAL

- Do you remember what you thought when you first arrived?
- Was there anything that was exactly as you had imagined it?
- Was anything that was very different from what you had expected?
- Did anything surprise you (in a good or in a bad way) when you first arrived?
- Did you wish anything/anyone had been different?

### 4. LIVING IN ITALY

- What are the main differences between Ghana and Italy?
- What are the main similarities?
- Did it take long for you to get used to life in Italy?
- What is the best thing about Italy?
- What is the worst thing about Italy?
- Is there anything about Italy you wish you hand known before leaving?
- Is there anything that you would you change about Italy, if you had special powers?
- What would you say to children that are in Ghana waiting to come here to join their parents?
- What do you think could be done to help children who arrive to Italy from other countries?

# Appendix 13: Interview schedule Ghana

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Giovanna Fassetta
*PhD student*
University of Strathclyde

## 1. GROUP INTERVIEWS

### A) OPENING:

During this part I shall aim to:

- Welcome the children
- Make the children feel as relaxed and as welcomed as possible
- Explain the reasons for the interview and reassure them of anonymity
- Make sure they understand that they can refuse to answer an questions that they do not feel comfortable with and leave whenever they want to
- Explain the different phases of the data collection (group conversation – photographs - second interview)
- Ask for children’s permission to switch on voice recorder

### B) BODY:

In this part I shall prompt the children to talk about the following four general topics:

- Background information
- Patterns of parent(s)-child communication
- Knowledge of Italy
- Feelings about moving

For each of these topics some possible questions are listed below. However, the interviews aim to be quite informal and the exact questions each participant will be asked may vary considerably depending on the responses of the children. All care will be taken to avoid upsetting the children in any way and their emotional wellbeing will be paramount at all times; there will be no pressure for the children to answer any questions they do not wish to answer and I will endeavour to make the conversation as relaxed and as enjoyable as possible. Should any child wish to leave, they will be free to do so and no questions will be asked.

#### *1. Background information*

- How long have your parent(s) been away?
- Who looks after you?
- Did your parent(s) move straight to Italy or did he/she/they move somewhere else first?
- Why do you think your parent(s) went to Italy?
- Has your life change since your parent(s) moved? In what ways?

#### *2) Patterns of parent(s)-child communication*

- How do you keep in touch with your parent(s)?
- How often do you communicate?
- Do you talk to anybody else in Italy? Who?
- What do you normally talk about?

### *3) Knowledge of Italy*

- Have you ever been to Italy yourself to visit your parent(s)?
- What do you know about Italy? How do you know about these things?
- Is there anything you were told, about Italy, that you found very surprising, unusual, worrying or amusing?
- Do you think your parent(s) live(s) in the country or in the city? What is it like?
- How do you imagine your parent(s) house in Italy?
- How do you imagine the town where they are?

### *4) Feelings about moving*

- Do you think you're going to move to Italy yourself one day? Would you like to? Why?
- Should you move there, what do you think you would like/enjoy most?
- What do you think you would like/enjoy least?
- What would you be sorry to leave behind in Ghana?
- What do you thing you would not miss about Ghana?
- What do you think would be very different between living here and living in Italy?
- What do you think would be more or less the same in both countries?

### C) CLOSING

In the last part of the interview, I shall aim to:

- Explain the children what will happen next
- Distribute the disposable cameras and explain what I would like them to photograph
- Thank the children for their time and collaboration and let them ask any questions they have

## 2. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

During these interviews I will be looking to the children's photographs with them. I will ask the children to explain what they photographed and why. I will also go back to some of the questions already asked in the group setting to better understand the expectations and concerns of the individual children.

## Appendix 14: Thematic analysis of photographs (Italian participants)

**Total number of photographs taken: 303**
of which:
**by children born in Italy: 134**
**by children born in Ghana: 169**

**Theme 1: PEOPLE**

| Theme 1: People | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FAMILY MEMBERS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 28 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 4 | 2 | 6 | 16 |
| | | 6 | | 22 | |

| Theme: 1 People | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FRIENDS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 12[40] | male | female | male | female |
| | | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| | | 7 | | 5 | |

| Theme 1: People | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SELF | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 12 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 2 | --- | --- | 10 |
| | | 2 | | 10 | |

| Theme 1: People | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School mates | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 4 | male | female | male | female |
| | | --- | --- | 1 | 3 |
| | | 0 | | 4 | |

| Theme 1: People | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gathering and events | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 12 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 6 | 6 | --- | --- |
| | | 12 | | --- | |

---

[40] 10 of which were Ghanaian

### Theme 2: TOWN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

| Theme 2: Town and Neighbourhood | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BUILDINGS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 28 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 3 | 4 | 8 | 13 |
| | | 7 | | 21 | |

| Theme 2: Town and Neighbourhood | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOWN FEATURES | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 16 | male | female | male | female |
| | | --- | 2 | 7 | 7 |
| | | 2 | | 14 | |

| Theme 2: Town and Neighbourhood | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ROAD AND VIEWS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 49 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 10 | 9 | 12 | 18 |
| | | 19 | | 30 | |

| Theme 2: Town and Neighbourhood | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 20 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 3 | --- | 3 | 14 [41] |
| | | 3 | | 17 | |

| Theme 2: Town and Neighbourhood | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CARS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 4 | male | female | male | female |
| | | --- | 1 | --- | 3 |
| | | 1 | | 3 | |

| Theme 2: Town and Neighbourhood | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RUBBISH AND BINS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 5 | male | female | male | female |
| | | --- | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| | | 1 | | 4 | |

---

[41] 11 of which by Philly

**Theme 3: HOME**

| Theme 3: Home | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PERSONAL OBJECTS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 28 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 15 | 8[42] | 2 | 3 |
| | | 23 | | 5 | |

| Theme 3: Home | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FOOD | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 13 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 5 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| | | 10 | | 3 | |

| Theme 3: Home | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HOME EXTERIOR | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 20 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 14 | --- | 4 | 2 |
| | | 14[43] | | 6 | |

| Theme 3: Home | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HOME INTERIOR | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 7 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | | 3 | | 4 | |

| Theme 3: Home | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| OBJECTS | Total | Born in Italy | | Born in Ghana | |
| | 45 | male | female | male | female |
| | | 12 | 12[44] | 14 | 7 |
| | | 24 | | 21 | |

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[42] 7 of which by Kate

[43] 11 of which by Marty

[44] All between Kate and Clare (who are sisters)

VISUALIZATION OF MAIN THEMES:

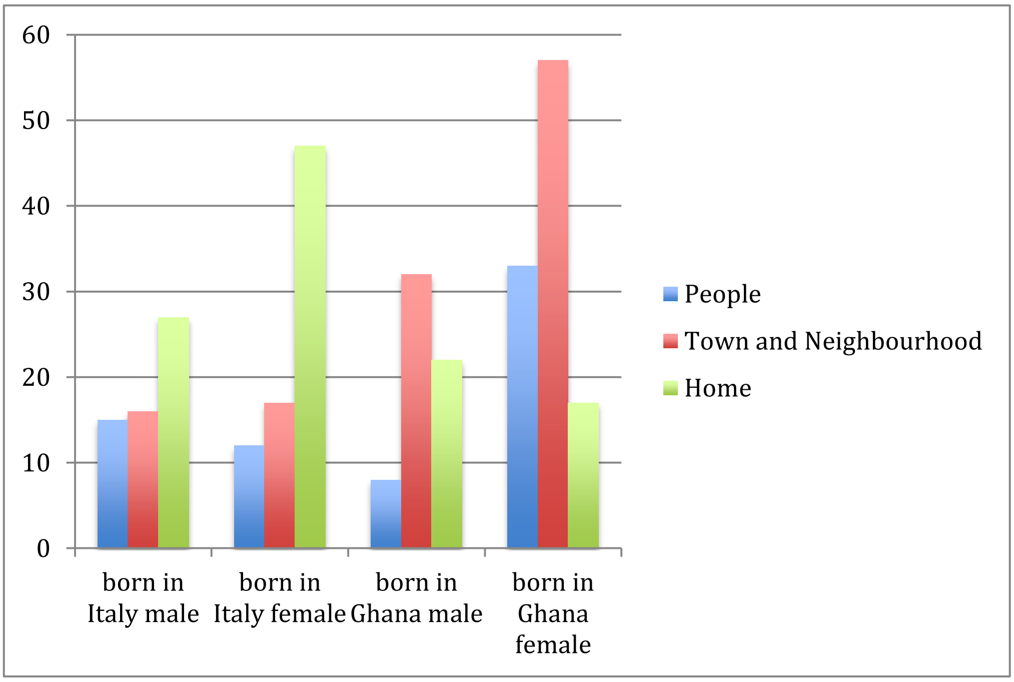

Figure 1: Themes of photographs taken in Italy (by place of birth and gender)

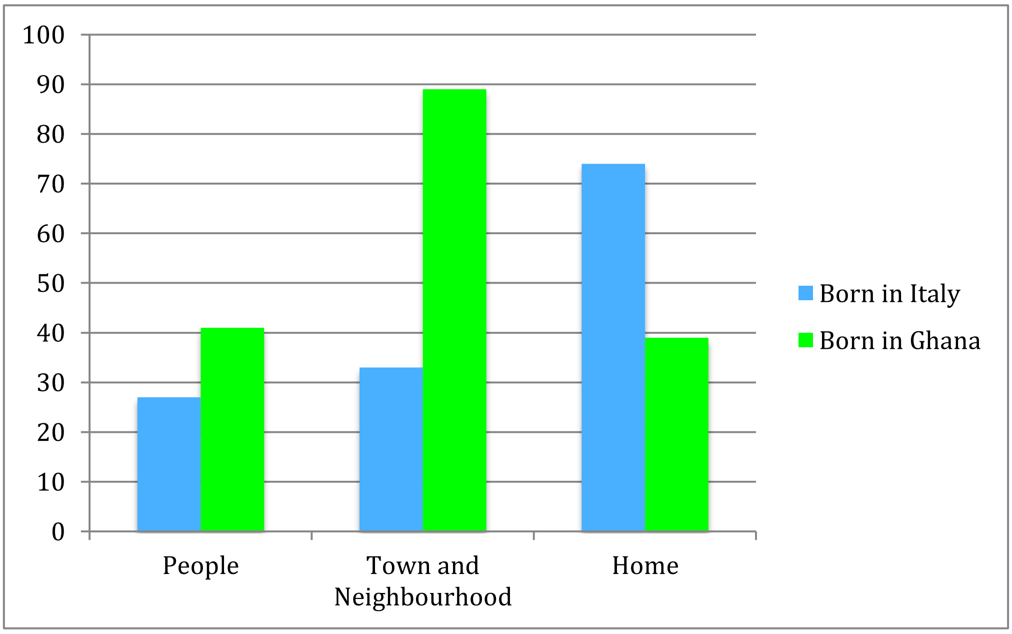

Figure 2: Themes of photographs taken in Italy (by place of birth)

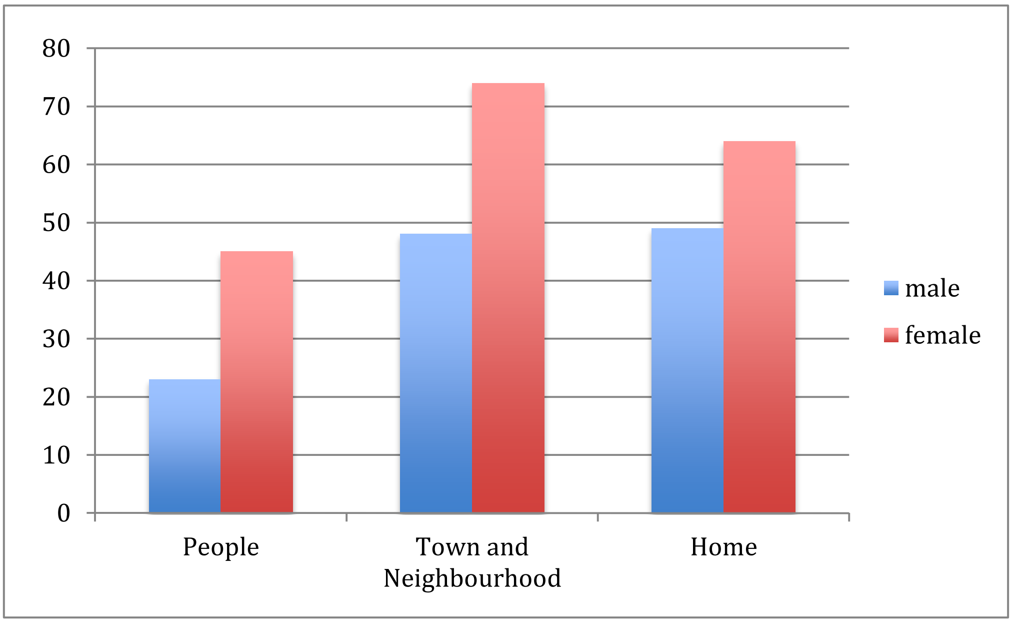

Figure 3: Themes of photographs taken in Italy (by gender)

# Appendix 15: Conventions used in interview transcripts

| | |
|---|---|
| GF | Giovanna Fassetta |
| … | noticeable pause or hesitation |
| […] | word(s) or sentence(s) omitted for brevity |
| *that* | words that are emphasised |
| [the one] | word(s) or sentence inserted for clarity |
| [laughs] | non-verbal clues |
| {…} | incomprehensible word(s) or sentence(s) |
| {another} | unclear word(s) or sentence |

## Appendix 16: Coded Transcript

**Location:** Computer lab

**Notes:** Gabriella looks fairly relaxed and happy to chat. We sit at one of the desks, the picture between us. It is very hot in the room as the air conditioning is not working and the computers add to the heat. However, the room is quiet and we chat undisturbed.

| | Coding | **Categories**<br>*Observations* |
|---|---|---|
| *GF:* number 1: who are these?<br>*Gabriella:* these are my **friends**<br>*GF:* these are your friends… why did you take a picture of your friends?<br>*Gabriella:* because if I go to Italy I will **miss** them<br>*GF:* I'm sure you will, yes. So are they very good friends?<br>*Gabriella:* yes. If you want something and if you ask them, they will give it to you. They care about you {…} if you are in the class and you are doing something or your don't understand something, if you go to them they will take the time to explain to you<br>*GF:* right, very good friends, yes. And good friends are precious. Do you think that if you did go to Italy… ah… will you be able to keep in touch with them?<br>*Gabriella:* yes<br>*GF:* how would you do that? | Friends<br>Missing | **Significant others**<br>*Would miss friends* |
| *Gabriella:* I would **call** their **telephone** number, **every day** I would call them and talk to them<br>*GF:* yes… to tell them what? What would you tell them?<br>*Gabriella:* I would tell them that I've **missed** them, and also 'hurry up and **join me'**<br>*GF:* and join you? Ah… do you think that you will go to Italy? Was it you who said that your father is coming for you?<br>*Gabriella:* yes, he said he will be coming for me<br>*GF:* and did you ever tell your friends that you may be going away<br>*Gabriella:* no<br>*GF:* no? Why not? Why do you keep it secret?<br>*Gabriella:* because… ah… it's not | Keeping in touch<br>Phone | **Significant others**<br>*Would ask friends to join her* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| everything which is, like, it's in your family that you have to say it out. Me, I believe that, if you have somewhere to go, like you have to go to **abroad or somewhere like Italy**, and you tell your **friends** sometimes they can get **jealous** of you. Maybe some of them… maybe there are some sprits standing somewhere, they can hear you. And maybe someone you don't know, if any of your friends are **witches** they can plan **bad things** {…}<br>*GF:* ah, ok. So you keep it quiet<br>*Gabriella:* yes<br>*GF:* ok. And I will not say anything, I can promise you that. Ah… this is a very nice picture, by the way, I like it. Ok. And… are these more friends? Here, number 2, number 3 and number 4, are these all your friends?<br>*Gabriella:* yes. They are all in the same dorm<br>*GF:* you are all in the same dorm? Do you have one special friend?<br>*Gabriella:* [laughs]<br>*GF:* I'm not asking you to tell me which one, but do you have one special friend that you talk more with or are they all the same?<br>*Gabriella:* they are all my friends<br>*GF:* all your friends… right, good<br>*Gabriella:* I used to have a special friend, like… we used to live at the same place and we all grew up in the same place, but she's not there now.<br>*GF:* she's not there anymore. And… where are you… are you from… around here?<br>*Gabriella:* I'm from X<br>*GF:* right, from X. Do you go home at weekends? Do you go back to X?<br>*Gabriella:* I'm home on midterms and vacations.<br>*GF:* ok. And who's in X? Is it your mum?<br>*Gabriella:* yes<br>*GF:* and… do you have brothers or sisters? I can't remember<br>*Gabriella:* yes, I have brothers and sisters<br>*GF:* and are they in this school?<br>*Gabriella:* no. I'm the only one<br>*GF:* you're the only one here<br>*Gabriella:* yes | Witchcraft<br>Friends<br>Envy<br>Danger | **Practices**<br>*Family is safe*<br>*Good friends she will miss may still be witches!*<br>*G Is from X*<br>*Goes home at mid-terms and hols*<br>*Mother in X*<br>*Older brothers and sisters* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *GF:* and are your brothers and sisters bigger… sorry, older, younger? | | *Siblings working abroad.* |
| *Gabriella*: they are older than me. I'm the last one, they are all older | | |
| *GF:* you're the baby in the family. So what do they do, your brothers and sisters? Do they all go to school, study? | | *Sister at university* |
| *Gabriella:* only one goes to school, because she has not finished, but the others they are outside the country and they are working. But A. is at university, and she will finish this year | | |
| *GF:* uh, excellent! Ok. What is she studying? Do you know? | | |
| *Gabriella:* at Y | | |
| *Gabriella:* at Y university? Ok… so she's… and what are you planning to do? Are you planning to go to university? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | **Knowledge**<br>**Skills**<br>**Language** |
| *GF:* what would you like to do with your life? | Ambitions<br>Job | |
| *Gabriella:* I would like to be an **actress** | | |
| *GF:* an actress? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* uh, that's a difficult job! So you'll have to study acting… and where would you like to be an actress? In which country? | | |
| *Gabriella:* […] | | Comparing Countries |
| *GF:* that's a difficult choice… you don't have to answer | The wider world | |
| *Gabriella:* **in the UK** | UK | *Would go to the UK* |
| *GF:* in the UK? Ok. Do you know anyone in the UK? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, my brother | | *Brother is in the UK* |
| *GF:* ah, your brother is there? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* does he work there? | | |
| *Gabriella*: yes | | |
| *GF:* yes? So he could help you? So, would you rather go to the UK? | Italy<br>UK | *Italy or the UK* |
| *Gabriella:* …I can go to **Italy** or… maybe I can go to **the UK** {…} | | |
| *GF:* ok. Both countries are fine? Right… I live in the UK as well, so I like them both… So you've got your brother there, that's handy. Ok. This is not… it doesn't look like a child to me… number 5. Who's this? | | *Aunt works in the school* |
| *Gabriella:* she's my auntie. She's the one who looks after me at the dormitory | | |
| *GF:* ok. Does she work in this school? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Gabriella:* yes | Neat | **Comparing countries** |
| *GF:* oh, I see. Ok. Is it good to have an auntie here? | Dirt<br>Ignorance | |
| *Gabriella*: yes. When we do something {…} she will **correct** you and then teach you. Like, some of those who came here, some of the children who came here… like, they **don't know** how to **wash**… some of them, they don't know how to do some things and it's {…} to teach them. And some of them are **from outside**… ah… and they will bring them to this school, and my auntie is there to teach that person what the person has to know | Cleanliness<br>Knowledge<br>Education | *Aunt teaches Cleanliness to outsiders* |
| *GF:* ah, ok. So she looks after the children here, to teach them about… about… | Cleanliness | *outsiders= dirty?* |
| *Gabriella:* keeping themselves **clean**… | | |
| *GF:* ok, ok… do you get on well with your aunt? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* so is it a good thing to have an aunt in the school, then? | | |
| *Gabriella*: yes | | |
| *GF:* because sometimes, you know, it's more difficult having someone in the school who… | | |
| *Gabriella:* …to help you | | |
| *GF:* great. And… should she see you being bit naughty, would she then tell your mum… would she do that? If you misbehave, would she tell your mother? | | *Aunt to look after her as a 'daughter'* |
| *Gabriella:* yes, she would tell my mother that's what I did and my mum would ask me did I do that and I would say yes, and my mum would tell her that next time I do that she shouldn't leave me alone, she should… take care of me as if I'm her own daughter | | *Caring= punishing?* |
| *GF:* right… | | |
| *Gabriella:* everything I do, she should **punish** me for it | Punish | |
| *GF:* ok, I see. Ok, now… this is another friend, I'm sure… number 6, 7 and 8… who are these? All friends? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes. This one is my friend L. and this one is also my friend, F | | |
| *GF:* right. And these are all people that you would miss if you went to Italy | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, but this one is me. | | |
| *GF:* ah, this is you [laughs] but you were doing a funny face! | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Gabriella:* [laughs] | | |
| *GF:* I couldn't recognise you! So which one is this… number 7! I couldn't tell it was you! You were being silly… ok… ah… if you went to Italy to… to live with your father, and maybe your mum came as well, ah… what would be the first thing that you would want to do or… to see in Italy. Anything special that you would like to do? | Museums and monuments | **Knowledge, skills, language** |
| *Gabriella:* like, he should show me to the **zoo**… | | |
| *GF:* you would like to go to the zoo | | |
| *Gabriella:* …the **museum**… **places**… | Zoo | *Importance of school. Expectations of Italian children and teachers* |
| *GF:* all these places. And… anything that you would like to do there? | | |
| *Gabriella:* I would like to go to **school** there | School | |
| *GF:* right? Do you think you would like school in Italy? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* what would you like more, you think? What do you think would be good about school there? | | **Knowledge, skills, language** |
| *Gabriella:* the… how the **teachers** would **behave to you**, how the… ah… the **children** would **behave to you** and how you… you **pay attention** in class, and how you do your **work**, how you **respect**, how you **talk** to people… | School in Italy<br>Pupils<br>Teachers<br>Learning<br>Behaviour | |
| *GF:* yes… and do you think… what about the buildings? Do you think that the school… | | *The colour?* |
| *Gabriella:* the **building**, the **food,** the **colour**, the uniform, the **colour**… | Buildings<br>Food<br>Uniform | |
| *GF:* do want me to tell you something? There's no uniform… Ah… children your age don't wear uniforms there. They wear their own clothes in school… do you think you would like that? | | |
| *Gabriella:* […] | | |
| *GF:* you can wear anything you want: you can wear jeans, you can wear… skirts… you can wear what you want in school, your own clothes that you wear when you are at home. Do you think that would be nice? | | *Confused by my intervention?* |
| *Gabriella:* […] | | |
| *GF:* different, right? It's quite different. And if you went to Italy, do you think you would go to a… a… residential school? Or a day school? | | *Going to day school = growing up?* |
| *Gabriella:* I would like to go to a **day school** | School in Italy | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *GF:* a day school, right? Ok… talking about residential, I can see lots of beds here: number 8. Is this your dorm?<br>*Gabriella:* yes, it is my dorm, she's also my friend<br>*GF:* yes?<br>*Gabriella:* I snapped her yesterday, when you said we should bring the cameras, then I snapped her<br>*GF:* right, you snapped her. You did well, you got them all there, so you can show them the pictures. And… do you think you would miss the dorm? | Day school | **Significant others** |
| *Gabriella:* yes, because if you are going to sleep, we all **talk** to each other. Like, **what we learnt** in class today, where we went to for the ah… **vacation**… ah… places that we went, **movies** that we watched… and this kind of stuff<br>*GF:* excellent, so it's quite fun… but you said that if you go to Italy you wouldn't like to be in a residential school. There are residential schools in Italy, not many, but there are. But you wouldn't like that | Friends<br>Intimacy | **Knowledge, skills, language** |
| *Gabriella:* I've been in a boarding school since my childhood, I came here when I was a small girl, I was in class two here…<br>*GF:* right<br>*Gabriella:* it's about time…<br>*GF:* now you would like to be in a day school and go back home in the evening, right? Ok… number 9 and number 10… I have a feeling this is not something you would miss… what was this? | School in Ghana | *'About time' (See above re; growing up)*<br>*Photo 9 and 10*<br>*Dirt* |
| *Gabriella:* I snapped them because… if I go to Italy I won't see this kind of things<br>*GF:* ok… this is… what is it, rubbish?<br>*Gabriella:* yes<br>*GF:* people through away rubbish… do you think this would be different in Italy? | Dirt | |
| *Gabriella:* Yes, I'm sure I **would not see** these things **in Italy**<br>*GF:* why do people do that, you think? Why do people through rubbish around?<br>*Gabriella:* this one… I and my friends **did it ourselves**. Like, when they cook it… when the auntie finished cooking, and… we ourselves did it like this **so that I would snap** the picture<br>*GF:* right you did it… | Neat<br>Italy | **Comparing countries**<br>*Staged picture?* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Gabriella:* but usually people used to do this, but it's **not good** | Bad | |
| *GF:* no… why do you think they do it? Because nobody likes… ah… rubbish… ah… | | |
| *Gabriella:* **some people**, they are **lazy**, and some they think… why should I put this ball in my house, I'll have to wait for the pers… the people who will be coming for the rubbish. I can't wait for that person, so let me go and {…} and when… when they do that, when it rains, like this May… it is rainy here… and they rubber things went in the water and… ah… the rubbers will collect the water, and then you see, ah… the spread of **malaria**, you see people getting bitten by mosquitoes and people start **dying** | Laziness<br>Malaria<br>Contamination | **Comparing countries**<br>*dirt= disease= contamination* |
| *GF:* yes, it brings… it brings… | | |
| *Gabriella:* …**malaria** | | |
| *GF:* …diseases, yes. But does everybody… do you think everybody throws their rubbish around? ALL the people in Ghana? | | |
| *Gabriella:* no | | |
| *GF:* no? Who? Who throws the rubbish around? Which people? | | |
| *Gabriella:* we ourselves | | |
| *GF:* yourselves? | | |
| *Gabriella:* we, the people ourselves… who does the… ah… we ask who makes the **environment dirty**, but the thing is that we have to keep it **clean**. The **environment**… | Environment | **Comparing countries** |
| *GF:* and do you keep it clean? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, some… we do it here. But when we go **outside** we don't do it because people are {…} at us first to **clean** the place. But the **environment** ah… It's **not neat**. Here. In **Italy people** are **neat**. People **know** that the **environment** depends on us. So we have to keep it **clean**… but **here some people don't know**… | Neat<br>Italy<br>Knowledge<br>Dirt | *Echoes of lessons on environment?*<br>*Look up curriculum* |
| *GF:* to keep it clean… you're right, it's important… ok… that's great. Number 11… 12 and 13. Who are these? | Ignorance | |
| *Gabriella:* these are my friends | | |
| *GF:* your friends. Are these from your school? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, here | | |
| *GF:* would you miss them? Would you write to them, ring them? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Gabriella:* yes… | | |
| *GF:* would you send them anything from Italy? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes. I… I'll go in December, Christmas, and I'll **send** them something like… when I'll **call** them, then I'll ask them 'what do you want? Something for Christmas' when they tell me, then I'll put it… | Friends<br>Presents | **Significant others** |
| *GF:* does your father send you stuff for Christmas? What does he normally send you? | Dresses | |
| *Gabriella:* **dresses**, **shoes** | Shoes | |
| *GF:* right… nice ones? Is he good at choosing clothes and shoes for you? | | |
| *Gabriella:* he knows… sometimes he knows the things I like | | |
| *GF:* he knows the things you like? That's good | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, and he will buy some. But sometimes, if he doesn't {…}, when he comes **he will come** and ask me, G. which shoes do you want? Or, like, your shoes size, I want to know, so I… | Parents<br>Father | *Presents= care?*<br>*(see Cati Coe material Cork Conference?)* |
| *GF:* ok, and then he sends them from Italy? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* ok, and then they'll be good, you'll like them. Ok… and so you would do the same for your friends, right? Do you think you would have more money if you were in Italy? | Keeping in touch | |
| *Gabriella:* yes because… I {…} **write** to my father the other day that I… I'm **serious** with my… my studies. As far as I know that I'm finished **university**, I'll get **work** and then I'll get **money.** If only I'm **serious** | Write<br>Ambitions<br>Studies<br>Work | **Knowledge, skills, language** |
| *GF:* of course… if you study and you go to university you are bound to get a better job… or better paid. But… you said you wanted to be an actress? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* so, is this the work… | | *doctor or actress? ('realistic' vs dreams?)* |
| *Gabriella:* I would like to be a **doctor** | Job | |
| *GF:* a doctor… ah… that's a lot of studying! But it would be a nice job… right… number 12… is this you again? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, it's me | | |
| *GF:* and these are again your friends… was she reading a letter there? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, she's reading. And **my** | | *friend took* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **friend snapped it** | | *picture* |
| *GF:* ah, you didn't take the picture? | | |
| *Gabriella:* no, because I was standing here and she was reading, so I told my other friend that... | | |
| *GF:* but she cut you out! | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* she's not a very good photographer, is she! [laughs] And number 13, the last one… This looks like more rubbish, right? | | *Photo 13*<br>*Dirt* |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* where is all that rubbish? Is it in the school? | | **Comparing countries** |
| *Gabriella:* no, **outside** the school | Dirt | |
| *GF:* outside the school? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes, I went to snap it there. It's really **bad** | Bad | *Dirt is 'outside': school as clean (safe)? moral standards?* |
| *GF:* and… you said to me that in Italy the environment wouldn't be so dirty, right? | | |
| *Gabriella:* yes | | |
| *GF:* why do you think people in Italy don't throw the rubbish around? | Neat | |
| Gabriella: because they are more… they are **educated** and… they take good care of the **environment**. They know that 'what I'm doing is not good for the environment, so I won't do it', but the **people here**, some of them, **they know**, but they **will do it**, and don't want someone to come and tell them that what they are doing is **not good**. They know that what they are doing is **not good**, but they'll do it, and they'll **want** someone to come and **clean** | Knowledge<br>Dirt<br>Laziness | *Moral judgements*<br>*'Not good'* |
| *GF:* but why do they not stop? I don't understand this, though. Why do they not stop? | | |
| *Gabriella:* I do not know | | |
| *GF:* no idea? | Laziness | **Comparing countries** |
| *Gabriella:* me I think **laziness**… yeah, I think it's **laziness**. And we even have a campaign in Ghana, {…} which goes around the country and cleans the country, but still there are **some making dirty**, which is **not good**. | Bad | *Clean Ghana campaign*<br>*Italy=clean =good* |
| *GF:* ah, ok. And if Ghana was cleaner… | | |
| *Gabriella:* it would look better. It would be **neat**, and that's **good**. But **some people** are **not careful**… | Neat<br>Good | *'Some people' don't care* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *GF:* Sure…. ok. Right. I think that's me… tell me just something… if there was anything that you… say tomorrow your father calls and says 'ok, get ready, we are going to Italy'. What would you like to take with you? If you could take ANYTHING with you, even… you know, a building… what would you take with you?<br>*Gabriella:* I would take my **mum**, my **friends**, some of my **aunties**, my… the **stuff** that you see **here**…<br>*GF:* yes? All the people and… people more than anything else, right? And… what do you think would be the most difficult thing in Italy to get used to?<br>*Gabriella:* […]<br>*GF:* do you think there's anything in Italy that you would find very difficult to get use to… or you may not like<br>*Gabriella:* I think that **nothing** will be difficult<br>*GF:* right… I'm sure you will do very well. So you would be happy to go even tomorrow?<br>*Gabriella:* yes<br>*GF:* ok. I hope everything works out fine for you. Are you going back to class now?<br>*Gabriella:* yes<br>*GF:* can you ask E. to come, when she's ready? I don't know what class she's in… do you?<br>*Gabriella:* yes, she's in XX. I will go<br>*GF:* many many thanks, Gabriella. It was a pleasure talking to you. Thank you for helping me. Ah… take these with you, will you please?<br>*Gabriella:* oh! Thanks… wh… ah… are you coming back?<br>*GF:* I don't think I'll be coming back, not soon anyway. I have to fly back to Scotland tomorrow! But… But I'd love to come back to Ghana, it's a lovely pla… ah… country… Best of luck for your future<br>Gabriella: thank you. Have a safe journey | Parents<br>Missing<br>Mum<br>Friends<br>Aunts | *(She and the school do. Moral stance?)*<br>**Significant others**<br>***No*** *concerns (trying to please me?)*<br>***Cf:***<br>XFGA<br>XFGB<br>XFGC<br>XIIC<br>XIIE<br>XIIG<br>XIIK<br>XIIM<br>YFGA<br>YIIE<br>YIIJ*<br>_*Identifiers of transcript with contrasting narratives_ |

# Appendix 17: Emerging themes

## **Emerging themes** (September 2009)

*CLB* = Children left behind
*CBG* = Children born in Ghana
*CBI* = Children born in Italy

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- **NEAT**

*CLB:*
Italy (Europe) is neat
Neat= clean, tidy, well organised (Ghana is not)
sign of modernity and social belonging
Influence of school curriculum (but also info from parents)

*CBG*
Italy is neat, but there are old and untidy parts

*CBI:*
Ambivalence
Ghana is untidy and poor (rectified by use of past) –
Ghana is rich and modern (Ghanaian films)
'Staged' photos and symbolic violence

- **LEARNING ITALIAN**

*CLB:*
Concern about future language barriers

*CBG:*
Language as one of main barriers in adapting to new fields
Perceived lack of support by Italian peers and teachers
Speak about a 'Ghanaian/African language', even though there's not such thing
Inferiority of Italian as a world language (= inferiority of Italy in the hierarchy?)

*CBI:*
Italian is a useless language
Territorialised fulfilment and hierarchy of countries

- **SCHOOL**

*CLB:*
Looking forward to going to school in Italy (knowledge and learning top priorities)

Aware that children in Italian schools are not beaten
Defence of practice of beatings in school (‘spare the rod, spoil the child’)
Not aware of possible discrimination in Italian schools

*CBG:*
Disliked attracting attention in Italian schools
Presence of other Ghanaian children helped during the initial stages
Language barriers great problem
Children get beaten in Ghana: ambivalence towards this practice
Discipline issues in Italian schools

*CBI:*
Dislike of Ghanaian practice of hair-cutting: controlling the performance of gender
Children as needing ethero-directed discipline: praise of beatings
You learn more

- **FOOD**

*CLB:*
Worried they may not like food

*CBG:*
Did not like food at beginning

*CBI:*
Ghanaian food a staple for many
Declaring not to like Ghanaian food (fainting when in Ghana on a visit): distancing device

- **MONEY AND POSSESSIONS**

*CLB:*
Get presents and money from parent(s)

*CBG:*
Aware of differences between expectations in Ghana and actual financial means
Were rich when still in Ghana
Are asked for money by family and relations back home

*CBI:*
Are asked for money (the ‘collective lie’)
Build homes in Ghana: symbolic capital

- **MOVING**

*CLB*
Would be sad to leave friends
All happy and excited to move

*CBG:*
Were happy and excited
Were disappointed

*CBG:*
None would settle in Ghana
Vast majority aspires to move to the US or the UK in the future

- **WITCHCRAFT**

*CLB:*
Not telling that they are going because someone may be jealous and do something to stop them (evil eye)

*CBG:*
Many were not told they were leaving or told to keep quiet about it: may have been to avoid jealousy and evil eye.

*CBI:*
Ambivalence towards Ghana (Ghana as a place of fond parental memories and as a place full of menaces and powerful forces.)