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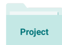

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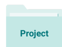

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Chapter 9

A Multicultural Italy?

Riccardo Armillei[1]

Abstract This chapter discusses the approach the Italian Government is taking to cope with an increasingly diverse population. It focuses particularly on the circumstances of the Romani communities in the sphere of education and social justice, but also deals with marginalised migrant communities. Based on fieldwork conducted in Rome between 2011 and 2012, and an analysis of relevant secondary sources, this chapter draws attention to the educational system and its capacity to deal with ethnic and cultural diversity. Analysis of the *via Italiana* (the "Italian way") of promoting intercultural education enables an appraisal of current ethnocentric and assimilative policies, together with related social inclusion strategies. The position of the Romani peoples, in particular, functions as a magnifying glass with which it is possible to analyse Italy's overall approach towards cultural diversity. The discourse on 'interculture' in Italy is also placed in the broader context of the ongoing international debate about the "multiculturalism" versus "interculturalism" paradigm.

(**Keywords** multiculturalism, migration, institutional racism, interculturalism, intercultural education, Italy, Romani peoples)

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9.1 The Italian Context: Between Interculturalism and Monoculturalism

For many years Italy was as a country of emigration; only in the last few decades did we see an inversion of this trend. Since the 1970s Italy has moved from being a net exporter of migrants to a net importer (Bonifazi et al. 2009). As Britain, West Germany and France closed their frontiers to immigration in the 1980s, Italy became a transit country (Myors et al. 2008). Each year Italy continued to grow as a global destination for migrants and today it counts among the European countries with the highest volume of immigrants on its territory. In January 2011, there were around five million immigrants in Italy, amounting to 7.5 per cent of the national population (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica [ISTAT] 2011). At the same time an influx of illegal immigration has also developed (Rocchia and Scassiano 2008). Despite this situation "Italian law and policy in the area of immigration are still struggling to catch up with this phenomenon" (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions [COHRE] et al. 2008: 11).

The multicultural paradigm that developed in many parts of Europe in the 1970s has never taken root in Italy. At the beginning of the 1990s, instead, a lively debate on intercultural issues started to emerge. The growing presence of foreign students had prompted the Government to introduce a new paradigm, particularly within the Italian educational system. In 1995 the *Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Universita' e della Ricerca* (Ministry of Education, Universities and Research [MIUR] 1995: 109) issued a document, the *Circolare Ministeriale* (Ministerial Memo No. 205/90), which for the first time introduced the concept of "intercultural education" (see Chap. 7 on conceptions of "multicultural education"), with the following definition:

> The primary goal of intercultural education is the promotion of a *constructive coexistence* within a composite cultural and social framework. Not only does it entail acceptance and respect of the other, it also promotes the recognition of cultural diversity while encouraging dialogue, mutual understanding and mutual transformation.

In 2007, Italy even claimed its own model of cultural diversity: *La Via Italiana per la Scuola Interculturale e l'Integrazione degli Alunni Stranieri* ("The Italian way to intercultural schooling and the integration of foreign students").

According to this document issued by the MIUR (2007: 8–9), the Italian school system is guided by four main principles: (1) Universalism: in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by the Government in 1991, education is promoted as the fundamental right of every child; (2) Communal schooling: all students are enrolled in "normal classes", thus avoiding the creation of "special or separate classes" for foreigners; (3) Centrality of the individual in relation to the "other": the educational project places particular attention on the uniqueness of each student; (4) Interculturalism: in adopting an intercultural perspective, diversity *in all its forms* is considered a paradigm of school identity. The Italian intercultural model is based on a "dynamic conception of culture" which acknowledges 'cultural relativism' while promoting social cohesion and the building of common values.

Yet, despite the theoretical push, "both the media and policy reports suggest, if not affirm, that Italy is struggling with the overall social inclusion project" (McSweeney 2011: 4). On top of that, "interculturalism" has gradually become a vague general term, used to define a vast range of initiatives, all differing in their motivations, intentions and results. There is now an established intercultural rhetoric, which is used in many projects that define themselves as "intercultural" but too often employ the terminology uncritically (Interculture Map 2006, para. 3). In particular, the situation of the Romani peoples in Italy provides a clear example of the failure of this approach. The fact that these communities have not yet been recognised as a *minoranza storico-linguistica* ("historico-linguistic minority")—like numerous other well-established ethnic groups—a status that would have enhanced and protected their language and

culture, represents one of the main contradictions in the implementation of genuine intercultural practice.

In addition, public institutions still tend to categorise the Romani peoples as "nomads" or unsettled immigrants, although most are Italian citizens. The research conducted with Romani communities in Italy reveals the limits of interculturalism (in theoretical detail and practical application alike) and the associated underlying schemes aimed at their assimilation. The Government's avowed commitment to guaranteeing all ethnic groups equal treatment failed to champion the presence of this vulnerable minority and its unique culture. Besides that, immigration is still treated by the Government as a socioeconomic "emergency" rather than a structural phenomenon with potential cultural and economic advantages (Intercultural Dialogue 2007). Romani peoples, and immigrants more generally, have effectively been expected to assimilate and conform to the dominant culture.

Intercultural discourse in Italy, therefore, is founded on very shaky grounds. Despite evidence of increasing cultural and religious diversity, Italy can hardly be defined as a multicultural society; particularly since multiculturalism is a concept that has always been absent from Italian public policy and discourse. In fact, as argued by Allievi (2010: 85), Italy should be rather considered "a monocultural and monoreligious (Roman Catholic) country". Interculturalism is still predominantly theoretical in character and not supported officially, in the sense of being incorporated into the nation's history. Furthermore, a major issue in Italy has been the absence of a coherent social inclusion policy across the board. The prevailing trend is merely to devise policies that promote a balance between the preservation of national identity and a vague idea of social integration.

9.2 The Emergence of the Intercultural Paradigm in Europe

Particularly after the economic "miracle" of the 1950s in Europe, a lively discussion on topics related to linguistic problems in schools started to emerge. This was certainly more prominent in countries where the immigration flows had been higher, such as France, Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands. Later, starting from the 1970s, the first experiments of a so called "pedagogy for foreigners" were introduced. This represented a new subject which over time became target of strong criticism mainly because of its "assimilatory/compensatory" approach. Only in the 1980s, though, the "theoretical considerations and practical intervention strategies with respect to intercultural pedagogy slowly began to form" (Portera 2008: 483). Europe was becoming increasingly diverse.

The internal building of the European Union, as an economic and political alliance, had initially favoured a gradual process of liberalization of goods, capital and services. But gradually and over time it had also enhanced the free movement of people from different member states, and consequently engendered more intercultural contact as well. These intercultural encounters—sometimes collisions, as described by Huntington in his controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996) (see also Chap. 2 in this volume)—have then turned into every day and tangible socio-cultural phenomena. For instance, according to a recent survey conducted in 2007 by The Gallup Organization, commissioned by the European Commission DG Education and Culture, "two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondents in the 27 EU Member States were able to recall some interactions with at least one person either of a different religion, ethnic background or nationality (either EU or non-EU) than their own" (The Gallup Organization 2007: 4).

Such increased intercultural contacts prompted the EU member states to start investing in some cross-cultural paradigms, many of which have recently been declared a failure (Emmett Tyrrell 2011). Moving away from these unsuccessful 'cross-cultural' approaches, EU

member states began to pursue and implement the concept of interculturalism, which emphasises "the idea of a fruitful exchange between different cultural groups that will enrich the whole society" (European Commission 2009: 3). Taking account of European cultural diversity became particularly important after the 9/11 terrorist attack. In fact, during the following three years (2002–04) the Secretary General of the Council launched an integrated project, titled *Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society*, which aims "to help decision makers and others to implement consistent policies of awareness-raising, prevention and law enforcement to combat violence in everyday life" (Bourquin 2003: 3). In this context, *Violence, Conflict and Intercultural Dialogue* was "the fifth in a series of publications designed to acquaint the reader with recommendations or instruments used to launch Council of Europe (COE) activities and projects on violence prevention".

The intercultural approach not only aimed to support a strategy of recognition and respect for human diversity, as implied by multicultural theory, but it also presented "an interpretation of cohabitation that valorises positive dynamics of exchange and redefines the notion of identity" (Pompeo 2002: 134). This new strategy was also committed to the creation of the best conditions for the "other" to fully develop its own subjectivity. Furthermore, it did not focus only on the foreigners but also on the locals, thus leading to a *logica dei rapporti* ("logic of relations") which, even if it did not eliminate social conflict, it enhanced cultural exchanges and borrowings (Susi 1995: 31).

According to a recent document issued by the COE (2011, para. 1),

> rather than ignoring diversity (as with guest-worker approaches), denying diversity (as with assimilationist approaches) or overemphasising diversity and thereby reinforcing walls between culturally distinct groups (as with multiculturalism), interculturalism is about explicitly recognising the value of diversity while doing everything possible to increase interaction, mixing and hybridisation between cultural communities.

The challenge proposed by the intercultural approach marked an epochal shift. Multiculturalism simply promoted the pure coexistence of multiple cultures (Pompeo 2002), whereby people were basically allowed to keep their own values but risked marginalisation and ghettoisation as a result of the "ethnic mosaic" dynamic embedded in multicultural theories (Bissoondath 2002). Interculturalism, instead, endorsed a perspective aimed at facilitating genuine cross-cultural communication, developing the ability to interact with others in dialogue and conflict resolution, in the reciprocal, positive and constructive management of diversity.

This new approach is now playing an important role in fostering a new European identity and citizenship (Vidmar-Horvat 2012). The year 2008 was even proclaimed *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* by the European Parliament and the member States of the European Union (EU), with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices and of increasing socio-political participation and equality. During the same year the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* was launched by the Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, arguing that interculturalism should be the preferred model for managing cultural diversity in Europe. Multiculturalism, a policy that was now defined as "inadequate" was thus replaced by this "work in progress and work of many hands" approach (COE 2008). As Kymlicka (2012) noticed, the new intercultural trend was also welcomed by the UNESCO in its 2008 "World Report on Cultural Diversity", which somehow signed the beginning of a more global consensus.

9.3 "Multiculturalism" Versus "Interculturalism"

In recent years a heated debate has developed around the concepts of "multiculturalism" and "interculturalism". Particularly, scholars from émigré societies such as Canada and the UK

(e.g. Kymlicka 2012; Meer and Modood 2012; Taylor 2013), are now trying to analyse and compare the two approaches at times implying a distinction between a "bad multiculturalism" and a "good interculturalism" (Kymlicka 2012: 211). Drawing on the analysis of Meer and Modood's (2012) work, which at the present recognizes multiculturalism as a better political orientation to cultural diversity, Kymlicka (2012) explains that there is "very little intellectual substance" underlying the trend to approach interculturalism, as a new, innovative, realistic approach, compared to a supposedly tired, discredited, naive "multiculturalism".

Contrasting the claims in the 2008 EU "White Paper" regarding post-war Western Europe embracing relativist and segregationist multiculturalism, Kymlicka suggests that "interculturalism" was basically introduced "as a remedy for failed multiculturalism" (2012: 213). While multiculturalism is now "offered up as a sacrificial lamb, a handy scapegoat for popular discontent" (2012: 214), he argues, interculturalism could be better described as a form of "political rhetoric/theatre". The main purpose of this shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism was just a way to create and establish a new narrative/myth. Another Canadian scholar, Charles Taylor (2013: 2), seems to reinforce perfectly Kymlicka's viewpoints. As Taylor puts it, in fact,

> […] the European attack on "multiculturalism" often seems to us a classic case of false consciousness, blaming certain phenomena of ghettoization and alienation of immigrants on a foreign ideology, instead of recognizing the home-grown failures to promote integration and combat discrimination. (2013: 2)

According to Taylor, the current anti-multicultural rhetoric in Europe would reflect "a profound misunderstanding of the dynamics of immigration into the rich, liberal democracies of the West" (2013: 2). Taylor explains that although initially immigrants tend to create networks with people of similar origins and background in order to adapt to the new environment, their major motivation is to find new opportunities. It is only when their hopes for integration are frustrated that a sense of alienation and hostility to the receiving society can

grow. It is thus a failure of the host society to implement multicultural policies which would radicalise certain segments of immigrant communities. As a matter of fact, Kymlicka (2012: 214) argues,

> […] the evidence suggests that popular discontent with immigrants is in fact higher in countries that didn't embrace multiculturalism, and there's no evidence that adopting multiculturalism policies causes or exacerbates anti-immigrant or anti-minority attitudes.

What seems to emerge from the analysis of the work of these scholars has a two-fold implication. On the one hand, claims regarding the superiority of interculturalism over multiculturalism cannot be proven theoretically or empirically. On the other, interculturalism does not yet offer a "distinct perspective". As a consequence, "at present, interculturalism cannot, intellectually at least, eclipse multiculturalism, and so should be considered as complementary to multiculturalism" (Meer and Modood 2012: 175).

Although the standpoints expressed by the supporters of multiculturalism can be quite understandable,—especially in the light of the Western European failure in implementing "real" multiculturalism—the discourse made by Kymlicka, Meer, Madood and Taylor refers to a very specific context which at the moment seems to be extremely sensitive to the topic. There is, in fact, an ongoing ideological battle between "multicultural (Anglophone) Canada", which represents the majority of the population, and prevalent "intercultural (Francophone) Québec" (see also Chap. 4). This open confrontation has a long history of separatist movements behind it. The largely French-speaking province of Québec has been openly aspiring to independence for decades. The sovereignty question promoted by Quebeckers can thus account for why interculturalism has been chosen over multiculturalism. Taylor (2013: 5) suggests, "multiculturalism could never take in Quebec" and finds highly understandable a call for interculturalism instead. At the same time, though, he also stresses the fact that there are no real differences between the intercultural and multicultural approaches.

Despite the fact multiculturalism seems to be described here as the right approach to follow, the Canadian case is not free from internal criticism. For instance, Muslim Canadian Congress founder, Tarek Fatah (in Davidson 2011: para. 3), on the subject of the 2006 Toronto 18 terrorist plot, argues that “Canada has been too tolerant in allowing Muslim immigrants to settle into closed communities, some of which preach Islamic values and a hatred toward the West”. Wong (2010) refers to the non-acceptance of multiculturalism by a consistent part of mainstream Canadian society. Other problems, often associated with multiculturalism, such as the development of ethnic enclaves, and the correlated risk of creating a mere mosaic of cultures rather than practical were also reported in a number of studies (e.g. Kunz and Sykes 2007; Qadeer 2003; Preston and Lo 2009). In 2003 Fawcett (ii) even claimed that instead of working towards equality for all individuals, multiculturalism in Canada was devoting itself to “a subtle form of cultural gerrymandering”.

But the Canadian model is not the only “successful” multicultural paradigm to face criticism today. Australia, also considered one of the forefathers of multicultural policies in the 1970s, has been experiencing a series of ups and downs over the years. Particularly it faced its darkest time during the “Howard era” (see Chap. 10 on this period in Australian multicultural politics). For more than a decade, during the conservative Howard government (1996–2007) era, “the idea that Australia is a multicultural society has disappeared completely, leaving a bare recognition of cultural diversity as a demographic fact, rather than any sense of a multicultural policy framework” (Jakubowicz 2009: 9). Hage (2000: 18) arguing that Australian multiculturalism has a “white-centric” past and an assimilationist present, coined the definition of “White Multiculturalism”, where the dominant culture plays a central role in mixing the migrant cultures, which are depicted as mere voiceless ingredients. In other words, just like the previous “white Australia”, “multicultural Australia” has also been the result of a top-down political action, driven by the desire to assimilate European immigrants within the

dominant culture (Tilbury 2007) (see also Chap. 8 on the historical contingencies of multiculturalism in Australia).

9.4 The Negative Representation of Migrants in Italy

Concern at the media's role in disseminating "ideas of racial superiority or incitement to racial hatred" (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2012: 5) was particularly high after the national elections of 2008 when a right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi capitalised on fears about immigrants and public safety concerns to win elections (Sciortino 2010). Since then, despite its obligations under international human rights law, the Italian government kept reinforcing discriminatory measures against immigrants, which became a security issue for the nation (Chiarini 2011). A moral panic-oriented approach was particularly visible with regards to the arrival of "boat people" from North Africa which stimulated alarmism among Italians with fears of an immigrant invasion. The migration cooperation announced with Libya in May 2009 is a clear example of the government's willingness to set aside human rights to advance populist anti-migrant policies. The introduction of a "pushback" policy brought to a rapid decrease of asylum applicants, as stated in a recent report by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011: 9). Identification and expulsion procedures were also intensified.

In 2008 the Italian Government had also launched an extraordinary initiative, the so-called *Emergenza Nomadi* ("Nomad Emergency"), to tackle a number of threatening situations that had emerged among the Romani communities living in "nomad camps". As Amnesty International (2012: 6) noted, "high-profile crimes allegedly committed by people of Roma ethnicity from Romania [were] extensively reported in the news, instigating aggressive anti-

Roma rhetoric by local and national politicians". The Romani peoples' presence came to be associated with crime and treated simply as a security issue (on the racialization and criminalisation of minorities see also Chap. 5). The 2007 EU enlargement had contributed to raise public fears of an influx of immigrants from the new member States of Romania and Bulgaria (Sigona 2010). According to the European Network against Racism (2010), the ensuing years saw a dramatic increase in the vulnerability of migrants to racism and discrimination, a trend affecting all nationalities and ethnic groups.

As remarked by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR] 2007: 23), "when crimes are committed by persons of foreign origin or belonging to the Roma or Sinti communities, their nationality or ethnicity is particularly emphasised". The negative exposure of vulnerable minorities in the Italian media is reinforced by the general tendency of journalists not to cover instances where they are victims. This emerges from a 2008 survey by Sapienza University of Rome: "Only 26 out of 5684 television news stories about immigrants did not relate to crime or security issues […] The media present a virtually one-dimensional image of immigrants in Italy" (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2011: 11).

Recognizing the strategic role played by the media in shaping the way public opinion perceive immigrants, and cultural diversity more in general, in 2007 the *Ordine Nazionale dei Giornalisti* ([ODG] National Order of Journalists) and the Italian Press Federation adopted a code of ethics, the *Carta di Roma* ("Charter of Rome"), in order to improve the handling of issues relating to asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of people trafficking and migrants (ODG 2007). European Commission against Racism and Intolerance ([ECRI] 2012: 23) welcomed this initiative, noting that the *Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali* ([UNAR] National Office on Anti-Racial Discriminations) had also set up a centre for monitoring the use of discriminatory language in public discourse. But the media were not the only actors responsible for inciting hostility against minorities. Concerns were also expressed over an

increase in racist and xenophobic rhetoric by certain politicians. Instead of taking a clear stand against racial discrimination, they contributed decisively to stigmatising immigrants. In 2009 another body, the Observatory on Xenophobia and Racism, was set up by the Italian Parliament with the aim of combating racism and intolerance.

Despite such actions taken by Italian officialdom to tackle outbursts of racist intolerance in public discourse, no penalties were introduced for these offences. Besides the *Carta di Roma*, which only recently identified the Romani peoples as "particularly vulnerable groups", another code of conduct for journalists has existed since 1993. Nevertheless, as argued by ECRI (2012), not only have these codes never been systematically enforced, but journalists who breached them rarely incurred penalties. There is little public awareness of the Observatory on Xenophobia and Racism or its role. So far, few politicians have faced criminal prosecution for xenophobic statements. As for UNAR itself, this body doesn't observe the principles of independence and impartiality, either *de jure* or *de facto*. It is still not adequately resourced or financially autonomous, and it is dependent on the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (ECRI 2012).

9.5 Interculturalism in the Italian Educational System

Education is a fundamental right as specified in the Italian Constitution. According to Article 34 it should be available to all, compulsory and free for at least eight years. Schools should play a key role in creating thoughtful, caring and productive citizens. The Professor of Social and Intercultural Pedagogy at Roma Tre University, Massimiliano Fiorucci, argues that despite its limits the

> Italian school system has been one of the main bastions of democracy, interculturalism and citizenship in the past few years. School represented the only place everyone always had access to. Too often, though, schools were asked to respond to situations that did not fall directly under their mandate. Consequently, they could not always provide the most appropriate solutions. (Personal communication, 20 December 2011)

According to Naletto (2009: 249), the education system "plays a very strategic role in the development of intercultural dynamics: it can help foster the elimination of stereotypes, prejudices and racist behaviour".

In the past two decades in particular, the MIUR started to pay specific attention to the growing presence of foreign students within Italy's educational system. The first important measure fostering the inclusion of foreign pupils in the system was Circolare No.301 of 1989. This memorandum, entitled "Inclusion of Foreign Students in Compulsory Education: Promotion and Coordination of Initiatives in Support of the Right to Education", was aimed at improving Italian-language knowledge and valorising the student's native culture (Fiorucci 2011). A year later, another significant document was issued—Circolare No.205, *Compulsory School and Foreign Students: The Intercultural Education*—which contained additions to Circolare No.301/89 (Rossi and De Angelis 2012). For the first time, intercultural education was presented as a new methodology and a model for synthesising school activities. Several other memoranda were later issued with the twofold aim of monitoring foreign students' presence in the education system and bolstering the prevention of racism in all its guises.

Circolare No.73/1994, entitled *Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence: The Planning Commitment of the Schools*, represented the first systematic effort to shape what would later become "The Italian way to Interculture" (Rossi and De Angelis 2012: 9). This new approach was mainly the result of work undertaken by the National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Students and Intercultural Education, which the MIUR set up in December 2006. In 2007 the Observatory compiled a document which to this day constitutes

the key work of reference on the detail of school integration policy. *The Italian Way to Intercultural School and the Integration of Foreign Students* was a very progressive publication. By stressing a positive response to cultural diversity, this report highlighted a deliberate commitment to incorporate non-Italian pupils in ordinary schools, thus avoiding the establishment of separate places of learning (UNAR 2012). Unfortunately, as Fiorucci (2011: 193) argues, “a great part of this document is yet to be implemented”.

With specific regard to the schooling of Romani children, inclusive approaches had been in place since the 1950s. At that time, schoolteachers, acting mainly on a voluntary basis, initiated the first experiments in inclusivity within the system of compulsory education (Rossi and De Angelis 2012). The first really systematic schooling of Romanies began in 1965 with the creation of *Lacio Drom* (Good Trip) courses. But, as Fiorucci (2011: 187) argues, these “special classes” ended up with Romani children categorised as “special” and “different” (see Chap. 8 on ethicised segregated school spaces). Only in 1982 were these classes abolished. In 1986 the MIUR issued Circolare 207, officially extending compulsory schooling to all Romani children (Rossi and De Angelis 2012). During the 1990s, in line with the advent of intercultural education in the school system, legislative acts confirming the right to an education started to favour the generic category “foreign students”, which embraced the non-Italian Romanies. The intercultural paradigm became increasingly important over the years and was a key element in several significant initiatives at the European level (UNAR 2012). Despite this, Romanies continue to be treated differently from other foreigners.

9.6 The Limits of “The Italian Way” to Intercultural Education

In recent years a number of intercultural initiatives and projects have been launched with the aim of entrenching educational inclusivity. Still, implementation of the intercultural approach in the State's education system has lacked institutional impetus. A recent study of social inclusion practices within the Italian education system noted that 90 per cent of initiatives were engineered by Third Sector associations (or "not-for-profit" sector) in partnership with local authorities and schools (Gobbo, Ricucci and Galloni 2009). One result of this *modus operandi* was an intrinsic fragility. These actions were generally "carried out on the basis of annual funding, without any continuity or final evaluation of their efficacy" (Gobbo, Ricucci and Galloni 2009: 6). Only recently did local authorities request final reports on the associations' activities.

In the past two decades a number of legislative steps have been taken to guarantee increasing autonomy for educational bodies. Probably the most important of these are Law No.59 of 15 March 1997 apropos teaching and cultural pluralism, and Presidential Decree No.275 of 8 March 1999 governing educational methods, organisation, research and development (Gobbo, Ricucci and Galloni 2009). But the gap between "declared principles and the actual availability of resources and teaching training activities" (Caneva 2012: 36) undermined the prospects for managing change. The freedom granted to schools implied that they had to finance their own projects and their new educational functions. Unfortunately, though, "principals and teachers have not always succeeded in securing the necessary resources" (Gobbo, Ricucci and Galloni 2009: 4). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD] 2011: 3), Italy remains among the members of the OECD with the lowest investment in education as a percentage of GDP.

Scarce funds impacted on teaching quality. Although the body of law seemed to be advanced, at least with respect to the principle of legitimising cultural diversity, there were "still important loose ends to do with transition from the planning and explanatory phase to

that of practical implementation" (Rossi and De Angelis 2012: 41). Besides, the fact that the school system was the first institution to test socially inclusive practices in its management of foreign students meant that intercultural measures could only be introduced tentatively (Santerini 2006). As Gobbo (2011: 15) observed, interculturalism was basically used only as a sort of "palliative treatment", not to create any stable and durable framework of inclusion policies:

> While the intercultural education discourse and the "good practices" aim to build a climate of respect, dialogue and critical reflection on ethnocentric assumptions, classroom teaching and learning are still often defined in terms of "problems" or "emergency" that teachers have difficulty answering.

Further, the documents on interculturalism produced by the MIUR gave only very general instructions and some basic principles, leaving the key task of implementing them to schools and teachers. As a result,

> […] although theoretically teachers accept the [diversity] principle, they have difficulty in appreciating and positively reinforcing students" differences in their teaching programs, and in managing some cultural and religious claims by immigrant families. They do not always succeed in overcoming their ethnocentric approach and culturally constructed views. (Caneva 2012: 34)

This particular aspect was also emphasised by Cortellesi (2009) in her contribution to the *Libro Bianco sul Razzismo in Italia* (White Book on Racism in Italy), she concluded: "It was often the school initiatives and the teachers' conduct which drew attention to the 'chronic differences' of immigrant teenagers" (2009: 107). The precariousness of teaching quality in Italy was recently confirmed by Professor Fiorucci,

> […] the teacher's role is now considered low-grade, in a system where, by contrast with other countries, there is no possibility for professional advancement. […] Most teachers, except for the new ones, know nothing of pedagogy, didactic precepts, or how to work cooperatively. (Personal communication, 20 December 2011)

Things have not changed much since 2000, when Marco Brazzoduro wrote an article condemning the fact that teachers were generally left alone to face new educational challenges. Unsurprisingly, over the past decade the schooling system lacked an evaluation process: “The assessment of scholarly institutions was generally confined to inspections instigated by the Ministry of Education. This activity, though, lacked any regularity” (Associazione TreeLLLe 2002: 36). It was not activated by the need to introduce regular testing of educational processes and outcomes (see Chap. 8 for a case-study look at the impacts of institutional evaluations on ethnic segregation in the sector). A decade later, a study released by the OECD (2011: 5) revealed that neither inspections nor evaluations were carried out. The only reporting that schools are required to submit to higher-ranking authorities is the “*rapporto di conformità*” (compliance certificate) confirming that they are obeying the law and various procedures. In educational practice, the “Italian way to interculture” was basically left to the discretion of each school and the keenest teachers. It remained more a declaration of intent than a suite of policies (Santerini 2006).

9.7 Impressions from the Field

My research reveals entrenched disenchantment with intercultural practices over the past decade in Rome. While the previous centre-left mayoral administration displayed some interest in championing cultural diversity, at least in theory, its successor—the right-wing Alemanno’s mayoralty—erased this topic from council’s program. Yet, despite different rhetorical stances, actual policy remains consistent. A representative from the Culture Office of XII Municipal Hall confirmed this point:

> At the moment the city council is not promoting any type of multicultural or intercultural theory. The policy enacted by this administration is definitely no different from that carried out by its predecessor. Both are based on the payment of millions of euro for forced evictions, constantly shifting the problem from one place to another. This is the only real policy on Romani culture. (Personal communication, 24 April 2012)

Interviews conducted by representatives of several NGOs operating in the "nomad camps", and involved in promoting inclusion projects within the school system in Rome, offer an insight into the intercultural approach:

> Today it makes no sense to talk about interculturalism. For instance, the previous administration had launched the so-called *menu etnici* (ethnic menu) into school canteens. [Then Mayor of Rome Gianni] Alemanno replaced this with the "*menu regionale*" (regional menu). *Pasta all'amatriciana* was promoted as a mark of Roman identity. […] Interculturalism is not on the political agenda: rather, it is a problem. The Government finds it vexing that there are more foreign students in a class than Italians. As a consequence, many a Bengali mother is not allowed to enrol her kids in the neighbourhood school because it already has too many foreign children. They have to go to another school much further away. (Ermes, personal communication, 3 May 2012)

A similar view was expressed by a social worker from the organisation Casa dei Diritti Sociali (House of Social Justice):

> Schools today basically consider foreign students a nuisance. In Italy the concept of interculturalism vacillates between folklore, exoticism, disregard, denial and an approach that merely tolerates the "Other". Intercultural schooling is still at an embryonic stage in Italy. (Personal communication, 20 December 2011)

The difficulties public authorities encounter in implementing an intercultural approach also emerged from interviews with a representative of Rete Scuole Migranti, a large network of Third Sector organisations funding L2s, schools of Italian as a second language for immigrants:

> The Italian Government's inclusion policy is completely inefficient and contradictory. It rests on a very inadequate normative framework. […] The "migrant flow" decree was a failure. The

State-run Employment Offices are extremely inefficient despite rampant unemployment. There are no housing policies. Educational policy is also a failure: 30 per cent of foreign kids fail compulsory school; 18-49 per cent are lagging behind; 16 per cent drop out of the education system altogether. The new measure on linguistic integration demands that immigrants know Italian in order to get a residence permit, but there are no public funds for training courses. […] Italian-language schools, staffed by volunteers, were launched in Rome in 1984-85; but the first institutional intervention was only in 1997! […] As well as teaching Italian as an L2, we offer a wide range of socialising opportunities, intercultural exchanges etc., but with very limited funds, and the spaces we use are also inadequate. […] Can we really then speak of interculturalism in Italy? Systemically, the answer is no; but there is certainly a sprinkling of qualified initiatives in this sector. (Email, 21 June 2012)

The State school system has not yet proved capable of giving Third Sector activities enough support and of ensuring courses in Italian are available to all immigrants, so how can they be expected to sustain their own languages and cultures, as implied by intercultural theory?

By way of concluding this outline, an interview with a prominent Romani intellectual provides a privileged insight into the intercultural issue:

Cultural recognition is surely important, but it represents only the final stage. Before we get there, we really need to promote Romani self-determination. Many projects are initiated today for our people. These are carried out by organisations which work *for* the Romani peoples, but not *with* them. […] It is time to move from mediation to participation, from multiculturalism to interculturalism. A multicultural society becomes intercultural when there is active participation. […] We are at risk today of losing our culture and our identity. If we do lose them, what are we going to cling to? We will be basically swallowed up by the rest of society. My plea today is for cultural diversity, interculturalism, active participation, intercultural democracy and recognition as a cultural minority. (Nazzareno Guarnieri, personal communication, 21 April 2012)

9.8 Concluding Observations

Despite its official adoption, the intercultural approach in Italy over the past few decades has been vaguely conceived of and poorly executed (Fiorucci 2011; Gobbo 2011; Santerini 2006). Non-recognition of cultural diversity was plainly visible in terms of not only the Romani communities but the broader immigrant population. The school system and public institutions in general found it extremely difficult to commit themselves deeply to a positive cultural diversity agenda. Paradoxically, spending on the "camps policy" initiative, forced evictions and emergency measure grew over the past two decades. Public funds are basically used to promote a "fake" inclusion (Massimiliano Fiorucci, personal communication, December 20, 2011). Continuous monitoring of available resources was also lacking. The Third Sector emerged over time as an important agent to fill the gap and "patch things up". But the intervention of volunteer-based organisations relies on limited funding and resources even if at times they managed to deliver a number of valuable intercultural services in support of fringe communities. Perhaps their major effort and impact was in the area of teaching Italian language as a second language, as opposed to promoting foreign languages and cultures. A monocultural and assimilationist attitude still predominates in Italy, together with widespread racism against "Other" communities.

In the past few decades growing scepticism has emerged in Europe at large with regard to multiculturalism. This trend was observed in Italy as well as, although in Italy's case multicultural policies have never been implemented. Instead, interculturalism was increasingly promoted as the most appropriate strategy for dealing with cultural diversity. But the development of this new paradigm lacked a solid foundation, nowhere more so than in relation to the Romani communities. In the past decade, the Italian Government signed several

international agreements and proclaimed its commitment to empowering these peoples.[2] Yet, Romani communities, and immigrants more generally, are still considered "security" issues and treated solely through the application of extraordinary actions. Politicians refer to the idea of national "insecurity" in order to convey a political willingness to pursue a more 'muscular' approach towards diversity and "Othered" communities. As predicted by Agamben (1998), though, emergency measures lost their initial provisional character and morphed into a "new permanent political category" (Sigona 2002).

In fact, even within the so-called intercultural paradigm, the associated principles and values such as positive and constructive management of diversity, dialogue and conflict resolution, mutual learning, exchange and identity transformation, are all absent from the nation's socio-political arena. The plight of the Romani peoples clearly underscores the weakness of the "Italian way" vis-à-vis cultural diversity.

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[2] In 2011, for instance, a "National Strategy" was launched introducing a number of measures to enhance their social inclusion. This commitment, which was a mere response to a larger European Union's initiative, aimed at transcending the 2008 "Nomad Emergency" but remained mostly on paper.

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