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(doi: 10.12828/88618)

Scuola democratica (ISSN 1129-731X)

Fascicolo 3, settembre-dicembre 2017

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Public School and Madrasas

Parallel Circles of Sociability and Neighborhood Life

Antimo Luigi Farro and Simone Maddanu

ABSTRACT: *This paper is based on fieldwork research on different education experiences in three areas of Rome. We focus on two public Italian schools – Istituto Comprensivo (IC), preschool and primary school – with high presence of foreign pupils and pupils with parents of foreign origins (non-EU countries) in the city's Torpignattara and Esquilino neighborhoods. By participating in associations related to the school, parents elaborate practical and dialogical relations in order to tackle the fragmentation of social relations, multicultural and multi-religious issues in their neighborhoods. By promoting the school as a common good, the parents' collective actions aim at rebuilding new social relations in a transformed neighborhood. On the other hand, we also focus on two madrasas (Islamic Schools) set up and functioning in Centocelle and Torpignattara, two semi-peripheral boroughs. We consider these experiences as part of parallel cultural processes (Taylor, 1989) involving two different educational missions and, for the children, two different circles of sociability. Within the frame of a multidimensional world (Appadurai, 1996) characterized by inedited planetary migrations, these parallel experiences are considered on the light of the sociological perspective of «living together» (Touraine, 2000).*

KEYWORDS: *Friendship, Intercultural Education, Islam, Madrasa, Public School.*

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Simone Maddanu wrote Introduction, §1 and Conclusion; Antimo L. Farro wrote §2 and §3. In this article we present part of the survey Sustainable practices of everyday life in the context of the crisis: toward the integration of work, consumption and participation, funded by MIUR-PRIN 2010-2011 and coordinated by Laura Bovone (Università Cattolica di Milano).

Introduction

Following a national trend since the Nineties, migrant settlement in Rome has been characterized by a multi-ethnic and multinational presence in downtown area (Municipality I) as well as in peripheral areas of the city, within and beyond the edge of the Capital. Even though the flux of a traveling non-permanent migration characterizes some areas of the city, a large number of immigrants are nowadays officially resident. They start families and rent or buy apartments as well as commercial activities (Farro and Maddanu, 2016; Broccolini, 2010). New generations of immigrant background, born or attending school from an early age in Italy, grow up in a multiethnic context.

This article focuses on two popular public schools in Rome (preschool and primary school), well known for hosting a high number of foreign children, and two madrasas (Koranic and Arabic schools) in the semi-peripheral Municipality V. The two schools that we took into consideration, Di Donato School (Municipality I) and Pisacane School (Municipality V) host pupils from four continents: most of them are from Asia, in particular from Bangladesh, China, the Philippines and Pakistan; others from Africa (Egypt, Morocco, and Senegal); a huge number from Eastern-Europe, particularly Romania, but also many non-EU countries; and a few from South America¹. According to school staff, in the early 2000s the number of children that did not speak Italian was high, also in the primary classes, due to recent arrivals from foreign countries. This number has drastically decreased over recent years, which would seem to prove a more stable presence of immigrant families in the neighborhoods². On one hand, these public schools are used to raise issues on immigrant concentration. On the other hand, they are mentioned and renowned for their commitment to promoting intercultural projects, and for enhancing diversity and equality in education. Furthermore, they are inspired by the agency of each

¹ In the neighborhood Rione Esquilino (Municipality I) where the Di Donato school is situated, in 2013 Italians registered as residents were 16.451, Chinese 1.837, Bangladesh 1.130, Philippine 409, African 1.268 (184 from North Africa). The Torpignattara neighborhood has one of the most high population densities: at the end of 2014, in all the Municipality (V) the number of Bangladeshi officially registered was almost 6.000 (15.169 from all Asia), 4.628 from Africa, more than 3.300 from Central and South America, and 7.500 from Romania. Source: *Anagrafe Comune di Roma*.

² At the end of 2015, in the entire Municipality I foreign population under the age of 4 is 1.332 and 1.235 from 5 to 9, out of 6.334 and 6.829 (total Italians and foreign citizens). In the Municipality V for the same age group the numbers are 2.719 and 2.330, out of 10.469 and 10.434. Source: *Anagrafe Comune di Roma*.

parents' association, which introduced after-school activities inside the school, a network of non-profit associations and volunteer social workers, and aim at recreating a social fabric in the neighborhood in order to integrate migrants. Particularly Di Donato School Parents' Association, which has been the strongest advocate for the *Open School* project in Rome³, combines its mission with the theorization of «the school as a common good» (Kirkland, 1982; Farro and Maddanu, 2015). According to this practical interpretation, the school becomes a space in which the parents experiment a subsidiary practice in order to support and enhance public institution missions (Arena, 2011; Arena and Cotturri, 2010; Moro, 2013) with a grassroots engagement. On the light of the urban common goods (Garnett, 2012; Harvey, 2012), the civic engagement of parents in the after-school activities draw on the new political theories strengthened by the National Referendum on the public water⁴ (Rodotà, 2012; Mattei, 2012).

In addition, this article presents a parallel experience – not in a comparative way – of religious and cultural education for Muslim pupils run by resident immigrants. As we observed for the public school, we wondered what is the role and engagement of immigrant parents in the religious schools, also in light of their active participation in the neighbourhood and substantive issues of the 'living together'. Attended yearly by 600 Muslim children from 5 to 15 years old, these madrasas set up in Rome's Municipality V. From different backgrounds and orientations, the two madrasas offer a cultural and religious education in the neighborhood. One, in Centocelle neighborhood, is run by Arabic-speaking North African people, while the other is more national-oriented, being attended mostly by Bangladeshi children, which is the largest national Muslim group in the I and V Municipalities. This Bangladeshi madrasa is located in the Torpignattara neighborhood, which is now also well known as 'Banglatown' (Broccolini, 2010, 2014; Della Queva, 2010; Pompeo, 2011).

Since early 2000, due to the migrant pupils' number far outweighing Italians, the Di Donato and Pisacane schools, respectively in the Esquilino neighborhood (Municipality I), and Torpignattara (Municipality V) have been con-

³ The project *Open Schools* promotes a new citizen engagement. Co-working with teachers, instructors and school principals, this project aims at creating a community-based model in which the school is considered as a socialization vector in the neighborhood and city.

⁴ The national Referendum repeals in fact the law about the privatization of the water, in June 11th and 12th.

sidered «ghetto schools» (Benadusi, 2012)⁵. This representation goes with the idea that the learning process could be compromised by the heterogeneity of children's background and their alleged lack of knowledge of Italian. At first, the teachers and the parents' association aimed at reversing this stigma, in order to open up to other Italian families and implement an intercultural process⁶. Creating a meaningful integrational model and a socialization project are at stake. What is the role of immigrant parents in this process? Does the public school really represent the key player for Muslim integration in the neighborhood?

According to the parents' associations, immigrant parents attempt to participate in afterschool activities by giving manual and practical aids to the school. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the parent associations are organized and run by active Italian members of middleclass, high education and political or associative experiences background.

On the other hand, some Muslim families enrol their kids in the local madrasa, in order to complete their children's education, provide Islamic knowledge, and Arabic or Bangla teachings. The organizers of madrasas carry on this educational process in an autonomous way from the parents, taking care of all steps of the scholarship. The madrasa of Torpignattara, in particular, shows cultural markers of a deterritorialized (Appadurai, 1996) Bangladeshi immigration. Madrassas do not have any connection among themselves, nor with the public school.

Even if religious leaders do not see any opposition between the two childhood educations, madrasas represent a space reserved for religious and cultural education, in which children experience a parallel socialization pattern (Maréchal *et al.*, 2003).

This essay shows the incomparability between those two educational experiences, which lay on coexistent, but parallel, everyday life realities (Appadurai, 1996). This frame raises questions leaning on the issue of «living together» (Touraine, 2000), which concerns not only the intercultural education outcomes, but also the contemporary significance of citizenship and cultural differences

⁵ This representation is spread by right wing and conservative-oriented national press, but also related by some residents we interviewed during research. See *Il Giornale*, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/classi-ghetto-scuola-pisacane-tre-bambiniitaliani-e.html> (retrived on February 2nd 2015).

⁶ By mobilizing networks, political views and subjective engagement, members of the parent associations were able to create a collective action that aimed to turn the stigma of the ghetto into an example of excellence for other schools (Farro and Maddanu, 2015; Vereni, 2014).

(Habermas and Taylor, 2003; Taylor, 1994) in an age of planetary immigration flows (Withol de Wenden, 2012). The research outcomes show that immigrant parents rarely engage into the public school and madrasa. As regards the intercultural education process, in which the open school represents the major vector, it asserts an experimental experience that does not change perspectives and issues of immigrant parents, as well as cultural and social differences in the neighbourhood.

1. Parents, school and interculture

The research has been conducted on the field from the end of 2013 to 2015. We conducted 15 qualitative interviews among members and leaders of the parent associations Di Donato and Pisacane. Interviews focused on three topics: individual engagement in the association; social and cultural issues of the 'living together'; subjective and collective sense of their agency. In addition, we collected 6 interviews with different school staff⁷, 10 interviews with immigrant parents⁸, 2 imams⁹, 2 chairmen of Islamic associations¹⁰, 2 members of the conservative neighborhood committee *Filarete*¹¹ of Torpignattara. Furthermore, the research benefits from a deeper sociological observation led in Esquilino about cultural relations and economic dynamics, due to the immigration settlement in the neighborhood¹².

According to Italian parents, instructors, and school principals, over recent years Pisacane and (especially) the Di Donato school have been hosting an increasing number of Italian children from Italian families. The Parents' Associa-

⁷ 3 school principals in Rome's V Municipality (Ferraironi, Piranesi and Pavoni Schools), one teacher of Di Donato, one of Pisacane, and one of Pavoni.

⁸ 6 from Bangladesh, 3 from North Africa, 2 Chinese, working and living in the I and V Municipality.

⁹ One of the mosque-madrassa *Al Huda*, Italian from Tunisia, and one of the mosque-madrassa *Masjeed e Rome*, from Bangladesh.

¹⁰ One Islamic association-mosque in Esquilino (Associazione Islamica Piazza Vittorio) and one in Centocelle (Centro Culturale Bangladesh-Italia).

¹¹ Born to respond to the emergency brought up by a chasm that seriously damaged the street – local authorities were not able to restore the viability for years –, this group includes local shop keepers and residents (Farro and Maddanu, 2016).

¹² The research was developed in three periods – end of 1990s, first decades of 2000s, and from 2010 to 2015 – collecting different materials, including more than 300 qualitative interviews. For a deeper analysis of the social and cultural context in which the schools and madrassas take place, see Farro and Maddanu (2016).

tion and school staff are giving public communication a more positive light for the entire neighborhood and presenting the Di Donato and Pisacane schools as multicultural places of educational excellence. Persuaded by an optimistic rhetoric emphasizing an intercultural education based on different national and cultural origins, which are presented as a benefit in terms of pupils' curricula, Italian families are increasingly encouraged to enroll their kids in these schools¹³.

In order to promote and facilitate cultural exchange and an inclusive civic participation of immigrant parents, members of the school association organize events, workshops and after-school programs that emphasize children's cultural origins. These forms of collective engagement take place in a context of conflicts and disagreements amid some autochthones living in the neighborhood. Some Italian residents and right-wing politicians criticize the high presence of migrants in the city and their concentration in those schools. By their agency around the school, promoting social policies and aids for immigrants, Italian members of the school associations face these critics and claim the ethical and civic potential of their schools as an integrative institution. Even if some mores and religious orientations of immigrants (especially tied to Islam) might be in opposition to staff and parents' political views, the observed agency attempts to overcome these contradictions showing it to be cognizant of respect and multiculturalism practices.

As Agostino Portera observes, «[i]ntercultural Education in schools is often utilized singularly as education which concerns merely immigrant children» (Portera, 2011: 25), even if its application can include other integrational processes. In other contexts, the intercultural education is considered to have the potential to facilitate integration (Gundara, 1997) and «participation in mainstream society» (Aikman, 1997) as citizens (Alred *et al.*, 2006), part of a civic engagement (Hart and Kirshner, 2009: 113; Cortesi, 2009). Other scholars have been focusing on this concept in American society since the 1940s, un-

¹³ In 2009 children of immigrant origins accounted for 90% of students in the Pisacane primary and elementary schools. In 2014 the average figure was 84%, with 50% of Italian children attending elementary school. For instance, other nearby schools were attended by 34% of children from immigrant parents. At the Di Donato school, between 2010 and 2014 the number of immigrant children decreased from 80% to 40% (according to Pisacane and Di Donato school staffs). Amid children from immigrant parents, the number of Italian speakers has substantially increased, which constitutes an essential turning point to achieve the intercultural education purposes (Gobbo 2000). The evidence of this second generation is explained in the note 3. In order to have some insights of the debate about Pisacane school, identity and culture, and the ways politics exploited these issues, see Vereni (2014) and Farro and Maddanu (2016).

underscoring the importance of facilitating inclusion of races and ethnic groups (Vickery and Cole, 1943; Van Til and Denmark, 1950), the role of school leaders in the inclusion process (Shah, 2009; Madsen and Mabokela, 2002), and nowadays the role of teachers' and leaders' diversity in the schools (Madsen and Mabokela, 2002). One clear definition of intercultural education, in its broad and strict sense, has been given as follows:

«In its broader context, intercultural education includes in addition to formal classroom instruction, adult education, teacher training, the work of civic and other organizations in the field of human relations, in short any type or aspect of education which in some way serves to promote intergroup understanding and cooperation. In the strict sense [...] intercultural education is restricted primarily to the school itself. It can, then, be defined as that education which seeks to impart a knowledge of the different cultures represented in the community together with a friendly understanding and respect for these cultures» (Novak, 1949: 59-60).

Attempting to face diversities due to an increasingly presence of immigrants, Italian public-school commitment includes the intercultural education as a major teaching philosophy mission (Pattaro, 2010). Zincone points out some recurring educational methods that aim to underline other cultural forms of expression (dancing, games, celebrations and food) or emphasize cultural richness of different populations using narratives and fairy tales (Zincone, 2001)¹⁴.

Going beyond the schools' missions, parents' associations and other networked associations in the neighborhoods consider the school as a magnet for common needs and participation between families, Italians and immigrants. Some associations target immigration issues, trying to bring support to women, organizing Italian courses for immigrants, space for life-story hearings, and legal help¹⁵.

According to our interlocutors engaged in the parents' associations, these schools represent an experimental field for integrating immigrants, children and parents as well, in order to recreate a social fabric capable of challenging social fragmentation. For them this means reconstructing a social life by educating

¹⁴ For a deeper review of intercultural education policies in the schools, in Europe and Italy after the 1990s, see Mantovani and Savarani (2005) and Benadusi (2012).

¹⁵ We encountered, particularly, the Onlus *Asinitas* in Torpignattara and *Il Cielo sopra Esquilino*, in Rione Esquilino neighborhood.

and communicating in a networked and dialogical way. These schools attempt to tackle diversity and segregation issues by addressing weaknesses and then turning them into strengths. One parents' association leader describes the community mission and collectivist feature of the Di Donato school as follows:

«The difference is that at Di Donato School they take care of everybody's children. Otherwise, if you wanted to be within an individualistic model you should have chosen another school... A school in which you talk about your priorities, your needs and goals tailor-made for your kid. [...] And they [school staff] listen to you [*laughing*]. [...] If you, as a parent would have talked in this way to the former Di Donato principal, he would have replied 'That's not this kind of school. Here we do school for everybody', you see? Because, you know, some parents want to choose the class, the best for their children, so that you have a class composed by parents' choice and that's not good» (Filippo, Di Donato Parents' Association member).

«'Choice' as a value for an individual-centered education is considered a privilege that undermines the public school's scope. It is not a school for competing: «children feel like they are appreciated for what they are, as children. Instructors focus on pupils' needs; they use a learner-centered teaching approach, focusing on how a schoolchild can learn, according to his background and level» (Domitilla, Parents' Association member, Di Donato).

On the one hand, the school as an institution and parents, which in some ways are directly related to it because of their children, are part of an agency that aims at promoting an inclusive education and at strengthening a community relationship in the neighborhood. The goal is to maintain or improve relationships in a context of lack of communal spaces, but also attempt to involve immigrant families in the process. Public events, cultural and 'folklorized' activities organized around the school emphasize intercultural aspects.

On the other hand, by criticizing the state of the neighborhood – the urban sanitation and cleanliness, insecurity perception, and the high concentration of immigrants – a part of the local residents does not disguise their skepticism about the outcomes of the immigrant presence they experience in the everyday life¹⁶. According to some scholars, Islam in Europe catalyzes anxieties and rejection against immigrants as people who embody counter-values, opposite to

¹⁶ According to our interviews conducted with local traders and a local Citizens' Committee in Torpignattara.

western customs (Dassetto, 2000; Maréchal *et al.*, 2003; Dobbernack and Mo-dood, 2013). Visibility of Islam is also at stake (Göle, 2014), drawing the attention – traditional clothing, Islamic headscarf and worshippers nearby mosques – of those who perceive Islam's presence as an invasion.

2. Classmate and friendship

By improving afterschool activities, including educational, psychological, and social support, the parents' association becomes more significant. The settlement of *Intermundia* section¹⁷ inside the school makes Di Donato a benchmark for other public schools in Rome. As has been observed in other cases, friendship and classmate networks are a path to integration for immigrant pupils (Rivellini *et al.*, 2011), while segregation and non-mixing schools divide in closed communities (Felouzis, 2005; Shah, 2009). Gabriella Cortesi (Cortesi, 2009) observes narratives of friendship and cultural diversity in the Formerly Children's International Summer Villages (CISV). According to Cortesi (2009), the sense of community and friendship overlap possible conflicts based on cultural differences. In general, stories are modeled to facilitate a melded and normalized acceptance of cultural differences, as follows: «1. Expression of cultural diversity through interpersonal relationships. 2. Consideration for cultural diversity through cooperation and interaction. 3. Expression of cultural diversity through acceptance of different cultural forms» (Cortesi, 2009). Once again, the role of an intercultural education is in the hands of the school staff and adults. Our case study considers preschool and elementary classes (5-10 years old) in which friendship is not yet a matter of choice: Children meet their classmates during and after-school. According to a mother we interviewed, cultural differences and colors appear not to apply for them. She told us how difficult it was for her to understand that her son's best friend was black, because 'friendship is colorblind'. If school instructors and teachers handle specific pedagogical approaches, it is up to the parents to take care of the after-school environment, facilitating encounters, friendship and companionship.

¹⁷ The *Polo Intermundia* is a project funded by the Department of Educational and Cultural Policies of Rome for the purpose of creating cultural exchanges, mediators, and support between communities, for children as well as adults and families.

«My son used to invite his classmates for his birthday party, but they never came. So, I noticed that some [classmates] never went to the birthday parties. So, there is a problem, I guess. So, what's the problem? Investigating with the social worker, it came out that they [migrant classmates] never went to the birthday parties because in their culture the concept exists of 'gift to gift', so if you invite me, I have to invite you. But 'I do not want to invite you home because I live with other people'... so 'I have a situation, and I do not feel comfortable inviting you'. [...] The children... my son did not understand why his fellow never came and he was upset [...] Once we understood that [...] we set up a place inside the school for everybody's parties» (Domitilla, Di Donato School).

The parents we encountered, by way of the association, follow their children's everyday life, seeing the school as a pivotal space where an entire neighborhood is evolving. It is a place to rebuild or reconstruct a new community-based relation, while immigrants have been reshaping the neighborhood in terms of local businesses (shops, markets), mosques and other visible presences. Immigrant parents participate especially in practical activities related to school structure and equipment, showing language difficulties and interest differences. Participatory modalities like dialogical exchange, political views, and cultural projects carry social and cultural differences between Italian parents and immigrants. Although a high number of children in these schools are from immigrant parents, Italian parents are overwhelming more active in organizing, planning, and leading all the after-school activities and events. Speaking of engagement and sociability processes, language, social and cultural differences between adults remain an important factor that hampers the development of relationships between Italians and immigrants. On the other hand, as Domitilla recalls, friendship circles can help to overcome adults' differences if an environment conducive to relationships is provided.

«In a huge city like Rome you hang out with people like yourself, colleagues etc. [...] The school is the last enlarged world you can find, because everything is in a [public] school: the guy you like, as well as the one you would never talk to during a dinner, you see? [...] It's a place where parenthood triggers, then you get engaged, not for you but for your kids. We start doing things in order to keep children together [...] So you do it for your children and for everyone else's».

3. Religion and community

Living in the neighborhood or in other parts of the city for several years, immigrant groups organize themselves by creating informal supporting networks. These phenomena can generally be observed in certain contexts in which immigrants have settled permanent businesses and residences (Ambrosini, 2011). Cultural and religious associations appear to be complementary, supporting institutions for comforting (Allievi and Dassetto, 1986) and maintaining a communitarian sense and identity. Above all, religious associations such as places of worship or informal mosques¹⁸ play a crucial role in gathering Muslim communities together, organizing Koranic education, and teaching Arabic or Bangla. We focused on two different madrasas in the V Municipality, a semi-peripheral working class area, nowadays hosting a high rate of immigrants, university students and middle class young people (Broccolini, 2014).

The first mosque, *Al Huda*, situated in Centocelle, is led by a Tunisian imam, who arrived in Italy in the 1990s as a political refugee escaping the Ben Ali regime due to his *Enhada*¹⁹ affiliation. It hosts different nationalities of Muslims, promoting a de-ethnicization of Sunni Islam²⁰. The mosque, a Cultural Association founded in the early 1990s, provides Koranic education for 400 pupils (5-15 years old), from Rome and the suburbs. The location, a former huge garage set up as mosque, even though well-furnished cannot provide classrooms. Classes are hosted in a public-school building (San Benedetto School) and take place during the public-school semesters after school activities on Saturdays and Sundays, and every day during summertime. Although public school activities and madrasa classes are not related (nor the curriculum nor the tutoring management) classes are mixed, boys and girls, and no dress code is required. Pupils' family backgrounds are different: some are not religious but show an interest in giving a broad education on religious and cultural aspects of Islam and Islamic civilization. In addition, the Cultural Association of Centocelle offers Arabic classes with native-speaking teachers. All the 18 teachers employed in the school

¹⁸ Concerning the difference between mosques and prayer place in Italy, see Allievi (2003). For other examples in Rome see Russo (2014), Maciotti (2013) and Caragiuli (2013).

¹⁹ *Enhada* is a Tunisian political Muslim party founded in 1981 inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

²⁰ Regarding the de-ethnicization process and the appearance of a European Islam, see Bistolfi and Zabbal (1995).

are women, mostly housewives. According to the imam this choice guarantees a full engagement and availability that men would not ensure, due to their job activities. Attended by many worshippers living in the area or coming from other places, the Cultural Association of Centocelle, mosque Al Huda, aims to expand its reception capacity and be autonomous from the public-school facilities²¹. The mosque's scope appears to be oriented to renew interest and religious perspectives for Muslims in western countries (Saint-Blancat, 2004). It considers itself part of a modern process, reviving Islamic culture and principles through stable and non-conflicting arrangements with secular societies²².

The second madrasa set up at the mosque *Masjeed e Rome* in Torpignattara is an Islamic Cultural Center. It is presented as a reference point for Bangladeshi residents of Torpignattara, which is considered by them as the most important place for Bangladeshi in Rome and Italy – so-called Banglatown. It provides Koranic classes and language courses like Arabic, Bangla and English. According to the imam, 200 pupils from 5 to 15 years old attend the classes; almost all are from Bangladeshi families. The imam came to Italy following an economic migration at the end of the 1990s, joining the community network in Torpignattara (Appadurai, 1996). After a short period working in Bangladeshi shops, he was in charge of the religious and cultural association in Torpignattara and managed Bangladeshi networks in Italy, maintaining contacts with the UK and Bangladesh. Classes take place in a busy timing: 6 days per week (except Monday), after the public school – which ends at 4.30 pm – from 5 to 7.30 pm, so that children experience a sequence of teaching and tutoring activities: «When the Italian school ends, we start our school» (Mizan, imam of *Masjeed e Rome*). Like the first mosque in Centocelle, this Bangladeshi religious entity keeps classes mixed, boys and girls, as in the public school. Unlike its counterpart, however, this mosque is characterized by a national community-based education exemplified by its use of Bangla as common language, which is considered the cornerstone of Bangladeshi identity due to historical reasons that led to Bangladesh independence. Scheduling the madrasa classes almost every day and just after the public school, the mosque doubles schoolchildren efforts and,

²¹ The mosque received some Qatari funding to buy a new building in the neighborhood that will host the new prayer place and madrasa classes. This project aims to create a large and attractive Islamic center in the area.

²² For a specific analysis of different articulation of the concept of secular in different contexts, see Casanova (2013).

basically, does not let them participate in the public afterschool activities. This madrasa in Torpignattara appears to be a second circle of classmates, national community-based oriented, which creates an in-group space of sociability for national (Bangladeshi) and Muslim children. If, on the one hand, this experience marks an autonomous path for the Bangladeshi community in Rome, on the other hand it represents an attempt to reproduce a national and communitarian context (Appadurai, 1996). This insertion of the Bangladeshi group attempts to find a communitarian way to integrate Italian society and reproduce their own internal organization.

All the cases we have observed are characterized by a positive relationship they establish with local institutions. It happens that the Centocelle mosque set up its madrasa using the same public school facilities that some Muslim pupils attend during regular school time. Schoolchildren that attend the madrasa are maybe familiar with these places. Even when they attend other schools in the neighborhood, the public school's appearance can create a sense of continuity and inclusion. In some way, the public school and its symbols are always there. Nevertheless, madrasas express an autonomous project parallel and never convergent with the public school and not an inclusive agency open to the neighborhood as a whole. By implementing their own madrasa curricula, Muslims and especially the Bangladeshi group guarantee an Islamic education, which is considered as a complementary as well as a whole form of sociability for the new generation. Living and being educating in a secular society and under a public-school curriculum, Muslim children grow up with Italian classmates following an intercultural education. Madrasas do not guarantee an Islamic sociability but represent the parents' wishes to maintain, improve or instill a cultural and religious specificity, which does not apply to the public school.

Observing the two experiences, the parents' associations of Di Donato and Pisacane, and the Centocelle and Torpignattara madrasas, we can highlight a different agency and meanings. Italian parents who take part in afterschool activities aim at creating a social fabric that will include immigrant families in the neighborhood. Attempting to activate a participatory model around school issues, these parents aim to promote an inclusive society capable of normalizing cultural differences, which is an extended policy of the intercultural education implemented inside the public school. This agency tries to go beyond the specific local context, embracing a political orientation cognizant of multicultur-

alism, common goods and collective practices. Through the school, they get engaged in a communicational process in order to involve immigrant parents in the everyday life activities of the neighborhood. Even though the school effectively enables an intersecting relation between children from different national, cultural and religious backgrounds, the intercultural dynamics do not automatically activate a melting pot in the neighborhood. Despite the rhetoric designed to present alterity and cultural exchange as an opportunity, the neighborhood remains fragmented, in which different orientations can raise cultural divergences and separations. After all, intercultural education is a process, but 'respect' still remains a political perspective, here articulated by Sara, a parent association's mother from the Pisacane school, as a method. According to her, as a feminist, she does not agree with Muslim wives that decide to wear a *niqab* (a headscarf covering all the face except the eyes) or dress their seven-year-old daughters with a headscarf. Nevertheless, she needs to deal with that and all the differences in order to find a way to communicate and live together. As Sara says, people are not compelled to like each other's differences, but should be educated to respect them.

The madrasas' experience aims at consolidating an Islamic tradition for the new generation born or raised attending school in Italy. Furthermore, the Torpignattara madrasa combines this education with Bangla classes, which represent an improvement of the communitarian belonging for children living in Italy. Even if these experiences are not aimed at creating an alternative proposal to the public school and confirm openness towards the neighborhood, they enhance a communitarian perspective. Nevertheless, as other studies on the second generation have shown, circles of sociability are always unpredictable, and the new generations of Italians are able to adjust their specificity (Colombo and Sciortino, 2003), also Islamity (Frisina, 2005; Maddanu, 2013), with their everyday life experience at school (Siggillino, 1999; Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Bosisio *et al.*, 2005) as well as elsewhere (Ambrosini and Molina, 2004; Colombo and Semi, 2007).

Conclusions

The experience of the two Italian school cases illustrates a teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach that empathizes intercultural education as a method for normalizing differences, and pupils' cultural and religious backgrounds. This approach takes place within a problematic framework in which a majority of schoolchildren have foreign origins.

The parent's associations agency at the Di Donato and Pisacane School attempts to improve school efforts by promoting events and civic engagement in the neighborhood, in part filling the lack of political policies for social and integrational issues. Facing everyday life problems concerning their children relationships, the parents try to address limits and difficulties that could occur due to social differences between classmates. In this way, they facilitate the first circle of sociability around the public school. These engaged Italian middleclass parents aim to create a new social fabric that includes new social and cultural diversities, through an agency cognizant of the common goods, into and around the school. Integration by normalization of differences represents a stake laying on the construction of a social life.

As for the two madrasas, we can observe, on the one hand, an attempt to forward religious and cultural knowledge. The Centocelle madrasa is characterized by an ambitious project to involve all Muslims. Even if pupils can experience madrasa classes inside a public-school building, the circle of sociability diverges from the Italian school. On the other hand, the Torpignattara madrasa, which takes place in the mosque location, focuses particularly on a national-community based approach, attempting to reinforce or instill a sense of community as well as Islamic learning. Due to the full-time schedule of the madrasa, children experience a double immersion in two different circles of sociability and knowledge approach. Centocelle madrasa as well as Torpignattara, represent a renewal of Islamic education for the new generation of Muslim pupils that attend Italian public schools and grow up in a secular (European) frame.

All these experiences – parents' associations, the public-school education, cultural Islamic associations and their madrasas – conduct parallel forms of sociability. New generation paths and everyday practices are at stake, to implement and adjust different circles of sociability, citizenship and values.

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