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Immigrant families interactions with schools. Some evidence from an Italian research

Maria Perino and Enrico Allasino***

Abstract: The article examines the ability of immigrant families to interact with Italian schools, seeing this as a fundamental process of social class formation. The idea is that there are specificities due to being migrants, even apart from the “cultural” specificities usually assumed. The paper will draw on material from the ongoing research project *Second Generations: Migration Processes and Mechanisms of Integration among Foreigners and Italians (1950-2010)* which shows that parents and pupils have very incomplete and inadequate information of the Italian school system and of local schools. This makes information and educational advice and orientation crucial questions in the educational trajectories of children of immigrants and in the creation of class inequalities. Interviews gathered during the research also illustrate the micro mechanisms shaping school choices. We believe these micro-mechanisms influencing choices and strategies are as important as structural constraints in reproducing inequalities.

Keywords: migration processes, school selection, parent-school interaction, second generation immigrants

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The specificity of the second generation: cultural inheritance or migration effects?

In recent years the “second generation” has received much attention from scholars, but also in the public debate, adding Italian contributions to the international debate (Colombo & Santagati, 2010). The North American and European literature has often presented the integration of immigrants, and of their children in terms of populations which have their own history, language and culture, which marks them out from the “autochthonous” population. So national (or “ethnic”) differences are seen as mostly explaining the degree of success of integration in the immigration country (Wimmer, 2009).

It is usually claimed that Italy is a country new to immigration, which only really began in large numbers around the later 1980s; so it is believed that the young people of foreign origin who are growing up now are the first case of a second generation in Italy. In reality however the situation is more complex, for in the years of the economic boom of post-war decades there was massive internal migration from Southern Italy (and earlier from the North East) towards the more industrialized regions of the North-West, including Piedmont (the region surrounding Turin). In Piedmont and other areas of the North West, there are therefore substantial percentages of the population who have a background of internal migration. These people have experienced problems and difficulties very similar to those experienced by foreign migrants, both in the early years and later on: so among the second generation, there is large disadvantage in educational achievement (Ceravolo, Eve & Meraviglia 2001; Eve, 2010).

Focusing on both this past internal migration and on the more recent international migration¹ allows us to capture similarities as well as

¹The article is based on some results of the research project *Secondgen*, “Second Generations: Migration Processes and Mechanisms of Integration among Foreigners and Italians (1950-2010)”, <http://secondgen.rs.unipmn.it>. The project started in 2011 and ends in April 2014. It was directed by University of Eastern Piedmont, Department of Social Research, with University of Turin, Department of Political Studies and Department of History, FIERI, Gruppo Abele, and was funded by the Region of Piedmont (Bando scienze umane e sociali). Scientific objectives are a systematic comparison between mass internal migration of the past and foreign migration of recent decades in Piedmont, in order to shed light on the integration processes of migrant families, especially the “second generation”. The empirical material in this text draws on various parts of this research: 1) 170 in-depth interviews with children of foreign migrants aged 18-30, who had been in Italy for at least 7 years. A further criterion for inclusion was having done some of their schooling in Italy.

differences in the social processes by which immigrant families and their children have integrated into the arrival context; and this has allowed us to get away from the question of differences linked to national cultures and to focus on social mechanisms which are inherent in the migration process as such.

The results of the research support the initial hypothesis that it is *migration itself*, rather than supposed cultural difference which affects the social trajectories of the individuals and groups involved².

We believe in fact that that geographical moves have major and long-lasting sociological consequences, in terms, for example, of position in the labour market, social networks, changes in family structure associated with the separations and reunions so frequent in migration. In today's international migrations as in the internal migrations which make up part of Turin's past, in geographical moves families, in particular, inevitably have to reorganize the way they work, and the division of labour amongst family members: if grandparents are not present, for example, this may involve major reorganization of how small children are cared for. So families are forced to construct new relationships which are neither those typical of the departure context, nor of the place of immigration (Grillo, 2008). The

Most interviewees are what Rumbaut (1997) calls 1.5 and 1.75 generation, but there are also 2.0 generation and 1.25 generation. 2) participant observation with young people not in education, work or formal leisure circles, involved in "deviant" lifestyles; 3) 20 interviews with foreign parents contacted through their children or other channels. 4) 23 interviews with teachers and various experts, members of associations and voluntary groups. Interviewees were contacted directly, often after numerous attempts which may have helped to establish a relationship of trust, in schools (one part of the research concentrated on students in vocational schools for catering), in parks in different areas of Turin, in workplaces, in leisure centres, labour agencies and cafés. It was decided not to use associations of migrants or the second generation as the source of contacts, in order to avoid a sample dominated by these ambits. It was also decided not to select interviewees on the basis of nationality, as the aim was not to structure the field of analysis by the "origins" of the families. The young people interviewed thus reflect the broad spectrum of national origins present in Piedmont: the most numerous national origins in the sample as in the region are Romanian, Moroccan, Peruvian, Chinese, with smaller numbers from a variety of African and east European countries.

² As Colombo and Santagati (2010, p. 23) note: "it isn't possible to explain the differences in the paths of immigrant students exhaustively on the basis of national origin. Ethnical origin can be considered an element that allows us to describe educational experience – as connected with family migration – but which does not enable us to fully understand its specificity". Colombo and Santagati thus shift the focus of attention from ethnicity to class. In the present paper, however, we wish to stress the long term effects of the migration process itself.

immigrant family is indeed *different*. But as Elias and Scotson (1964) point out, the differences in the various social configurations to which we give the name “family” lie above all in the “wider social units of which families are part”. In our case, this means the context in which migrant families rebuild their networks.

The migration process thus has long term effects on the educational and occupational careers of children (and perhaps even grandchildren) – in other words, long term effects on the system of social stratification. Independently of where migrants come from, migration has effects on social networks, producing partial, over-general, and distorted maps of social reality, not so much because migrants are blinkered by culture or the weight of tradition, but because their networks provide them with limited information – networks established at the beginning of migration which often condition ties formed later (Eve, 2013).

Our analysis of the social trajectories of the second generation in schools and the labour market thus focuses on effects of migration in itself, rather than on issues of cultural difference and of resistance of locals to cultural difference. The consequences of geographical movement on social networks are well known (Grieco, 1987; Werbner, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). However, we believe that it is insufficiently realized how much the conditions created by migration systematically structure the lives of families, social capital, and channels of access to information which open up opportunities. In the debate over immigration policy, there is a deep-rooted tendency to see the problems at issue as essentially cultural ones. So evidence of disadvantage among the second generation, tends to be seen as a result of the closure of “community networks”, and the supposed distance between “our” and “their” culture and exclusion on the part of locals.

Researchers also often focus on what is called ethnic disadvantage - seen as disadvantage due to national origin, religion, skin colour or physical appearance - as an explanation of social trajectories empirically observed (e.g. disadvantage in education or the labour market). This runs the risk of seeing ascriptive traits (usually identified rather roughly on the basis of nationality or the predominant religion in a particular nation) as themselves explanatory, rather than going on to explore how inequalities are actually produced and maintained in the interaction between persons. We believe that children of immigrants are channelled into particular positions in the educational system and the labour market not so much because of their ascriptive traits and cultural identities but in large part

because of the specificity of their social networks formed during the migration process and associated with the position in the labour market their parents are in, the neighbourhoods they live in, the social circles they live their lives in.

So, precisely because school does not passively or mechanically reflect society (Dubet, Duru-Bellat, & Veretout, 2010, p. 9), it is not sufficient to refer to discrimination and xenophobia in the wider society to explain disadvantage of second generation students, nor to make generic assumptions about discrimination in school procedures³. We need to enter into the specific micro-sociological mechanisms whereby the unfavourable selection of children of migrants occurs in everyday interaction (Essed, 1990). Many mechanisms are similar to those at work with children of the working class (which most immigrant families form part of) but there are also more specific and complex mechanisms not immediately cultural, but which situate the undeniable cultural difference in a more complex social process. Even though it does not deal with children of migrants, we believe that Lareau's (2002, 2008, 2011) work showing how the relationship with the school is conditioned by the power differentials pertinent here.

Our interviews with Italian teachers, and with migrant parents and young people, bring out many of the mechanisms which Lareau describes in her account of American working class families' relationship with the school. Lareau interprets her evidence not in cultural or psychological terms but in terms of the power differential between lower status families and the school which makes it difficult for many parents to express their problems or negotiate leeway for their children in the way middle class parents can. The weak sense of entitlement which emerges from many of our interviews is similar. We do not, however, want to reduce the position of the migrant family either to class position or to discrimination; rather we stress the specificity and effects of migration in this power relationship, the lack of familiarity with the "rules of the game" of the educational system. Thus "more interaction between 'classical' factors and those linked to migration would be useful both for understanding the mechanisms

³ "An assumption of xenophobia among certain administrative, political, professional or intellectual élites, and of 'ideological osmosis' among them risks making xenophobia into a screen which makes it impossible to see the complex of social and political logics which combine to produce and reproduce inequalities affecting foreigners" (Déplade, 2011, p. 20).

underlying inequality in general, and the specific inequalities affecting children of migrants” (Eve, 2013, p. 53).

School for all. Children of immigrants in a time of mass schooling.

Numerous studies and databases have shown that foreign students in secondary schools in Italy are heavily over-represented in technical and vocational education, that they have worse results than Italian students as a whole (Miur & Ismu, 2011), but not worse than those of Italians in the same classes (Invalsi, 2012-2013).

In the classrooms of the upper secondary schools where children of immigrants are most concentrated, Italian students are more likely to come from working class families and to have been less successful than average in their previous school career⁴ It may be hypothesized that this concentration of foreign and of working class students in less prestigious tracks leading to less “saleable” credentials is the result of the workings of the school system. And the fact that foreign-origin pupils are more likely to be in these classes means they may “adapt” to the relatively low “local” level established in these classes, in a process of peer socialization which makes foreign newcomers more similar to their Italian classmates with relatively little cultural, social and economic capital⁵. The over-representation of foreign students in vocational schools is often interpreted as a wish to enter the labour market early due to families’ straightened

⁴ As a previous study conducted in secondary schools in the Provinces of Asti, Alessandria and Turin, shows, many of the classmates of today’s immigrants are the grandchildren of regional migrants of the past – a fact which shows how long-lasting are the effects of many migrations (Eve & Perino, 2011).

⁵ See: Dalla Zuanna, Farina, & Strozza (2009); Ballarino, Bernardi, Raquena, & Schadee, (2009); Checchi (2010). For the notion of school habitus and its performative nature, see Besozzi (2009), which describes the different habitus of different school tracks in the Italian system, which “socialize students into a particular style of study, a particular predisposition to study and to legitimate culture” (p. 139). The “culture” of particular schools is influenced by various factors: organizational features, teachers’ expectations of what level students should achieve, styles of teaching, modes of interaction in class, evaluation procedures, the “hidden curriculum” transmitted. As Kentli (2009, p. 88) argues, “socialization of schooling can be identified by the social interactions within an environment. Thus, it is in process at all times, and serves to transmit tacit messages to students about values, attitudes and principles. Hidden curriculum can reveal through an evaluation of the environment and the unexpected, unintentional interactions between teachers and students which revealed critical pedagogy”.

finances. However, our interviews do not confirm this idea: foreign families push their children to continue with their studies, as Italian families, even when their financial problems are acute, and if their children leave a course, they tend to try to convince them to continue⁶. School experience is thus central, both for those who have careers which go smoothly and for those whose careers are erratic, where the young people concerned may repeat a year, have a period doing nothing, change their course to something completely different, change to a different school.

Especially in vocational schools, these wandering, disoriented trajectories, which probably do not accumulate any kind of capital useful for a future career, are common. Hasnaa⁷ is a good example:

At the end of junior high school I made a mistake. That is, I don't know if it was my mistake, I don't know who should have told me that there were state vocational schools and regional courses. Anyway, I didn't know the difference. First I went to the * to train as a cook, but they wouldn't take me because I was too young, and then I enrolled at the * to do odontoiatrics. I spent two weeks there but I didn't like it. The students were nice but I didn't like the teachers, it was all strange there, it wasn't like other schools.... So I left: I met a friend of my mother's.

I hadn't told my mother that I was changing school, but this friend of my mother had only just arrived, she didn't know any Italian, and I told her that my mother was in Morocco, and asked her if she could sign a form for me. I took that enrolment form to * and they enrolled me. When my mother found out she didn't say anything (laughs). At that school there I did three years of "shop assistant and secretarial skills", and then a training period at *. When I had finished I was nearly 17, but I couldn't work because I wasn't 18 and well... last year I enrolled with a friend at * and I'm doing that – it's a two-year course [...] There was nothing to do, and then I met this friend and I said to her "I have to enrol somewhere, I don't want to sit around doing nothing, I could get another certificate. I tried to enrol again for that course as a cook, but this time they wouldn't take me because I was too old! But a teacher told me about this course for waiters, it's more or less the same thing I thought, so ... well in the end this friend of mine and me signed up" (Hasnaa, 18 years old, Morocco, training course).

⁶ Lagomasino & Ravecca (2012, pp.115-116) were able to find very few children of immigrants who were not enrolled in some sort of course. Even those who had left the normal school tracks tended to be enrolled in one of the vocational courses financed by the Region, perhaps at the same time as doing temporary jobs. Our interviews similarly contain few young people who have given up education definitely. Likewise, it is difficult to draw a sharp line between those in employment (which may be insecure, temporary and off the books) and students.

⁷ For data protection reasons, we have used pseudonyms for all our interviewees. Names of schools have been replaced with asterisks.

Almost all the families we interviewed, even those headed by single mothers, support long educational trajectories, and are prepared to make considerable financial sacrifices to this end, believing that expenses for school, and in some cases university, are a priority. In some cases, school is seen as an alternative to “not doing anything”. It is worth mentioning that even some of the young people we met who were living in very marginal conditions or involved in illegal activities tended to be enrolled in school. Parents see education as something which will “protect” their children, and make it possible for them to avoid “ending up in a job like mine” – i.e. in an underpaid and low-status “immigrant job”.

This emphasis on education makes today’s immigrant families sharply different from families of regional migrants in the past. Unlike the case of migration from southern Italy around the 1960s, it seems very rare nowadays for families to ask their children to cut their education short in order to contribute to the family budget. Today’s second generation describe their parents encouraging them to continue their studies, and stay on at school, even when they are struggling in their studies.

How did your parents react when you failed a year? They reacted badly. At first I studied. But from the third class onwards, I let things go.. They took it badly, especially my mum. My mum was really upset, she cried. My parents never want me to work, not even now, they’d like me to study, but I... Then [after the second failure] my parents didn’t want me to go out, I could only go out with my best girlfriends, then in the end I got through the exam, and they softened up... (Elsa, 22 years old, Albania, temporary jobs).

Families see investing in education as a possible route to social mobility and in some cases even opposed the part-time jobs young people often take to pay for things for themselves, on the grounds that this could distract them from their studies. One young woman replied in this way to a question about such part-time jobs:

my mother has never asked me to do anything. She says to me: ‘I work, earn and spend for you, you study and do your duty there... Everyone has their own role’. My mother and my father too feel that their role is to maintain us and ours is to study. So I’ve never felt I needed to do a job. And in fact if it took up too much time I’m sure they wouldn’t have allowed me to do it (Dalia, 22 years old, Egypt, undergraduate).

Some young people are however pulled two ways; on the one hand their parents support them financially to continue their studies and put moral pressure on them to do so; on the other hand, school may be a demotivating experience, giving them bad marks and failing them perhaps because their rhythms of learning are slower for language reasons or other reasons.

Mass education and the lengthening of the average number of years spent at school are one of the sharpest changes dividing the experience of children of foreign migrants today from that of children of regional migrants in the past. Whereas for the second generation of regional migrants growing up in Piedmont in the 1970s and 1980s, work was an alternative to study, for today's second generation the worth and strategic value of education does not seem to be questioned: this is a highly significant change, at least for Italy.

Something which is similar to the past, however, is the fact that migrant families seek – in the past, in a job, now, in school – protection from deviant experiences, an ambience which will socialize and control their offspring, in an immigration context which they are not familiar with and which presents risks (especially drug dependency and petty crime). At the same time, access to the higher status occupations is now only possible at later ages and with a university degree; so now it is above all the failure to do university studies which limits young people's careers.

Few of the young foreigners we interviewed who were working were doing so in a permanent job and in a predictable career structure. Nor were most of them in jobs which followed on logically from the studies they had done. This, of course, is the situation for most Italian young people as well. It is difficult to know how these young people's careers will develop in the future, and in what position they will end up in the class structure. However, it is clear from the interview material that long schooling is no guarantee of "successful integration". In some cases, young people are disoriented and may, for example, decide to go to university simply "because there are no jobs", or "just to try", without any real plans and with very little knowledge of the university and how it works. And when they start university courses, they may realize that knowledge and skills their high school gave them is not enough to cope with courses.

How do students end up in *that* class? Information and choice of school.

What are the mechanisms which explain why children of immigrants are more likely to end up in upper secondary schools where there are a disproportionate number of disadvantaged Italians with poor school careers? In the past selection took place mainly at the lower levels of school, for only a minority of students went on to high school (although there was already a clear hierarchy between different types of high school); now, however, most students continue to some sort of high school and all high school diplomas, formally speaking, give access to university. However, failure rates in end-of-year exams at high school are quite high, forcing students to repeat the year, and some students give up their courses or are channelled into low quality courses which provide few prospects for future work (Colombo & Santagati 2010, p. 20).

The lengthening of the average school career has increased the importance of having the skills to navigate in the system and make appropriate choices. This means that choice of one type of school rather than another, one particular school, one particular course within the school (*sezione*) are crucial selection processes which have major effects on subsequent careers.

So what kind of information do migrant families have, and how does the information they have influence enrolment in certain schools and orientation towards certain kinds of jobs?

What did you decide to do after junior high school? Yes, this is the big mistake I made. Having parents who hadn't studied, here in Italy, they don't know how Italian schools work. I got "very good" [the second highest mark] in my school-leaving exam at the end of junior high school. But my dad, basing himself on what he'd heard... I wanted to do a technical school for surveyors [geometri], because I liked technical drawing, or a scientific lyceum. But my dad said, No, go to a vocational school: that'll teach you a trade. And that was the biggest mistake of my life. The teachers too, they didn't help: I had a really good mark and they told me to go to a vocational school - I don't understand why. My dad pressed me to go to a vocational school where I could acquire a job and a trade, and I thought at the time that all high schools were the same, it was just the specific content which was different: I didn't manage to visualize what a liceo was as against an istituto tecnico or professionale (Ali, 24 years old, Morocco, unemployed).

Faced with a school system which he does not understand, this father suggested a school track which seemed to him to have a clear end and one which kept the university option open. His daughter did not propose any alternative because she too, notwithstanding having attended an Italian junior high school, has very little knowledge of the real differences between types of high school.

Foreign parents are less likely to know what courses are available, to have information about the various types of school track, or the reputation of particular schools, less likely to be able to tell whether the advice a school gives is directing their child “downwards”, limiting their ambitions, even if school results are good as in this case, or because the school’s advice takes little account of the fact that school results may be just a result of the pupil not having had enough time to overcome an initial language handicap, as happened to Costel and Filippa:

Costel: “My junior high school advised me to go to a vocational school, definitely not a liceo. They told me it would be too difficult for me because of the language problem. And in fact I didn’t apply to a liceo” (25 years old, Romania, undergraduate student).

*At the end of junior high school, how did you decide to go to * ?*

Filippa: At that time I didn’t know what the schools were like, what the difference was. The teachers were supposed to help us a bit and my teacher of Italian advised me saying ‘For you this would be right because your Italian isn’t good and so you can’t do a difficult school’ (21 years old, Macedonia, seasonal worker).

Our interviews make it clear how personal interactions at the micro level shape students’ choices and their school trajectories.

a) For example information transmitted by word of mouth about the reputation of a school:

That school (a vocational school for electricians) was no good... looking at the lads who came out of that school there, the examples of what it did for them, they’re still wandering around now/they still haven’t found any job [...] ok, it’s a vocational school, it teaches you a trade, but if it ruins me for three years... because of the people who are there! Obviously I try and go to a school where you don’t study much, but at least where I’m not “ruined”, let’s say ... you don’t want to go too far. If you’re in a class where nineteen of them are mucking around, you can’t just sit there and do

nothing, you just can't... (Nabil, 18 years old, Morocco, high school student).

b) In some cases, a school has a reputation of being “welcoming towards foreigners” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008):

Honestly, at the beginning I didn't know what this school was like when I came here. It was only gradually that I realized... I would definitely have chosen another school, but anyway, that's the way it is, so there's no point in worrying! I wouldn't choose it again, if I had to choose now. But there again, it's been good because of the friends I've made... If I'd gone to another school, maybe it wouldn't have been so welcoming.... This is a bit of a school for foreigners, it's mostly foreigners who come here. In a classical lyceum there aren't so many, maybe there'd be two or three foreigners, here it's half Italians and half foreigners so we got on fine (Adriana, 21 years old, Albania, undergraduate student).

c) Sometimes, students and their parents do not realize that they are being channelled towards schools or tracks “for immigrants” until later. This was the experience of Pilar's mother:

She went to the *. I remember well, because I didn't know what to do. I'm a teacher and for me school is important. When you're in a foreign country, many things you don't know. I asked around a bit, and a friend told me about this school, where her daughter went. She told me it could be useful to find a job. Now I know it's not a good school. Lots of foreigners go there. So you don't reckon it's a good school? It's well known that foreigners aren't given the best places. Neither in jobs nor in schools. I should have informed myself better. It's my fault. I was too trusting (Maria, 48 years old, Perù, saleswoman).

d) One young woman followed the advice of her teacher of Italian, who suggested she should enrol in a vocational school for social services because she would be able to use it in the “immigrant community”. The parents of this girl were totally lacking in information:

Well, you see, my parents aren't, don't have... that is, I'm saying they don't have the knowledge to be able to compare one school and another. In fact, my parents with the little knowledge they have... My father has lived in Italy for years, but he doesn't really know what services exist, he doesn't

know anything about administrative things (Ghimar, 28 years old, Morocco, office worker).

The lack of information led this family to accept the teacher's advice, to acquire skills which could be spent in an "immigrant" segment of the labour market, probably due to a certain risk aversion (Belzil & Leonardi, 2007).

e) The pamphlets given out by schools or the information on their websites may help families to make their choices in some cases, it was viewed with suspicion by some of the young people we interviewed:

It's all advertising. Anyone can write an appealing description; but they don't do what they promise they will (Dia, 21 years old, Cote d'Ivoire, office worker).

And many interviewees were aware that the material is not enough on its own, and requires interpretation: to make a sensible choice requires knowing the system *well*.

Other factors which emerge as important in the descriptions our interviewees give of how they made their choices include: chance, "what people say", misunderstanding of what a course consisted of, the school an older brother or sister had gone to, parents' lack of the tools necessary to intervene in the decision. This last factor comes out in the frequency with which parents exerted a generic pressure to continue studies, but at the same time "let them [their children] decide". Phrases like "*Choose what you want*" and "*It doesn't matter, you just have to put in an effort*" are very common in the interviews. But they seem to be evidence of parents' lack of knowledge to intervene rather than particular confidence in the decision-making capacity of their children.

The interview with a young Moroccan illustrates different difficulties, and the way they reinforce each other:

In the end I chose the mechanical course at *, a vocational school, and now I'm in the fourth year. Why did you choose mechanics? Well, I heard about this course, and it was the only one which I thought was easy enough for me to cope with. [re. school orientation procedures] They gave us an orange book with the other schools, but it was my decision. Then they talked to me, and they did the enrolment for me. From my junior high school, only one schoolmate came to the *. Others went to, say, scientific lyceums, or

technical schools. [re. absence of guidance from parents] My father... nothing... it was the only thing I could do...

I would have liked to have become a footballer, that's what I would have liked!! In Morocco I played football. I like sport, and still do sport. I didn't know there were sports schools. I only knew about this mechanics course. But actually I thought it was something different: you know, when something breaks you go the mechanic, that's what I thought it was. But it's something completely different – numerical calculation, computer aided design, that kind of thing. I didn't expect it, I expected another kind of chance. When we went down to see the machines...[Possibility to change school] No, I didn't think of changing, by then I was there. And my brothers are here: the oldest does the electrician course, in the final year, and the younger one started with the course for dental assistants, here at the *, then had some difficulties, he just couldn't manage it, so he failed a year; and so he changed to the mechanical course. So now there are three of us in the class, because my cousin is here too (Auso, 18 years old, Morocco, high school student).

Even though he has no desire at all to study, and even though he has been forced to repeat a year, this interviewee still continued on at school, even after obtaining his three-year qualification. School is an alternative to hanging around on the streets:

You could have left the school after three years. Yes, but since everyone talks about the crisis, and friends of mine who have left haven't found jobs... So it's better to continue. But I don't like studying, I don't like it at (Auso, 18 years old, Morocco, high school student).

The social mechanisms in play are many, and affect also the process whereby schools are chosen, as an arena where inequalities are created in the interaction between the family ambiance and the school.

Teachers may advise foreign students to go to vocational schools in good faith, in order to avoid discouraging defeats and failures. But the result is nonetheless that of directing second generation pupils towards schools which they themselves think of as “easy”, and thus to courses which are devalued and devaluing in their eyes. In the junior high schools attended by our interviewees, there have been for some time formalized procedures offering guidance for school choice (formalized standard tests, presentations by teachers of the various types of upper high school which pupils can choose, individual interviews), but this does not seem to have

altered the final result that foreign origin students are channelled towards vocational and technical schools more than Italians.

Some interviews show that schools' orientation is often unclear or did not have a decisive impact on the choices students made in the end.

In other cases, the families do not accept the advice given by the school. Sometimes this is because a person who is seen as authoritative provides a counter-weight - for example the employer of the father or mother. This can be an advantage in cases where the school has advised an unambitious choice and the employer in question is well-informed about the reputation of local schools in terms of middle class parameters.

The lady where my mum works advised her. She had children who went to that school, and anyway I told her what I wanted to do, and she said that a scientific lyceum would be the right thing to do (Fermia, 26 years old, Romania, office worker).

This is not the only case in which advice from a trusted employer outweighed that coming from the school.

My parents don't know really how the school system works in Italy and so when I had to choose we asked the family where my grandmother works to help us to understand. I was clear about what I wanted – I wanted to become an engineer. In our community there is an engineer, a man who worked as an engineer in the Philippines. Anyway with this lady we looked at the catalogue of high schools and we chose. What did the school advise? My teacher told my mother I should go a technical school – in that way I could choose whether to go on to university or look for a job. They suggested the *, but the lady's husband advised us to go to the *, because it was better. Now I know that the * is in the working class outskirts of the city (scuola di periferia), whereas this school is in the centre; I gather that there, there are lots of foreigners (Michael, 20 years old, Philippines, undergraduate student).

In this case, the employers applied criteria of judgment which corresponded to the ambitions of the young person and his family. The criteria they used in making the choice are clear: even though the employers did not dispute the school's advice of a technical institute, they distinguished between "schools on the outskirts" and "schools in the centre", on the implicit assumption that this is a distinction between schools which work well and schools which have more problems (which are

thought to be also those which contain more foreign pupils), and therefore to avoid.

However, for many students with mediocre school careers, the advice given seems simply to confirm the idea that they are “not suited” to a “difficult school”.

I asked... because I didn't even know what schools existed here. The level I was at in the last year of junior high school weren't really good for a lyceum. If I could choose now I would have chosen a lyceum, but given the average marks I had... anyway that's the way it went, and that's ok, no regrets. I chose the high school I did choose not so much because I had a definite preference for one rather than another, but just because it was near to home, because they told me it was easier than a lyceum.. Then at that time I had a rather low idea of myself, I thought I would be able to cope, like those witches [schoolmates] told me: 'You couldn't cope with a lyceum'. Some of them did manage to cope though, but if I compare myself with them now, I think they don't know anything because they don't study. Then the teachers said: 'Do this school [a vocational school], it's in the same building [as the junior high school], it's a nice school, and after five years if you don't go to university you'll have a trade, you can earn some money. They didn't suggest other schools (Marta, 19 years old, Albania, undergraduate student).

In our interviews we tried to understand whether particular schools or types of school were never taken into consideration simply because they were never suggested by anyone – did not even enter on the horizon of the range of choices, as it were. The information we have on this point is very incomplete because interviewees tended to give very brief and generic replies, but it seems to be possible to say that the number of alternatives seriously taken into consideration is generally very low and is often restricted to one kind of ambit. In families where parents are more educated, the various opinions are more carefully assessed, more information is acquired, there is more discussion, and it is more likely that the high school eventually chosen will not be that suggested by the junior high school. Some migrant families have been downwardly mobile occupationally but have the cultural resources to participate actively in the choice and advise their children to choose better – and “more difficult” – schools.

Parents and teachers: gathering information and negotiating.

The evidence which emerges from our interviews on interaction between parents and teachers shows that this is difficult. Not so much because of cultural differences, nor even necessarily because of long working hours of immigrant parents. Families' ability to negotiate seems slight, and this sometimes means that the young person in question is trapped by the bureaucracy of the system. As we have already described, Ali enrolled at a vocational school. But at the end of two years, he tried to change.

Already in the second year I had begun to see what kind of other schools there were – scientific lyceums, technical institutes. The trouble with my school was the students, most of them couldn't care less about school, in the whole class there must have been three of us who worked properly. So I decided to change, and go to a technical institute. I went to one and they told me to do evening courses. I said, no, I want to do the normal day school. And what reason did they give for suggesting their evening classes? They said it was more difficult to integrate into the daytime courses, there were lots of subjects, they said the evening courses weren't so difficult. But I couldn't do a night school and do nothing all day. So anyway the head of the school said he'd prepare the papers for me. I had to wait because I had to do the exams in three subjects I needed for the two year programme that I hadn't done. I went to the technical institute because I was sure I wanted to make the change. But when I went back the head had forgotten to prepare the papers for me. ... I felt a bit ... not ... respected. And so, well I just kept on at the vocational school (Ali, 24 years old, Morocco, unemployed).

The tendency for many foreign parents to delegate education to the school, and to remain rather passive and silent if they come to meetings with teachers or to school events is sometimes interpreted (by teachers and others) in terms of lack of interest in their children's education. In some cases, it may be attributed to cultural attitudes towards school and the fact that their own school experience was more authoritarian and gave little role to parents. In reality, however, other reasons may be at least as important. Many migrant parents clearly have objective problems which make participation difficult – among the most prominent, long working hours and limited mastery of the language. But even more than these, it may be crucial that it is an unrewarding experience for parents to be told by a teacher that their child is struggling at school, and to have the impression

that teachers consider them, in some way less than adequate parents (Delay, 2011).

Even when foreign parents do go to meetings with teachers, they rarely have the cultural and social resources enabling them to negotiate actively over educational practices, the evaluation has of their child, or their tendency to channel them into a low prestige track.

This is a more general problem which all parents of lower status have with schools⁸. Upper middle class parents (including migrants) are less subaltern to the symbolic and cultural power of the school and are more able to disagree with teachers and make counter-proposals. In this way they obtain more favourable conditions for their children and maintain closer contact over how their children's school progress is going (Lareau, 2011). Among our interviewees, there are cases of young people whose families ignored the school's advice and enrolled at a lyceum, and obtained positive results there.

However, it would be wrong to think that migrant parents were simply in the same position as Italians of the same social class; for a number of aspects of being a migrant have effects similar in their mechanisms to those making working class parents subordinate. So even parents in our sample who were in middle class positions in their country of origin find themselves at a disadvantage – partly because of lack of familiarity with the Italian system, and partly because in Italy they have experienced downward mobility and hence find themselves in a low status position. Lareau (2011) suggests that the institutional standards or “rules of the game”, and the compliance with them, have been generally overlooked by researchers. Yet awareness of what are the real implications of registering in one school

⁸ “The evidence shows that class position influences critical aspects of family life: time use, language use, and kin ties.[...] Differences in family dynamics and the logic of childrearing across social classes have long-term consequences. As family members moved out of the home and interacted with representatives of formal institutions, middle-class parents and children were able to negotiate more valuable outcomes than their working-class and poor counterparts. In interactions with agents of dominant institutions, working-class and poor children were learning lessons in constraint while middle-class children were developing a sense of entitlement” (Lareau, 2002, pp. 772-774). Lareau notes “Thus my data indicate that on the childrearing dynamics studied here, compared with social class, race was less important in children's daily lives” (p. 773). The results of a recent survey of middle class and working class families in Turin (Bonica & Olagnero, 2011) confirm that working class families have more difficulties at school, in choosing an upper secondary school and more difficult relationships with teachers.

rather than another, and the ability to follow one's child competently and critically (see: Lareau's "soccer moms") in the various stages of the school career, may be crucial. A family which daily transmits language competences, and forms of interaction with adults in structured situations, the ability to negotiate with institutions, a family which monitors, assists and intervenes directly, shapes its children's lives, creating a sense of entitlement vis-à-vis the school and teachers (and vis-à-vis institutions more generally). Few migrant families are in this condition or have the resources to act appropriately – not even former middle class families. The situation of formerly middle class migrant parents is well illustrated by a father who is very well-educated and has high educational ambitions for his son: "I remember going to see the head teacher, to talk to him. I didn't manage to talk to him, he was very brusque. I wanted to talk about the problems my boy was having, but I didn't manage to". The same thing happened with a teacher. "I didn't manage to talk to him. He just told me what marks my son had, that he wasn't adequately prepared". Looking back, he recognizes that his defeat was more general. The parents had chosen prestigious schools attended by the local upper middle class, but there was no real process of "integration": "We were a bit vain. We asked around, asking what the best schools were, without asking really in detail. We lived near the * school, where all the local elite go. You know we foreigners have a bit of an obsession with education.."

Another father, a teacher in his home country, decided to adapt this new situation and present himself as "humble and unassuming" in his relationships with teachers (who no doubt expect either passivity or frontal opposition from immigrant parents).

Have you ever felt ill at ease in the relationships with your child's teachers in Italy? No I've never felt ill at ease. Since I used to be a teacher myself I could communicate, also because I like to be a humble, unassuming person, I don't like to boast of my education, it's how you behave which counts (John, 50 years old, Romania, remover).

It is clear enough that this father cannot construct a genuinely equal relationship with teachers, because he is no longer a member of the same profession⁹.

⁹ Lareau makes a distinction between a disposition to ask questions, systematically gather information and negotiate with teachers, and the skills necessary to put all this effectively into practice (thus exploiting it as a form of cultural capital): "Such disposition and sets of

Parents' own experience of school in another educational system many years previously makes their knowledge obsolete or irrelevant. If their social networks are small, and parents have lives rather restricted to the home, and to a very small number of other immigrants, a handful of workmates and neighbours, they have little opportunity to explore the local society. And if the young people themselves have a social network made up of other young people in a similar situation, their knowledge too of the opportunities available is likely to be very limited.

The overall effect of the limitation of parents' networks and those of young people themselves is that families tend to have a very limited idea of what is available in either the labour market or in the educational system. Since parents have relationships with few Italians, probably working class, and their kin and acquaintances from the home country are likely to be employed in a small number of occupational niches, they are unable to provide their children with contacts with other ambiances. Even though the young people are unlikely to imagine themselves doing the kind of "immigrant's job" their parents probably do, they often remain in the same kind of area. In this sense it is interesting that work in the catering trade, in health care and in industry are so prominent among our interviewees. In this sense, it seems that although they aspire to more security less marginal status than their parents, when it comes to concrete decisions they often go for jobs which are not totally different. Certainly, a mother who works as a carer may know nurses and may be able to suggest this as a possible career. But they are less likely to know, say, biologists or other kinds of health specialists.

Conclusion: structure and micro interactions

Above and beyond specific policies "for the integration of foreigners" what seems even more important for the future of the second generation is the direction Italian schools will take in general. For example, it will be crucial whether inequalities grow or diminish between schools in their

skills usually go together. It is theoretically possible for a middle-class person to have the disposition to assertively control the process at every step of the way but lack the skills to be effectual. Likewise, it is possible for someone to have the skills and not the disposition" (Lareau, 2011, p. 410) Lareau thinks that this disjuncture between disposition and skills is empirically rare. However, we believe that it is common among families of labour migrants who have middle class origins.

ability to transmit skills (and work opportunities) to students. Or the devaluing of particular school tracks. The differences between different types of school – vocational courses financed by the regions; vocational schools; technical schools; lyceums (*centri di formazione professionale; istituti professionali; istituti tecnici; licei*) – are clear today. In which direction these inequalities go will be crucial for integration in the future. So measures are necessary not only aimed specifically at ethnic inequalities but also measures to contain inequalities between schools more in general. What may be damaging for the child of an immigrant is not just not being able to make friends with the child of a native but also (perhaps even more so) the fact of going to a poorly-functioning school, where little is learnt. Schools produce and reproduce difference. So they are not (only) a major tool for young people, including children of immigrants, on universalistic criteria and on the basis of equal opportunities; they (also) discriminate and reproduce the system of social stratification. The fact that children of immigrants and of working class families are disadvantaged is predictable and part of the nature of the system in its current form. The numerous thorough studies of factors influencing school achievement end up showing in one way or another that pupils who have the characteristics and behaviour of the ideal type of the upper middle class have better chances of entering in the tracks which lead to upper middle class occupational positions. In this way, the school continues to reproduce and conserve the social hierarchy instead of actively encouraging the recognition and development of individual gifts, cultural diversity and innovativeness.

Italian schools, based as they are mainly on state schools, are more universalist and of better average quality than those of many other developed countries, and primary schools are now well equipped for the reception of foreign pupils. But in secondary education the situation is more problematic. The problems do not depend on the presence of foreign students, and cannot be solved by policies aimed solely at the latter. For example, the challenges which vocational education is currently facing (Santagati, 2011) do not depend on difficulties foreign students may have in adjusting to a new educational system nor on difficulties of foreign and Italian students in getting on together. They are the result of structural stress due to factors like change in industry and the effects of this on careers in manual work – for example, the lessened possibility to set up a small business in a craft sector – changes which have major effects on motivating students. It is worth noting here that research on the school and occupational careers of the second generation in other countries have

shown that the institutional organization of school systems, apprenticeships, etc., can have very major effects: for example, the age at which school starts, the number of contact hours per week children have in class, selection mechanisms, etc. (Crul & Holdaway 2009; Crul & Schneider 2010; Crul & Vermeulen, 2003). These institutional arrangements obviously were not invented for (or against) the second generation, but they have major effects on them.

Currently, policies for immigrants tend to be thought of as a specific field, centred on “ethnic-cultural issues”. However, if we recognize that migration is a process which shapes the system of social stratification, it is clear that a more general, “integrated” approach is needed which does not focus *primarily* on discrimination or cultural misunderstandings, but rather on changes in the labour market, school systems, urban areas, etc. If we reason not in terms of “peoples” which need to be integrated, but in terms of specific positions in the local class structure, the policy implications are significant.

As an example, we might mention policies which take account of the specific time rhythms of the immigrant family and how these clash or fit in with the rhythms of the school. Research which has compared school achievement of children of immigrants in different countries (see the references above to work of Crul and his colleagues) show that results are better where students choose secondary school track relatively late, where it is easy to change type of school once chosen, where the number of contacts hours pupils spend in class is high, so that (especially in earlier years) results do not depend too much on study done at home (where immigrant parents may not be able to help much). In this kind of approach, it is essential for the future of the second generation *general changes* in the labour market and the educational system which penalize children of immigrants disproportionately by, for example, channelling them into the least prestigious and least functional tracks of the school system and the least rewarded sectors of the labour market.

What is crucial in this perspective is not so much “dialogue between cultures” and national origins, but rather the social effects of migration. Hence we do not see achieving “integration” as depending so much on “policies for immigrants”, but more widely on measures to limit social inequality. Precisely the fact of recognizing that immigrant families and their children are a constituent part of Italian society (even in times of economic crisis) should lead us to shift the emphasis to an approach which includes immigrants and their children in a wider framework.

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