Tensions in Recognition Politics in Europe: A Reading of Italian Interculturalism(s) as Ideology

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Tensions in Recognition Politics in Europe: A Reading of Italian Interculturalism(s) as Ideology

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Abstract

This article provides a brief investigation of Italian interculturalism(s) in relation to a highly relevant European policy document, the White Paper on Intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe). I will specifically focus on conceptually relevant tensions which cut across recognition politics more generally and may empirically translate into different versions of intercultural politics. An analysis of various Italian interculturalisms confirms the prominence of the cultural dimension, while the issue of equity is clearly neglected. I will assess the profile of the interculturalism as revealed by the European and Italian education discourses and highlight tensions and dilemmas. I will propose a reading of interculturalism as ideology and assess the possibilities and direction of the current versions to altering the practice and support inclusive politics.

Keywords: Italian and European Interculturalism, Ideology, Politics of Recognition

Introduction

Scholars in the intercultural education field have largely dealt with a foundational tension: how to respect culture and differences while promoting equality? How to avoid both particularistic-relativistic perspectives and also universalitic-egalitarian solutions? An equity pedagogy and colour-sensible is needed in order to acknowledge socio-economic inequalities while also recognising that culturally diverse individuals are particularly at risk. Looking at the profile of European interculturalism(s), the choice to privileging differences over equity consent us to speak about an excess of culturalism. In response to the above mentioned tension and to relevant shortcomings as induced by the risks of an idea of culture as innocent of class, different approaches and antidotes to such a multicultural education have emerged over time. In point of fact, anti-racist education, critical multiculturalism, and equity pedagogy are conceived of as potential antidotes to a differentialist paradigm or to the perverse effects of cultural difference (May, 2009). A multicultural education idea as developed by Banks (2009, p. 15) is very much in line with an equity pedagogy, while clearly addressing the risks of a colour-blind school politics.

The choice to briefly analyse in the first place the White Paper [WP] is motivated by its representativeness for the conceptual/ideological orientation of a European idea of interculturalism. Actually, this policy document is the result of a joint effort of national experts to defining a common framework of understanding intercultural politics. This perspective serves as a European background against which I will more specifically focus on the Italian case. I consider it as both very much in line with the European policy as revealed in the WP, and also highly representative for new countries of immigration' politics of recognition.

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Ideas about what an intercultural education must be are not to be considered just theories: they imply political and ethical choices, are globally highly diffused and thus become products of processes of specific political and cultural appropriation. Therefore, ideologies are more fruitful lenses to read these theories and their meanings and uses in contexts.

In the subsequent sections, I will briefly sketch a theoretical framework of interculturalism as ideology and then question the profile of Italian interculturalism as related to the European vision of the White Paper. Then, I will show how conceptual tensions and dilemmas inform and filter into the White Paper and in the Italian politics of interculturalism. I am concerned by the prominence of culture as the principal dimension of interculturalism. I will indicate some conceptual dilemmas in interculturalism more generally, and some of its meanings in relation to some important uses in practice. I distinguish between two major versions of Italian interculturalism: (1) a dominant "culturalist"- driven interculturalism and (2) a less diffused and more "progressive" interculturalism. Both, however, fail to acknowledge the issue of equity and equality from a social class and redistributive viewpoint.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FOUNDATIONAL TENSIONS AND IDEOLOGIES

In this section I will show tensions in the European identity conceptualisation and in the politics of recognition, while taking a specific look at interculturalism as ideology.

Starting from the process of building a European identity, the very "conceptual basis for [European] identity remains contested" (Camia, 2010, p. 110). In addition to territorially-based identities, an emerging European identity may be said to be in competition with non territorially-based identities, such as class or gender (Fossum, 2001). The normative perspective proposes nested identities, plural and multiple affiliations, competitive and/or non-competitive identities. For some scholars, a European identity principally would involve a different and emerging post-national type of identity (Delanty, 2002; Fossum, 2001).

At the national level, the identity issue is principally related to the wave of migration within Europe and immigration from outside, which relates to a recognition policy matter, although one which is sometimes under-conceptualised or ineffective in its practical application (see the Italian case). Grassroots demands for a recognition policy, in terms of recognition of uniqueness *and* equality, in public areas such as education, is a constant and common issue of concern and political negotiation in European countries. In this conceptual dichotomy, which translates into different practices, we can find a major tension between differences and equity which may inform different intercultural ideologies. This dilemma has been conceptualised by scholars in terms of redistribution versus recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) and class versus race[2] (Appiah & Gutmann, 1998). Fraser (2003, p. 11) considered it a "false antithesis" and conceptualised it from the perspective of justice as "two dimensional". However, while assessing the profile of current European and Italian interculturalism, these are rather unidimensional perspectives, in line with a one-sided morphology which is typical of ideologies.

In focusing on a European identity, a relevant issue is the way we conceptualise the national and the transnational, whether or not a transnational stage is emerging. Soysal convincingly argues that "transnational and national should be seen as constitutive and signifiers of each other. They are not separate levels of analysis or separate trajectories" (2002, p. 273). He goes on to argue that "we should locate the transnational and its factors in the territorially defined spaces and institutions of identity. This also means paying attention to how local and national are re-articulated within the transnational" (Soysal, 2002, p. 273). This logic can be fruitfully applied to the dynamic of the different levels at which a policy of recognition is negotiated and

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[2]   In the original text, Appiah & Gutmann refer to a concept of "race". I prefer to adapt it to a more European way of referring to this issue as "culture", although I am fully aware that they imply significant differences.

mediated, that is at regional, national and European levels. One way to deal with this is to focus on the discourses and the core message of policy documents at all these levels. How does Italian interculturalism relate to a current European vision on interculturalism?

Taking a step further, one cannot but question if there is anything similar to a European policy of recognition. The impressive number of standards and legislative tools developed over the last fifty years by the Council of Europe, drawing upon the European Convention on Human Rights in particular, are all deemed to strengthen human rights and the policy of interculturalism, recently labelled as "intercultural dialogue" (Council of Europe, 2008), which strongly resonates with national versions of intercultural education throughout Europe.

The intensity and direction of the politics of recognition are without doubt a crucial factor that affects a possible European identity (Soysal, 2002; Munch, 2001). From a sociological viewpoint, however, we can only assess different directions of the integration process and therefore several possible scenarios. It is significant to notice, for the present discussion, the plainly visible dichotomy between an *equal dignity*- versus *difference*-driven policy of recognition, a crucial factor in future scenarios of European integration.

Table 1: *Politics of Recognition*

Direction of the integration process	*Equal dignity*	*Difference*
Intergovernmental	EU as a collection of democratic (rights-oriented) Member States (1)	EU as a collection of national cultural communities (2)
Supra-national	EU as a rights-based federal-type entity (civil, political, economic and social rights) (4)	EU as marked by "deep diversity" – a wide range of identity-based claims – nationalist and social-movement based (3)

Source*: Soysal, 2001, in Fossum, 2001, p. 383

Turning our attention to the education field and intercultural politics, analogous theoretical tensions and dichotomies are evident in the overarching paradigm of social justice. For most scholars, a dichotomous social justice concept involves a distributional idea of Rawlsian origins versus a difference driven concept, with the recognition of cultural and relational aspects (Vincent, 2003). As Cribb & Gewirtz (2003) warn us, a plural social justice conception often involves tensions between its many facets, and particularly between a redistribution policy, tackling socio-economic inequities and thus levelling group differentiation, and recognition remedies, which through affirmative actions tend to promote group differentiation. This is what Fraser calls a redistribution-recognition dilemma.

In this article I will focus on the ideological dimension of the politics of recognition. When multicultural politics are read as ideologies, implicitly these are mostly read as inferior and negative theoretical forms, incapable of producing (positive) changes. In contrast, ideologies are to be seen as texts, discourses, or cognitive maps, shaped by specific historical conditions and by the vested interests of certain social actors. Furthermore, when institutionalised they "may play a decisive role in acting back on [their] environment" (Wuthnow, 1989, p. 548). Therefore, they are not only the products of cultural settings and specific conditions, but also agents of social transformation. Political and educational ideologies may impact and transform social and educational realities, although in rather unpredictable ways. In addition, as Melotti argues, both universalist and particularist ideologies and politics of integration, as is the case with the paradigmatically different French and British models, may equally involve strong ethnocentrism (1997, p. 79) and thus produce "unintended thought-practice" in Freeden's words (2000).

These ideas must be seen as distinctive type of political thought-practice, action-oriented, particular to time and space and not universal. Another relevant difference from the point of view of

classical political theories is that ideologies involve a two-way flow between theory and practice, in the form of an „open-grid". In this sense, they mask real thoughts and relationships and therefore a special attention must be paid to the „unintentional thought-practices" . Ideologies are vey much the same as practices, in that they are the product of groups and not speculative outcomes of individuals. Most significant is that even „when ideology involve distortion, misrecognition or rhetoric there are contextual reasons for those features and they too evince ideotional patterns that may be decoded" (Freeden, 2000, p. 321).

Although politics of recognition perform a principally political function (ideological, rhetorical, "decorative"), not all recognition politics are to be discarded as ineffective (Fraser, 2000). In order to prove efficient, any version of interculturalism as ideology would require, among other elements, coherence between its core political message and proposed strategies of implementation (Freeden, 2000). In addition, such strategies should actually speak in some way to "reality" from a plurality of dimensions, if they are to be efficient.

ANALYSIS

The White Paper as European policy of recognition

I will now turn to the White Paper's message which is said to be synthesis of the voices of national scholars throughout European countries. The Council of Europe's member countries have deemed an intercultural dialogue policy approach as the most appropriate to promote inclusiveness. The "intercultural dialogue" policy is intended to combine assimilation, "focusing on the individual", with a multiculturalist idea of "recognition of cultural diversity" (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 19). It also includes a "new element", the concept of "dialogue on the basis of equal dignity and shared values" (p. 19). This multi-composite version of interculturalism is not completely new and actually appears to be an assemblage of old (nationally defined) approaches and difference-oriented.

The novelty of the "dialogue" element, which draws on shared values, seems to hint at a supranational perspective as in the model of Soysal. The meaning here at work is that dialogue is needed for exchanging different world-views and possibly reaching some form of consensus, if not substantial, at least of a Habermasian procedural type. The document highlights some self-evident limits of the dialogue: "it is not a cure for all evils or an answer to all questions", "dialogue with those who refuse dialogue is impossible" (p. 17).

The concept of "equal dignity" is invoked, with a rather tautological meaning or "decorative" function, at best lacking incisiveness. Dignity appears rather to be a matter of negotiation or a process of "external prescription", and not an intrinsic human quality. Dignity is a superior principle – and an ontological property, i.e. human dignity, as stated in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, one expect that the White Paper as a more practically oriented policy document, would focus on strategies to implementing and protecting it through positive discrimination actions, not just reminding it at a rhetorical level.

The spaces where the dialogue may be practised are ineffectively conflated (Council of Europe, 2008, pp. 10, 34), including "the neighbourhood, the working place, the education system and associated institutions, civil society [etc]". (p. 10). I consider that it is not a matter of multiplying spaces, which is simply another way of minimising the responsibility of specific institutional and legal mechanisms of protection, in this case of the education system, but rather a matter of actions to be undertaken in specific forms and places. An evident "open-grid" patter of linking possibilities between interculturalism and its practices reveal the ideological nature of then WP.

Most emblematically, a robust "governance" and "competences" language is the thread of

this document which clearly presents an image of "cultural diversity" as manageable, in need of control since it is constantly read as potentially dangerous, or as a source of economic prosperity (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 45): immigrants should "abide by the laws and respect the basic values of European societies and their cultural heritage" (p. 11). The image here is of dangerous non-European immigrants, minimising internal European immigration processes or even worse, it may hint at a hierarchy of different European citizens. Here we can find the core message of this ideology, that is the prevalence of culture and difference, dealt with from a negative perspective of perceived problematic and highly unspecific practical configurations that need to be addressed.

Although the White Paper considers universal issues such as human rights and democracy more than is the case with Italian interculturalism(s) as we will see below, its core message is still very much culturalist. Its conceptual apparatus is rather vague: "intercultural intellectuals" (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 32), an unspecified "inclusive society" as a social configuration, the management of cultural diversity and the need to create "a new identity balance" (p. 18). In addition, the perspective of equality of opportunity and equity as a social dimension in support of a comprehensive policy of recognition is quite underdeveloped.

An emblematic trait of this ideological interculturalism is the lack of reference to practical configurations and problematic issues that need to be addressed specifically in the education systems at large. The ideological message is clearly shaped, at a rhetorical level, in separation from relevant practical configurations in the school systems, for instance dropping out, segregation, school choice policy. One can consider that here is at work a mask reality function of the ideology of European interculturalism.

Some conceptual dilemmas of Italian interculturalism(s) in use

Over the past twenty years, a European-continental version of multiculturalism, "intercultural education", has emerged throughout Europe, most prominently in new areas of immigration such as the Southern European countries (e.g. Italy). Initially, academics in these European contexts oscillated between attitudes of uncritical adoption and outright rejection. Most Italian scholars considered, naively and in a *sui generis* legitimatory vein, that since Italy's experience of immigration had been so recent, it could benefit from that of other countries and thus avoid potential pitfalls: at the end of '90s, the legislation was already considered to be ahead of other immigration countries:

"Southern Europe took advantage of the prior experience of countries like the UK, France and Germany and thus the intercultural perspective is the starting point and not the terminus of a long journey of trial and error." (Fischer & Fischer, 2002, p. 173).

Interculturalism expanded rapidly and became a "new mantra" in Italian pedagogy. In public policy, its recognition was rather contradictory: while acknowledging international legislation, the "application of civil protection anti-discriminatory norms is almost entirely lacking" (Roagna, 2009, p. 53). In fact, the Council of Europe recently strongly recommended substantial initiatives, such as creating institutional premises for the protection of human rights, including, in the field of education, equality of opportunities and equity (Hammemberg, 2009, p. 2)[4]. Intercultural pedagogy courses have proliferated, while major sociological assessments of social and educational issues relating to immigration and new stratification processes have been fairly limited. Quite symptomatic is a general (and academic) reluctance to use racism as a conceptual sociological

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[3]   All translations from Italian to English have been made by the author.

[4]   In line with European legislation, in 2003 Italy created the UNAR (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali, National Ethnic Antidiscrimination Office). However, Thomas Hammemberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, recommends that "the authorities promote further systematic human rights education" and "promptly establish a national human rights institution." (2009, p. 2).

descriptor[5]. A political appeal to interculturalism reached virtually every Italian school, and yet it remained confused and highly problematic even for those teachers who honestly engaged with it for decades (Omodeo, 2002).

A FIRST DILEMMA

A major dilemma emerges when interculturalism is conceptualised in terms of a normative perspective which, in the long run, is to lead through social engineering processes to genuine new social configurations. Therefore, interculturalism refers to a normative concept, since the experience of "cultural difference" in inter-cultural situations is said to be personally *enriching*. Here we see an underlying concept of culture as a resource, which Appiah considers problematic (2005, p. 123). However, interculturalism(s) in use also refers to a social reality yet to be created, if a mere multi-ethnic (or "multi-cultural" as most European pedagogists read it) society is to be overcome.

From an Italian perspective, most European societies followed a path from assimilation to multiculturalism and then to interculturalism. Emblematically, this is also considered to be the Italian case (Santerini, 2010, p. 188):

"The phases of integration of these varied groups have been similar to many other European countries. Initially, there was a phase of assimilation, or insertion of the minority culture with little or no attention paid to the culture of origin, followed by a phase of multiculturalism, understood as the "discovery" of pluralism but also the romanticising of other cultures. Today, there is the feeling that it is necessary to reach an intercultural model to accomplish integration without giving up social cohesion."

However, this idea clearly contradicts the popular premise of a "privileged position", which would have allowed Italian decision makers to avoid the pitfalls of other countries and jump to the final phase of interculturalism. Moreover, in this quotation the "intercultural model" plainly hints at a concrete social configuration, although yet to be attained. The circulation of intercultural education in university course books and scholarship more widely definitively connote it as both a normative concept and a societal configuration.

While the normative layer is more naturally inscribed in interculturalism as a political (and ideological) conceptual umbrella, an intercultural idea as a sociological configuration is definitively more obscure on sociological and anthropological grounds. If we consult classical mainstream sociological studies, we learn that initial group contact and subsequent dynamics of competition and stratification may lead to assimilation (amalgamation), egalitarian pluralism (political autonomy) or to non-egalitarian pluralism (exclusion and annihilation) (Marger, 1991, pp. 128-148). Following this model and keeping in mind that societies may exhibit all three patterns, we cannot but question the nature of an intercultural societal configuration. Is it to be associated with egalitarian pluralism (recognition of cultural communities?) or to a form of assimilation/ integration of single individuals? In order to highlight a lack of sociological analysis inherent in Italian interculturalism, it suffices here to raise the question. In addition, some assimilationist patterns and intentions are too easily discarded as risky only on the basis of "experience elsewhere", in the absence of a thorough analysis of historical and theoretical potentialities of the assimilation/ incorporation paradigm (for a theory of assimilation revisited, see Kivisto, 2005).

While denying both assimilation and multiculturalism as disrespectful and inadequate, very few sociological and educational studies seriously engaged with what it is actually the major risk to Italian society and its school system: a non-egalitarian pluralism as a creeping ethnic separation (Facchini et al., 2005).

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[5] For more on racism in Italy see Bencini, Cerretelli & Di Pasquale (2008).

A SECOND DILEMMA

A second difficulty emerges when investigating the meanings in use of culture and cultural difference as core concepts and the main "pillar" of interculturalism. It is ironic, at least from the point of view of Italian historical developments, that a policy of recognition labelled interculturalism has been considered the best way to promote equity, justice and human rights. All the more so since this is not a side effect, but a specific preference. As Fischer & Fischer (2002, p. 32) observe:

"An important Council of Europe recommendation issued in 1985 concerning the teaching of human rights in schools has been accepted. The Italian legislation, which was relatively progressive, has chosen to undertake the most difficult approach: that of intercultural education, which was deemed the most satisfactory framework in which to rethink overall educational practices."

Note that the intercultural choice was assessed from the outset as "the most difficult approach". A necessary synthesis between universalism and relativism was declared necessary, along with "the recognition of differences and of their value [which] must be conceived in the framework of a search for commonalities" (C. M. [Ministerial Circular] n. 73, 2nd March 1994 in Fischer & Fischer, 2002, p. 32). In other words, differences are self-evident, while commonalities need to be sought out!

A largely neglected class dimension and a wider equality perspective on intercultural education is barely mentioned in intercultural teaching and scholarship, and seldom addressed as a key focus. It is emblematically a missing topic and quickly discarded by a "social cohesion" appeal (e.g. MIUR, 2007), which is a very different concept from the equity issue. In this case, equity and equality, which should reasonably be recognised as major objectives, are downgraded to mere means and "strategies" in implementing intercultural education. While culture comes to the forefront of the debate, the issue of teaching for equity as an overarching and more comprehensive paradigm is strikingly absent.

Appiah (2005, pp. 114, 119, 254) considers that abuses of "culture" and differences are an effect of an anthropological perspective on reality and therefore nothing less than a "disciplinary" prejudice. In the same vein, Bernstein's warning against the "evacuation of social class" from sociological analysis proves particularly useful in understanding other possible rationales of contemporary interculturalism(s), here investigated as Italian-style:

"Apple, amongst others, has remarked that class analysis has been disappearing in research in education, as the focus has shifted to race, gender, region, and indigenous groups. The effervescence of so-called post modernist analysis celebrates, on one hand, the local, the blurring of categories, the contextual dependencies on subjectivity, and on the other, announces the end of grand narratives. […] The privileging of discourse in these analyses tends to abstract the analysis of discourse from the detailed empirical analysis of its basis in social structure. The relationship between symbolic structures and social structures are in danger of being severed." (2000, p. xxvi)

So, it is not merely a problem of one-sided ideologies, but also of the theoretical perspective from which they are derived, as well as of national filtering and reception and subsequent levels, as we have seen in the case of the 1985 Council of Europe recommendation (Fischer & Fischer, 2002). Scholarship on the Italian case is particularly relevant for an analysis of how the intercultural agenda is regionally and locally received and interpreted (Grillo & Pratt, 2003). The "obsession with cultural difference" can be assessed not only in terms of widespread representations (Maritano, 2002), but also as public and highly visible initiatives unpacked as "identity and difference" or "ethnic" politics.

Policy documents and scholarship, even of a sociological type, cannot escape to a culturalist language. We can thus read that "[r]egarding relationships between cultures, the school as an institution represents a protected enclave, (...) a happy island, where it becomes possible to live together and exchange culture, so difficult to experience outside it" (Fischer & Fischer, 2002, p. 33). We can also learn that "*métissage* and cultural syncretism, which are constitutive traits of all

societies, cannot by themselves lead to idyllic communication and lack of conflict" (Fischer & Fischer, 2002, p. 5). And finally, that "interculturalism is a sort of a third way to accept diversity and *métissage*" (Fischer & Fischer, 2002, p. 13).

A few Italian scholars (e.g. Susi, 1999, Gobbo, 2008) signal a more complex distributive notion of culture, while warning against a metaphorical biological drift and culturalism more widely. While fully acknowledging the risks, such a "progressive interculturalism" based on critical anthropology may at best serve as further reading and in-depth understanding for those few teachers who might take it seriously and thus volunteer in this area. However, the core message converges with renewed official policy (MIUR, 2007), since its focus is still on culture and identity[6]. Once again, equity and equality remain background concepts. A different and more inclusive approach based on classroom heterogeneity and drawing on a more universalistic equity perspective is by and large missing from school practice. On practical grounds, the message of "progressive interculturalism" still remains imbued with culturalism and may encourage different forms of segregation in schools. Quite emblematic are unanswered questions such as:

"In the context of a multi-ethnic classroom, do teachers need primarily pedagogical or ethnological competences?" (Fischer & Fischer, 2002, p. 13).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article I have focused on a crucial theoretical tension which lies at the very heart of the European vision of integration, the dichotomy between an *equal dignity* versus *difference* driven policy of recognition. I have explored the way this tension translates in the Italian politics of interculturalism, characterised by a one-dimensional difference-based message. The two dilemmas clearly show the distance between scholarly theories and ideological uses and filtering meanings in the Italian case.

Moreover, the analysis of the White Paper as European policy document prepared by national experts from several European countries indicates that European- transnational, and Italian-national versions of interculturalism are both essentially difference-based, although with some differences. At a rhetorical level, the WP's message is a more balanced one, including a more universalist perspective. The lack of substantial links to problematic issues of inclusiveness in the European societies and concrete suggestions for affirmative actions make it ineffective to producing the expected changes. The vision on "human diversity" as in need to be managed and controlled unmask real thoughts and relationships, in Freeden's words. The scenario of a European integration that informs the WP and the Italian interculturalism oscillates between the second and the third type, as in the Soysal conceptualisation: a collection of national cultural communities and a supranational dynamic marked by "deep diversity" – a wide range of identity-based claims – nationalist and social-movement based.

Italian interculturalism(s) as difference-oriented in its two slightly different versions do inform school practices and substantially contribute to support processes of pupil's labelling, segregation or just reinforce teacher's reluctance and lack of competence to fully engage with affirmative actions in support of the immigrant students. A more balanced message from an equity pedagogy, drawing on a "class and culture" theoretical perspective and a two-dimensional social justice notion, will clearly proved to be a more efficient ideology. As Freeden argues (2000), ideologies should actually speak in some way to "reality" from a plurality of dimensions if they are to be successful on practical grounds.

Concrete, alarming and largely understudied issues like unequal access to schools, the "white

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[6]   We must admit that the message is more balanced at a linguistic level and, most relevantly, it denounces forms of segregation. The necessity of an approach based on an overarching notion of diversity (including the class dimension) is recognised. However, in spite of more universalistic turn, a social cohesion concept is preferred to equity and equality.

flight" phenomenon (with few exceptions, see Ciafaloni et al., 2007; Facchini, 2005) and the lack of adequate positive discrimination strategies in schools are all crucial and urgent matters to be addressed by policy makers. The current ideological messages of Italian and European levels do not represent a good basis to contrast shortcomings and actively promote a new policy. In fact, starting from the common sense premise of the lack of support, many teachers rightly state their lack of time and competence to undertake intercultural education from an anthropological perspective. They feel entitled to understand interculturalism as an issue of volunteering, gratuity and good will.

Uses of interculturalism can be noted in teachers' guides and textbooks. For instance, a textbook on didactics introduces prospective teachers to a "metaphorical background, that is different contexts for educational activities and classes, specifically designed to present a symbolic restructuring of the meaning of a situation (for instance, an all-yellow world to allow the harmonious integration of a Chinese child" (Cristanini, 2001, pp. 240-245.) An invitation to discover an "ethnic district" implies a search for all sorts of visible signs, such as phone centres, restaurants, shops, satellite dishes, nameplates, geographically conceptualised as "different ways of living" in a specific area, and to change this profile (Giorda, 2006, pp. 155-158). Ethnographical based books when become course textbooks for prospected teachers reinforce the message of "how are the Sick or the Roma pupils", how different are their "cultures at home" as compared to the school culture. This kind of teaching material is further legitimated through a culturalist argument: "it may help to comprehend our culture, too" (Gobbo, 2008). Therefore, scholarly works too, while undertaking a unique theoretical perspective, such as the anthropological one, cannot speak to reality in the proper way and thus promote a balanced and comprehensive conception of intercultural education and practically oriented to affirmative actions. These are, in my view, some of the main reasons why I argue that Italian school actors and particularly teachers are clearly socialised, when specific training is provided, within a culturalist paradigm.

From this exploratory study focused on the ideological dimension of intercultural politics of recognition I cannot fully assess the links between practices and interculturalism as distinctive type of politically oriented thought-practice. A more thorough analysis of these links and of the ideational patterns is therefore required, as well as a deeper understanding of how this discourse is shaped at the national and the transnational level in relevant policy documents.

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