

Article history: Received 7 March 2015; accepted 25 November 2015

Learning by sharing and integration of second-generation: the Italian case

Roberta Ricucci♦

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to show how - apart from rhetoric about interculturalism and good integration practices - today's second generations in Italy are still facing stereotypes or outright discrimination. Comparison with historical minorities and with internal migration has left little trace in the memory of many Italians of knowledge of, and ability to manage, relations with otherness in the daily practices of many institutions (from schools to social-health services). It is a situation of “suspension of memory” delaying or negatively influencing insertion processes: in other words, the assumption that people learn from history and successfully repeat today policies which have been implemented in the past is contradicted in everyday practice. And second generations are the living proof of this lack of knowledge transfer. The academic, socialisation and identity problems facing the children of immigration today could have been reduced if teachers, educators and social workers had benefitted from experience of the past.

Keywords: migration; second generations; intercultural skills; stereotypes

Introduction

The development and intensification of immigration into Italy in recent years has placed the integration theme at the heart of debate (Zincone, 2015). Furthermore, the increase of second generations has drawn attention to the topics of identity, recognition, participation and – not least – the safeguarding of rights (Ricucci, 2014).

What seems to distinguish particularly the latest period of immigration into Italy is the change of the phenomenon itself in terms of sojourn in the arrival society with its consequent implications for matters connected with not only different immigrant needs (no longer just individual needs but, for example, family needs) and reactions of natives (for instance, calls for greater control and security) but also with the appearance of second generations (Colombo, 2012). Family reunion or formation of a new family has always given rise to the need for relations with the territory: first of all with the labour market and then with social and health services, which is to say all those – whether public offices or private organizations – who are interested in various aspects of social life. With family reunion and children's arrival, the relationship which immigrants establish with the surrounding society may become more complex (Cesareo and

♦ Dr Roberta Ricucci, Dipartimento di Culture, Politica e Società, Università di Torino, Torino, Italy. Email: Roberto.Ricucci@unito.it



Blangiardo, 2009; Colombo, 2013; (Saraceno et al., 2013). Minors, especially, impose contact with schools. At that point it becomes necessary to understand how educational services work, how the school system is organized, norms and customs of education, training and cohabitation currently practised in Italy (Santagati, 2011)¹.

Teachers, social workers and other civil servants (especially those who work in various welfare services) must also learn how to deal with linguistic and cultural diversity, trying not to make the mistake of thinking that the characteristics of the first immigrants they meet identify an entire ethnic group. In other words, they run serious risks of stereotypes and cultural reification (Cohen-Emerique, 2011)².

On the other hand, if immigrants, those who are considered society's "foreign body", are expected to learn the society's language and rules (through, for example, language and civic integration courses), then it is reasonable to ask that those who manage services should also learn. This learning curve can by no means be taken for granted, asking people as it does to update their working methodology and to rethink their concept of citizenship in a multicultural environment (Kazepov, 2009). The process directly affects all those who, in their professional activity, come into contact with end-users of foreign origin (from teachers to educators, from doctors to registry-office clerks) and therefore need operating tools for complex contexts and continuous updating on immigration-society relations. In a broader sense it also concerns all the citizenry, without forgetting that relational dynamics, in their cultural and economic aspects, are triggered not only between natives and foreigners but also among foreigners of different provenances (Gundara, 2000).

It is also useless (and in some cases even dangerous) to deny that the encounter of natives and migrants is fraught with difficulties and tensions, especially in a social and territorial environment characterized by economic problems and scant social cohesion (Pastore and Ponzio, 2012). Daily contact and competition (for jobs, public resources, services) may lead to intergenerational social fractures and dangerous phenomena of closure, mistrust and exclusion of the weakest social layers. This evolution has already been faced by other nations before Italy; and Italy itself has seen the challenge with old minorities. Now as then – albeit in different socio-economic and cultural-political contexts – the relationship with various diverse collectives can be interpreted as a relationship between the "majority" society and different communities or "minorities" distinguished by language, religious affiliation, migratory project and demographic composition.

¹ Here we may situate various efforts at citizenship education aimed at immigrant citizens and taking place in Permanent Education Centres (CTP, now CPIA – Provincial Centres for the Education of Adults) or in private social associations in collaboration with, and financed by, local bodies and/or private subjects, mainly bank foundations.

² Some polemical themes in the public-opinion debate are non-Italian citizens' access to public housing, to communal infants' schools and to social assistance.

Would it be possible to examine the experience of managing relations with old minorities with a view to policy learning?

Easy in theory, not so easy in practice, even when the scenarios seem similar and the populations of reference comparable. The definition of policies for groups considered “non-integrable”, “too different”, “a danger to the national community’s identity” touches a sore spot with citizens – or, rather – voters. Today, as in the past when other minorities were under observation, we are faced with some common challenges in handling linguistic, religious and cultural minorities – especially in the area of recognition of rights. Connected with this there is the struggle against discrimination and “ad hoc” treatment (for instance in the world of work, in access to housing), then participation, then citizenship. In addition to these challenges concerning relations between minorities and Italian society in general, there are those within different minorities, i.e. how the arrival of second generations³ modifies (strengthening or weakening, changing or cancelling) the demands for recognition forwarded by their fathers and mothers. In order to try to sketch the current scenario in which Italy fits, the paper uses some interviews with young people belonging to the new ethnic minorities⁴.

Minorities and without citizenship

What does it mean to live as ‘non-citizens’? Relations of friendship, work, closeness to the Italian community and a passport are not enough to shake off the immigrant mantle. Perception means more than reality. It is the recognition theme that the Italian community – today as yesterday – may be composed of people with different somatic traits from the usual, who wear clothes which evoke faraway places (from Indian saris to the colourful robes of African women, from the chador to the Sikh turban), people believing in a divinity which is not that of the majority of the population (who, to be truthful, believe more from culture and education than from convinced and active faith) (Martino and Ricucci, 2011). Lack of awareness of this transformation

³ If one should synthesize some characteristics of the children of immigration (i.e. 21.6% of the entire foreign population by the end of 2014) in Italy, the portrait of adolescents and young foreigners (and therefore potentially of future Italian citizens) may be drawn as a group increasing demographically, variegated as to provenance and future prospects, educational level (especially technical-occupational) on the rise, with a limited number taking a deviant path. This picture is extracted from registry-office and residence-permit statistics, school attendance and deviancy, as well as numerous qualitative studies which have in recent years studied in depth arrival and insertion paths of this segment of the foreign population. Such research – as always a useful tool for understanding and analysing reality – seems increasingly allied with the most hotly debated topics on the international scene. For further details see: Colombo 2013; Ricucci 2015.

⁴ I refer to 20 interviews I carried out in 2013 in Turin with a group of young people aged 18-24 with various migratory backgrounds, equally divided by gender. For more information on the research project, see Ricucci 2014.

conditions the daily lives of foreign families, even those who have reached the objective of becoming Italian citizens⁵.

Of course an attitude of mistrust (sometimes becoming outright hostility) has no effect on the rights which may be claimed, but may make daily life more difficult. For example, it may be more difficult to rent accommodation outside “typically immigrant” areas and neighbourhoods. It might mean not being able to find work other than that – low paid, dirty, dangerous, heavy and socially penalizing⁶ – reserved for foreigners.

It is not a simple matter to touch upon stereotypes and prejudices. The feeling that immigrants and their children are unwelcome guests is returning to the fore in these years of reduced employment opportunities and welfare benefits. Indeed, a 2014 survey carried out by Eurobarometer reported a resurgence and strengthening of dangerous stereotypes and prejudices among the Italian population: this finding confirms what another survey had already shown in 2010 (Camera dei Deputati, 2010): one-quarter (25%) of the interviewees declared that immigrants were taking work away from Italians, and almost half (no less than 48%) considered it right to give precedence to Italians when hiring⁷.

Apart from wishful thinking and claims, what is really going on?

If entry into the community of citizens is step-by-step journey from the precarious initial insertion leading to social integration, the environments in which it is possible to read the characteristics of the itinerary are those of every family’s daily life: home, school, work, free time (Zincone, 2009).

Yet it is clear that integration represents (or should represent, since it cannot be taken for granted) the other side of settlement, the decision to transform one’s migratory project from temporary to permanent. In this sense, some social-insertion environments help to make up an information mosaic, the best possible indicator to describe the lights and shadows of integration into Italian society of those who are not (yet) citizens (Zincone, 2006). As various studies have shown, an immigrant integrates into the arrival society, but the real question is into which part of the society s/he integrates and, above all, how this process varies from one generation to the next: does the passage from first to second generations follow the “downward assimilation” logic described by Portes (1996) and Gans (2009) or does it delineate ascending mobility strategies typical of an immigrant middle class (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

The challenge of identity

In 2011, the 150th anniversary of Italian unification, meetings and discussions were devoted to tomorrow’s Italy. Foreign minors are among the

⁵ Becoming Italian doesn’t mean being well-treated. Sometimes, stereotypes continue to affect neo-Italians’ daily-life (Unar 2014).

⁶ See Ambrosini 2005 for more details on the immigrant labour market insertion.

⁷ On this issue see also a survey carried out by Pew Research Center: the findings confirm this data (Pouschter, 2015).

elements that help define the future of the country. They are the reflection of the ambivalence that binds Italy to its immigrants. On the one hand there are those who see these children and adolescents as the human capital of tomorrow and it does not matter whether they are qualified or not: in any case, they are necessary for the economy of each local productive district (Fullin, 2011). On the other hand, there are those who see them as potential competitor students and college students, carriers of identities that, in comparison with their parents, will be able to move forward in Italian society in a more effective manner. In both cases, however, they are regarded as foreigners and less and less as immigrants.

Reactions towards foreigners, especially if they are immigrants looking for work rather than tourists, are generally irrational.⁸ A foreigner is always a foreigner, as one of the above interviewees pointed out.

Somatic traits, first name, surname and religious affiliation “condemn” or “acquit” young people in the eyes of Italians. This is the story of some youth with a migratory background like Mohammad and Fatima, who – as they referred during an interview carried out in 2014 - perceive themselves to be at risk. Even if they possess Italian passports, they are—in the common perception—foreigners. What’s more, since 11/9 they are foreigners and “potential terrorists”, a worrying and intimidating association (Guolo, 2010). Also Jocelyne and Isabelle, two Filipinas, are trapped within their identity. At school they are considered as “custodians of traditional values and carriers of a religiosity which are not often found among young people today”⁹. Then again, Roberto and Victor, two Peruvian boys, whose rapper clothes cause them to be stopped and checked by police. Peruvians attract attention because of rival gangs settling accounts. The next step is easy: all young Peruvians (both boys and girls, those involved in the game of the “boss’s girlfriend” and, playing this role, they become the “bone of contention”) are members of “Latino gangs”¹⁰

Is there any way out? How can one react to and “survive” daily life so conditioned by damaging stereotypes? According to one young interviewee, their patience has almost run out: “It doesn’t matter who we are, what we do. The only thing that matters is what our parents do. We will always be immigrants for you. Italy should take note of the Paris *banlieues* and the London riots. Sooner or later we young foreigners, best in the class but judged only according to our parents’ occupation, will stop being good. We will start shouting and demonstrating, making our presence felt.”¹¹

⁸ In Italy, reports carried out by UNAR (National Office against Racial Discrimination) outline this aspect.

⁹ Taken from an interview with Joyce, a 19-year-old Filipina.

¹⁰ It is a phenomenon that started in the city of Genoa and then spread to Milan and other surrounding areas in the North of Italy. It is characteristic of distinctive groups of South American adolescents. On this theme see Queirolo Palmas 2009; Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005.

¹¹ Taken from an interview with a 21-year-old Peruvian boy.

And that is indeed what's happening: young immigrants are trying to find their space, their identity, in offline associationism¹² and on the web, by involvement in intercultural activities and civic self-promotion. They do not want to be considered as "children of immigrants" or "foreigners' children of foreigners". One side of the coin is how society sees them; the other is how they define themselves.

Self-definition is never easy and can take place on different levels: linguistic or national, local or global, gender or generational. Using labels and categories is not a game, but often awareness of the weight (and consequences) of the use of words (one's own and others', spoken and written, enounced and read) is lacking. Sometimes this may help to create or widen fissures, even increasing the spectre of fear. Therefore the role played by the society where one grows and builds one's identity is crucial. Indeed, how young foreigners portray themselves and what identity they decide to adopt partly depends on how the society where they live sees them. The theme of immigrants' identity, especially second generations', is not ascribable to an "either-here-or-there" optional choice. It must be framed in a more general context involving traditionally different actors: 1) The individual (one may feel loss and homesickness or may try to forget and camouflage oneself); 2) The family (which has, in most cases, taken the decision to leave and makes choices about future plans, whether to become part of the new society or stay on the edges); 3) The welcoming society which, with its attitudes and policies may encourage, in migrants, disparagement or revaluation behaviour with regard to belonging and various cultural traditions. Further actors have recently come on the stage: 4) The society of (one's own or one's parents') origin, which continues to be present through transnational ties and local visits; and 5) Virtual space where cyber homelands are constructed, nostalgic sites for the first generation, a refuge for reunited adolescents, an exotic discovery for second generations (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2011).

What we have said hitherto brings us to the theme of identity and how the protagonists of this contribution are finding their voice, giving life to civic activism paths and combating the image that will always see them as foreigners. It is a story of involvement and identity results with roots in their family history, which for many of the young people I met has been a history of reunion. And in the crevices of this process, transversal to all origins, attitudes mature and the insertion strategies so well described by Berry (1998) are outlined.

¹² I define as "offline associationism" the traditional aggregation of immigrants, characterized by the presence of a physical place (a church, a prayer room, an apartment or a local venue), but not always with a legal form. According to the distinction of Layton-Henry which distinguishes associationism on the bases of "what it is" and "what it is for", associations considered here as "offline" are groups that gather together physically, characterized by face-to-face interactions and they "may exist for a wide variety of reasons: social, recreational, political, cultural, religious, professional, business, service, citizenship or a combination of some or all of the above" (Sardinha 2009: 76).

From the family to free-time associationism: another environment in which young people's identities are polished, sometimes being called into question. They are also the setting where - little by little - young people are beginning to express themselves, showing themselves to be autonomous subjects distinct from the immigrant stereotype of an unskilled labourer doing precarious, ill-paid, dangerous and socially penalizing jobs (Ambrosini, 2005). The web, which is what characterizes these youth, insofar as they are part of the Facebook generation or Millennials, becomes a context rich in opportunities - to show themselves, express themselves and (as happened to the children of North African emigration) to rediscover hushed up identities.¹³

Suggestions for policy makers

The multicultural environment is not a novelty in the Italian scenario (Sollors, 2005). Neither debating how to manage minorities' requests in the city nor how children of immigration challenge the society is new. Comparing how Italian society addressed these issues in the past with what is going on nowadays means bearing in mind two key turning points: 1) The 1970s when Italy shifted from being an emigration to an immigration country; and 2) The growing number of minorities (i.e. countries of origin, languages, religious affiliations, migratory projects) cohabiting in the same areas, requiring attention, demanding specific (exclusive) services and questioning local authorities. The current scenario is a new framework, which cannot be compared with that where the old minorities grew up.

In addition, intense anxiety emerges about what will happen to the foreign children when they grow to adulthood. The images of both the French *banlieues* and the London suburban districts worry Italian citizens, especially in neighbourhoods where the proportion of the foreign resident population is highest. School and the education system as a whole are under pressure because of their role of socialization and as trainers of new young generations to learn how to become active and responsible citizens. In other words, considering schools as a micro-community where students learn respect for one another, tolerance, responsibility and mutual acceptance, and experience day-by-day exposure to a multicultural environment, it is obvious that there are expectations about their role as promoters of social inclusion. The Italian case shows three crucial points which can intervene negatively on the role played by school. First, a lack of knowledge of who the students are: What are their socio-demographic characteristics? What are their educational needs? What kind of families are behind them? If children are the focus of inclusion, the lenses for looking at them have to be updated: educators/teachers have to observe, to listen, to interpret and to understand difficulties, resources and the requirements of children and families. Therefore, the necessity of reflection is the first step. If adults open their eyes, they can meet the real needs of all

¹³ On the effects of Arab Springs on Moroccan, Tunisian and Egyptian young people living in Italy see Premazzi (2014).

children and can see the competences and the agency of all actors on the educational scene. Thus projects and activities for minors can be more suitable to the true interests of children, and participation, intercultural views, citizenship activities become concrete, daily aspects in the education process.

Second, it is important to update, on the one hand, educational objectives, including relationship competences and, on the other hand, to support teachers in improving and renewing their didactic and methodological tools. In fact, if all children are totally included in the classroom and have positive relationships with others, many benefits are realized: social skills, awareness of differences between people, acceptance of and respect for others are experienced and increased.

These competences are relevant, but in this light inclusion concerns the overall well-being of all children and adults: projects exclusively dedicated to minorities (foreign students and children with disabilities), indeed, they are an incomplete curriculum of inclusion.

Furthermore, inclusion - like well-being - facilitates a positive environment where adults (and students) live more serenely. Today, in fact, teachers often burn themselves out and are subjected to great stress. Helping teachers is, at the same time, a strategy and an effect of the inclusion process.

For inclusion to be successful, a teacher's positive attitude is fundamental, but socio-psychological, anthropological and pedagogical research is an important support. In this light, it is appropriate that people with educational roles work together. This is the last point: the Italian case strongly stresses the positive role of network collaboration of all entities, both public and private, working in a specific context/district: adults (educators/teachers, administrators, researchers...) must build a network, assembling information, knowledge and suggestions.

In this perspective, they have to learn team work: so it is essential to think about the future. Today, the scenario is different: the framework of "Do it yourself" and "Do it now and don't worry about the future" is prevalent and it is a common experience in Italian schools from North to South.

Teamwork, however, should spread throughout one's school or service: a single educational service can and has to have an inclusive view and a collaborative and cooperative approach. Inclusion is a global question that concerns several socio-educational agencies. Schools, after-schools, churches, social services and institutions should cross borders and build concrete networks. National and/or local institutions, moreover, have to support inclusion projects and provide attention, means, resources and safe places for children and youngsters, but should also guarantee that people trust the educational system.

This can succeed only if administrators/teachers/educators understand how important it is to work together to reach the upper levels of preparation and significant knowledge. If institutions want to help their staff, they should organize refresher courses and supervision: improvisation limits the outcome

and places the staff in a condition of insecurity and anxiety. In fact, to help schools it can be useful to organize courses that teach teachers and management design and planning, team work, communication, intercultural attention etc. They have to understand changes and challenges in their roles and learn how to cope, but institutions should support them with sufficient funds and qualitative initiatives. Sporadic courses can have some good effects, but to transform work methods profoundly and effectively and to facilitate relationships, suitable formation, psycho-pedagogical supervision and training are of use. Some opportunities should be offered to educators because problems of daily life and group dynamics require attention and awareness: therefore offering space, time and able supervisors permits us to reflect and elaborate on personal perceptions and careful observation/consideration.

This training isn't enough: other people have to be involved too. When institutions organize cultural events and create a favourable climate of opinion, parents, educators and administrators can share targets, languages and projects. These cultural events are expensive and often involve few participants, but are indispensable for working in the cultural substratum. Therefore inclusion requires great effort, but permits us to increase social cohesion (Caponio and Ricucci, 2015).

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