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# INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE EDUCATION OF DIS/ABLED ASYLUM-SEEKING AND REFUGEE CHILDREN IN ROME: CRITICISM AND DISCREPANCIES OF "*INTEGRATION*-STYLE INCLUSION" MODELS


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*Education is indoctrination if you’re white –*
*Subjugation if you are black.*

James A. Baldwin

# ABSTRACT

This thesis is about 'race', disability, and the education of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. Based on nine refugee services in the city of Rome, the study investigates the intersections of 'race', disability and migratory status in relation to the educational and social experiences of forced migrant children. Located within the interpretive paradigm, the methodological approach adopted in this qualitative study is constructivist grounded theory. Data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 27 participants divided in two groups, the Professional participants (17), and the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants (10).

It was found that both group of participants sought various strategies to maximize their educational and social experiences through various forms of *integrating through disablement*: promoting neoliberal integration, SENitizing and disabling refugee children, discriminating discourses and performing discursive agency. In their overall orientation to current models of "integration-style inclusion", both groups differentially prioritized material and cultural aspects, based on their identity, professional role, knowledge about migration or social context and migratory status. While the Italian professionals emphasized the material conditions of integration, reproducing what the Italian state establishes, forced migrant children – when not performing "the good asylum seeker" focused more on social and participatory elements. A further important finding was that despite having a radical de-segregation policy (i.e. *Integrazione Scolastica*), asylum-seeking and refugee children are facing barriers such as ableism and racism. They are increasingly labeled as having Special Educational Needs, and constantly disabled, in order for them to receive quality education within mainstream, homogeneous and normative school settings. Discriminating discourses articulated by Italian professionals legitimate processes of SENitization and disablement. This is due to Eurocentric and medical views on diversity and it is the product of un-discussed issues of 'race', racism and White supremacy in the Italian context. Further, asylum-seeking and refugee children disrupt the fixity of the notion of 'vulnerability' within forced migrant subjects, and a whole array of hegemonic meanings attached to them, thanks to their capacity to perform discursive agency and to make clear their life and educational expectations.

Drawing on the intersectional and interdisciplinary framework of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and on Judith Butler's notions of subjectivation and performative politics, the study provides evidence of criticism and discrepancies within current models of refugee reception, and demonstrates how inclusion is conflated within ontologically different and exclusionary meanings of integration. In this configuration, the reception models continue to produce and reproduce educational inequalities of forced migrant children, without determining a systemic change in the teaching and learning practices. The study suggests the urgency to reform educational and social reception policies and practices by adopting an intersectional and anti-racist stance, as well as a social model perspective of disability. Recommendations include further attention to the selection process of professionals operating in refugee agencies, constant pre- and in-service training, transparency and explicitness in communication, and actual transformation of institutions in inclusive terms.

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# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| CI.PI.A | Centro per l'Istruzione degli Adulti |
| CTP | Centri Territoriali Permanenti |
| MIUR | Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca |
| DS | Disability Studies |
| CRT | Critical Race Theory |
| PTSD | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| GT | Grounded Theory |
| BA | Bachelor Degree |
| IEP | Individual Educational Project |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| NIC | Non-Italian Children |
| EU | European Union |
| UC | Unaccompanied Migrant Children |
| STP | Stranieri Temporaneamente Presenti |
| BES | Bisogni Educativi Speciali |
| DISCRIT | Dis/ability Critical Race Theory |
| QDA | Qualitative Data Analysis |
| ADHD | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |

# KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS AND TEXTUAL CONVENTION

## TRANSCRIPTS

Data generated through my semi-structured interviews are presented in quoted speech, in line with the convention of constructivist grounded theory interviewing, discussed in detail in chapter five. Within quoted speech, background or contextual information appears in [square] parenthesis. Emphasis and raised voices are indicated through *italicised* text. The transcripts material has been edited out by […].

## TEXTUAL CONVENTIONS

I have used ‘single inverted commas’ in order to indicate the problematization of a term or a concept. I have used single inverted commas whenever a term or a concept appears in the various chapter of this thesis. In relation to the term ‘race’, I have used the single inverted commas to emphasize its social construction as society’s response to differences from the norm and to reject it as biological fact. “Double inverted commas” indicate citation of published works, or are used where participants’ talk appears within the body of the text. The term dis/ability is sometimes adopted, in line with the used made of it by the authors of the Disability Critical Race Theory authors: to counter emphasis on having a whole person represented by what he or she cannot do, rather than what he or she can, and to disrupt notions of the fixity and permanency of the concept of disability, seeking rather to analyze the entire context in which a person functions.

# Chapter One: Introduction

> "Schooling is property. Achievement in schooling is earned, owned and deployed to access privilege. Hierarchies of merit justify an unequal distribution of goods and status. Derived from one of the primary tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the notion of schooling as a property is a useful conceptual tool to explicate the machineries of class, race and ability at work in school discourses" (Baglieri, 2016, p. 167)

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is about 'race', ability and the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth's experience within educational settings and the reception system in the Italian city of Rome. It is about educational disadvantage and schooling as a form of property- one that is unequally distributed by 'race', class, and ability and that positions Black and Minority Ethnic students, students with disabilities and migrant and forced migrant learners on the margins. The study engages in an in-depth examination of the ways that macro-level issues of racism and ableism, among other structural discriminatory processes, are enacted in the daily lives of Black, 'Sub-Saharan'[1] asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth with disabilities hosted in some of the foster care homes in Rome. The goal is to unmask and expose the normalizing processes of racism and ableism as they circulate in Italian society, highlighting the criticism and discrepancies of current models of social and educational "integration-style inclusion". As this thesis intends to shed light on the intersections of 'race', disability and migratory status, encompassing the reception systems and school and out-of school environments, a multidimensional vision of the present issue is offered, as reflected in the perspectives of educators, teachers, social workers, psychologists, neuropsychiatrists, cultural mediators, and of course asylum-seeking children and youth. I focus on unaccompanied forced migrant children and teenagers- as I did not encounter any accompanied minor requesting asylum- with a certified or not certified disability, who have presented an asylum request, or have

[1] A term widely used by White Italian professionals in refugee agencies to subjectivate young asylum-seekers and refugees from West and East Africa.

been waiting for the result of the Territorial Commission for asylum[2], or have had their status recognized.

### 1.2 Why is this Study Important?

In the Italian context, current models social integration (popularly referred to as social inclusion) of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth seem to be focused mainly on the achievement of what have been defined as "material conditions", including social and economic mobility, access to training and housing (see Catarci, 2011). Such material conditions are essential to allow young forced migrants to transit from reception to 'autonomous' life within the host society. Hence, the education of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth is conceptualized by the Italian State as the project to acquire transferrable skills that would render them more competitive within the Italian job market, increasing the possibility of being employed in high-skilled jobs, and limiting their possible recruitment and exploitation in illegal or low paid jobs (Catarci, 2011; Programma Integra, 2013). Compulsory education is a right of forced migrant children envisaged by Italian law, and in the cases where they fall outside of the compulsory education age, they are required to enroll in what some of the Professional participants in this study have defined as "special schools" for adult learners, or *Centri per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (CI.PI.A).*

A recent study promoting intercultural education models for a successful integration of migrants and forced migrant students in Italian schools reports two areas of concern that the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) has pointed out in relation to these groups of learners: the choice of upper secondary schools and lagging behind in studies (Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015). As it is clear from the data collected by the MIUR in the academic year 2013, the majority of students with "non –Italian citizenship" – the standard definition used by the Ministry for migrant, forced migrant and second generation students, as we will see in chapter two-, attend mainly vocational schools (64.852) and technical institutes (62.981). Their attendance is much lower in high schools and former general secondary schools (31.731) and artistic educational

[2] The Territorial Commissions for Asylum, or *Commissioni Territoriali per il Diritto all'Asilo,* which was established regionally by the Italian government with the purpose of hearing the story of each migrant and evaluating the recognition of refugee status, humanitarian or subsidiary protections.

institutes (4.960). In terms of percentage, professional institutes always have the highest concentration of migrant and forced migrant students compared with total enrolment (Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015).

Substantial differences in preferences emerge from the comparison between the educational choices of Italians and migrant and forced migrant students, which makes the phenomenon of early educational channeling of learners “with non-Italian citizenship” even more evident (Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015). Migrants and forced migrants are concentrated in vocational schools (39.4 %), and technical institutes (38.3 %), followed at distance by high schools and former general secondary schools (19.3 %). On the other hand, Italians prefer high schools and former general secondary schools (44 %), technical institutes (33.3%) and, to a lesser extent, vocational schools (18.9%). The overall picture of the relationship between the chronological age of migrant and forced migrant student and class of school entry continues to indicate a worrying situation. The gap between Italians and migrants and forced migrants is clear-cut from primary school level and is reinforced at subsequent school levels (Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015). The MIUR data in 2012 indicates that the average rate of lagging behind of Italian students was 10.7 %, while for migrant and forced migrants was close to 40%; and although it is already evident in primary schools, it reaches very worrying levels in upper secondary schools (68.9%) (ibid.). The variables that contribute to determining the lagging behind of migrant and forced migrant students are numerous and include decisions concerning the entry class for the new arrivals, the territorial mobility of families, language skills, academic success (see Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015), but also their necessity to access the job market to be able to sustain themselves and their families in the country of origin, and –as we will see in chapter eight- processes of “SENitizing and Disabling”, or the increasing phenomenon of  the over-representation of migrant and forced migrant students in Special Educational Needs and disability categories.

Forty years after the passing of the internationally celebrated policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* (i.e. school integration), which already envisaged the participation of all pupils, with or without disabilities in the process of learning, the Italian Ministry of

Education introduced Special Educational Needs (SEN) policies[3], in line with the general tendency of other European countries (see D'Alessio, 2014). Such policies have been officially introduced to bring justice and equity for all those learners experiencing school failure and that cannot be provided with educational support and provisions, in line with the general principles of inclusive education as conceptualized in the Italian context. Within the frame of *Integrazione Scolastica*, inclusive education has meant anything from physical integration of 'diverse' students in general education classrooms to the transformation of curricula, classrooms, and pedagogies, and even the potential transformation of the entire education system (see D'Alessio, 2011). Yet, despite efforts to expand and extend its meaning and practice, in the Italian context inclusive education has focused on 'diverse' students' and students with disabilities' access and participation in normative contexts (i.e. nondisabled cultures).

Given the above background, Disability Studies (DS) in education scholars in Italy have debated about the contrapuntal logics and approaches of SEN policies, highlighting how they are actually oriented to the identification, classification and categorization of 'difference' within the mainstream school settings (D'Alessio, 2013, 2014; Medeghini, 2013; Medeghini, Valtellina, 2006). Particularly, migrant learners in Italian classrooms appear to be over-exposed to processes of "SENitization" (i.e. the over-representation in the macro-category of Special Educational Needs –SEN) (Bocci, 2016), and have to increasingly address issues of labeling and stigmatization of difference, not to mention the impact on teachers' expectations regarding their school performances. Disability Studies in education scholars argue also that the ways in which SEN policies describe difference appears controversial. The resilience of a medical language is evident in the use of terms such as "comorbidities", "disorders", "learning difficulties" and "limit cognitive functioning", which place the pupils' 'needs' within himself and his functioning. The concept of 'normality' continues to dominate the teaching methods, by building differences on the basis of their distance from the 'norm', and the notion of 'educational homogeneity' is never critically discussed and thus the policies maintain the *status quo* of the existing educational

[3] Introduced with the Directive of the 27th December 2012, including three kinds of pupils: "disabled pupils according to the handicap certification established by Law 104/1992, students with learning disabilities according to Law 170/2010, and finally students coming from poor socio-economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and students with emotional and behavioural disorders".

system by operating on individual pupils, especially if from a migrant background, to help them reaching the school standards (D'Alessio, 2014; Medeghini, 2013; Canevaro, 2001, 2002, 2006).

As the above discussion demonstrates, within the Italian context issues of educational inequalities and school macro and micro exclusions have been addressed separately within the field of Intercultural Education or Special Education, with still very timid attempts to apply Disability Studies. In the attempt to respond to the limits of tackling these issues in two separate fields, this study adopts an intersectional, interdisciplinary and critical framework, Disability Critical Race Theory in Education, enriched with philosophical concepts such as Subjectivation and Performative Politics, elaborated by Judith Butler, to encourage systemic changes of teaching and learning practices and refugee reception strategies within the Italian context.

As I will demonstrate, the concepts of 'globalization' and 'knowledge society', and the values underpinning the philosophy of neoliberalism, emphasizing free market economics, entrepreneurialism, individualism and completion have significantly affected migration influx into Italy, and Europe more generally (see Sassen, 2014), have had a significant impact on marketization processes of education (Giroux, 1997; Leonardo, 2002; Youdell, 2006), on current Italian models of social integration of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth, and on the capitalist production of disability as a serviceable condition (Oliver, 1990; Baglieri, 2016). The current economic crisis in Italy, and the recent corruption scandal – known as *Mafia Capitale*[4]- that has involved some of the refugee agencies in Rome, has posed a serious threat to the system of forced migrant reception in the Italian capital. Claims that under-funding constrains the quality of the services offered to refugees are common, even among the Professional participants who participated in this research. The funding debate has, in large part, centered on the low salary and precarious job conditions of professionals in refugee agencies in Rome, on the paucity of economic and human resources within healthcare services for migrants – especially for the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms-, on the scarcity of funding for the reception and inclusion of asylum-seeking and refugee pupils in public

[4] Updated news on the scandal are available, in Italian, on this website: http://www.repubblica.it/argomenti/mafia_capitale.

Italian schools, and for the periodical training of teachers and educators on issues of forced migration.

The current social and economic situation in Italy provokes an intensifying combined process of demonization of asylum seekers (including children), the racialization of asylum, and the simultaneous conflation/collapse of statuses so that labor, migrants, students, asylum seekers and nationals perceived by other nationals as Other could be routinely grouped together and viewed as potentially threatening in a number of ways such as through crime, competition for resources, sex and disease (see Garner, 2007). The media and the citizens, especially of suburban areas of Rome where foster care homes are located, have responded to the asylum of unaccompanied children in negative ways, most of the time complaining about the corrupted business behind them and about how the already limited economic resources available have been destined to 'foreign' children rather than to poor Italian children[5]. In the context of public schools, the rhetoric of lack of funding has resulted in the controversial implementation of both *Integrazione Scolastica* and SEN policies. The over-representation of forced migrant students in disability categories and Special Educational Needs has been justified by the need to have an extra classroom support (i.e. support teachers), to cover for the lack of teaching resources and teachers' training on issues of forced migration.

This study is important as it attempts to show, not only how racism and ableism are co-constructed in society and have a powerful impact on the social and educational lives of students "forged at the crucible of difference" (Lorde, 2007, p. 112), but also that when targeting asylum-seeking and refugee children with disabilities inclusive education in the Italian context has failed to address power issues at the individual, organization and system levels in explicit and systematic ways (Kozleski, Artiles, Waitoller, 2015). As this research shows, one of the biggest obstacles to attaining the ideal of inclusive education in Italy is the failure to acknowledge and address historical sediments of oppression that are layered within institutions, as well as the cultural perspectives and understandings of how ethnicity, 'race', gender, language,

[5] See for example: http://www.latinaquotidiano.it/latina-scalo-nasce-il-comitato-spontaneo-contro-il-centro-di-accoglienza/. Or also: http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/11/27/news/tor_sapienza_grasso_non_razzismo_ma_grida_d_aiuto-101568034/.

citizenship, migratory status and other markers of identity are conflated with ability. For this reason, I was prompted to interrogate the discourses of White Italian Professionals and their subjectivating effects on raced/disabled young asylum seekers and refugees, and the capacity of young forced migrants to deploy discursive agency to unsettle, resignify and reinscribe hegemonic meanings about themselves (see Youdell, 2006; 2012). Therefore, I attempt to examine powerful questions and issues untangling myself from the laces of blindness and unconsciousness familiarity.

Furthermore, in line with Tomlinson's (2017) argument, the study attempts to show how in contemporary neoliberal economies where education is a 'capital' and part of a global industry, the category of special educational needs, subsumed into the wider global movement of inclusive education and permeated with an ideology of "benevolent humanitarianism" (Tomlinson, 1982, p. 5), is implicated in the strategic process of manufacturing the 'inability' of young people who are troublesome to existing systems, especially by mantras of fixed ability/disability. As the author argue, and as this study also demonstrates, the category of special educational needs has become a tool deployed by powerful governments for 'the strategic maintenance of ignorance' (Archer, 1988, p. 190, in Tomlinson, 2017) directed at subordinate groups, such as migrant and forced migrant children in the Italian context, thus determining the amount and kind of education they will receive (Tomlinson, 2017).

Insofar as I am aware, no studies within the Italian context have focused on the co-construction of 'race' and dis/ability from an intersectional lens and targeting forced migrant children. This study aims to further expanding knowledge and understanding of 'race' and disability, when targeting forced migrant children, while inspiring the readers to systemic change of teaching and learning practices in inclusive terms.

Employing a (constructivist) grounded theory (GT) methodology (using in-depth, semi-structured interviews) provided an opportunity to contribute conceptually and theoretically to the field. This is important because the education of refugee children as an area of study is regarded as 'under-theorised' (Pinson and Arnot, 2007). The application of a constructivist perspective is aligned to my philosophical beliefs about the nature of 'reality' and my emphasis on the co-construction (with my participants)

of the emerging analysis and theory. These important points will be examined in more detail in chapters four and five.

## 1.3 On Intersectionality, "Asylumgration" and Refugee Children's Education: a Critical Autobiographical Reflection

> "[...] All research is in one way or another autobiographical or else the avoidance of autobiography." (Reay, 1998, p. 2)[6]

Having established the policy and research significance of this study, I now consider the importance of the topic to me, the researcher. Fundamental to a constructivist approach to social science research is the understanding that our analyses of the social world are constructed and inevitably influenced by our historicality and autobiography (Lather, 1991). In constructivist grounded theory, it is important for the researcher to examine and make explicit his/her individual position in relation to the study (Mills *et al*., 2006; Strauss, 1987) and to put information about their experiences and interest in the field "on the table" (Clarke, 2005, p. 12).

I became acquainted with Miller's (1995) concept of the "autobiography of the question", during a qualitative research methodology seminar conducted by Professor Penny Jane Burke and Professor Kathy Charmaz. The "autobiography of the question" emphasizes the researcher's relationship to the questions she/he is exploring, requires careful consideration of the experiences, identities and perspectives she brings to the research process and asks her to make connections between herself, the research participants and other voices in the field. The autobiography of the research question helps the researcher examine the questions, knowledge and experience she/he brings to a particular research focus (Miller, 1995). As such, it supports practices of reflexivity, which are concerned to locate the researcher in wider social relations of power and inequality, and engage her in critical processes of interrogation with a strong level of sensitivity to inequalities and

[6] In Burke, 2002, p. 5

misrecognitions. This helps the researcher to consider her sense of self as relational, to acknowledge and pay close attention to complex power relations and to consider identity formations across intersecting and embodied sets of difference (ibid.). Miller (1995) explains that the autobiography of the question will involve the researcher in:

> "[…] Beginning with the story of [her] own interest in the question [she] is asking and planning to research into. From that initial story she may move towards the mapping of her developing sense of the question's interest for her onto the history of more public kinds of attention to it." (Miller, 1995, quoted in Burke, 2002, p. 5)

While discussing and reflecting on this concept during the seminar, and the months following it, I have come to see its 'truth'. Since that seminar I started thinking about the reasons why I was motivated to research issues of migration and forced migration – "asylumgration", Garner (2007) calls it-, intersectionality and educational exclusions. Coming towards the end of the PhD process, I now see that what generated my research questions and interest and that what I found mirrors my preoccupations, worries and ideology, considering that my own educational and life experiences as a White European woman has been different from those of the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth in this study.

"We are all refugees, […] lost in an intricate universe made of words, searching for refuge in a story", says Timira the Italo-Somali refugee woman and main character of Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed's *Romanzo Meticcio* (Mestizo Novel). This quote, and the book in particular, reminds me why I am passionate about researching education for refugee children. Since a young age, I myself have been looking for refuge in the stories of people from different backgrounds, searching for the intrinsic meanings and realities layered within multicultural communities and that safe space or sanctuary where they may be expressed. I started my BA in Education in Rome in 2003, and as an undergraduate with limited resources, I shared a flat with other students near Piazza Vittorio –one of the most multicultural areas of Rome. In order to be more involved in the community, I began to volunteer in a grassroots organization operating a nursery serving refugee and asylum seeking children, aged 0-3, and their families. Listening to the stories of my students and their families, my eyes were opened to the fact that these narratives were crucial not only in responding to their immediate needs, but in giving them the tools they needed to mediate relationships

and meanings in a different social context. This experience sparked my interest in education, and motivated me to be creative and finding innovative solutions to change the school curriculum in order to facilitate migrant and forced migrant children's inclusion in the host society.
After graduating with a major in Intercultural Education, in 2007 I left Rome to go and live in London, where I had been offered a place to study a Masters in Social Justice and Education at the University College London Institute of Education. In such a vibrant city, I had the chance to be part of an extremely multicultural community. I was living in John Adams Hall, a Georgian house converted to dormitory, with fellow students from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Iran, India, Greece and the U.S., to name a few. The friends I made there enhanced my curiosity about education systems worldwide, while I was becoming an informed member of the educational research community, and increasingly passionate about refugee children's rights and access to education. I did not hesitate to share such passion with my newly found friends, over an Ethiopian or a Japanese homemade dinner. The experience of building friendships with brilliant people from different countries and cultural backgrounds taught me that bringing people together around points of common interests, such as education or social justice, facilitates communication and helps reducing the differences and fosters understanding.

Developing significant relationships with housemates and friends sharing similar interests is essential to the feeling of belonging, and for a personal sense of accomplishment. This seems to be true also for the relationship between a host society and forced migrants. In 2011, before embarking on the current PhD journey and while volunteering with a Lebanese organization in Beirut providing sports activities for Palestinian and Iraqi refugee children, I observed how willing these children were to form a community as part of a new life for themselves, as well as realizing their personal educational potential and developing meaningful relationships, without being judged by stereotypes and without seeing their personal aspirations neglected. Many of these children had disabilities and their rights had been completely ignored by the Lebanese government. Experiencing these realities has led me to question how we can develop and improve educational and inclusive policies for children at the intersection of marginalities on a global scale, but starting from my "home" context, Europe.

This interest found fruition when I was awarded a scholarship from the Italian Ministry of Education (administered by the Department of Education at Roma Tre University) to carry out the doctoral research presented in this thesis. Exploring how 'race', disability, gender, class, migratory status and other axis of identity intersect and affect the life of young forced migrant students in the Italian context and analyzing the (often unconscious) discriminatory discourses of White Italian Professionals in this study, which seem to reconfigure their social and psychological boundaries to exclude certain groups of people from their national imaginaries, has made me aware and critical about my own Whiteness and the array of privileges that this status entails – all of which have been carefully kept hidden by the Italian society and educational institutions.

I must admit that I have struggled with the tension, which has arisen, between my wish to provide this information as part of my methodological approach and my concerns about exposure of personal details. I was concerned that I would be seen as not 'rigorous' in my methodological approach where I introduce this thesis with a personal reflection. I had a fear of "trivializing" my work by "relinquishing the distanced stance of an abstract supposedly universal speaker" (Grumet, 2001, p. 171). I also worried that the reader would assume that my analysis and findings derived mainly, however unconsciously, from my own previous experiences. While as a constructivist I emphasize that one cannot separate oneself from and stand outside one's historicality, in this research, my understanding of the role of personal experiences was retrospectively derived. It has been through my analysis and the research process overall that I have come to interrogate, understand, and 'frame', previous personal experiences- thus becoming a critical White-, and not the other way around (although of course there is some interaction between the two). This recalls Giddens' (1976) "double hermeneutic", where there is a two-way relationship (between the social world and the researcher) in the quest for understanding through research. In this case, the two-way relationship could also be construed as being between the research process and findings, and my own personal experiences.

The study is oriented towards a participatory approach, and therefore, in part, the research is co-constructed. Within such framework, I am indeed a co-participant in the process.

### 1.4 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

In this study I aimed to

- Explore the educational experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee children, hosted in some of the refugee agencies in the area of Rome, particularly looking at where they are educated and with whom (whether they are located in 'segregated schools' or adult vocational training institutes with high number of migrant students), and the quality of social and medical support they receive;
- Critically analyse the various steps that characterise disablement and SENitizing processes;
- Shed light on the discriminating discourses of White Professionals, operating in Rome's refugee services, and their subjectivating effects on asylum-seeking and refugee children, while revealing the "colour-evasive" (Annamma, Jackson, Morrison, 2016) racial ideology dominant in the Italian society;
- Focus on forced migrant children's possibility to perform discursive agency, thus challenging the prevailing constitutions of the asylum-seeking subjects thus rendering intelligible their educational and life aspirations;
- Contribute conceptually to the fields of Intercultural and Special and Inclusive Education, generally and specifically in the Italian context, through the use of (constructivist) grounded theory and of an intersectional theoretical framework, and to explore the usefulness of this methodological and theoretical approaches; and
- Identify recommendations for policy and practice, particularly in relation to the promotion of systemic changes in inclusive terms that would reduce educational inequalities of forced migrant children in the Italian context.

A crucial point of the research is to interrogate the subjectivating power of professionals' discriminatory discourses on the way in which disabled refugee children construct meanings related to their migratory status, 'race', discrimination and disability, and to what extent their experience is embedded in larger structures, networks and situations, where hierarchies of power (such as that of school personnel and health professionals) maintain and perpetuate differences and inequalities. In a

grounded theory study, while the researcher has a substantive area he/she wishes to explore, and may commence with an area of interest (such as I have, above), throughout the research he or she must be attuned to identifying what the research participants' main, underlying concern might be, as well as those behaviours in which they engage to resolve that main concern. Hence, through an exploration of the two groups of participants' (i.e. the Professionals and the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children) experiences, a related objective of the research was to develop a grounded theory, which help us to understand their main concern, and those actions, which are instituted to process that main concern. I wanted to examine the strategies that they were deploying which were constraining or enabling their *integration* (however defined), or negatively or positively impacting upon their experiences.

In summary, then, the research questions were:

- To what extent can asylum-seeking and refugee children access mainstream education? And how is the construction of their disability impacting on their experiences in social and health services – including the foster care homes where they are hosted?
- How are the categories of disability and 'migratory status' constructed by the school personnel and health professionals, and how is this 'meaning making' influencing disabled refugee children's education and life in Italy?
- To what extent disabled refugee children have an active role in the certification process of the disability and in the negotiation of the school activities included in the Individual Educational Project (IEP)? How intelligible are their educational and life expectations?

### 1.5 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

As previously noted, the methodological approach employed is constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014) (see chapters four and five). In grounded theory, one does not commence with a pre-ordained theoretical or conceptual framework, nor is one's study framed from the outset by a particular theory/theorist, or a set of theories/theorists. Rather, the emphasis is on inductively deriving a

conceptual framework from one's data. One uses one's analysis and findings to consider conceptual and theoretical sources upon which to draw, as relevant and appropriate. Being of a constructivist bent, however, I feel it important to set out the various influences on my thinking at the outset of my study.

In terms of the education of forced migrant children with disability I would have rejected a Special Education or an Intercultural Education approach, for maintaining a double focus on inclusive education and diversity and for not grasping the complexities of identity intersections, and how these have an impact on students' lives. My theoretical leanings would have been in the direction of social model of disability, anti-racists and Critical Race Theory. I would have disagreed with a Special Educational Needs (SEN) approach, as a means of social control and as a way of increasing or maintaining the power of professional medical experts under the guise of promoting equality in education for all students (see Oliver, 1990). I would have criticised a merely top-down approach that is distant from the views of disabled people and that leave the education and mainstream schools system unquestioned. I would have criticised the often superficial and universalistic aims of Intercultural Education, which largely missed to address radically the causes for educational and social inequalities and, of course, of racism, and that left un-criticised controversial terminology within Italian education policies, such as students of "non-Italian citizenship", or "foreign" students.

Throughout my research process, my theoretical position has, naturally evolved somewhat. In terms of my *derived* conceptual and theoretical framework, I would position myself alongside Disability Critical Race Theory, Intersectional analysis and Butler's (1990;1997a, b) notion of subjectivation and performative politics. I have found these concepts to be most useful in understanding my participants' overall orientation to *integration* and their attitudes within the educational and social realms. I argue that the co-construction of 'race' and 'ability and the normalizing effects of racism and ableism are of great salience in the educational experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee students. I suggest that discriminatory discourses by White Italian Professionals in refugee services legitimate processes of "SENitizing and Disabling" of forced migrant children, and thus their construction as deviant from the standardized norm of the society. I consider how such disabling processes are

strategies for the integration of refugee children that can be then considered not as potential terrorists, but as actual human beings. While these have been hinted at in the literature (see chapter three), they are key findings of this study. My analysis indicates the urgent need for reform in the training of Italian professionals working in refugee services and in public schools, as well as inclusive changes in the school curriculum and in the teaching and learning practices.

For all the above points, my positioning has been derived from my analysis, the process of which I will demonstrate throughout this thesis.

### 1.6 Conclusion and Overview of the Thesis

This was the first of eleven chapters in this thesis. Chapter two provides an overview of the context, including policy, with regard to the presence of unaccompanied forced migrant children in Italy, with a specific focus on Rome. It demonstrate that the influx of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is a permanent trend of migration into Italy, and that their presence in mainstream public school is lower compared to other migrant groups. Chapter three considers my theoretical assumptions and reviews the conceptual framework used for this study. Chapter four explains my rationale for employing a constructivist grounded theory methodology. The next chapter outlines the procedures employed throughout the study, and provide information about the participants, their recruitment, and data collection and analysis. In chapters six to ten, the findings of the research are presented, both conceptually in grounded theory fashion in chapter six, and in more contextual detail in chapter seven, eight, nine and ten. In the final concluding chapter I consider the significance and contribution of the study, as well as its 'quality' and limitations. I also identify recommendations for policy and practice and directions for future research.

# Chapter Two: Background, Context and Policies

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the presence of migrant and forced migrant students in Italy and in Rome, more specifically, while illustrating the policies and discursive context regulating their legal status, and social and educational integration. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that over one million people fled to Europe in 2015 (UNHCR, 2015). In the same year, over 110,000 children applied for asylum on their own, having arrived in the country of refuge alone, with no parent or guardian (UNICEF, 2015). Italy received 8,461 unaccompanied minors, of which around 1,000 of them asked for asylum (Refugee Council, 2015). The increase in the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum reveals to what extent their arrival is not simply a temporary development but a long-term feature of migration into the E.U. and, of course, Italy (COM 554 final/2012). Particular attention will be given to the categorization of forced migrant children, and the terminology used by refugee agencies in Rome, and to how their social and educational integration is conceptualized within existing education policy documents. The chapter ends with an overview of the existing intercultural and inclusive policies implementing access to compulsory education for unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children in Italy, while analyzing how the issue of disability is addressed in such policies.

It seems crucial to highlight here that the legislations and statistical reports presented in this chapter provide the specific lenses through which State institutions see migrant and forced migrant children, and which are offered to the general Italian public. Asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children seem to be all grouped within the discriminatory and exclusionary category of “students with non-Italian citizenship”; hence the diversity of their migration processes, identities and life experiences are not emphasized nor considered appropriately. Left unchallenged by the two distinct approaches of Intercultural and Special Education, worshipped by the majority of Italian scholars, these policies perpetuate a color-evasive racial ideology and a

medicalized view of disability without finding plausible solutions to address the educational and social inequalities affecting asylum-seeking and refugee students, among the others (see for example MIUR, 2007; 2014). As an example, some of the educational policies seem to state the obvious by arguing that "foreign minors, just like the Italians, are above all human beings and as such they have rights and duties in spite of their nationalities" (MIUR, 2014, p. 3). In this chapter, and indeed in the whole thesis, the use of terms such as migrants, forced migrants or specifically asylum-seeking and refugee children is preferred in order to avoid discriminatory generalizations, and to better represents the various identities of the children considered, unless when specifically reporting data from Ministerial policy documents.

## 2.2 Migrant Children in Italy

Data published by the Italian census (*ISTAT*) in January 2011 shows that the number of 'foreign' minors, a discriminatory term used interchangeably with minors with 'non-Italian citizenship' (NIC) in all the official Italian policy documents to indicate all kinds of migrants, residing in Italy is of 993,238, with a slight prevalence of males over females (Programma Integra, 2013). Generally speaking, in the last five years there has been an increase in the migrant children population, which corresponds to the general rise of the migrant population. The distribution of migrant children in the Italian territory shows that their presence varies significantly across the Italian regions. Of the total number of migrant children residing in Italy, the 26% of them are registered in the city halls (or *Comuni*) of the major cities in the northern regions of Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia Romagna, while significantly lower numbers are in the southern areas, as Table 1 shows (Programma Integra, 2013). Within the above three regions, migrant children constitute between 10% and 16% of the total percentage of minors residing in the area. In Lazio, where Rome is located, the number of migrant children corresponds to 10% of the population, while in Campania in the southern part of Italy their presence slightly exceeds the 2% (ibid.)[7].

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[7] These data have been gathered by the Italian census (*ISTAT*), and indicates the numbers of migrant children (up to 18 years old) regularly resident in Italy. However, these data they do not seem to include unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

At the end of 2011, the total number of migrant children from non-EU countries residing in Italy amounted to 759,080 and represented 21.5 % of the total migrant population (Programma Integra, 2013). In the same year, the top five non-EU countries by number of migrant children were Morocco, Albania, China, Tunisia and Egypt, which considered together represent more than the half of the migrant children regularly residing in Italy (Programma Integra, 2013). A further important figure is represented by the 'permanent component of migration', or long-term residents that hold an indefinite permit to stay. Long-term migrant children numbered 440,292 at the end of 2011, and constitute 58% of the total of non-EU minors (ibid.).

**Table 1. Percentage of Migrant Children divided by Sex and Region- Year 2011**

| **Region** | **Males** | **Females** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lombardia | 25.9 | 26.0 | 26.0 |
| Veneto | 12.2 | 12.2 | 12.2 |
| Emilia Romagna | 11.5 | 11.5 | 11.5 |
| Lazio | 10.1 | 10.0 | 10.1 |
| Campania | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.5 |

Data Gathered by the Italian census (*ISTAT*) by the end of 2011, reported by Programma Integra (2013)

Between 2011 and 2015, the number of migrant children in the Italian territory increased significantly due to the presence of unaccompanied minors, so that at the end of 2015 it was just below 12,000, an increase compared to 2014 of 1,385 with a percentage change of 13.1 % (Ministero del Lavoro, 2015). However, such an increase is much lower than the significant rise registered at the end of 2014, compared to the end of 2013: + 4,217 children, or +66% (ibid.), as Table 2 shows. In 2014, the regions with the highest number of unaccompanied migrant children were Sicily (3,100 children), Lazio (2,241 children), Calabria (1,470 children) (see www.programmaintegra.it). Importantly, by the end of 2015 there were 6,135 unaccompanied minors that were un-traceable, and that had therefore left the reception centers and services. These data reflect the complexity of the phenomenon of un-traceability of many unaccompanied minors, due to multiple factors, including the migration project, the family and individual expectations, the information in the

possession of the child, parental networks and reference points within countries of destination (Ministero del Lavoro, 2015).

**Table 2. Number of Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UC) in Italy at the End of 2013, 2014, 2015**

| Period | N° of Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UC) | Increase in the Number compare to Previous Period |
|---|---|---|
| **31/12/2013** | 6,319 | - |
| **31/12/2014** | 10,536 | 4,217 (+66.7%) |
| **31/12/2015** | 11,921 | 1,385 (+13.1%) |

(Data published by Ministero del Lavoro, 2015)

The next paragraph deals with the categorization and the specific terminology used for migrant and forced migrant children, and the specific laws and policies governing their judicial status within the Italian state.

### *2.2.1 Categorization and Terminology*

The law regulating the permanence of migrant children within the Italian territory is the *Testo Unico Immigrazione – Dlgs 286/1998*, modified by the law *189/2002* or *Bossi-Fini Law* and by the *Law 94/2009* or *Security Law*. This law, and later amendments, deals with issues such as residence, social and health assistance and family reunification of migrant children with and without their parents or relatives (Programma Integra, 2013). In the case of unaccompanied migrant children, common standards of protection and treatment of children are applied, regardless of their nationality. In this case, the policies regulating the staying and the treatment of unaccompanied migrant children are the *Codice Civile* (art. 400, and following), and the *Law 184/2003 "Diritti del Minore ad una Famiglia"* (i.e. children's rights to a family), which establish the procedures for reporting, taking charge, protecting and adopting children in the conditions of having no parental care. Importantly, the *Testo Unico Immigrazione* highlights that for all administrative and judicial proceedings related to the protection of unaccompanied minors, the best interest of the child must be taken into account, as established by the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the

Child (Programma Integra, 2013). Given the juridical distinction made by the Italian law between accompanied and unaccompanied migrant children, the paragraph takes into consideration accompanied migrant children, and the recent phenomenon of unaccompanied migrant children and of unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

Accompanied migrant children, residing in Italy with their families, usually have the same juridical and migration status of their parents. If the parents or one of the parents has a resident permit, the children will be given a residence permit for family reasons that have the same length as that of the parents. Once the children reach 18, they have to change their residence permits for family reasons into one for work or for study. However, following the implementation of the 2008 directive of the Ministry of Interior[8], which recognizes that young adults might still have uncertainties about their future, the residence permit for family reasons can be renewed for the same period indicated in that of the parent(s) (Programma Integra, 2013). Importantly, accompanied migrant children, residents within the Italian territory, have the right to education and to healthcare recognized, regardless of the validity of their residence permits (ibid.).

International and European laws define unaccompanied migrant children as those citizens of non-EU countries aged less than 18 that have entered a EU country without their parents or adult relatives. The Italian law, and specifically the *Testo Unico Immigrazione 1998*, and more recently *Disegno di Legge n.1658B* approved on the 29th of March 2017, establishes that unaccompanied migrant children cannot be expelled from the host country and thus they are entitled to a residence permit. As argued earlier in this chapter, in this case they are considered as children *tout court*, and therefore given the State's protection. The mayor of the local authority, where unaccompanied migrant children are residents, is appointed as their legal guardian and s/he in turns delegates social workers to perform all the administrative and judicial acts on behalf of the children (Programma Integra, 2013). Since December 2012, following an agreement between the State and the regions (i.e. *Accordo Stato Regioni*) on access to health services by migrant population[9], it has been established that

[8] *Direttiva del Ministero dell'Interno del 28 marzo 2008 n°17272/7*.
[9] Available at: http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/02/07/13A00918/sg

regardless of the validity of their residence permits, unaccompanied migrant children can freely access national healthcare services. This agreement has simplified the healthcare bureaucracy for unaccompanied migrant children, since before 2012 those without a regular resident permit were considered as irregular migrants, therefore receiving medical treatment exclusively upon obtaining the *Stranieri Temporaneamente Presenti (STP)* (i.e. temporarily resident foreigners) health card.

Data gathered in 2015 by the Ministero del Lavoro on the nationalities of unaccompanied migrant children residing in Italy shows how Egypt continues to figure as the main country of origin of unaccompanied migrant minors (23.1%), followed by Albania (12.0%), Eritrea (9.9%), Gambia (9.7%), and Nigeria (5.8%) (Ministero del Lavoro, 2015). Table 3 provides the detailed numbers of unaccompanied migrant children by country of origin.

**Table 3. Number of Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UC) by Country of Origin**

| **2015** | | | **2014** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Country of Origin** | **N° UC** | **%** | **Country of Origin** | **N° UC** | **%** |
| Egypt | 2,753 | 23.1 | Egypt | 2,455 | 23.3 |
| Albania | 1,432 | 12.0 | Eritrea | 1,303 | 12.4 |
| Eritrea | 1,177 | 9.9 | Gambia | 1,104 | 10.5 |
| Gambia | 1,161 | 9.7 | Somalia | 1,097 | 1.4 |
| Nigeria | 697 | 5.8 | Albania | 1,043 | 9.9 |

(Data published by Ministero del Lavoro, 2015)

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children represent a particular type of migrant children. In the Italian context, there are two laws, *Dlgs 251/2007* and *Dlgs 25/2008*, modified by *Dlgs 159/2009*, that govern their legal position. Specifically, these laws set the conditions for unaccompanied migrant children's request for asylum and the recognition of the status of refugee, or the subsidiary protection (Programma Integra, 2013). Once the unaccompanied minor has formally obtained a legal guardian, then this would help him or her to put forward the asylum request, and will

assist the audition for the refugee status recognition at the Territorial Commission[10] (ibid.). The auditions of children at the Commission should always happen in front of one of the refugee's legal guardians. The possible results of the auditions for unaccompanied forced migrant minors can be: recognition of the refugee status, with a residence permit for asylum valid for five years; recognition of subsidiary protection, with a permit of three years, or refusal of international refugee protection with the recommendation of granting humanitarian protection with a resident permit valid maximum for two years, as established by art. 5 of the *Dlgs 286/1998* (Programma Integra, 2013). For what concerns the reception and integration of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, the *Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati (SPRAR)*[11] holds specific places for such category of children.

In 2015, unaccompanied migrant children presented 3,950 new applications for international protection. There has been an increase of 54% in the total number of requests presented by unaccompanied children, compared to 2014 when the submitted applications were 2,557 (Ministero del Lavoro, 2015). The vast majority of unaccompanied migrant children seeking asylum in Italy come from African countries: the number of unaccompanied minors of African origins seeking asylum in Italy in 2015 is of 3,327, representing 80% of the total (ibid.). As Table 4 shows, the main countries of origin of children needing international protection are Gambia (1,171 minors, 29.6% of the total), Nigeria (564 minors, 14.2% of the total), and Senegal (437 minors, 11% of the total). Interestingly, the countries of origin of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum differ from those of the adult population, for which the prevailing nationalities are Somalia and Eritrea (Ministero del Lavoro, 2015).

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[10] For a detailed description of the procedures for the asylum request in Italy see http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/Italy/asylum-procedure/general/short-overview-asylum-procedure.

[11] The System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) was created under *Law no. 189 of 2002* and consists of a network of local authorities that set up and run reception projects for people forced to migrate. It draws, within the limits of available resources, upon the *National Fund for Asylum policies and services* managed by the Interior Ministry and included in State Budget legislation. At a local level local authorities, with the valued support of the third sector, guarantee an "integrated reception" that goes well beyond the mere provision of board and lodging, but includes orientation measures, legal and social assistance as well as the development of personalised programmes for the social-economic integration of individuals.

**Table 4. Number of Unaccompanied Children (UC) Seeking Asylum in Italy by Country of Origin**

**2015**

| **Country of Origin** | **N°UC Seeking Asylum** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| Gambia | 1,171 | 29.6 |
| Nigeria | 564 | 14.2 |
| Senegal | 437 | 11.0 |
| Bangladesh | 420 | 10.6 |
| Mali | 310 | 7.8 |
| Ghana | 239 | 6.0 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 188 | 4.7 |
| Guinea | 151 | 3.8 |
| Egypt | 70 | 1.8 |
| Others | 409 | 10.3 |
| TOTAL | 3,959 | 100.0 |

(Data published by Ministero del Lavoro, 2015)

### *2.2.2 The Presence of Unaccompanied Migrant and Forced Migrant Children in Italian Schools*

The growing number of migrant and forced migrant children in Italy has a significant impact on the education system, with an increasing presence of migrant students in Italian schools. If in the academic year 2001/2002 students 'with non-Italian citizenship' (NIC)[12] – as the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) defines them- represented the 2.2% of the total school population (196,414 pupils), in the academic year 2012/2013 they constitute the 8.8% of the total (786,630 pupils) (ISMU, 2014). A significant increase has been registered in the academic year 2014/2015, when the

[12] This label seems to be rather controversial, firstly because it is meant to refer to children from very different background and with different educational needs (i.e. accompanied, unaccompanied minors, asylum-seeking and refugee children, children born in Italy from migrant parents, and so on), secondly as it appears to reinforce the elitist character of the Italian citizenship (i.e. until now children born in Italy from migrant parents cannot acquire the Italian citizenship until the age of 18. More information on the recent Parliamentary debate on citizenship reform, available at: http://www.italy24.ilsole24ore.com/art/laws-and-taxes/2014-10-20/renzi-supports-automatic-citizenship-to-immigrants-born-italy-163914.php?uuid=ABLek04B).

number of students 'with non-Italian citizenship' in Italian schools reached 814,187, or the 9.2% of the total (ISMU, 2016). The current school year marks a slight growth of 1.4% over the previous year (ibid.). Table 5 shows the increase in the school enrolment of students with 'non-Italian citizenship' (NIC) in the last fourteen years.

**Table 5. Students with Non-Italian Citizenship (NIC) within Italian Schools**

| Academic Year | NIC students | Early Years | Primary | Lower Secondary School | Upper Secondary School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001/2002 | 196, 414 | 39,445 | 84,122 | 45,253 | 27,594 |
| 2002/2003 | 239,808 | 48,072 | 100,939 | 55,907 | 34,890 |
| 2003/2004 | 307,141 | 59,500 | 123,814 | 71,447 | 52,380 |
| 2004/2005 | 370,803 | 74,348 | 147,633 | 84,989 | 63,833 |
| 2005/2006 | 431,211 | 84,058 | 165,951 | 98,150 | 83,052 |
| 2006/2007 | 501, 420 | 94,712 | 190,803 | 113,076 | 102,829 |
| 2007/2008 | 574,133 | 111,044 | 217,716 | 126,396 | 118,977 |
| 2008/2009 | 629,360 | 125,092 | 234,206 | 140,050 | 130,012 |
| 2009/2010 | 673,800 | 125,092 | 234,206 | 140,050 | 130,012 |
| 2010/2011 | 710,263 | 144,628 | 254,653 | 157,559 | 153,423 |
| 2011/2012 | 755,939 | 156,701 | 268,671 | 166,043 | 164,524 |
| 2012/2013 | 786,630 | 164,589 | 276,129 | 170,792 | 175,120 |
| 2013/2014 | 802,844 | 167,650 | 283,233 | 169,780 | 182,181 |
| 2014/2015 | 814,187 | 167,980 | 291,782 | 167,068 | 187,375 |

(Published by ISMU, 2016)

When considering the growth in the number of students enrolled in various school levels in the last fifteen years, it is important to consider that such growth has been particularly significant in the upper secondary school, as Table 5 highlights, while for early years and primary education the increase occurred at a pace similar to that of the entire migrant school population (ISMU, 2016). If for a long time statistical data has underlined the absence of children 'with non-Italian citizenship' in upper secondary education, when comparing it with the over-representation of the migrant student population in early years, currently this situation has changed due to the rise in the number of the second generation children (i.e. born in Italy from migrant parents) in the education system (ibid.).

In the academic year 2014/2015, the main countries of origin of migrant children in Italian schools are Romania with a total of 157,153 pupils, followed by Albania with 108,331 students, and Morocco with 101,584 students. Other significant presences are the Chinese students (41,707) and Filipinos (26,132) (ISMU, 2016). In early years education most pupils are from Bangladesh (27.1%), Morocco (25.8%) and Egypt (23.8%). In primary schools, in addition to Bangladesh (43.2%), and Egypt (39.6%), there are students from Pakistan (40.1%) and India (39.5%). Within Italian lower secondary schools there are many pupils from China (24.7%), Macedonia (24.4%) and the Philippines (24.1%). Finally, at the upper secondary school level there are numerous Eastern European students (e.g. 39.4% Ukrainians and 38% Moldavians), and Latin Americans (e.g. 34% Peruvians and 33.9% Ecuadorians) (ISMU, 2016).

Interestingly, the countries of origin of the pupils 'with non-Italian citizenship' in lower and upper secondary school levels are different from the countries of origin of young unaccompanied migrant children or unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children. This is because, as the analysis chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, unaccompanied migrant children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children are 'advised' to attend Italian classes (L2) and a specific course to get the middle school diploma (*Terza Media)* in 'segregated' public institutions, organized to provide adult education for all - but as a matter of fact the attendance of migrants outnumbers that of Italians-, also known as *Centri Territoriali Permanenti* and more recently renamed *Centri per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (C.P.I.A)*.

As highlighted by the ISMU (2016) report, there are no accurate national and local demographic data on the numbers of unaccompanied migrant children and on unaccompanied children seeking asylum attending Italian schools. Only some data gathered at the local level, in regions such as Tuscany and Lombardia, are available. In Tuscany, the data of the Regional Office of Education and the University of Florence demonstrates that there are approximately 112 unaccompanied children enrolled in the schools across the region. However, it is not clear whether they are asylum seekers or refugees (ISMU, 2016). The research conducted by the Regional Office of Lombardia reveals that in the academic year 2015/2016 there are 281 unaccompanied children in Milan's school, and the majority of them have an age of

16 and more. Also in this case, it is not clear if such students are seeking asylum or whether they are refugees (ibid.).

In the Italian context, the lack of statistical data on unaccompanied forced migrant children's enrolment in public schools attests to the weak educational arm of Italy. Such phenomenon might also be due to the fact that teachers, head teachers and school staff are not aware, for privacy reasons, of the children's migratory status, unless it is the child who communicate it openly, which hardly happens. Consequently, school personnel in Italy struggle to take into proper consideration the effects of extreme trauma on refugee children's learning process, and consequently do not seem to be able to develop inclusive teaching and learning practices. As the analysis of the data gathered for the present research shows, this is caused by a serious lack of teacher training on the schooling of asylum seeking and refugee children, and the lack of constant communication between schools and refugee agencies at the local level. Of course, such a superficial approach to the education of forced migrant children might have disastrous effects on their learning experience as well as on their future integration within the Italian society.

### *2.2.3 Migrant and Forced Migrant Children in Rome's Schools*

Statistical data from the academic year 2011/2012 to 2014/2015 shows how Rome is the first city for the number of migrant students enrolled in local schools (Programma Integra, 2013; ISMU, 2016). In the academic year 2014/2015 the number of migrant pupils was of 40,000 approximately, and Rome was followed only by Milan (over 36,000 students) and Turin (over 23,000 students) (ISMU, 2016). Taking into consideration the percentage of incidence of students with 'non-Italian citizenship' born in Italy, and students 'with non-Italian citizenship' (NIC) newly arrived to Italy, we see that Rome has a low incidence of students "with non-Italian citizenship" newly arrived and a high incidence of second generation students (i.e. students with "non-Italian citizenship" born in Rome) (ibid.).

Data gathered by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR), and re-elaborated by Programma Integra in 2012, show how in the city of Rome, the percentage of migrant students for the academic year 2010-2011 is bigger in primary and lower secondary

school, where it is around 9%, while it lowers to the 7. 4 % in upper secondary school level (Programma Integra, 2013). Table 6 shows this tendency in more detail.

**Table 6. Percentages of 'Students with Non-Italian Citizenship (NIC) in Rome - 2010/2011**

| School Level | N° Total Students | N° NIC Students |
|---|---|---|
| Primary | 122,395 | 11,720 |
| Lower Secondary School | 75,657 | 7,231 |
| Upper Secondary School | 121,430 | 8,984 |
| Total | 319,482 | 27,935 |

(Data elaborated by MIUR and re-elaborated by Programma Integra, 2013)

In the academic year 2014/2015, the percentage of students with 'non-Italian citizenship' (NIC) in Rome enrolled in early years education is of 18.4%. Primary education level holds the highest percentage of NIC students with 34.9% of enrolment, while lower secondary school sees 20.3% and upper secondary education 26. 3% (ISMU, 2016).

For what concerns the countries of origin of NIC students in Rome's schools, the majority come from Romania, and they constitute the 30% of the total NIC students enrolled (ISMU, 2016). Students from the Philippines are the second larger group in Rome, with just above the 11% of the total. While Bangladeshi students have had a significant presence in the academic year 2014/2015 with a percentage of 5.4% of the total, as Table 7 indicates.

**Table 7. Countries of Origin of 'Students with Non-Italian Citizenship (NIC) in Rome's Schools - 2014/2015**

**Rome**

| | Romania | Philippines | Bangladesh | Perù |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Absolute Value | 11,196 | 5,065 | 2,161 | 2,006 |
| % | 28.0 | 12.7 | 5.4 | 5.0 |

(Published by ISMU, 2016)

Even the data gathered by ISMU in 2016 for the city of Rome, do not seem to account for the unaccompanied migrant children and asylum-seeking and refugee children in Rome, as their nationalities, showed earlier in this chapter, do not features in the above tables. As a consequence, it seems rather difficult to speculate on the percentage of newly arrived migrant and forced migrant children in Rome's school, or to estimate a difference between those enrolled in mainstream schools and those in the *CI.PI.A* (ISMU, 2016, but see also Programma Integra, 2013).

### *2.2.4 Reception, Social and Educational Integration of Unaccompanied Migrant and Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum in Rome*

The reception system for unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children in Rome has a fairly complex structure, and it is characterized by various kinds of centres that perform different functions and roles, according to the degree of 'autonomy' that it is allowed to the children host in them (Programma Integra, 2013). Figure 1 represents briefly the various stages that constitute a prototype of reception of unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children in Rome, from the very first contact with the Police and with the refugee agencies. It is important to note that reception begins with the first contact that unaccompanied minors have with the services (ibid.). The first contact might happen in different ways. For example, the Italian Police can signal the minor to the services, another form of access to the services is through children's spontaneous presentation or through the signaling of private entities (e.g. citizens or organizations). A crucial role in this 'signaling' stage is played by agencies that have a street unit, and that initiate the very first relations with unaccompanied children, who have not yet entered the formal reception system (Programma Integra, 2013).

Following the first contact with the Italian Police, and in the cases in which the children are undocumented, come the identification procedures. Such procedures entail for example age assessment, which is carried out through specific medical practices that –in the case of Rome- take place in public hospitals. Once the identification procedures are over, unaccompanied children should be taken in a “protected center”. Thus, their presence is signaled to Rome social services (*Sala Operativa Sociale, Dipartimento Promozione dei Servizi Sociali e della Salute di Roma Capitale*), which acquire all the data pertaining to the children (Programma Integra, 2013). The social services are in charge to find for unaccompanied children a place in a “first reception” center that has space available for them (ibid., p. 159). In the area of Rome, there are four “first reception” centers for unaccompanied minors, for a total of 123 places that established a partnership with private social organizations.

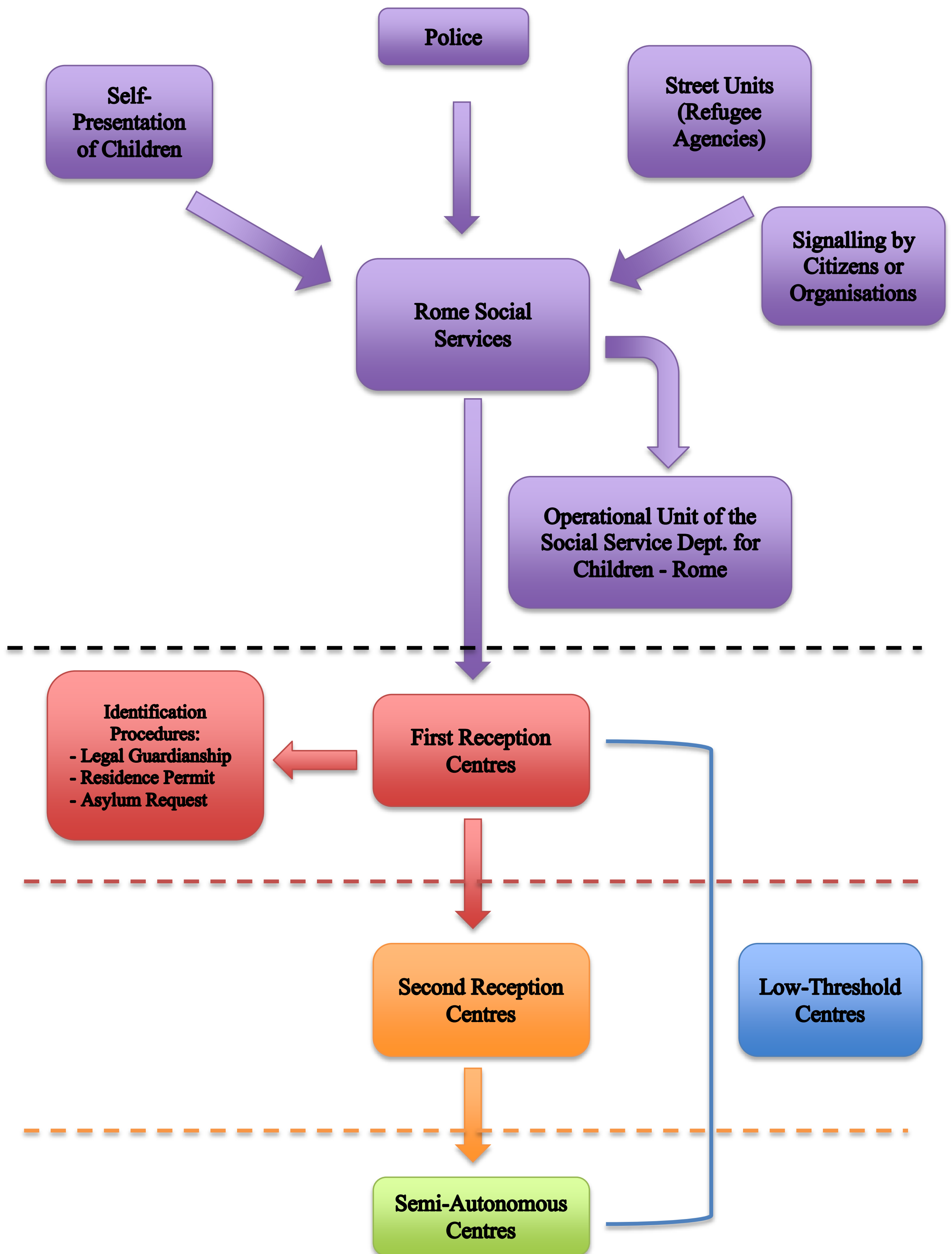


**Figure 1. Unaccompanied Migrant and Forced Migrant Children's Reception in Rome**

During the first stage of reception, unaccompanied minors are invited to take part in an interview with a social worker and a cultural mediator. This interview seems crucial for the reception pathway, as it tries to reconstruct the biographical history of unaccompanied minors, and helps evaluating whether they would have the possibility to apply for asylum. After such interview, and as a result of a complex and often lengthy bureaucracy, unaccompanied children are given a legal guardian who is usually the mayor of the city where they reside (Programma Integra, 2013). The mayor then nominates social workers of the centers hosting them to carry out legal and administrative duties related to unaccompanied migrant children. After gaining an identity card, unaccompanied children can request a residence permit or – where applicable- they could demand international protection. While sorting out such legal bureaucracy, unaccompanied minors in first reception centers can participate in Italian language courses (L2).

When the conditions for the first reception are satisfied, and the children have obtained their residence permit, then they enter the second stage of reception, and as a consequence they are transferred to foster care homes, where they are constantly followed by social workers and other professionals, and they are expected to access mainstream education, but following a specific and individualized educational plan usually provided to pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), called Individual Educational Project (IEP) (Programma Integra, 2013). This plan is structured in a way that unaccompanied children could access education and get a school degree. This, in turns, would help them in accessing the job market, and later they could be able to change their permit into a working or a studying one. Once they reach 18, if they demonstrate they are able to live autonomously, they are transferred in semi-autonomous foster care home, which have a lower level of social and psychological assistance (Programma Integra, 2013).

The above reception pathway is slightly different as regards young migrant children arriving in Italy at an age close to adulthood. In such cases, they are hosted in what are defined as “low threshold” centers, characterized by a great flexibility in relation to access, and they are very much oriented to finding a job, rather than furthering their education. This is because they have less time to convert their permit into one for work or for studying (Programma Integra, 2013). Once the reception stages are

completed, unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children should be able, at least in theory, to leave their lives 'autonomously'. Despite leaving the reception centers, many young adults are invited to maintain good relations with the social workers and the professionals working in such centers, to receive help when needed and to keep track of their integration progress.

The education of unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children has been largely interpreted as the project to acquire transferrable skills that would render them more *competitive* within the Italian job market, increasing their possibility to be *employed in high-skilled jobs*, thus limiting their possible recruitment and exploitation in illegal or low paid jobs (e.g. Programma Integra, 2013, my emphasis). As far as Italian policies are concerned, unaccompanied migrant children have their right to compulsory education recognized by art. 38 of the *Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione*, which establishes that "all the foreign children within Italian territory are subject to compulsory education, all the provisions established by the right to education, access to educational services and full participation in the life of the school community apply to them" (in Programma Integra, 2013, p. 178). In addition, art. 45 of the Decree of the President of the Republic – *DPR 394/1999*- affirms that unaccompanied migrant children in Italy are subject to compulsory education regardless of the regularity of their residence permit and migratory status, and without any forms of discrimination compared to the Italian citizens (ibid.).

Practically, unaccompanied migrant children education starts when they are under the protection of social services, and can entail access to mainstream compulsory education or a more 'focused' professional training. For what concerns access to compulsory education, unaccompanied minors have two options depending on their age: if they are under 16 years old, they can access mainstream lower secondary schools, but if they are more than 16 years old then they have to enroll to the *CI.PI.A*. Following this stage, unaccompanied children can attend upper secondary schools of various types, but in order to access 'easily' the job market, they are advised –usually by social workers in foster care homes- to attend professional and vocational schools. According to the social workers and the professionals, professional and vocational training seems more suitable for unaccompanied minors as it allows them to enter

quickly the job market – theoretically speaking (Catarci, 2011; Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015; Programma Integra, 2013).

## 2.3 Migrant and Forced Migrant Children with a Disability

Data on students with 'non- Italian citizenship' with a disability enrolled in Italian public schools began to be collected in the academic year 2007/2008, following the start of a comparative European project on inclusive education run by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs and Inclusive Education (ISMU, 2014). Importantly, Italian statistical data gathered by the Ministry of Education and shared in the ISMU's reports (2014; 2016) tend to consider as "students with disability" only those who have a certified disability – whether visual, auditory, physical or mental, leaving outside all those unaccompanied forced migrant children who –as the analysis chapter of this thesis will show- have been diagnosed with a disability but that has not been promptly certified, due to the lengthy bureaucratic processes to access health services. It is also important to highlight that when mentioning "migrant students with a disability" within the statistical reports, the Italian Ministry of Education considers only those students with a physical disability. Learning disabilities and emotional disturbances are usually identified as Special Educational Needs (SEN) (or *Bisogni Educativi Speciali- BES)* (ISMU, 2014). As we will see in chapter eight while physical disability might have an impact on the individual life of the students, their categorization as SEN might impact their educational experiences; however both processes of "disabling" and "SENitizing" have significant consequences on the daily lives of forced migrant students in the host society.

In the academic year 2014/2015, the total number of students 'with non-Italian citizenship' is of 233,486, with an increase of 4,805 students compared to the previous school year (ISMU, 2016). The average incidence of pupils with a disability and with "non-Italian citizenship" on the total of students with disability is of 12% (+0.4% compared to the previous year). The highest percentage of disabled students 'with non-Italian citizenship' can be found in early years education (15.2%), followed by primary education (13.8%), and middle school (12.6%). However, the highest number in absolute values is in primary education, with 11,864 units (ISMU, 2016).

The most significant increase in this academic year has been detected at the level of secondary school, where there has been a shift from 3,975 to 4,546 presences (+571). In state school the incidence is of 12.1%, while in the private sector is of 11.3% (ibid.). As Table 8 shows, disabled pupils with 'non-Italian citizenship' are distributed for the 94% in state schools, while for the 5.9 % in private schools in the academic year 2014/2015.

If one examines the presence of students with 'non-Italian citizenship' with disability in the various Italian regions, it is possible to note that Lombardia comes first with 8,396 children, while Lazio – where Rome is located- follows in the fourth place with 2,699 children (ISMU, 2016).

As noted previously, the above data do not indicate clearly whether these disabled students with 'non-Italian citizenship' are second-generation migrants, or asylum seekers or refugees. Therefore, it is not possible to speculate on the numbers or percentages of forced migrant children with a disability. However, it seems crucial to note that since the beginning of the data collection for this specific group of learners in the academic year 2007/2008, there has been a remarkable increase of pupils with 'non-Italian citizenship' with disability: from 11,760 to 28,117 (ibid.). According to the ISMU (2016) report, the reasons for such steady increase are many: the fact that students with 'non-Italian citizenship' with disabilities attend school for a greater number of years, following the extension of compulsory education; there is also a tendency of such students to attend school beyond the compulsory education period; the disability diagnosis might be more accurate and it seems possible that "phenomena that could not be diagnosed previously, today can be detected" (p. 40). It should be noted, though, that according to the medical professionals participating in this research, the diagnostic material for certain disabilities does not seem to be culturally or linguistically appropriate for children coming from different backgrounds. Thus, as the data presented in this thesis will show, all these explanations given by the Ministry of Education's ISMU report of 2016 do not offer a justification to the sharp increase of disability certification of migrant and forced migrant children, or students 'with non-Italian citizenship'.

**Table 8. Percentage Distribution of Students with Non-Italian Citizenship with Disability by School Level- 2014/2015**

| | Disabled Students with Non-Italian Citizenship | |
|---|---|---|
| **School Levels** | **State** | **Private** |
| Early Years[13] | 69.7 | 30.3 |
| Primary School | 97.2 | 2.8 |
| Middle School | 97.3 | 2.7 |
| Secondary School | 98.5 | 1.5 |
| Total | 94.1 | 5.9 |

(Published by ISMU, 2016)

## 2.4 *Integrazione Scolastica* and Intercultural Education: Education Policy Response to Diversity

Italian policies and provisions related to inclusive education of marginalized groups of learners seem to keep a double focus: on one side, the disability and special educational needs issues, on the other side questions of culturally diverse background, migrant, forced migrant and "second generation" children falling under the umbrella of intercultural education. Despite the universalistic and comprehensive character of the internationally celebrated policy of *Integrazione Scolastica*, passed in 1977 with the aim of dismantling special schooling in Italy, up to the present day Italian educational scholars and policy makers seem to maintain this double focus within inclusive education and have not yet adapted, both in the policy and in the practice, and interdisciplinary and intersectional approach.

As D'Alessio (2011) rightly argues in her book *Inclusive Education in Italy: a critical analysis of the policy of Integrazione Scolastica*, which critically examines the historically ground-breaking Italian policy through the lens of the social model of disability, amongst the many challenges that inclusive education has to face is the struggle against discrimination and exclusion, in particular, the macro-exclusions which are inherent in special education in segregated settings and the various forms of

[13] Among the private early years schools, the Ministry considers also those managed by the municipality, thus public as a matter of fact. Public early years schools are normally referred to as state schools.

micro-exclusion perpetuated in both 'special' and ordinary settings. Many education systems in Europe and in the world still place some groups of students outside the mainstream system; the decisions about placement are often made on the basis of students' physical and intellectual impairments or cultural and social differences, and they deny some students their right to education with their peers (D'Alessio, 2011). Since 1977, Italy took a different direction, and despite the difficulties arising from systemic constraints and the lack of research and resources, the country passed such a piece of anti-discriminatory legislation. As a consequence of the application of *Integrazione Scolastica*, all students are welcomed into their neighborhood schools regardless of socio-economic background, physical and intellectual impairments, or of any other selective organization designed to segregate and exclude (D'Alessio, 2011). At the same time, special schools have dramatically decreased in number and have been almost completely dismantled. Moreover, since the passing of this policy, teaching and learning procedures in ordinary schools have sought to respond to all students' requirements, in particular by drawing upon specialized forms of pedagogy and teaching methods (ibid.).

*Integrazione Scolastica* seems to create an ideal context - legislative, educational, pedagogical and social- for the development of inclusive education. This is particularly evident when it is compared to other policy contexts in Europe, in which segregated education is sometimes the only available option for disabled students (D'Alessio, 2011). Italy's decision to adopt this policy was part of a wider educational policy of "comprehensiveness" whose purpose was to break the reproduction of inequalities through a selective education system (such as the Fascist education system). At the same time, this policy was part of the post-war reconstruction, which aimed to maintain the political unification of the newly reformed state. However, during the 1970s, the education system was not 'ready' to embrace the broad diversity of students because of the limited amount of research available and the lack of resources and of opportunities for professional development for teachers (D'Alessio, 2011). It is not surprising that, when the legislation on *Integrazione Scolastica* was passed in 1977, situations arose in which some disabled students were placed in unprepared school settings (ibid.). This testifies that the choice to integrate did not arise from research in education, but as part of a wider political discourse that requires further investigation. As Oliver (1990) would affirm, many scholars have engaged

with issues of segregation and the concomitant development of special education as a means of social control and as a way of increasing or maintaining the power of professional experts, but they have only peripherally investigated the theory and practice of integration.

As such, under a critical analysis *Integrazione Scolastica* appears to be an essentially un-problematic and perfectly designed top-down initiative that led to the development of inclusive education. It seems to be considered merely as a technical "debate about the quality of educational provision" and "divorced from the views of disabled people themselves" (Oliver, 1996, p. 82-83), as such a tradition leaves education systems and mainstream schools unquestioned. D'Alessio (2011) affirms that although some research was conducted to demonstrate the validity of the policy from a pedagogical, social and economic perspective, the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* appears to be the result of the fusion – or the hegemonic bloc – of different social groups. They were used to support the ruling groups' major interests and to maintain the status quo of the newly born state against possible perils, as exemplified by the social upheavals of the 70s (D'Alessio, 2011). The interests of ruling groups – for example State and Church- were transferred and shared by different lobbies – teachers, psychologists, educationalists, parents and disabled people, as the only possible alternative to segregated education (ibid.). Subsequent legislative measures, such as the 1992 Framework Law, or the 1994 Presidential Decree, known as the *Atto di Indirizzo*, step back from an ecological perception of the notion of disability, reaffirming the view of disability as a personal problem, the hierarchical position of medical professional in the certification of 'handicap' (term reported by the '94 Presidential Decree) and in the implementation of *Integrazione Scolastica.* Despite these limitations, by acting as a hegemonic bloc, the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* managed to concretely disseminate a philosophy of integration and to put an end to segregated education throughout a divided country (D'Alessio, 2011). Despite the existence of a few exemplars of special schools, nowadays almost all students attend local schools and this is certainly one of the most important legacies brought about by the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* that needs to be acknowledged (ibid.).

Interculturalism has been at the center of the scientific debate, in the European context, on how to manage cultural diversity in the education system and in society in

the last 50 years. Intercultural education has been defined as promoting a dynamic process of positive interaction between various identity groups of a society, calling for an inherent interdependence beyond static descriptions and recognition of differences (Gundara, 2003; Smith, 2003). Such notion originates from the attempt to address the issues of cultural pluralism as a counter to assimilation, and aims to promote understanding among different groups while seeking to value the contributions of minority groups in mainstream society (Woyshner, 2003). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has defined interculturalism as a dynamic concept which refers to evolving relations between cultural groups. Interculturality presupposes local, regional, national or international level (UNESCO, 2006). Three basic principles on intercultural education stem from this definition:

- Intercultural education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all;
- Intercultural education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve full participation in society;
- Intercultural education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (UNESCO, 2006, p. 32).

Additionally, Gundara (2003) draws attention to a current major challenge of intercultural education: addressing educational inequity. In a context of continuous social change, intercultural education should contribute to addressing the many forms of exclusion and marginalization, and developing policies that include disadvantages from all communities (ibid.).

In the Italian context, the debate on interculturalism entered the academic world during the 1990s, and first appeared in education policies with the publication by the Ministry of Education of the *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students* (MIUR, 2006), and *The Italian Way for Intercultural Schools and Integration of Foreign Students* (MIUR, 2007). The last is considered an advanced document, still relevant and largely yet to be realized (Fiorucci, 2015). The document

outlines the essential general principles, which have inspired best practice in both schools and in national and local regulations. These principles are:

- Universalism (application of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of The Child to the Italian law);
- Common Schools (reference to *Integrazione Scolastica*, education in mainstream settings for children from diverse cultural background);
- Centrality of the Person in Relation to Others;
- Interculturalism (Actions for integration – reception and insertion into the school, Italian as a second language, relations with families, enhancement of multilinguism-, Actions for intercultural interaction – intervention on discrimination and prejudice, intercultural perspective in knowledge and skills-, Actors and Resources – autonomy and networks among educational institutions, civil society and territory, role of school directors, role of teachers and non-teaching staff) (see Fiorucci, 2015).

Italian scholars in the field of intercultural education acknowledge that engaging in intercultural education means working to identify, design and test the educational teaching strategies most appropriate for encouraging a positive insertion of 'foreign' students in schools, and therefore in society (Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015). Thus particular attention should be given by the teachers on the scholastic reception of pupils with 'non-Italian citizenship': this means acquiring information about the school system of origin and pupil prior schooling and it means also providing information on the Italian school system (Fiorucci, 2015). Teachers should encourage multilingualism and promote the learning of Italian as a second language in mainstream educational settings (ibid.). Knowledge thought in school, and thus the curriculum and schoolbooks should be revised and reinterpret to be less Eurocentric and give space to other cultural perspectives. Lastly, significant investment is needed to provide teachers with intercultural training, and to extend their knowledge of an anthropological, sociological, pedagogical, linguistic, psychological nature (Fiorucci, 2015). These are all essential actions to be realized, but schools and social educational services cannot be left alone in this task (MIUR, 2006). This involves provision of the necessary conditions to ensure that all the individuals achieve the same rates of academic success.

As the research presented in this thesis intend to show, so far intercultural education actions and strategies have not yet significantly reduced educational inequalities of migrant and especially forced migrant students, and indeed they have not served to contrast the phenomenon of the over-representation of migrant and forced migrant students in Special Educational Needs, and other disability category. Besides reinforcing processes of micro-exclusion within the classroom and the school environment and focusing mainly on one identity marker (i.e. cultural diversity), intercultural education have failed to address significantly the color-blindness or color-evasiveness (see Annamma *et al*., 2016) of contemporary educational policies related to 'foreign' or pupils with 'non-Italian citizenship', thus leaving largely untouched the unbalanced power relations lurking behind the elitist character of the Italian citizenship. Lastly, the actions so far taken by supporters of intercultural education within Italy have not contributed to eradicate discrimination and microforms of racism that, importantly, characterized the professionals operating in refugee agencies and educational services in Rome.

Such criticism of intercultural education in Italy extends to the European context, and reverberates the contemporary crisis of both Interculturalism and Multiculturalism on a global scale (Leonardo, 2012; Tarozzi, Torres, 2016). In their recent book *Global Citizenship Education and the Crises of Multiculturalism*, exploring a transformative social justice education as a new paradigm to deal with difference, Tarozzi and Torres (2016) raise criticism about an intercultural education approach on practical, political and cultural levels. The latter critical point, in particular, raises very crucial issues according to the authors: the risk of culturalism, the narrow-minded ideology considering cultures as separated universes, compact and stable over time and space that encapsulate univocal individuals (Tarozzi, Torres, 2016). Additionally, the authors compare multicultural and intercultural education policies and discourses, prevailing respectively in the U.S.A and in the E.U. From this comparison, equality and difference emerge as conceptually alternative and mutually exclusive in political discourse. This impasse should be assumed in its controversial complexity and never reduced in simplifying positions (ibid.). According to the authors, it can be developed within the theoretical notion of democratic, plural and active citizenship, which is conceivable only on a supranational level (Tarozzi, Torres, 2016).

In full consciousness of recent tensions and critical aspects of Intercultural and Special Education, both at international and nationals levels, this study intends to make a more radical move towards the application in the Italian context of an intersectional and interdisciplinary framework such as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) may offer new and more radical way to dismantle educational inequalities of forced migrant students and to really promote their inclusion in Italian society.

### 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the data concerning the presence of migrant and forced migrant students in Italy, and more specifically in Rome. I have outlined the policy context with regard to unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children's access to services and particularly to education. I have shown how current policies tend to categorize 'foreign' children, without specifically focusing on the social and educational needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. I have also noted that *Integrazione Scolastica* or Intercultural Education policies deal with diversity in education focusing mainly on one identity marker of marginalised students (either disability or migration status), without adopting an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach, despite their universalistic scope. In reviewing these policies, a medicalized perception of disability and a colorblind approach have emerged, thus leaving questions of educational inequalities and social mobility of unaccompanied forced migrant children with a disability substantially unresolved in the Italian context. I have also noted how there has been inadequate examination of normalizing processes of racism and ableism in these policy documents and I have argued for the necessity of the application of a more radical intersectional approach such as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit). Thus, the next chapter will focus on reviewing theoretical frameworks forged at grassroots level by Black and Minority Ethnic people (referred also as "people of color" in the U.S. context), and people with disability.

# Chapter Three: The Research on Intersectionality, 'Race' and Dis/ability in Education

> "Our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to "make sense" we continue to employ and deploy it. I want to argue, then, that our conceptions of race, even in a postmodern and/or postcolonial world, are more embedded and fixed than in a previous age. However, this embeddedness or "fixed-ness" has required new language and constructions of race […]. Conceptual categories like "school achievement", "middle classness", "maleness", "beauty", "intelligence", and "science" become normative categories of whiteness, while categories like "gangs", "welfare recipients", "basketball players", and "the underclass" become the marginalized and de-legitimated categories of blackness. […] In a racialized society where whiteness is positioned as normative, *everyone* is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition." (G. Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9)

## 3.1 Introduction

The chapter presents theoretical frameworks forged at grassroots level by Black and Minority Ethnic people (referred also as "people of color" in the U.S. context), and people with disabilities to counter hegemonic knowledge-claims about the meaning of 'race' and disability in education and in society, and to analyze some of the most entrenched educational inequities from an intersectional standpoint. I commence with Critical Race Theory in Education, to set the stage for what a critical analysis of 'race' and education looks like. I then consider intersectionality as a new theoretical model to understand, analyze and engage with difference, and the contribution that can be made to such conceptual framework by Judith Butler's notion of subjectivation and performative politics. The last section of the chapter addresses the genesis of Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), simultaneously engaging with the fields of Disability Studies (DS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in order to recognize the multiple dimensions of individuals and the systems of oppression and marginalization in which they survive, resist and thrive. Finally, I end up by locating the current study in relation to others in the field, especially in the Italian context.

### 3.2 Critical Race Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory (CRT) began as a movement in U.S. legal circles in the late 1970s and was inspired by the need to study and transform the relationship among ‘race’, racism and power. The movement started by considering many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but placing them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001; Delgado, 2008). Unlike traditional civil rights literature, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. This new approach seemed necessary to cope with the more subtle forms of institutional and unconscious racism that were emerging and a public newly indifferent (‘color blind’) to matters of ‘race’ (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory builds on the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism. It also draws from certain European philosophers and theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida, as well as from the American radical tradition represented by figures such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements of the sixties and early seventies (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006b). From critical legal studies, CRT borrowed the idea of legal indeterminacy – the idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome. Instead, one can decide most cases either way, or interpreting one fact differently from the way one’s adversary does. CRT also built on feminism’s insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001).

Despite its name, CRT is not so much a theory as a perspective. That is, CRT does not offer a finished and exclusive set of propositions that claim to explain precisely current situations and to predict what will occur under a certain set of conditions in the future. Rather, it is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of ‘race’/racism and how it operates in contemporary Western society (Gillborn, 2006a). Tate (1997, p. 235) describes it as “an iterative project of scholarship and social

justice". Unlike antiracism, a series of key elements (perspectives and insights) can be taken as largely representative of a distinctive CRT position (Gillborn, 2006a). In addition, there is a series of more specific methodological and conceptual tools that are often used by CRT writers but whose presence in a study is neither sufficient nor necessary to identify it as part of CRT in education. Gillborn (2006a) uses this distinction between defining elements and conceptual tools as a heuristic device, meant to help clarifying thinking about the shape of CRT as an approach. As more scholars add to the tradition and priorities alter, it is likely that certain features may change in status, or disappear, while new aspect might be added. However, as Gillborn (2006a) argues, presenting defining elements and conceptual tools of CRT separately, is a useful strategy that builds on a wide range of existing approaches. The CRT defining elements are:

- Racism as endemic, "normal", not aberrant nor rare: deeply ingrained legally and culturally;
- Crosses epistemological boundaries;
- Critique of civil rights laws as fundamentally limited;
- Critique of liberalism: claims of neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness and meritocracy as camouflages;
- Call to context: challenges ahistoricism and recognizes experiential knowledge of people of colour.

The CRT conceptual tools are:

- Story-telling and counter-stories (e.g. Use of narrative and (auto)biography to challenge mainstream assumptions);
- Interest convergence (i.e. White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when such advances also promote White self-interest) (Bell, 1980);
- Critical White Studies (e.g. Deeply critical and radical nature of questioning Whiteness, that is deconstructing the taken-for-granted myths and assumptions that circulate about what it means to be, and not be, a "white" person).

The starting point of CRT is a focus on racism, and in particular, on its central importance in society and its routine (often unrecognized) character. As Delgado and Stefancic (2000) argue:

> "CRT begins with a number of basic insights. One is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity – rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and whites (for example) alike- can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair." (p. xvi)

In this way, CRT argues that racism is "endemic in U.S. society, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically" (Tate, 1997, p. 234). Importantly, the term "racism" is used not only in relation to crude, obvious act of 'race' hatred but also in relation to the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups (Gillborn, 2006a; Leonardo, 2012). Thus, this is a more radical approach than many liberal multiculturalists are comfortable with.

CRT is frequently criticised for taking a dismissive stance on the advances achieved by the U.S. civil rights movement at enormous human cost. This, however, misreads CRT. As Crenshaw (1995) argues:

> "Our opposition to traditional civil rights discourse is neither a criticism of the civil rights movement nor an attempt to diminish it significance […] we draw much of our inspiration and sense of direction from that courageous, brilliantly conceived, spiritually inspired, and ultimately transformative mass action." (p. xiv)

Furthermore, CRT's critique of liberalism springs from its understanding of racism (as wide-ranging, often hidden and commonplace) and its frustration with the inability of traditional legal discourse to address anything except the most obvious and crude version of racism (Gillborn, 2006a). As already noted, CRT's principal concern is with "the business-as-usual forms of racism" that are "normal" in society, not with the few exceptional cases of obvious discrimination "that do stand out" (Delgado, Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi). CRT not only criticizes the inability of traditional legal discourse to deal with such complex and comprehensive racism; it goes further by

viewing legal discourse as one of the prime means by which such a critical perspective is denied legitimacy and the status quo is defended (Crenshaw, 1995).

CRT's criticism of meritocracy and related notions such as objectivity and colour-blindness are not a rejection of them in principle but a criticism of their raced effects in practice. It is simply and demonstrably the case that these notions, despite their concerns for equity and justice, operate as a mechanism by which particular groups are excluded from the mainstream (be it in relation to legal redress, employment, or educational opportunities) (Gillborn, 2006a). Tate (1997) concludes that the CRT approach "challenges a-historicism and insist on a contextual/historical examination of the law and a recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of colour" (p. 235). This relates to what Richard Delgado calls "call to context": an insistence on the importance of context and the detail of the lived experience of minoritized people as a defence against the colour-blind and sanitized analyses generated via universalistic discourses (Delgado, Stefancic, 2000).

Although CRT began as a movement in the law, it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline. At present, many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT's ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001). In 1995, an article by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate in the *Teachers College Record* set out the first steps toward taking a CRT perspective and thinking through its possible application and insights within the field of education (Ladson-Billings, Tate, W. F. IV, 1995). Both authors have refined their views in subsequent work (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013; Ladson-Billings, Donnor, J., 2005; Tate, 1997), and a new wave of radical scholars have begun to take the perspective forward in novel ways and in relation to different issues and a wider range of minoritised groups (e.g. Dixon, 2005; Parker, 1998).

CRT in education (like CRT in the law) has mainly focused on the United States. However, there is no reason why the underlying assumptions and insights of CRT cannot be transfer usefully to other (post-) industrial societies, such as the United Kingdom, Europe and Australasia (Gillborn, 2006a). As a matter of fact, CRT complements much of the work that critical antiracists have pursued in places like

Britain and Australia, but also offers an *advance* on current antiracist perspectives for a number of reasons, not least its clarity about the development and application of key concepts (Gillborn, 2008). In the chapter "Critical Race Theory beyond North America", which has anticipated the book *Racism and Education. Coincidence or Conspiracy?* officially introducing CRT in the European context, David Gillborn (2006a; 2008) considers CRT promises for critical antiracist scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic, and especially in the British context. Gillborn (2006a) believes that CRT offers a way to describe what is characteristically antiracist about an "antiracist" analysis; and second, to offer a suitable starting point for further explorations in educational theory, policy and practice.

Gillborn's (2006a; 2008) argument on the need of CRT for antiracists is motivated by the long historical tradition of antiracism in Britain, which at present seems to have assumed the character of empty rhetorical device in educational policies and to have a weak critical character of scholarship that addresses racialized inequalities in practice. Antiracism in Britain arose as much from a critique of liberal multiculturalism as it did from an analysis of the racist nature of the state. Academics played a vital role, but so did committed teachers and activists struggling to effect change in a wide variety of ways (Coard, 1971; Gilroy, 1987; Mullard, 1984; Tomlinson, 1984). Antiracism established its credentials by exposing the deeply conservative nature of approaches that struck liberatory postures but accepted the status quo and frequently encoded deficit perspectives of black children, their parents and communities (Gillborn, 2006a). The most influential antiracist examples were Carby's corrective to colorblind white middle-class feminism (Carby, 1982), and Mullard's analysis of the assimilationist basis of multicultural education (Mullard, 1982). In education, this trend was perhaps at its strongest and most sustained in the work of Troyna (1984; 1987; 1988; 1992; 1993). Initially seduced by the ideology of multicultural education, Troyna emerged as one of the most steadfast critics of multiculturalism and the most prominent advocate of antiracist education (Gillborn, 2006a).

The absence of an antiracist "orthodoxy", as Sivanandan (1988, p. 147) calls it, in Britain can be a source of strength, as racism takes many forms, and so antiracism must be flexible and constantly adapt. However, as Gillborn (2006a) affirms, the absence of a dogmatic "manual" on antiracism does not require the avoidance of all

attempts to systematize our critical approaches and conceptual starting points. Unfortunately, continues the author, awareness of the multifaceted and constantly changing nature of racism may have led inadvertently to a failure properly to interrogate conceptual history and theoretical frameworks (ibid.). Thus, Gillborn (2006a) concludes that CRT offers a systematic approach to antiracist theory and practice, especially in education, as it combats "policy rhetoric beneath the skin of public multiculturalism" (p. 244). Despite the rhetoric of antiracism that features in the official multicultural policy pronouncements, it appears that the British education system has a long way before it even complies with the basic of existing race equality legislation (ibid.). As Gillborn righly argues, asserting our antiracist intentions means nothing if we leave unchanged the dominant systems of testing, the curriculum, teacher education, and the punitive inspection regimes that penalize schools serving working class and minority communities. Lastly, Gillborn (2006a) argues that CRT in Britain would ensure that antiracist scholarship resists the pressure to become a reformist perspective and retains a radical, critical edge.

Applied to the field of education, CRT insists on the complete racialization of the educational enterprise such that 'race' is no longer only a variable to be plugged into a research study but rather a dynamic that saturates the entire schooling process (Leonardo, 2012). Whereas educators commonly think of 'race' as attached only to issues of curricular transformation led by multiculturalism, CRT argues that race and racism are implicated in every aspect of education. It is an ethos captured by Omi and Winant (1994) phrase "racial formation", Bonilla-Silva's (2005) "racialized social system", or Mills' (1997) "racial contract". The features of CRT mentioned above can be applied to the field of education, in order to have a deeper and more radical understanding of inequities. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue, CRT is not much incompatible with its predecessor, multiculturalism, but it represents its militant form. After a two-decade head start, multiculturalism might be perceived as having laid the groundwork based on which CRT would start its intervention (Leonardo, 2012). Having been a fledging discourse in education in the 1970s, multiculturalism challenged Eurocentrism, arguing first for a more inclusive curriculum that incorporated the achievements and contributions of non-European and non-White groups. This was considered an unwelcomed act by pro-establishment scholars and

educators, reaching the apex of its debate during the "cultural wars" of the 1990s (Symcox, 2002).

By the end of the 1990s, multicultural thought reached common sense and the focus was on the *kind* and *amount* of multiculturalism that schools should practice. Even Euro-centrists on the Right, who argued for the centrality of the "dead White man" in the official curriculum, did so *through* the language of diversity- that is, by including White authors as part of the overall respect for difference (Leonardo, 2012; original emphasis). Although this is not a statement about absolute victory for multiculturalism, it speaks to a new stage in the struggle for 'race' representation in education, particularly the moment when multicultural thought reaches common sense (ibid.). The possibility of co-optation becomes real as diversity and difference are accepted as the mantra of education. One might even go as far as suggesting that multiculturalism has become hegemonic insofar as it is the dominant frame in education.

As multiculturalism shifted from a rebellious discourse in education in the 1970s, to a threatening movement in the 1980s and 1990s, and then an accepted educational agenda by the 2000s it also gave birth to a reaction on the educational Left (Leonardo, 2012). In this sense, CRT does not represent a break from multiculturalism but rather it is an extension and intensification within a colour-blind era, in which CRT in legal studies was well prepared to intervene (Gotanda, 1995; Lopez, 2006). Banks was sensitive to this development and included a chapter on CRT by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004) in the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. From other direction, the collection *Critical Pedagogy and Race*, a dialogue between Critical Pedagogy and CRT, included a chapter by Banks on multicultural education (Leonardo, 2012). In addition, the *Handbook* contains a chapter by Sleeter and Bernal (2004) on anti-racism, critical multiculturalism, and CRT. In this light, the difference between multiculturalism and CRT is not insurmountable, and each perspective developed in it specific historical context: the first as a response to Euro-centrism (Banks, 2005), intercultural education (Banks, 2004), and ethnic studies traditions (Banks, 2008); the second on the limitations of liberal and Marxists perspectives on the law (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995) and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997).

In the inaugural essay of the Critical Race Theory in Education movement, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue for a conceptual framework to respond to the limits of the multicultural paradigm in contrasting the persistent problems of racism in schooling, and to rethink traditional educational scholarship. They affirm that current practical demonstrations of multicultural education in schools often reduce it to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures, such as eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing song or dancing, reading folktales, and other less than scholarly pursuits of the fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge or quests for social justice (Ladson-Billings, Tate, 1995). As resourceful as it is trenchant in its critique, CRT leave no intellectual stone unturned. Because racism in education and society is multifaceted, so must its analysis attest to the complexity of the problem, and CRT recruits allies from across the aisle as well as university departments (Leonardo, 2012). CRT in education is precisely the intervention that aims at stopping racism by highlighting its pedagogical dimensions and affirming an equally pedagogical solution rooted in anti-racism. In this, CRT displays a "theory with an attitude" (Leonardo, 2012, p. 12). CRT in education is a paradigmatic study of 'race' in which the problem of the color-line is made to speak within a particular discourse, community and postulates. For instance, the appropriation of Bell's (1992) well-known, defiant injunction regarding the "permanence of racism" is understood within the particular context and constraints (in the Foucauldian sense) of a CRT understanding of education.

To some, CRT might appear pessimistic. However, it is possibly less an announcement of defeatism and more about being vigilant about racism. As Gillborn (2005) argues, "this process of radical critique should not be confused with a prophecy of doom. To identify the complex and deep-rooted nature of racism is not to assume that it is inevitable nor insurmountable" (p. 497). CRT focuses its attention more on conceptual and practical strategies to end racism and less on ending race as an organizing principle, and it draws attention on the outcomes of actions and processes (Gillborn, 2006).

Critical Race Theory has at least three components based on its name: the "critical", the "status of 'race'", and the "theory" (see Leonardo, 2012). The following paragraphs explore firstly the specificities of what criticality might mean in the

context of a study of 'race', secondly the various analyses of the status of 'race', its conceptual meaning, and its pervasiveness in social life, lastly the role of theory in understanding the nature of 'race' contestation as well as a form of intellectual intervention into racial oppression (ibid.).

### *3.2.1 The "Critical" in CRT*

As Leonardo (2012) argues, Critical Race Theory is credited with inaugurating the break when 'race' research in education first became critical. But "critical" within a CRT framework begins from the premise that structured racial oppression is an educational reality. 'Race' is a social construction, but its consequences are real. Racial inequalities and its vestiges in education are products of historical events, not the least of which are the examples of slavery, cultural and physical genocide and labour exploitation. The reach and influence of these injuries into daily practices should not be underestimated. As such, being "critical" requires that a link between national, even global, and personal/group histories be established in order to set the record with respect to the challenged faced by Black people (Leonardo, 2012). CRT proponents prefer to name the process in the most direct way possible. CRT theorists believe that a critical sensibility begins with a language of demystification and prefer to call it "racial oppression", rather than arguably more acceptable terms such as inequality, disparity, or achievement gap (Macedo, 2000). The limitations of these terms become apparent when the more emotive and philosophical term "oppression" is criticized for being overtly politicized. As a matter of fact, the ability to name this process in the deepest way possible is part of demystifying racism (Leonardo, 2012).

Using "oppression" as the preferred descriptor for the racial state of affairs makes the seriousness of racism intelligible through a critical frame. Oppression recalls the fundamental link between the oppressed and oppressor as a relation. A racialized society cannot have the racially oppressed without the racial oppressor, two dialectical poles where each owes its existence to the other. Just like the exploiter and exploited (Marx, 1964) and colonizer and colonized (Memmi, 1965), the oppressor-oppressed dialect reminds us "that oppression is neither the masochistic drive of the first nor the inadequate properties of the second, but *the resulting dynamics of a social relationship* that favors Whites and dispossesses people of color" (Leonardo, 2012, p.

16). Thus, concludes the author, CRT scholars are "critical" insofar as they are able to name this predicament characterized by an intimate, concrete relationship.

The visibility of racial power is arguably more opaque in the color-blind era. Unlike the overt forms of White supremacy, the softened and coded expressions, like normative knowledge and unequal funding in schools, are either harder to transpose on 'race' or confounded by class issues. However the resulting relationship of White supremacy is consistent. Racism in education does not require a White conspiracy. As Gillborn (2008) affirms, because racial oppression is already a structural problem, conducting schooling as usual ensures that race-based inequality will continue. Because the racialized social system is embedded in all decisions that educators make, nothing short of a concerted, self-conscious intervention would alter the state of affair (Gillborn, 2008). Racism in education becomes unbeatable unless it meets with active resistance. Thus, meritocracy, naturalized canons of knowledge, historical facticity and inevitability of racial equality become targets of educational criticism. It is this spirit of "demystification" that renders CRT "critical" (Leonardo, 2012). Nothing is taken for granted, and everything is open for scrutiny.

### *3.2.2 The Centrality of 'Race'*

Critical Race Theory acknowledges the centrality of 'race' within U.S. social development, and that the nation was created as a racial project. 'Race' is indicative of not just U.S. creation but its continuation, like a "contract" that is rewritten over and again (Mills, 1997), a formation reworked to fit current cultural understandings and material arrangements (Omi, 1994). CRT in education proceeds by unmasking apparently non-racial phenomena as precisely racial in their nature. Just as Crenshaw *et al.* (1995) argue that 'race' is found not only in the criminal justice system but equally in tax, property, and inheritance laws, Parker and Stovall (2005) find that 'race' explains the uneven and harsh treatment of students of color when it comes to discipline in schools. CRT theorists expose a world of violence in what otherwise are touted as "safe spaces", like 'race' dialogue in the classroom (Leonardo, 2012). In this, CRT succeeds in developing a perspective that frames the everydayness of 'race' and removes the otherwise unhelpful argument that racism is understood through extreme and aberrant examples, such as slavery or genocide. 'Race' is central to the

inner workings of schools and society, woven into the common sense that drives decisions as formal as policy making and as quotidian as where kids sit together in the cafeteria (ibid.).

If ‘race’ is a social construction, then it takes the form of a narrative. Long-held beliefs about the inherent inferiority of the people of color and White superiority are examined for their storytelling origins. Storytelling is not valued so much for its truth content as its truth effect, its ability to affect our actions and orientation to the Other. Narrating ‘race’ then becomes a political choice, such as when educators perceive families of color to be obstacles to school governance because of their low rates of participations in official events (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001). In all, by conceiving of ‘race’ as a story, CRT breaks down its apparent objectivity. CRT theorists are committed to re-narrating the dominant racial frame that writes Black people into the story through consistently negative images at best and pathological histories at worse. Thus, CRT uses counter-storytelling (Solorzano, 2002) to reframe the tale, to flip the script. Questioning that ‘race’ is a fact and favouring a social-constructionist perspective, counter storytelling becomes an antidote to the majority’s line of thinking and a way to speak back in emotive, often first-hand, recounting of how ‘race’ affects minority lives. Offering a counter story does not make pretenses about truth-value but begins the discussion from the lived experience of the people most affected by ‘race’ (Leonardo, 2012). Finally, CRT believes it is important to determine when the plot begins and the importance of the narrator, which affects the story’s development and eventual resolution (ibid.).

*3.2.3 The Role of Theory*

In the CRT framework, the role of theory means that racism is not only a practical problem but also an intellectual one. As Goldberg (2002) argue, this requires the recruitment of perspectives that make critical theory sensitive to ‘race’ as well as making ‘race’ theory itself critical. In order to be critical, theory must make oppression and liberation from racism a central preoccupation. To have theoretical import, critical race thought must refuse the distortions that threaten either to compromise its ability to cut to the hearth of the matter, or become easily co-optable

(Leonardo, 2012). CRT, like other movements that the mainstream contends with, faces possibilities of convergence with White interests (ibid.).

Critical Race Theory in education stemmed from two responses to current theorizing. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) affirm that a more militant 'race' theory than multiculturalism was necessary in order to dismantle the pervasiveness of racism in schools and in the field of education. Secondly, CRT in education was taken up as a response to the limitations of a class-focused analysis of education in confronting the problem of racism, specifically White supremacy. Since Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* appeared on the intellectual scene, a generation of scholars focused on the nature of oppression within education, from a social class perspective. 'Race' relations seem to be secondary to class relations, and do not perform a synthesis of the racialised political economy. At the level of theory, 'race' receives little attention within a critical study of education (Leonardo, 2012). It is important but not central, dominant but not determining, and ideological rather than real. As Leonardo (2012) rightly affirms, "that race becomes the stepchild of class may be considered a conceptual form of White supremacy at the level of theory; it is not insignificant that race is theorized out of centrality" (p.24).

Theory is also part of 'race' relations because it speaks to question of legitimacy and the "right to matter" (Leonardo, 2012). If critical educational studies do not give proper weight to 'race', it is consequential because it speaks to making people and their concerns visible or invisible. According to the author, because theory is not disembodied, dominant theorizing determines whose voice is privileged in education. By voice, CRT means something more than who has the right to speak, voice is the striving to exist in a condition wherein Black people struggle for human status (ibid.). For example, Charles Mills (2003) talks about the failure to take up 'race' in philosophical discourse. Within the discipline, 'race' becomes a controversial concept, left up to the few who carry the philosophical burden of speaking to the color line. It is not surprising then that theories of the human in philosophical discourse are mainly about European humanity (Porter, 2012). In 'race' scholarship, it is no different and theory allows educators to see or not see racism, to regard or not regard people of color as concrete beings.

Rather than choose between ‘race’ or class analysis, CRT relies instead on Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) intersectional analysis, which shares a theoretical affinity with Collins (2000) idea of “matrix of oppression”. Intersectional analysis does not centre ‘race’ as much as it holds together a theory of co-implication among factors, such as ‘race’, gender, class and culture. This means that each social system is shot through with the others, best captured by hooks' (1984) phrase “White supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. In educational analysis, this suggests that the ‘race’ project is at the same time a gender project, which is a class and cultural politics.

Finally, theory in CRT represents the conceptual front in combating racial oppression. It is theory in critical sense of bringing clarity to the racial predicament, even as it deposes ‘race’ from the center on occasion (Leonardo, 2012). For the author, this complexity does not take away from ‘race’ analysis but reminds educators that ‘race’ is not an empty vessel but contains gender, class, culture and disability, within it. CRT may have begun as more or less a racial analysis, but it has since evolved into an elegant architecture to explain the nature of oppression (Leonardo, 2012).

### 3.3 Intersectional Analysis: Unraveling the “Matrix of Oppression”

As intersectionality has emerged in a number of discursive spaces, the projects and debates that have accompanied its travel have converged into a burgeoning field of intersectional studies (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013). This field can be usefully framed as representing three loosely defined sets of engagements: the first consists of applications of an intersectional framework or investigations of intersectional dynamics, the second consisting of discursive debates about the scope and content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm, and the third consisting of political interventions employing an intersectional lens.

The first approach applies an intersectional frame of analysis to a wide range of research and teaching projects. Aggregated together in this category are undertakings that build on or adapt intersectionality to attend to a variety of context-specific inquiries, including, for example, analyzing the multiple ways that race and gender interact with class in the labor market and interrogating the ways that states constitute

regulatory regimes of identity, reproduction and family formation (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013). A second field of inquiry focuses on discursive investigations of intersectionality as theory and methodology. This approach includes (but it is not limited to) questions and debates about the way intersectionality has been developed, adopted and adapted within the disciplines. A third category of intersectional projects reflects the reality that while intersectionality has been the subject of disciplinary travel it is far from being an academic project (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013). For the purpose of the study presented here, a specific focus is given to the first approach to intersectionality.

The notion of intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to draw attention on the controversial dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of anti-discrimination and social movement politics. It exposed how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013). Over the following decades, intersectionality has proved to be a productive concept that has been deployed in disciplines such as history, sociology, literature, philosophy and anthropology as well as feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies and legal studies (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013; Nash, 2008). Intersectionality's insistence on examining the dynamics of difference and sameness has played a major role in facilitating consideration of gender, 'race', and other axis of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines (Nash, 2008). Intersectional work has also reflected different orientations toward the relative importance and centrality of various layers of society, ranging from the individual to the institutional, and has also revealed different sensibilities regarding the ontological and epistemological premises of the intersectional approach and its disciplinary limits and potential (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

It seems important to acknowledge that intersectionality has travelled into spaces and discourses that are themselves constituted by power relations that are far from transparent. The debates that ensue around the essential subject of intersectionality epitomize this process. Intersectional scholars draw attention not only to the institutional politics of knowledge production that shape the context in which insurgent projects are formed but also to the way such projects are received,

historicized and engaged (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Nash, 2008). As the early histories of intersectionality reveal, its production was not located somewhere outside the field of 'race' and gender power but was an active and direct engagement with issues and dynamics that embodied such power. In fact, intersectional text in the early years of critical legal studies were virtual transcripts of active contestations set within institutional formations that both shaped what was talked about and established templates for making visible the dynamics that were at play (Crenshaw, 2011).

Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the foundational writers in Critical Race Theory, is widely credited with coining the notion of intersectionality as the "multidimensionality" of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (1989, p. 139). Her work attempts to eliminate the common misconception that CRT imagines that all social inequalities, and indeed all the situations, are reducible to racism, by showing how multiple forms of oppression work relationally within a "matrix of oppression" (Collins, 2000, p. 42). In Crenshaw's conceptualisation, well articulated in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and the violence against the women of colour*, intersectionality analyses "the various ways in which 'race' and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences" (1991, p. 1244). Thus, intersectionality tends to destabilize the 'race'/gender binaries for a better analysis of the subjects who "exist within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse and in the empty spaces between" (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 403). Secondly, intersectionality aspires to provide a vocabulary to respond to critiques of identity politics. Crenshaw (1991) argues that the reality of identity politics is that it elides intra-group difference, a problem that intersectionality purports to solve by exposing differences within the broad categories of 'women' and 'Blacks', and serving as a force for " mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 1296). Ultimately, intersectionality seeks to demonstrate the racial variation(s) within gender and the gendered variation(s) within 'race' through its attention to subjects whose identities contest 'race'-or-gender categorisations.

Finally, intersectionality invites scholars to come to terms with the legacy of exclusion of multiply marginalised subjects from feminist and anti-racist work, and the impact of those absences on both theory and practice (Crenshaw, 1989; Williams,

1989). As a response to the lenghty history of essentialism and exclusion that has plagued both feminist and anti-racist scholarship, the intersectional project centres the experiences of subjects whose voices have been ignored. Undergirding this approach is a belief that "those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen" (Matsuda, 1987, p. 324). For intersectional theorists, marginalised subjects have an epistemic advantage, a particular perspective that scholars should consider, if not adopt, when crafting a normative vision of a just society. Critical race scholars have evocked an array of terms to describe this methodology of drawing upon marginalised subjects' vantage points including "looking at the bottom" (Matsuda, 1992), and drawing on Black women's "multiple consciousness" (Harris, 1989). These strategies enable intersectional theorists to draw on the unique epistemological position of marginalised subjects to fashion a vision of equality (Nash, 2008).

While intersectionality has become a scholarly "buzzword" (Nash, 2008, p. 3), the notion that identity is formed by interlocking and mutually reinforcing vectors of 'race', gender, class and sexuality has pervaded Black feminist scholarship, long before the term was coined by Crenshaw in 1989. The women of colour critique of conventional feminism's essentialism emphasized the disconnection between feminism's claims to speak for all women and feminism's perennial inattention to racial, ethnic, class, and sexual difference(s) (Davis, 1981). To this end, intersectionality has provided a name to a pre-existing theoretical and political commitment.

As Nash (2008) argues, in its emphasis on Black women's experiences of subjectivity and oppression, intersectional theory has obscured the question of whether all identities are intersectional or whether only multiply marginalised subjects have an intersectional identity. While some feminist scholars insist that intersectionality refers to all subject positions (which are all fundamentally constituted by the interplay of 'race', gender, suxuality, class, disability and so on), the overwhelming majority of intersectional scholarship has centred on the particular positions of multiply marginalised subjects (Ferguson, 2000). This unresolved theoretical dispute makes it unclear whether intersectionality is a theory of marginalised subjectivity or a generalised theory of identity. If intersectionality is solely an anti-exclusion tool

designed to describe the “multiplier effect”, or the “lifelong spirit injury of Black women”, then progressive scholarship requires a nuanced conception of identity that recognizes the ways in which positions of dominance and subordination work in complex and intersecting ways to constitute subjects’ experiences of personhood (Nash, 2008). If, however, intersectionality purports to provide a general tool that enabes scholars to uncover the workings of identity, intersectionality scholarship must begin to broaden its reach to theorize an array of subject experience(s) (ibid.).

In recent years, the concept of intersectionality has taken central stage and become a dynamic model upon which to understand, analyse and engage with difference, whereby difference itself becomes a defining feature of ‘otherness’, even in the field of education. The intersectional approach has been used to explore Whiteness and the educational experience of Black and minority ethnic groups, and particularly to examine the inequalities and diversities of their educational experiences (see Bhopal, Preston, 2012). Within the field of education, the notion of intersectionality seems rather useful as individuals experience multiple inequalities and have diverse identifications, throughout the schooling process, that cannot necessarily be captured by one theoretical perspective alone (ibid.).

Intersectionality, however, has been criticised for its lack of universal definition (Verloo, 2006) and the absence of an accompanying set of rigid methodological guidelines (McCall, 2005). There are various debate on this concept, for example as to whether intesectionaity shouls be understood as a crossroads, as axes of difference, or as a process, and the extent to which it is a ‘theory (Davis, 2008). Yuval-Davis, for example, rejects Crenshaw’s methaphor of intersectionality as a crossroads on the grounds that it remains an ‘additive model’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006). There is also a significant debate over the nature and extent of categories that can be used in intersectional analysis (Bradbury, 2013a). Butler criticised the ‘etc.’ used by many writers after listing ‘race’, class and gender as indicating exhaustion and the ‘illimitable process of signification’ (Butler, 1990), and there is a continued debate over the number of categories that should be, and can be, taken into account in any intersectional analysis, and their relative importance.

Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that all categories of difference are not equal: "in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific positioning" (p. 203). Furthermore, the author contends that categories have different 'organising logics' which affect how they can be analysed. Davis (2008) calls an "interesting compromise" whereby 'race', class and gender are taken as the "minimum standards" of analysis, with other categories added depending on the context and research problem (p. 81). Davis (2008) also contends that "the vagueness and openendedness of "intersectionality" may be the very secret to its success" (p.69). Intersectionality allows for the complexity of lived experiece: it does not expect analysis to be simple or straightforward, or indeed apply the same rules in different places and at different times (Bradbury, 2013a). For a study based in the complex world of educational and social services for forced migrant children, I would argue that this is a distinct advantage.

### 3.4 Identity Intersections, Performative Politics and Subjectivating Practices in Education

Besides feminist and anti-racist scholarship, poststructuralism has also attempted to analyze the concept of intersectionality. Poststructuralists aim to deconstruct perceptions of the world and to challenge what appears to be 'normal' or 'natural' (Bhopal, Preston, 2012). The perspective of post-structuralism is grounded in different types of analyses such as discourse theory, psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory. Consequently, the focus is on examining questions of intersectionality through historical relationships, which are embedded in contesting fields of discourses and multiple subject positions (ibid.). Here the concepts of 'agency' and power (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1974) are central. As a result, new ways of examining how difference is understood within the realms of intersectionality have developed. For the scope of this study, particular attention will be given to Butler's (1990; 1997a,b) notions of performative politics and subjectivating practices, as constituting a significant contribution to intersectional theory to achieve a deeper understanding of educational and social inequalities.

A central project of post-structuralism has been developing tools and strategies for interrogating the "nature of the present" (Foucault, 1988a, p. 36), an interrogation that seeks to expose the relationship between the "subject, truth, and the constitution of experience" (Foucault, 1988b, p. 48). Foucault seeks to develop understandings of how the present is made and so how it might be unmade, by "following lines of fragility in the present", trajectories that might allow us to "grasp why and how and that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is" (ibid, p. 37). Butler (1997a) takes it further and affirms a performative politics in which she imagines discourses taking on a new meaning and circulating in contexts from which they have been barred or in which they have been rendered unintelligible, as performative subjects engage a deconstructive politics that intervenes and unsettles hegemonic meanings.

In her thought-provoking book, *Impossible Bodies, Impossible Selves*, and in her following chapter *Intelligibility, Agency and the Raced-Nationed-Religioned Subjects of Education*, Deborah Youdell (2006; 2012) explores Butler's understanding of processes of subjectivation, examines the relationship between subjectivation and the performative, and considers how the performative is implicated in processes of subjectivation, and the usefulness of such concepts for education, and in particular for educationalists concerned to make better sense of and interrupt educational inequalities. The author argues that, through Butler's subjectivating processes, it is possible to understand how some students are rendered subjects inside the educational endeavour, and others are rendered outside this endeavor or, indeed, outside student-hood (Youdell, 2006; 2012). Indeed, Youdell affirms, Butler's conceptualizations helps in highlighting the differentiating and exclusionary effects of schooling, and the operations of 'race', racism and White supremacy.

Judith Butler uses the notion of the performative, the notion of discourse, and the notion of subjectivation to think about the constitution, constraint and political possibility of the subject. She begins by adopting Foucault's notion of discourse as productive and uses this alongside the notion of the performative to consider the production of sexed and gendered subjects (Butler, 1990). This performative is borrowed from Derrida's work concerning the nature of language and its relationship to the world in which a performative is: "the discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler, 1993, p. 13). With this understanding of the

performative, the schoolgirl and boy, the gifted and talented student, the student with emotional and behavioral difficulties, even the teacher, is so because he/she is designated as such (Youdell, 2012). Indeed, while these designations appear to describe pre-existing subjects, it is the very act of designation that constitutes the subject as if they were already student, teacher, gifted and so on (Youdell, 2006). Butler argues that the subject must be performativity constituted in order to make sense as a subject. While these subjects of schools appear, at least at the level of the everyday or common-sense to precede their designation, this apparent prior subject is an artifact of its performative constitution. This has great implications for education because it insists that nobody is necessarily anything and so what it means to be a teacher or a student might be opened up to radical rethinking (ibid.).

Performatives have to make sense to work – they have to be recognizable in the discourses that are circulating in the settings and moments in which they are deployed. This suggests that performatives might constrain the sorts of subject students might be at the same time as they constitute students (Youdell, 2006). The notion of simultaneous production and constraint the Foucaultian notion of 'subjectivation' conveys is elaborated by Butler (1997b) as denoting "both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection- one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power [...]" (p. 83). In this sense, the subject who comes to be a subject through processes of subjectivation is necessarily "self-incarcerating" (Butler, 1997b, p. 32). Performatives that do not make sense in the discourses that frame schooling may fail or may act to constitute a subject outside the bounds of acceptability as a student. This understanding of the on-going subjectivation of subjects through discursive performativity enables us to see how schools come to be suffused with exclusions, with what the student-subject cannot be, with who cannot be the student-subject (Youdell, 2006; 2012). These ideas demonstrate that subjecthood- and studenthood- comes with costs.

Understanding students as subjectivated through ongoing performative constitutions suggests that the political challenge is to intercept these performatives in order to constitute students differently (Youdell, 2006). Butler draws on Derrida's assertion that any performative is open to misfire, and Foucault's (1990) insistence that meanings of discourses can shift and be unsettled, to detail how discourse and its

performative effects offer political potential. In Butler's account of subjection, the possibility for a specific understanding of intent and agency remains (Youdell, 2006). Thus, performatively constituted subjects have linguistic agency (Butler, 1997a):

> "Because the agency of the subject is not a property of the subject, an inherent will or freedom, but an effect of power, it is constrained but not determined in advance. […] As the agency of a postsovereign subject, its discursive operation is delimited in advance but also open to a further unexpected delimitation". (p. 139-140)

Butler (1997a) calls the capacity to name and so constitute that result from subjectivation "discursive agency". By thinking of agency as discursive, Butler moves beyond an understanding of intent and agency that is the property of a rational self-knowing subject. She insists, based on Foucault's conceptualization, that the sedimented meanings of enduring and prevailing discourses might be unsettled and resignified or reinscribed. Resignification or reinscription is not simply a doing again, but a reversal or a doing again differently. So the inequalities that are produced through the performative practice of institutions, teachers and, indeed, students, might be unsettled (Youdell, 2006). This is not to say that such performative politics is simply a matter of asserting a new or altered meaning. The regulatory operations of authorized discourses and the historicity of the terms render normative meaning resilient to reinscription (ibid.). However, they are never immune from it. As Butler argues, the possibility of reinscription is instrinsic to performative interpellation:

> "Context inhere in certain speech acts in ways that are very difficult to shake. […] Contexts are never fully determined in advance […] the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the centre of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking" (Butler, 1997, p. 161)

Understanding the subject as discursively constituted, as subjectivated but with discursive agency promises to expose how subjects come to be particular sort of students and learners in school. It promises to enable us to see how it is in the daily school life, its routine practices and everyday interactions that students come to be performatively constituted, not just along social, biographical and sub-cultural axes, but also as students and learners (Youdell, 2006; 2012). By understanding these

constitutions as the consequences of intersecting discourses, we can see how markers such as 'race', gender, ability, sexuality, disability, social class come to be entangled with the kind of learners that it is discursively possible, intelligible, for students to be; and how some students come to be impossible learners (Youdell, 2006).

### 3.5 Genesis of Dis/Ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) Framework

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) is an emergent and dynamic theoretical framework that simultaneously engages with Disability Studies (DS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education. For the development of such framework, Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016) draw on the critical work of scholars such as James Baldwin, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, Yuri Kochiyama, that - far before the development of either Critical Race Theory or Disability Studies-allowed for the recognition of the individuals' multiple dimensions and the systems of oppression and marginalisation in which they survive, resist and thrive (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). Furthermore, in justifying the importance of a theoretical framework on the intersection of 'race' and disability, the authors quote Chris Bell (2011) who affirms that the work of understanding raced and disabled bodies implies recovery and detection (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). Recovery is needed because raced bodies, are bodies also marked by disabilities that remain generally unacknowledged. Consequently, these individuals are (mis) constructed as unidimensional figures, and the narratives of these individuals often insist on misrepresenting their bodies and neglecting their situatedness at the intersection of 'race' and disability (along with other markers/shapers of identity). Recovery work requires also detection in order to consider ways in which these raced and disabled bodies also "transform(ed) systems and cultures" (Bell, 2011, p. 4). Crucially, detection "requires a willingness to deconstruct the systems that would keep those bodies in separate spheres" (Bell, 2011, p. 3).

Considering such conceptual influences, DisCrit emerges with the aim of expanding scholarly capacity to analyze some of the most entrenched educational inequalities from an intersectional lens. Importantly, Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016) make use of the term *dis/ability* firstly to counter the emphasis on having a whole person be

represented by what he or she cannot do, rather than what he or she can, and secondly to disrupt notions of the fixity and permanency of the concept of disability, seeking rather to analyse the entire context in which a person functions (p. 1).

### *3.5.1 "Racialising Ability, Disabling Race": Rationale for DisCrit*

Drawing on tools of scientific racism, including post-mortem studies of human brains, scientists have attempted to prove the inferiority and lower intelligence of African Americans in order to justify segregation and inequitable treatment within the United States and beyond (see for example the theory of anthropological criminality of Cesare Lombroso in the Italian context, that essentially stated that criminality was inherited). In his essay, *Racial Intelligence*, Du Bois (1920) highlighted some of these attempts to align ability with racial classification. These attempts included comparing skeletal and cranium sizes without regard to age or developmental conditions, and giving tests that required individuals to fill in details of pictures depicting things they had never seen before, such as tennis courts or bowling alleys. Du Bois documented what is now widely recognized as a continuous attempt throughout history to "prove" people of African descent possessed limited intelligence and were therefore not quite fully human (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). This notion had been reified throughout the nineteenth century in the fields of phrenology and racial anthropological physiognomy that claimed physical attributes were the basis of intellectual, social and moral growth. Black and brown bodies were viewed as less developed than White bodies, more 'primitive' and even considered sub-species of humans:

> "For a century or more it had been the dream of those who do not believe Negros are human that their wish should find some scientific basis. For years they depended on the weight of the human brain, trusting that the alleged underweight of less than a thousand Negro brains, measured without reference to age, stature, nutrition or cause of death, would convince the world that Black men simply could not be educated. Today scientists acknowledge that there is no warrant for such a conclusion." (W.E.B. Du Bois, 1920)

Such an historical conceptualization of human differences was used to justify the slavery, segregation, unequal treatment, harassment, violence and even murder of Black and brown bodies. The legacy of historical beliefs about 'race' and ability,

based on White supremacy, have become intertwined in complex ways that carry into the present day. Segregated special classes, in the U.S. context, have been populated with students from non-dominant racial and ethnic groups, from immigrant populations, and from "lower" social classes and status since their inception (Erevelles, 2000, Ferri, Connor, 2006). A disproportionate number of non-dominant racial and ethnic groups, from immigrant populations continue to be referred, labeled and placed in special education, particularly in the categories of Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, and Emotional Disturbance or Behavior Disorders (Harry, Klingner, 2014), and in the UK context a disproportionate numbers of Black students labelled 'educationally subnormal'. According to Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016), these categories are the most problematic in terms of diagnosis because they rely on the subjective judgment of the school personnel rather than biological facts. Although it is perhaps easier to conceptualize dis/abilities that are "clinically determined" (i.e. based on professional judgment) as subjective, all dis/ability categories, whether physical, cognitive or sensory, are also subjective (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). More specifically, societal interpretations of and responses to specific differences from the normed body are what signify a dis/ability. Indeed, notion of dis/ability continually shift over time according to the social context. Thus, dis/ability categories are not "given" or "real" on their own; rather dis/abilities such as autism, mental retardation and competence are what any of us make of them (ibid.).

In elaborating DisCrit, Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016), they have found that very few theories sufficiently examine how 'race' and ability interact with each other. Indeed, several authors in Disability Studies (DS) leave 'race' unexamined (see Bell, 2006; Connor, 2008). Some critical special educators employ DS on its own and mention 'race' as a mitigating factor (Reid, Knight, 2006). Others have begun to find points between DS and Critical Race Theory (CRT), with a view to showing CRT how this intersection can offer more accurate descriptions of the way 'race' and ability are deployed in schools and society (Erevelles, 2011; Leonardo, Broderick, 2011). Yet, some of these attempts seem to leave one identity marker foregrounded, while the other is an additive and subsequently defaults into the background (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). Within CRT it has been noted that the topics of dis/ability and special education are not sufficiently represented or simply omitted

(Connor, 2008). Similarly, it seems essential to account for 'race' and to critique the deployment of Whiteness within the field of DS (Bell, 2006).

Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016) argue that, given the ways that 'race' has figured so prominently in special education status, it seems irresponsible to leave 'race' out of dis/ability related research in special education. They point out that, among CRT in education scholars, it was the article by David Gillborn (2012), titled *Intersectionality and the Primacy of Racism: Race, Class, Gender and Disability in Education*, that formally accounted for the intersections of 'race' and dis/ability. While arguing that 'race' can unapologetically be positioned at the front and center of intersectional work, Gillborn (2012) incorporated dis/ability as a marker of identity and social location, alongside the more widely accepted classifications of social class and gender. Therefore, he recognizes that "it is fine for a primary interest to drive a researcher, but imperative that other dimensions must be taken seriously with the work, rather than giving a cursory nod before moving on" (Gillborn, 2012, in Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016, p. 12).

Thus, it seems clear that the Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) is a timely framework, to explore the ways in which both 'race' and ability are socially constructed and interdependent, and to examine the processes in which students are simultaneously raced and dis/abled (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). DisCrit sheds light on how Black students, labeled with dis/ability, are situated in unique positions where they are considered "less than" White peers with or without dis/ability labels, as well as their non-disabled peers of color. Their embodiment and positioning reveals ways in which racism and ableism inform and rely upon each other in interdependent ways (ibid.). DisCrit recognizes that racism and ableism are normalizing processes that are interconnected and collusive, and that should be unmasked. As Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016) affirm, "racism validates and reinforces ableism and ableism validates and reinforces racism" (p. 14). DisCrit then seeks to understand the ways that macro level issues of racism and ableism, among other structural discriminatory processes, are enacted in the day-to-day lives of Black students with dis/ability. It attempts to address the structural power of ableism and racism by recognizing the historical, social, political, and economic interests of limiting access to educational equity to Black students with dis/abilities on both macro and micro levels (ibid).

*3.5.2 Tenets of DisCrit*

The Disability Critical Race Theory framework has been formulated around some essential tenets, which put forth the desire to "reject forces, practices and institutions that attempt to construct dis/ability based on difference from normative cultural standards" (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016, p. 26). Through such tenets, the authors reject attempts at the containment of Black people with dis/abilities due to their perceived divergence from normative cultural standards. They, instead, encourage society to become more encompassing of diversity and perceived difference, while questioning the very norms that create difference.

DisCrit focuses on the ways 'race' and ability have been used to marginalize particular groups in society. It focuses on the interdependent ways that racism and ableism shape notions of normalcy (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). Such mutually constitutive processes are enacted through normalizing practices such as labeling a student "at risk" for simply being a Black person, thereby reinforcing the unmarked norms of Whiteness (Ladson-Billings, Tate, 1995). Neither institutional racism alone nor institutional ableism on its own can explain why students of color are more likely to be labeled with dis/abilities and segregated than their White peers with and without dis/abilities; instead it is the two working together (Beratan, 2008a).

DisCrit emphasizes multidimensional identities, rather than singular notions of identity, such as 'race', dis/ability, social class or gender. Of crucial importance is, too, the consideration of how certain identity markers, viewed as differences from normative cultural standards, have allowed teachers, other school personnel and society to perceive particular students as deficient, lacking and inferior. Additionally, DisCrit acknowledges how experiences with stigma and segregation often vary, based on other identity markers (i.e. gender, language, class) and how this negotiation of multiple stigmatized identities adds complexity (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016).

DisCrit rejects the understanding of both 'race' and dis/ability as primarily biological facts and recognizes the social construction of both as society's response to "differences" from the norm (Mirza, 1998). In other words, while recognizing the social construction of particular identity markers, DisCrit acknowledges that these

categories hold profound significance in people's lives, both in the present and historically (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). DisCrit seeks to disrupt the tradition of ignoring the voices of traditionally marginalized groups and instead privileges insider voices (Matsuda, 1987). It invites understanding of ways students respond to injustices through fostering or attending to counter narratives and explicitly reading these stories against the grain of master narratives. Attending to counter narratives encourage the learning of how students respond to injustice, not through passive acceptance, but through tactics, such as strategic maneuvering (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016).

DisCrit considers legal, ideological and historical aspects of dis/ability and 'race' and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of certain citizens. The root cause of this denial of rights is the belief in the superiority of Whiteness, wherein a racial hierarchy was created with Whiteness at the apex, Blackness at the base and all other 'races' falling in between (Bonilla- Silva, 2006). Furthermore, DisCrit recognizes Whiteness and Ability as "property", conferring economic benefits to those who can claim Whiteness and/or normalcy (Harris, 1989), and disadvantages for those who cannot lay claim to these identity statuses. Due to a societal subscription to Whiteness and ability as property, DisCrit holds that the political interests of oppressed groups have often been gained only through interest convergence (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). Interest convergence, a concept introduced by Derrick Bell (1980), holds that "the interests of Blacks in receiving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites" (p.22).

Finally, DisCrit supports activism and promotes diverse forms of resistance. Many Critical Race Theorists call for activism that links academic work to the community. This avoids sterile ideas being handed down from "ivory tower without practical application as well as studying the natives wherein people who know nothing about the community suggest ways to fix it based on deficit perspectives" (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016, p. 26). DisCrit supports diverse expressions of resistance that are linked to and informed by the community, whether that be academic or theoretical, pedagogical, or activist (ibid.).

### *3.5.3 Tensions and Cautions*

Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2013) affirm that there are various tensions between DS and CRT that should be seen as productive for furthering knowledge and transforming current inequities in the education systems within the U.S. context. Although the authors describe dis/ability as associated with deviance and lack of intelligence and that this might explain why Black people would fiercely fight against labeling themselves as dis/abled, they also believe that this ideology is grounded in hegemonic notions of normalcy (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). According to a hegemonic notion of normalcy, dis/ability is seen as a purely biological fact that is apolitical, asocial and ahistorical. Instead, the authors of DisCrit emphasize the importance of understanding dis/ability as political and social category (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). Resisting essentialism, the authors believe that having a dis/ability is not universal and, in fact, is qualitatively different for individuals with the *same* dis/ability depending on cultural contexts, 'race', social class, sexuality and so on. Likewise, *dissimilar* dis/abilities are experienced in various ways as they intersect with these and others markers of identity (ibid.).

Alongside with productive tensions, Annamma, Connor and Ferri (2016) outline also explicit cautions. Firstly, DisCrit recognizes that 'race' and dis/ability cannot be conflated, as they are not interchangeable. It acknowledges that to be Black does not make one dis/abled and to be labeled dis/abled does not make one of color (ibid.). It seems important not to assume that because of an individual has experienced oppression of one type (e.g. ableism) then that person knows what it is like to have experienced oppression of other types (e.g. racism). Positions of subordination, the authors argue, are not the same: to be a woman does not equal being Black, to be a Black woman does not equal to being a White woman, and to be a Black woman with dis/ability is different than being a White woman with dis/ability (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016, p. 28). Moreover, the authors add, there is a diversity of experiences within any of those categories based on social class, culture, and nation. DisCrit, is then use to address ways in which 'race' and dis/ability, as socially constructed and maintained systems of oppression, have been used in tandem to justify limiting access, and it encourages understanding about ways in which society limits access and embodiment of difference (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016).

## 3.6 Locating this Study

As we have seen in this chapter there is a burgeoning literature on Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies in Education (Erevelles, 2000; 2011; Ferri, Connor, 2006; Ferri, 2010, Ladson-Billings, Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2012). Although intersectional work on 'race' and dis/ability may be complex, there is a growing literature focusing on how 'race' and dis/ability are co-constructed (Gillborn, 2012; Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2013, 2016). However, the literature reviewed in this chapter focuses mainly on the U.S. or the U.K. contexts. Within the Italian context, studies on migrant and forced migrant children's integration are mainly dealt in the field of Intercultural education, and focusing mainly on one marker of identity, such as children's migratory status (Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015). Italian scholars in the field of Special Education have largely left 'race' unexamined, with a recent exception focusing on the over-representation migrant children in Special Educational Needs in primary schools (Bocci, 2016). Furthermore, mental health and emotional disturbance issues among migrants and forced migrants have been so far tackled by "etnopsychiatry", the fusion of psychiatry and anthropology, which despite its often critical stance remains strongly linked to a medicalized view of disability (e.g. Beneduce, 2007).

In so far as I can discern, no studies within the Italian context have focused on the co-construction of 'race' and dis/ability from an intersectional lens and targeting forced migrant children. Therefore, the normalizing processes of racism and ableism, both in asylum seekers and refugees' social integration projects and in the Italian society more generally, have not yet been unmasked and exposed. The following study will then contribute to the literature in the following way; by:

a) Further expanding knowledge and understanding of 'race' and disability, when targeting forced migrant children;
b) Highlighting discrepancies and contradictions of the Italian policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* and Intercultural policies- when applied to disabled forced migrant children;

c) Shedding light on the criticism of existing social integration pathways for young asylum-seekers and refugees in Rome, and how they produce and reproduce macro and micro exclusions;
d) Expanding and enriching the fields of Intercultural and Special Education, as applied in the Italian context, by offering a divergent and interdisciplinary framework to analyse educational inequalities, through a new lens;
e) Encouraging a systemic change of teaching and learning practices in inclusive terms.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has traced key elements in the literature related to Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies in education. Following an exploration of the development of CRT and its translation within the education field, it focused on intersectionality as a new theoretical model to engage with difference, and on how the latter can be enriched by Butler's notions of subjectivation and performative politics. Having examined the emerging framework Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), I ended by locating the current study within the field, by highlighting its contribution to the literature. The next two chapters focus on the philosophical underpinnings of my research design and the study's methodology respectively.

# Chapter Four: Research Design- Philosophical Underpinnings

## 4.1 Introduction

A clarification of one's positionality in relation to the philosophical underpinnings of the nature of inquiry is important and allows for a rationalised, contextual framing of the whole study. The aim of this chapter is to situate the study in terms of philosophical underpinnings, paradigmatic concerns, and theoretical orientations. Following a consideration of the broad approaches to social science research, the chapter examines the three paradigms of social science research. Next, it focuses on grounded theory (GT) and considers its origins, features and current debates. Finally, the chapter locates the study's philosophical, paradigmatic and methodological positionality, and considers the implication for the chosen research design and conduct.

## 4.2 Approaches to Social Science

There are two broad approaches to social science research: subjectivist and objectivist. Each is characterized by differing assumptions with regard to ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. In the ontological realm, we orient ourselves towards matters concerning the nature of reality, reflecting on whether there is an external, valid truth and reality 'out there', or whether what we see as reality is some sort of individually fabricated construction. Epistemology considers the nature of knowledge, and how that knowledge has been formed, defined, communicated and valued. A researcher with an objectivist conception of knowledge will likely take the role of neutral observer and be aligned with natural scientific methods (positivism). One with a more subjectivist and personal conception of knowledge will assume a level of researcher-participant interaction, and view the application of the methods of natural science as inappropriate (anti-positivism). Whether one considers an individual to be governed and determined by, or in control of, their environment is also of relevance. Methodologically, a researcher with an objectivist standpoint with regard to ontology, epistemology and human nature concerns is more likely to be oriented towards

quantitative methods. Instead, a researcher taking a more subjectivist stance will likely employ qualitative methods. The focus in each case is different and this will also be reflected in the nature of the research questions. In the objectivist/positivist approach the aim is to discover general laws and principles; in the subjectivist, anti-positivist approach the focus is on the individual and the particular rather than the general and the universal (Cohen, 2007; Guba, Lincoln, 2005).

## 4.3 Three Paradigms

Different schools of thought concerning social science research are typically organized into three main paradigms: the normative (positivist), the interpretive (anti-positivist), and critical theory/critical educational science (Guba, Lincoln, 2005).

### *4.3.1 The Normative Paradigm and Positivism*

The positivist and anti-positivist debate has important implications for research (Cohen, 2007). The natural sciences are concerned with 'discovering' natural laws and 'truth'. Positivism conceives social science as also being about discovering natural and universal laws, even if those which govern social behavior. Human behavior is seen as passive and determined, individuals' intentions and sense of agency are often ignored (Cohen, 2007; Guba, Lincoln, 2005). Criticisms of positivist application to the social science field abound. The quest for objectivity and quantification (as an end in itself) is regarded as inappropriate where the focus is on human condition. Habermas (1972) argues that the rational model of knowledge, which underpins positivist approaches, is inappropriate in the realm of human behavior and social processes. In addition, in the social world, both researcher and participants are 'subjects', whereas in the natural scientific world, the researcher (subject) is dealing with (usually inanimate) objects. Consequently, social science works in a pre-interpreted world in the sense that the meanings that subjects hold are part of their construction of the world (Giddens, 1976).

The positivist assumption that there is no relationship between the researcher and the 'object' of his/her research does not hold in social science. Researchers are not neutral spectators of the world, but participants in that world (Smith, 2002). More recently,

serious attention is being paid to the relationship between the 'knowing' subjects implicit to empirical research and the 'troubled' subjects of post-structural writing (Youdell, 2012). Understanding the researching and researched subject to be "perpetually but provisionally constituted through discourse means that research practice is wholly implicated in process of on-going subjectivation (of both the researcher and the researched), even as these subjectivities form the objects of study" (Youdell, 2012, p. 193).

The idea that there is no theory-free knowledge or observation is well established (Kuhn, 1962). It seems impossible to 'bracket' one's prior belief, arguing that one cannot stand outside the pre-understandings and historicality of one's previous experience (Charmaz, 2014; Giddens, 1976). Additionally, whereas in a natural science setting, the quest for knowledge and understanding is one-way, and thus involves only a single hermeneutic, social science research involves a double hermeneutic; because the findings of social science can be used by the participants, or other people, the relationship is two-way (Giddens, 1976).

Smith and Hodkison (2002) position neo-realism between positivism and interpretivist approaches. They explain that while neo-realists are committed to objectivist ontology, they nonetheless subscribe to "epistemological fallibilism" (p. 292). Whilst they believe that there is an external reality that can be known, there is some acceptance that knowledge is, at least in part, socially constructed. Such a position is an example of the post-positivist paradigm, where there is some limited acceptance of interpretivist principles in the social domain (Guba, Lincoln, 2005).

### *4.3.2 The Interpretive Paradigm*

An alternative to the positivist paradigm is interpretivism, which emphasizes interpretation and gives abstract understanding greater priority than explanation (Charmaz, 2014). Numerous traditions and perspectives can be found in this approach, including hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, constructivism, critical theory, postmodernism and post-structuralism, although some of these, in particular critical theory, may be considered as constituting a separate, and third emerging paradigm. Proponents of interpretivism view

theoretical understanding as gained through the theorist's interpretation of the studied phenomenon. Interpretivism allows for indeterminacy rather than seeking causality and aiming theorizing patterns and connections (Charmaz, 2014).

Ontologically the view is taken that while there may be an external reality within the physical world, in the social arena reality is always, to an extent, constructed: it is known and understood in a particular way because of the inevitable interaction between researcher, participants and data. Epistemologically then, in terms of what we know about the world we, individually, interpret and to varying extents, construct, our understandings of the world, and in interaction with our research participants. Most interpretivists accept the notion of an external, independent reality but stress that knowledge of this reality can only be socially constructed and "we can never know if we have accurately depicted that reality" (Smith and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 292). Hence, in interpretivist approaches, one speaks of 'constructing' and 'making' rather than 'discovering' and 'finding'. There is a concern with the individual and understanding subjective experience, "a rejection of the belief that human behavior is governed by general, universal laws and characterized by underlying regularities" (Cohen, 2007, p. 19), and an emphasis on understanding the social world from participants' perspective. Individuals are not seen merely as deterministic products of their environments but as actively constructing their environments in accordance with their intentions within particular sets of circumstances.

Interpretivism calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon and assumes emergent, multiple realities, indeterminacy, facts and values as inextricably linked, truth as provisional, and social life as processual. From an interpretive approach, we interpret our participants' meanings and actions and they interpret ours. According to Charmaz (2014), interpretivism aims to:

- Conceptualize the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms;
- Articulate theoretical claims pertaining to scope, depth, power and relevance of a given analysis;
- Acknowledge subjectivity in theorizing and hence recognize the role of experience, standpoints, and interactions, including one's own;

- Offer an imaginative theoretical interpretation that makes sense of the studied phenomenon.

The interpretive turn in theory has gained attention with the spreading of social constructionist principles among diverse scholars, particularly since the 1960s. In social science research, the aim of constructionism is to understand people's realities and how these realties are constructed.

> Constructivism [is] a social scientific perspective that addresses how realities are made. This perspective assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate. Constructivist inquiry starts with the experience and asks how members construct it. To the best of their ability, constructivists enter the phenomenon, gain multiple views of it, and locate it in its web of connections and constraints. Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction.
> (Charmaz, 2006)

The role of the researcher is one of "passionate participant" and "facilitator of multivoice reconstruction" (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p. 196). Ontologically, it is relativistic, stressing "local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities" (ibid. p. 193). Reality is constructed through human activity, with people together actively inventing the properties of the world. Therefore, reality cannot be discovered because it only exists through social construction. However, it is not that constructivists believe that there are multiple realities simultaneously co-existing. Most fully accept that an external physical reality exists but argue that in and of themselves such 'objects' have no meaning apart from that which we ascribe to them, and so we cannot have 'true' knowledge of them. Epistemologically, knowledge is also seen to be socially and culturally constructed- people create meanings in interaction with each other and the environment. Findings are thus 'created' as opposed to 'discovered' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p. 193). There is also a participatory and democratic aspect to constructivist approaches: participants are invited to take a more active role in the research process (ibid.).

Theorizing from interpretive perspective is an emergent process and compatible with George Herbert Mead's (1932) philosophical pragmatism that informs symbolic interactionism. Mead highlights action as the starting place for analysis that includes the person's imagined understanding of the other person's role and response during

the interaction. Symbolic interactionism stresses studying action and process(es), and individuals' agency and meaning making (Blumer, 1969). Within this approach, social life is regarded as dynamic and interactive and there is empathy towards research participants and their worlds.

Also under the interpretivist umbrella are post-structuralist and postmodernist approaches. Poststructuralists question the assumption that underlying structures govern human action and thought, as well as the idea that such structures can be 'objectively' perceived. As such, there is an understanding of the multiple interpretations of any 'reality'. Poststructuralist thinking paved the way for postmodernism; here the central theme relates to the nature of knowledge; all knowledges are regarded as situated, socially and culturally produced and contested. Belief in, or adherence to, any grand theory or set of methods is disavowed; 'metanarratives' and all-encompassing theories are rejected. Instead the need for local and particular knowledges and theories is emphasized (Lyotard, 1984). All claims of ultimate 'truth' are regarded as likely hiding and serving particular agendas. Postmodern theorists believe that all social and political discourses are related to structures of power and domination. There is an emphasis on democratic and emancipatory theory and practice. In terms of methodological implications, research is regarded as political in nature, and significant reflexivity on the part of the researcher is called for. The role of the researcher as 'expert' rather than co-participant is questioned, and the partiality and conditionality of the 'knowledge that is produced is stressed. Contextual and situated factors are considered and differences and contradictions, as well as similarities and coherencies, are explored (Clarke, 2005).

Interpretivist approaches are often criticized for being unsystematic, subjectivist, for lacking in transparency, and for contributing little to knowledge production. Some critics are concerned by the relativistic possibility of an 'anything goes' approach because " once one abandons a serious conception of the real, the only possibility is the interpretive void of all things equal", which for neo-realist critics, heralds "the end of rationality, reason, and even research itself" (Smith and Hodkinson, 2002, p. 293). However, relativists ague that what is at issue is merely recognition of the finitude of human beings, which means we must accept that there is uncertainty and contingency (ibid.).

### *4.3.3 Critical Theory and Critical Educational Science*

Critical theory and its variants are sometimes considered as constituting a third social science paradigm. Associated with the Frankfurt School of philosophy and social theory, this school of thought further developed in Germany and the US. Similarly to postmodernism, there is a rejection of modernist beliefs and, rather than being one coherent theory, there are many lines of thought. A rooting concern of all is that of social justice. A critical stance is taken towards society, its structures and processes, and there is a strong concern for the individual (Blake, 2003). There is a positioning in terms of values; critical theory purports to be not "value-free but interested" (ibid.). Critical theory focuses on change and on what behavior should be like in a democratic society. There is a strong emancipatory dimension, and a fundamental aim is to redress inequality. It focuses on issues such as "repression, voice, ideology, power, participation, representation, inclusion and interest" (Cohen, 2007, p. 26). Therefore, key objectives are to assist the oppressed to understand –through critical reflection- that the beliefs that society operates for the good of all its members perpetuate the *status quo* and leave them powerless, and to support action to transform society. In research drawing on this perspective, there is a concern that participants understand and critique oppression and inequality, and learn how to positively impact their lives (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Importantly, however, there are few examples of critical theory in action or evaluation of how it works in practice.

Participatory approaches can be positioned within the critical theory/critical educational science paradigm. Such an approach is based on assumptions of co-created "subjective-objective reality", a "critical subjectivity in participatory transaction", and "extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and "practical knowing" and "co-created findings" (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, pp. 192-196). Methodologically, active collaboration and action at the service of social justice are emphasized. There is a critical questioning of the lack of involvement by participants in the conceptualization, formulation and implementation of much research and this is seen as problematic where the focus is on the experiences of minority and/or disadvantaged group members (Byrne, 2004). Lynch and O'Neill (Lynch, 1994) argue that an emancipatory democratic research approach is required to avoid the 'colonization' of issues of class-based inequality for the professional purposes of

middle-class academics. Such an approach involves negotiating the nature, purpose, conduct, interpretation, theory-building and dissemination of the research with the participants (Cohen, 2007). The researcher is more a facilitator, collaborator and partner than ‘expert’, and works to include the participants as co-researchers.

Including minority groups in the design and interpretation of research is not, however, unproblematic. In fact, participatory research is more challenging for the researcher than conventional research: potential participants may be disinterested or sceptical about the research’s potential to lead to change. Competing (research-participant) research foci and interpretations may also cause tensions (Tormey, 2000). Additionally, there may be difficulties relating to analysis, ethics and credibility where both participants and researchers are engaged in the various research stages. Researchers also must be reflexive about building rapport with participants, as relationship-building may be rather fake and entered into solely for the purpose of the research (Cohen, 2007; Guba, Lincoln, 2005).

## 4.4 Grounded Theory

### *4.4.1 Rationale*

The focus on the intersection of ‘race’ and dis/ability in the educational pathways of inclusion of asylum-seeking and refugee children, and in the professionals’ working experience, has led me to design the present inquiry according to the constructivist grounded theory (GT) approach. As Charmaz (2005; 2011) argues, social justice inquiry is one area among many in which researchers can fruitfully apply grounded theory. The critical stance in social justice in combination with the analytic focus of grounded theory broadens and sharpens the scope of inquiry (Charmaz, 2005; Johnson, Parry, 2016). Such efforts locate subjective and collective experience in larger structures and increase understanding of how these structures work (Clarke, 2005; Maines, 2001; 2003). Grounded theory can supply analytic tools to move social justice studies beyond description, while keeping them anchored in their respective empirical worlds. Not only are justice and injustice abstract concepts but also they are enacted processes, made real through actions performed again and again (Charmaz,

2005). Grounded theorists can offer integrated theoretical statements about the conditions under which injustice or justice develops, changes, or continues (ibid.).

Grounded theory studies can show how inequalities are played out at interactional and organizational levels. Race, class, gender and disability are everywhere; but how do members of various groups define them? Researchers must define how, when, and to what extent participant construct and enact power, privilege and inequalities (Charmaz, 2005). 'Race', class, gender, age and disability are social constructions with contested definition that are continually reconstituted. Using them as static variables undermines their potential power; using grounded theory helps to develop fresh insight and ideas (Charmaz, 2005). This strength of grounded theory is particularly relevant here, as the main research question focuses on the ways in which 'race', dis/ability, and migratory status are co-constructed by White Italian professionals in refugee services in Rome, and their subjectivating power on young Black unaccompanied asylum seekers.

In particular, the analytic power of constructivist re-visions of grounded theory offers distinct advantages to this study, as it helps to understand the construction of inequities and how people act towards them. It does so by defining relevant processes, demonstrating their contexts, specifying the conditions in which these processes occur, conceptualizing their phases, explicating what contributes to their stability and/or change and outlining their consequences (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, this approach recognizes the constraints that historical, social and situational conditions exert on research process and acknowledges the researcher's active role in shaping the data and analysis.

At its core, GT is a way of doing social science research, which focuses on developing theory from data, in an inductive, emergent manner, as opposed to deriving hypothesis from existing theories and testing them. GT is both a process and a product: as a methodology it provides a set of heuristics about how to go about data collection and analysis, and the process results in a grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz 2007b). Although GT can be used with both qualitative and quantitative data (see Glaser, 2008), it is primarily used with the former. As noted by Bryant and Charmaz (2007a), while vast numbers of studies claim to have used GT, most do little more than refer to

(Glaser and Strauss, 1967) seminal text and quote various mantras about theories being 'grounded' and emerging inductively from the data.

The use of the constructivist version of grounded theory for this research project, influenced by the critical theory paradigm (see Guba, Lincoln, 2005), and of senitizing concepts such as DisCrit and Butler's subjectivation and performative politics generates productive tensions between the interpretive work done here and the methods, such as storytelling, widely used by scholars in Critical Race Theory, implying that racism is endemic within society. This then represents an innovative methodological aspect, given the paucity of constructivist grounded theory studies within the intersectionality and CRT fields.

### *4.4.2 Origins and Historical Context*

The history and development of GT are intertwined with larger currents in social scientific enquiry, and particularly with tensions between qualitative and quantitative research in sociology in the United States in the early 1960s, a time of US political and economic domination (Charmaz, 2014). In the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century, US sociologists, particularly at the University of Chicago, began building an empirical foundation in life histories and case studies, which found fruition in the work of George Herbert Mead (1932), John Dewey (1919/1948, 1925/1958), among the others. Inductive qualitative inquiry in sociology had shifted from life histories and case studies to participant observation in the US by the 1940s. This methodology had not been theorized, explicated, or codified in accessible ways. Nor did proponents talk about field methods. As a consequence, what researchers actually did in the field and afterwards remained opaque.

In their 1967 publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm, L. Strauss refocused qualitative inquiry on methods of analysis. Grounded theory emerged from their successful collaboration while studying death and dying in hospitals (see Glaser and Strauss, 1965; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). They each brought rather different traditions to the table. While Glaser's background was positivist and based on quantitative methods, Strauss's work was based on Chicago school pragmatism and symbolic

interactionism, with its emphasis on studying process, action and meaning (Charmaz, 2014). Both Glaser and Strauss were dissatisfied with social science methods at that time, and were concerned with demonstrating that qualitative analysis could make at least equally significant conceptual and theoretical contributions as quantitative-based studies. Critiques of quantification and the positivist paradigm more generally, were emerging at the time within social science. Khun's (1962) work in particular gave rise to enormous debate and questioning about the philosophy and practice of natural and social science. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work challenged the hegemony of the quantitative paradigm within social science (Charmaz, 2014), closed the gap between theory development and field research, and allowed for qualitative research to result in theory development rather than solely descriptive work. It also signaled a move away from "grounded theory verification" (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b, p. 19).

### *4.4.3 Key Features*

GT aims to develop an integrated mid-range theory, which is grounded in and fits the data, and which generates relevant, applicable and useful analytic explanations. Analysis and memo-writing commence early in the study. When coding data the focus is on action and involves a number of stages. Initial coding is conducted in a line-by-line manner; the researcher identifies and names units of meaning (Charmaz, 2014). One constantly compares codes with what one has previously coded, and properties (and their dimensions) of concepts and categories are delineated. During focus coding, the codes from initial, open coding are reviewed and the most significant, frequent and useful ones are selected and used to code subsequent data. Coding is a non-linear process, and involves a significant amount of going back and forth between the data and one's codes at different points. Underlying all stages is the use of the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1965), which involves comparing data with data, data with codes, and codes with data. Through initial and focused coding, memo writing, and memo sorting, the researcher develops initial categories, concepts and their properties.

There is a back-and-forth approach to data collection and analysis. One's emerging analysis directs further data collection (though theoretical sampling), and this continues until concepts and categories are saturated. Saturation occurs when no

further properties, dimensions or other aspects (of the concepts and categories) are identified (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling is a strategy, which involves further data collection as necessitated by one's analysis, either with new or previous participants, or using the data one as already collected, for further coding and analysis. Theoretical sampling is about filling conceptual gaps in the emerging categories; it is not about population representativeness (Charmaz, 2014).

The initial stages of coding aim to fracture the data in order to raise it to a more conceptual level. Further coding stages aim to recombine data, through the concepts and categories, into an integrated and coherent theory. Such coding may involve axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) or theoretical coding (Glaser, 1992). Axial coding involves a set of procedures designed to relate categories to sub-categories, in order to make such relationship visible. Glaser's theoretical coding focuses on specifying the relationships between categories, again with an emphasis on integrating the theory.

The focus on conceptualization versus description is an important distinction between GT and qualitative data analysis (QDA), which emphasizes faithful, 'thick', and coverage-based descriptions. This has important implications for the way in which analysis is conducted, the theory is constructed and the 'findings' are presented. There is an important balancing act in effect between, on the one hand, avoiding mere description and, on the other, not succumbing to theoretical conceptualization without adequate grounding in systematic data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, conceptualizing implies a certain distancing from the data themselves.

Developing theoretical sensitivity is a necessary precursor to theoretically rendering one's analysis. Being theoretically sensitive means being aware of a wide range of theoretical constructs across disciplines and utilizing them (where they have earned relevance and significance) in one's theory to relate categories (through theoretical coding) to the overall theory (or within aspects of the theory). There is some debate amongst researchers about how one can become theoretically sensitive if one has avoided engaging in major literature reviews in the substantive area until after analysis has been completed (which is recommended in GT). Sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969), and the notion of "theoretical agnosticism" (Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003) can be of use in this debate (see Charmaz, 2014, p. 306). Sensitizing concepts

give researchers initial but tentative ideas to pursue and questions to rise about their topics. Sensitizing concepts provide a place to start inquiry, not to end it; they are points of departure for studying the empirical world while retaining the openness for exploring it. Grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain guiding empirical interests to study and, consistent with Blumer (1969), general concepts forming a loose frame for looking at these interests. Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) define "theoretical agnosticism" as a critical stance toward earlier theories that neither denies nor accepts their potential relevance for the researcher's study without rigorous scrutiny. This stance concurs with the position of requiring extant concepts to earn their way into a grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

A further key feature of GT is that it is said to be emergent and inductive, in contrast to the hypothetico-deductive approaches traditionally employed in research. An inductive approach involves a form of reasoning moving from the specific and particular to the more general. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) note that critics point to what has been termed the "naïve Baconian inductivism" apparent in early GT texts. Critics question how exactly the step is taken from the particular to the general and emphasize the problem of limited cases. While Glaser and Strauss (1967) do not discuss the problematic nature of induction, Strauss and Corbin (A. Strauss, Corbin, J., 1994) acknowledge that the inductive aspects were overplayed in the early GT writings. More recently the notion of abduction has been raised, which is a mode of imaginative reasoning researchers invoke when they cannot account for a surprising finding (Charmaz, 2014). Consequently, they make an inferential leap to consider all possible theoretical explanations for the observed data and then form and test hypotheses for each explanation until arriving at the most plausible theoretical interpretation of the observed data.

#### *4.4.4 Criticisms and Schools*

GT is contested in that there are disagreements about its underlying philosophical assumptions and the resulting implications for its procedures. Four schools can be distinguished: the Glaserian 'classical' school, the Strauss and Corbin school, then more recent Constructivist school, and the situational analysis school of Adele Clarke (Clarke, Charmaz, 2014). Glaser and Strauss diverged in their thinking about GT

subsequent to their joint 1960s publications. While Glaser's ideas have not changed to any significant extent over the years, Strauss individually and with Corbin developed new technical procedures (such as axial coding, and the conditional matrix) and moved the method more towards verification. Glaser (1982) and scholars from the constructivist arena (Bryant and Charmaz 2007a,b) are critical about these developments, claiming that they are preconceiving in nature unless they are applied having earned their place in the approach. Adele Clarke's situational approach is unique in that it both uses and extends grounded theory; it employs established coding and memoing strategies, while extending the method to include three new kinds of maps and analyses of the situation focused upon in one's research. The situational approach is also the first use of grounded theory with historical, visual and discursive materials (Clarke, Charmaz, 2014).

The key point of contention between 'branches' concerns GT's underpinning philosophical assumptions, particularly in terms of the nature of reality and researchers' representations of that reality.

> […] The major divide among grounded theorists ... those who treat what they see or hear and record as objective and those who see both the research participants' actions and researchers' recordings and reports as constructed. (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b, p. 21).

Glaser, Strauss and Corbin are criticized for holding objectivist conceptions of reality. The nature of data is of great importance in the GT objectivist-constructivist debate. Bryant and Charmaz (2007a, p. 44) note that for positivists data is unproblematic, "it is simply what one observes and notes down in the course of doing one's research". At the same time, classical GT proponents' insistence on letting data emerge assumes an external reality, thus indicating an objectivist ontological stance.

While Glaser (2003) admits some data are constructed, particularly data gleaned though in-depth interviews, he emphasizes that such data only constitute one small part of GT research. However, data most used in GT studies are produced from in-depth interviews in qualitative studies. Thus, constructed data constitutes one of the main types of data upon which GT operates. In any case, data are attempted and partial representations of reality, not the reality itself nor its accurate depiction.

Importantly, constructivist grounded theorists accept that an external reality exists but stress that we can only imperfectly perceive or know that reality.

Further, the researcher is not a neutral, passive observer: she or he inevitably brings to bear on the data and their interpretation his/her previous assumptions, earning, and broader life experiences. In classical GT, the researcher is regarded as a neutral observer who discovers data in an objective, unbiased sense. There is no acknowledgement of the role played by the researcher's "standpoints, historical locations, and relative privileges" in shaping what is seen in the data" (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a, p.44). Instead, it is important to recognize that the researcher's impact on data is always likely and thus always relevant.

A move away from positive tendencies is seen in the work of Charmaz (2006) and Bryant (2002); particularly, Bryant and Charmaz (2007a) argue for a "repositioning" of GT to take account of philosophical and epistemological developments in the last several decades and to deal with many of the criticisms of the method. Charmaz (2006; 2014) speaks of *constructing*, rather than *discovering*, grounded theory and emphasizes the importance of the role of the researcher in the process.

> I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. My approach explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it ... Research participants' implicit meanings, experiential views - and researchers' finished grounded theories - are constructions of reality [...] (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). (original emphasis).

Classical GT focuses on conceptualization rather than 'thick', faithful description of individual participants' lived experiences. In constructivist GT, a focus is maintained on conceptualization but in rendering one's analysis in writing, more contextual detail, at times rather descriptively, is also provided (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Collaboration and reciprocity in terms of the researcher-participant relationship is emphasized, with an attempted repositioning of roles such that both are on a more equal footing in terms of power. This is achieved through active reflexivity, self-questioning and planning on the part of the researcher. Considering the differences

and similarities between oneself and one's participants, and the possible impact of these on the research process, is an important first step. Building a more equal and partnership-based relationship is facilitated through less structured approaches to interviewing, and being open with participants on a personal level, which enables a mutual construction of meaning. In addition the researcher's perspectives and priorities are also taken into account (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b). It is important to clarify the position the author takes in the text and to acknowledge the relevance of biography. Strauss (1987) too encouraged researchers to examine and make explicit their position in relation to the study. Thus, the resultant GT is grounded in both participants' and the researcher's experiences.

Glaser (2003) rejects the notion of a constructivist GT, and claims that attempts at further development are merely attempts to remodel it as a form of qualitative data analysis (QDA). He dismisses the QDA concerns, such as those relating to ontology and epistemology, as irrelevant, as GT can use all types of data and the focus is conceptualization and not description. However, in practice GT is mostly used with qualitative data, and thus, arguably, qualitative concerns are at issue and are relevant.

### *4.4.5 Constructivist Grounded Theory*

Kathy Charmaz first drafted her constructivist position in what become a handbook chapter "Objectivist and Constructivist Grounded Theory" (Charmaz, 2000), as a plenary presentation. The paper outlined constructivist grounded theory and juxtaposed it against both Glaser's and Strauss and Corbin's version of the method. Charmaz (2000) also brought relativity and subjectivity into epistemological discussions of grounded theory. The drafted paper was the result of a dissatisfaction of the author with social constructionist approaches to research in Sociology. Charmaz (2014) argues that sociologists who conducted social constructionist research often produced impressive analyses of the construction of the worlds they studied, but they treated their analyses as accurate renderings of these worlds rather than as constructions of them, nor did they take into account their processes of construction of the research and the structural and situational encroachment upon them. Thus, according to the author, researchers have increasingly erased the subjectivity they brought to their studies rather than acknowledging it and engaging in reflexivity.

Charmaz (2014) has chosen the term ‘constructivist’ especially to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data and to signal the differences between her approach and conventional social constructionism of the 1980s and early 1990s. Charmaz’ position aligns well with social constructivists whose influence include Vygotsky (1962), who stress social context, interaction, sharing viewpoints and interpretive understandings. Constructivists, such as Vygotsky, view knowing and learning as embedded in social life, while others sometime assume a more individualistic stance and a radical subjectivism to which Charmaz do not subscribe, as for her subjectivity is inseparable from social existence (Charmaz, 2014). Unlike Glaser and Strauss perspective, which implies discovering theory emerging from data separate from the scientific observer, Charmaz (2006, 2014) assumes that the researcher is part of the world he/she studies, the data he/she collects, and the analysis that he/she produces In keeping with its Chicago school antecedents, Charmaz (2014) advocates building on the pragmatist underpinnings in grounded theory and advancing interpretive analyses that acknowledge research participants’ and researchers’ constructions of reality.

Finally, according to Charmaz (2014) the process of *constructing* GT research is not linear, as flash of insight or instantaneous realization of analytic connections can happen anytime during the research process. Grounded theorists stop and write whenever ideas occur to them; grounded theory methods constitute a craft that researchers practices, and like any craft, practitioners vary in their emphasis on one or another aspect but taken together share commonalities.

*4.4.6 What is Theory in Grounded Theory?*

To think about meanings of theory in grounded theory, it helps to look at broader definitions of theory in the social sciences. Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) define theory as “stating relationships between abstract concepts and aiming for either explanation or understanding” (p. 41). However, the term theory remains slippery in grounded theory discourse and mirrors ambiguities about what theory means throughout the social sciences and professions. Disagreements among grounded theorists about how to use the method and what a completed theory should look like may arise from unsettled notions about what theory means. For Charmaz (2014),

theories try to answer questions, and offer accounts for what happens, how it ensues, and may aim to account for why it happened. Thus theorizing consists of the actions involved in constructing these accounts.

Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 3) consider the role of theory in sociology to be:

> (1) To enable prediction and explanation of behavior; (2) to be useful in theoretical advance in sociology; (3) to be usable in practical applications – prediction and explanation should be able to give the practitioner understanding and some control of situations; (4) to provide a perspective of behavior – a stance to be taken toward data; and (5) to guide and provide a style for research on particular areas of behavior.

The positive influences in the above are also reflected in Glaser's later writing about theory (2003), which emphasize context-free explanations. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) conceptualization of theory also contains some positivist assumptions, most particularly in terms of the focus on abstraction and explanation.

More interpretivist conceptualizations of theory focus on understanding rather than explaining. They acknowledge that understanding is dependent upon the researcher's interpretation of the data and participation in the research process, and emphasize multiple realities, indeterminacy and provisionality. Charmaz (2006) notes the numerous ways that theory is viewed in GT, including an empirical generalization, a category, a predisposition, an explication of a process, a relationship between variables, an explanation, and abstract understanding, a description and a theory resolving a main concern.

Constructivist GT recognizes that the theory produced is a contextually situated interpretation. Clarke (Clarke, 2005) views theory as "a located and limited story". She focuses more on 'analysis' than 'theory', and her conception of analysis includes analytic *description*:

> "More modest and partial but serious, useful, and hopefully provocative grounded analyses, sensitizing concepts, analytics, and theorizing are adequate. Analytics are unlike theory in that they do not presuppose a transcendent origin or cause of phenomena. ... The goal is not prediction but […]'thick analysis'" (Clarke, 2005, p. 29).

### 4.5 Positioning this Study

The present research takes an interpretivist, subjectivist, and anti-positivist stance, referring to a critical theory paradigm (Guba, Lincoln, 2005). The methodology of researchers adopting an interpretive subjectivist stance is qualitative (Bassey, 1999), and this is fully aligned with the nature of my research questions, as outlined in chapter one, and my philosophical assumptions. In terms of the multiple traditions and schools within the interpretive paradigm, the study is most closely aligned with constructivism.

I am assuming a semi-realist ontological position: I accept that an external reality exists in relation to the natural, physical world. However, our ability to perceive and depict any social reality is inevitably constrained by our historicality. Therefore, what we are depicting is always (our) constructed interpretation. Epistemologically, I am taking a subjectivist stance. Thus, I am firmly positioned within the study and I acknowledge research-participant involvement and interaction at all levels. In terms of human nature assumptions, whilst participants are actively involved in constructing their experiences and possess agentic power, it would be naïve to assume larger, societal structures have no effect on individuals. One must allow for the inevitable interaction and interplay between structure and agency. Axiologically, like all research, this research is value-laden and certain biases may be present. Certainly, I am very influenced by a social justice perspective.

The quest to understand, conceptually, the participants' experiences means that the adoption of GT is appropriate. However, considering my philosophical assumptions, the classical, objectivist approach will be rejected. An idiographic, methodological approach is assumed in that the subjective experience of individuals is stressed and the emphasis on the individual and the particular, and the development of a theory to understand the experience in this context, rather than on an attempt to discover a general law or principle. Such assumptions are well aligned to a constructivist stance.

I have noted that writing one's theory and analysis within a constructivist framework requires a more contextual rendering (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, both conceptual abstraction and 'thick' analysis, incorporating contextual description, are employed.

Quotes from participants are included to illustrate the findings and to include participants' voices in this final presentation of the research. The brief critical autobiographical reflection in chapter one serves to position myself, my motivations, my prior experiences and my perspectives within the study.

### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the philosophical and methodological roots of the research. Following a brief consideration of approaches to social science research, the three major paradigms and their underlying philosophical assumptions were examined. The origins, features and debates about grounded theory were then explored, and I ended by positioning this study in terms of its philosophical assumptions. The next chapter provides an overview of the procedures undertaken throughout the course of the research, including participant recruitment, data collection and analysis.

# Chapter Five: Methodology

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the procedures undertaken throughout the study. After giving some information on the refugee organizations operating in the city of Rome, considered for the present study, I then discuss participant recruitment. It follows an outline of the various over-lapping stages of data collection and analysis. Finally, I explore important ethical issues.

## 5.2 Mapping the Refugee Services for Children in the City of Rome

In order to conduct an in-depth study, I decided to base it in Rome, which has a high concentration of asylum seekers and refugees, and particularly in some of the most known and active refugee service agencies operating to host – and presumably to include - asylum-seeking and refugee children and teens. In keeping with its interpretivist underpinnings, the aim of this study was not to generate generalizable findings. However, there is no reason to suppose that professionals and young asylum-seekers and refugees – and their experiences- in other Italian cities would be significantly different to those in this study. The research was conducted in 9 refugee organizations spread around the Capital. Some of them are located in the city center, while the majority of those providing foster care are situated in the suburbs. In order to minimize the likelihood of services and of participants being identified, I am choosing to use numbers for the services (following the chronological order in which I had access to them), and pseudonyms for the participants, as part of my commitment to protecting their confidentiality.

The service agencies have been selected because they represent a well-known reference points (among the Italian authorities and the Capital's social and health services) for the integration of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth, with specific projects for their transition into adulthood. Importantly they tend to establish a network of mutual support, even if at different levels and in different ways, with

local educational and health institutions. Although heterogeneous in their scope - some of the services are part of the first/second reception systems, some offer educational and recreational activities to children, while others guarantee free health care specifically for forced migrants-, encouraging the 'social integration' of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth appears to be their paramount objective. Table 9 shows, more specifically, the characteristics of each of the 9 services.

**Table 9. Characteristics of the Refugee Services in Rome**

| | **Purpose** | **Year of Establishment** |
|---|---|---|
| ***Service 1.*** | Integrated social cooperative dealing with innovative projects for social inclusion of migrants and refugees. | 2005 |
| ***Service 2.*** | Cooperative providing social support, legal and educational orientation and protection to unaccompanied asylum-seeking, refugee or migrant children experiencing social exclusion or at risk of abuse and exploitation. Promoting children's rights. | 2011 |
| ***Service 3.1.***[14] | Semi-autonomous foster care home for unaccompanied asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant teens. | 2009 |
| ***Service 3.2.*** | Residential center for asylum-seeking and refugee families with children | 2001 |
| ***Service 4.*** | Health service/mental health support for forced migrants (adults and children) with PTSD symptoms | Established in 2008, shut down at the end of 2014 |
| ***Service 5.*** | Public institution providing social and health assistance to migrants. Providing transcultural | 2012 |

[14] Service 3 has different projects for hosting unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children and migrants, and for the reception of children with their families. For the purpose of this study, they have been identified as Service 3.1 and Service 3.2.

| | Purpose | Year of Establishment |
|---|---|---|
| | mediation in health-related matters. Characterized by the presence of a neuropsychiatric pediatric unit. | |
| ***Service 6.1***[15] | Health care service for forced and undocumented migrants. | 2005 |
| ***Service 6.2.*** | Health care service specialized in dealing with asylum seekers and refugees (children and adults) who have been victims of torture and extreme violence. | 2006 |
| ***Service 7.*** | Foster care home for unaccompanied asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children and youth. | 1992 |
| ***Service 8.1.***[16] | NGO promoting education and international development and with a focus on intercultural and peace education. Operating nationally and internationally. | 1982 |
| ***Service 8.2.*** | Youth recreational and educational center for all teens (Italian and migrants) | 2010 |
| ***Service 9*** | Foster care home for unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children and youth | 2011 |

Given the purposive and snowballing sampling of the research participants, the services described above were indicated by the professionals, at the time each interview took place. This has helped to explore the networking and cooperation mechanisms among major refugee organizations and institutions in Rome.

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[15] Also Service 6 has various projects that intend to promote healthcare for all migrants. Having had access to two of them, I make a distinction between Service 6.1 and 6.2.

[16] See note 1 and 2.

### 5.3 Negotiating Access and Participant Recruitment

The ‘sampling strategy’ in qualitative research is generally termed ‘purposeful’, of which there are many variants (Miles, 1994). In this study, the population – a total of 27 participants, 10 of whom are unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth and 17 are professionals in the area of education, healthcare and social assistance-, has been selected through a combination of purposeful and snowballing sampling (Glaser, 1967). The participants were selected among 9 refugee organizations described above, and they were chosen because of their roles of managers, educators, teachers, social workers, psychologists, neuropsychiatrists and cultural mediators. Access to unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth was made possible only through the professionals operating in three foster care homes selected for this research project. It is important to know that interviews were conducted mainly with professionals and not with asylum-seeking children and youth, due to various challenges (i.e. privacy issues, and code of practice of each refugee organization, which I was not allowed to read) that limited access to this ‘vulnerable’ population. It seemed to me that the “gatekeepers” within these service agencies wanted to “control” the narrative about how their agencies are perceived, in relation to the reception and social integration of forced migrant children.

Participants were invited to take part in the research by initial email. The email outlined the purpose of the interview and an abbreviated copy of the proposal, where the research intensions and interests, the interview schedule, and the broad areas to be discussed were indicated. I was systematic in terms of the procedures employed to recruit participants, and throughout the study. This was not in order to get closer to any ‘truth’; rather I view being systematic as good research practice. As Lather (1991) observes, “reducing the ambiguity” of the research process does not mean that we “deny the essential indeterminacy of human experience”.

### *5.3.1 The "Professional" Participants*

The focus of this research study is understanding the process in which education and 'social integration' become the conduit for the reproduction of societal inequities, affecting groups described as "minority" (see Harry and Klingner, 2014) by virtue of their 'race', language, ability level, social class, gender, migratory status among the others. As the study particularly intends to shed light on the intersections of 'race', disability and migratory status, traversing the reception systems and school and out-of school environments, a multidimensional vision of the present issue is offered, as reflected in the perspectives of educators, social workers, psychologists, neuropsychiatrists, cultural mediators (i.e. the professionals), and of course asylum-seeking children and youth.

There are a number of reasons why I opted to include various professionals operating in refugee organizations, as opposed to solely asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth. Firstly, I would have not been able to access a significant number of forced migrant youth, due to the privacy issues established by each service, hence I would have not been able to get enough information on their educational and 'social integration' pathways. Secondly, I am interested in tracing the discursive trajectories from education and 'social integration' in mainstream settings to special education identification and placement. In particular, I am looking for discourses and their "subjectivating effects" (see Youdell, 2012, p. 194). I am looking for moments in which the professionals constitute the raced-dis/abled subjects (the forced migrant children), and in which constituted subjects act. I attempt to understand what discourses might circulate among the professionals, inside and/or across the service agencies and school contexts, how these are being deployed and what their effects might be. As Youdell (ibid.) argues, "whereas at times it seems that discourses and their effects are clearly evident, more often it seems that these are subtle and oblique, needing to be teased out, to be deconstructed". A further purpose of selecting professionals participants is that I want to know whether thinking in terms of "subjectivating effects of discourse" can help me to understand how asylum-seeking and refugee children are made within particular constraints and how these constraints might be breached. I am seeking to construct compelling representations of moments

inside the organizations and educational institutions in order to untangle the discursive frames that guide meaning and render subjects within it.

Table 10 provides more detailed information about the 17 professional participants, including their sex, professional roles, years of working experience, previous training or working experience in the field of forced migration. I found that their working experience in forced migration prior to their current positions in the refugee organizations had a significant impact on the construction of a racialised imaginary on migration, and importantly on their relations with these children and youth.

**Table 10. The Professional Participants' Characteristics**

| Name | Sex | Professional Roles | Years of Working Experience in the organization | Previous Training/Working Experience in Forced Migration |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Participant D* | F | Managing Director | 10 | Yes |
| *Participant X* | M | Managing Director | 5 | Yes |
| *Participant F* | M | Social Worker | 7 | No |
| *Participant A* | M | Cultural Anthropologist | 7 | Yes |
| *Participant G* | M | Doctor, former Managing Director | 6 | No |
| *Participant E* | F | Educator, Teacher | 1 | No |
| *Participant N* | F | Pediatric Neuropsychiatrist | 5 | No |
| *Participant C* | M | Doctor, Managing Director Health Unit | 10 | No |
| *Participant O* | F | Social Worker | 10 | No |
| *Participant T* | F | Psychotherapist | 10 | No |
| *Participant H* | M | Social Worker, Manager of the Service | 12 | No |
| *Participant L* | F | Educator | 6 | Yes |
| *Participant V* | F | Teacher, Manager of Educational Project | 5 | Yes |
| *Participant Z* | M | Educator, teacher, vice-coordinator of Educational Project | 5 | No |
| *Participant CM1* | F | Cultural Mediator | 5 | No |
| *Participant CM2* | M | Cultural Mediator | 4 | No |
| *Participant Ps2* | F | Psychotherapist | 10 | No |

*5.3.2 The Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Participants*

Despite being small in number, I included a group of asylum-seeking and refugee children in their teens, hosted in three of the services described in paragraph 5.2, with the purpose of focusing the attention on their discourses about their experience of inclusion in the society, which are normally marginalized or rendered unintelligible by Italian educational research. The analysis of the discourses of asylum-seeking teens suggests a series of political, educational, popular and (sub-) cultural discourses that circulate within the organizations, the schools, educational institutions and the society as a whole, and which provide the discursive terrain on and through which these students are subjectivated. The analysis also considers how asylum-seeking and refugee youth render themselves through the possibilities for practices of self, or discursive agency, that subjectivation brings. This consideration demonstrates the capacity of Butler's (1997) performative politics to,

> "Maintain in view simultaneously a sense of the context of constraint in which these performatively constituted subjects are affected and the potential for these subjects to act and to act with intent" (Youdell, 2012, p.194).

Permission to interview asylum-seeking children was sought via email to the manager, or some of the professionals, in each service hosting the forced migrants. In most cases, the asylum-seeking participants, mainly Black boys from Western African countries and in their teens, were provided detailed information about the interview process, and they give consent to participate. Only in two cases, the asylum seeking teens were not correctly informed, or did not seem to remember, about the interview, but they give assent to take part in the interview process. It was extremely difficult to access asylum-seeking and refugee children, especially in the certification stage of their 'diagnosed' dis/ability, and in the following post-certification stages. Only in one case I was able to speak to an asylum-seeking boy, while the professionals were still debating his diagnosis. Importantly, Rome's major medical institution, for the certification of Special Educational Needs (SEN)[17] and other disabilities in migrant

[17] The recent policies implemented by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) regarding the education of students with Special Educational Needs are: MIUR, *Linee guida sull'integrazione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità, 4/8/2009; Nuove norme in materia di disturbi specifici di apprendimento in ambito scolastico* (Law 8/10/2010 n. 170); *Linee guida per il diritto allo studio degli alunni e degli studenti con disturbi specifici di apprendimento* (Ministerial Decree of the 12 July 2011); *Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo dell'istruzione* (September 2012; Ministerial Decree), *Strumenti d'intervento per alunni con bisogni educativi speciali*

children, refused to grant me permission (sought through formal email by my two supervisors) to observe and interview the children during and immediately after the certification process. The director of the medical institution issued the refusal, while the neuropsychiatrist, responsible for the certification of the dis/abilities, offered me the possibility to observe and to do interviews for a period of maximum 3 months while being interviewed. These problems of accessing the supposedly 'vulnerable' population of forced migrant children offer a glimpse on the controversial practices of dis/ability certification of asylum-seeking and refugee children in Rome.

*5.3.3 The Migration Status Issues*

The other selection criterion for the "Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Participants" was their migratory status. More specifically, I was looking for young children (unaccompanied or with their families) who would have put forward an asylum request, or that they were waiting for the result of the Territorial Commission for asylum[18], or they had their status already recognized. Firstly, I was interested in exploring the impact of the disability in the recognition (or not) of the refugee status, and on the eventual attribution of other forms of international protection (i.e. humanitarian or subsidiary). Secondly, I wanted to explore the extent to which the (un) certain migratory status would have had an impact in the performance of the "good asylum seeker" or the "good refugee", during the interview process. Selecting children according to their forced migratory status has also helped me in the attempt to untangle the complex and rich tapestry of their life histories and difficult journeys, which in some cases they have embarked on despite their dis/abilities, and that they might have added further distress and trauma.

Table 11 provides more detailed information about the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee participants. In summary, of the 10 Asylum-Seeking and Refugee participants, during the data collection stages of the study, 3 were preparing for the audition at the

*e organizzazione territoriale per l'inclusione scolastica*, 27 December 2012; C.M. n. 8, *Indicazioni operative concernenti la direttiva ministeriale* del 27 December 2012 indicating "*Strumenti d'intervento per alunni con bisogni educativi speciali e organizzazione territoriale per l'inclusione scolastica*", 6 March 2013; Note n. 2563/2013, "*Strumenti di intervento per alunni con bisogni educativi speciali e organizzazione* territoriale *per l'inclusione scolastica. Chiarimenti*", of the 22 November 2013.

[18] See chapter one, note 1.

Territorial Commission for Asylum, 5 already did the audition and were waiting for the final result of the Commission, and 2 were pondering the possibility of requesting asylum. All of them were unaccompanied, without any members of their family in Italy, and all of them were boys. 8 out of 10 were Black boys coming from Western African countries, and only two of them coming from Egypt. All of them had been suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, especially evident in their behavioral issues or in their sleeping and eating disorders, and had experienced a period of depression. One was diagnosed with speech-and-sound disorder, and another one with Downs Syndrome, which at a later stage (i.e. various months after the interview took place) was demonstrated to be an incorrect diagnosis, and consequently changed and certified as "acute PTSD symptoms". Importantly, at the moment of the data collection, the competent medical institution did not certify the dis/abilities that were diagnosed to the boys, or it was still in the process of 'testing'.

**Table 11. The Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Participants' Characteristics**

| Name[19] | Age Declared[20] | Country of Origin | Asylum Request Status | Dis/ability[21]: Certified (C) or not Certified (NC) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Yakub* | 17 | Mauritania | Preparing Audition Territorial Commission | PTSD (NC) |
| *Dembelé* | 14 | Nigeria | Preparing Audition Territorial Commission | Speech-and-Sound Disorder (NC) |
| *Djibril* | 17 | Mali | Preparing Audition Territorial Commission | PTSD (NC) with episodes of Sleeping and Eating Disorders |
| *Papis* | 16 | Senegal | On Hold | Downs Syndrome (NC) and later changed into acute PTSD with no "mental retardation" |
| *Chérif* | 17 | Gambia | On Hold | PTSD (NC) with depression traits. |
| *Ibrahima* | 17 and half | Gambia | On Hold | PTSD (NC) |
| *Adrame* | 17 | Gambia | On Hold | PTSD (NC) |
| *Mohammed* | 17 | Gambia | On Hold | Behavioral Issues (NC) |
| *Hachim* | 15 | Egypt | Not Yet Forwarded | Behavioural Issues (NC) |
| *Fadi* | 16 | Egypt | Not Yet Forwarded | Behavioral Issues (NC) |

[19] All the names have been change into pseudonyms for ethical reasons.
[20] It refers to the age declared to the Italian authorities at the borders of Italy, prior to any medical verification of the age. In the case of Papis, the professionals in the foster care home have disputed the declared age. Papis declared to be 16; following an examination of his bones, done in a specialised hospital in Rome, his real age was found to be 14. It is a recent phenomenon that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children tend to declare an age superior to their real age, to be able to work as early as possible to pay their families the debt of the journey.
[21] The table reports the dis/abilities diagnosed by the professionals working with these teens.

*5.3.4 Informed Consent*

The professional participants were aged over 18, and participated voluntarily to the interviews; thus, although informed consent was sought via email, this did not include gaining a signed informed consent form from them. As far as asylum-seeking and refugee children participants were concerned, consent to participate in the interviews was given by the professionals working in the services where they were hosted. As established by the Italian law, in foster care homes for unaccompanied migrants and forced migrant minors, professionals are nominated by the specific Court for Children (*Tribunale dei Minori*) to act as legal guardians of such minors[22]. Although forced migrant children and youth's consent to participate in the interview process has been given by the professionals in the services, asylum-seeking and refugee children participants give their assent. All the procedures employed throughout the study (for example, with regard to informed consent and guarding participants' confidentiality) have been regarded as fully satisfactory according to the ethics requirements established by the *Roma Tre* University[23].

The email of invitation provided information about the purposes of the research and the potential uses of the data. It highlighted also:

- The purpose of the study;
- Procedures for data collection;
- Participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time;
- Procedures for the protection of participants' confidentiality;
- My request for permission to audio-record the interview; and
- Known risks and expected benefits of participation.

In addition to the email, I sent a summary of the interview questions to each participant in advance. A copy of the interview questions in English has been provided to the professionals for the interviews with asylum-seeking teens. At the

[22] Legal guardianship of non-Italian unaccompanied minors as established by *Codice Civile art. 343, 347,348, 402*.
[23] Testo redatto dalla Commissione ad hoc ex DD.RR. di nomina 477 e 524 /2011 CODICE ETICO DELL'UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI ROMA TRE, *in attuazione della Legge 240/2010, art. 2, comma 4*. [Available at: http://oc.uniroma3.it/intranet/ALTRI-REGO1/Regolament/Codice-Etico.pdf].

commencement of each interview, I invited questions and comments about all aspects of the research process. Participants reported that they fully understood the purpose of the research and its procedures and voluntarily agreed to participate. Their consent can, therefore, be said to have been informed (Cohen *et al.,* 2007).

## 5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Table 12 provides an overview of all main data collection points, with reference to each participant. Many additional email, phone and text researcher-participant contacts took place over the time period of the research project; only formal intended contacts and 'data collection' points are recorded here. I remain in contact with many Professional and Asylum Seeking and Refugee participants.

**Table 12. Summary of Main Data Collection Points with Each Participant**

| | **Pseudonym** | **Role** | **Interview 1** *Oct.-Dec. '14* | **Update[24] 1** *Spring '15* | **Interview 2** *Mar.-Oct. '15* | **Update[25] 2** *Nov.'15* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Participant D | Managing Director | ✔ | ✔ | | |
| 2 | Participant X | Managing Director | ✔ | | | |
| 3 | Participant F | Social Worker | ✔ | ✔ | | |
| 4 | Participant A | Cultural Anthropologist | ✔ | ✔ | | |
| 5 | Participant G | Doctor/Former Managing Director | ✔ | | | |
| 6 | Participant E | Educator/Teacher | | | ✔ | |
| 7 | Participant N | Pediatric Neuropsychiatrist | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 8 | Participant C | Doctor, Managing Director Health Unit | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 9 | Participant O | Social Worker | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 10 | Participant T | Psychotherapist | | | ✔ | ✔ |

[24] Update 1 indicates further reflection of the first group of participants on the issues raised during the interview; in this case particularly related to receiving individuals with dis/abilities.
[25] Update 2 refers to further reflection of the research participants in relation to the issue raised in the interview, and a follow up on their migration status, in the case of "Asylum-Seeking and Refugee" participants.

| | Pseudonym | Role | Interview 1 *Oct.-Dec. '14* | Update[24] 1 *Spring '15* | Interview 2 *Mar.-Oct. '15* | Update[25] 2 *Nov.'15* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Participant H | Social Worker/Manager of the Service | | | ✔ | |
| 12 | Participant L | Educator | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 13 | Participant V | Teacher/Manager of Educational Project | | | ✔ | |
| 14 | Participant Z | Educator/Teacher/Vice-coordinator of Educational Project | | | ✔ | |
| 15 | ParticipantCM1 | Cultural Mediator | | | ✔ | |
| 16 | Participant CM2 | Cultural Mediator | | | ✔ | |
| 17 | Participant Ps2 | Psychotherapist | | | ✔ | |
| 18 | Yakub | Asylum-Seeker, preparing for Commission | | | ✔ | |
| 19 | Dembelé | Asylum-Seeker, preparing for Commission | | | ✔ | |
| 20 | Djibril | Asylum-Seeker, preparing for Commission | | | ✔ | |
| 21 | Papis | Asylum Seeker | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 22 | Chérif | Asylum Seeker | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 23 | Ibrahima | Asylum Seeker | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 24 | Adrame | Asylum Seeker | | | ✔ | ✔ |
| 25 | Mohammed | Asylum Seeker | | | ✔ | |
| 26 | Hachim | Unaccompanied minor-intending to request asylum | | | ✔ | |
| 27 | Fadi | Unaccompanied minor intending to request asylum | | | ✔ | |

*5.4.1 Method*

In-depth semi-structured interviews, developed following the constructivist interviewing practices (Charmaz, 2014), constituted the main method of data collection. Interviews are considered as the sites of exploration, emergent understandings, and legitimation of identity. Thus, particular attention was given to the negotiation of meanings about sensitive topics that could have arisen during the interview (Charmaz, 2014). Interviewing is not a neutral tool (Fontana and Frey, 2005). The "complexity, uniqueness, and indeterminateness of each one-to-one human interaction" and the "unresolvable ambiguities of consciousness, language, interpretation, and communication" (Scheurich, 1995, p. 241-242) are frequently underestimated. As noted previously, the essential indeterminacy of people's experience is taken as a given, and the representation of that experience in interviews is also taken to be indeterminate and, at least in part, constructed. As long as the researcher recognizes this and undertakes to remain reflexive throughout the research process, interviewing is a useful data collection tool. Although, the majority of interviews were individuals, in some cases I conducted group interviews with different professionals and asylum-seeking teens, within the same institution. The group interviews were not planned in advance, as contact was made only with one participant at the time, within each refugee agency. However, on the day of the interview more people were willing to participate and provide various perspectives in relation to the research focus.

Interviews with the Professional participants were conducted and transcribed in Italian, while the coding and other analysis steps were in English. I have translated the interview excerpts presented in the analysis chapters of this dissertation into English. I have done a literate translation, in order to keep the meaning of professionals' discourses as much as possible close to the original. Interviews with Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children were conducted and transcribed in Italian and some of them in English. The translation into English (where necessary) of their excerpts presented in the analysis was deliberately not literate, as I intended to represent their discourse and voices in the most respectful way, thus avoiding emphasizing the lack of Italian language knowledge, which is often used by mainstream Italian media in a racist way.

I chose a semi-structured format rather than a more tightly structured approach, which is preferable in research of a qualitative nature (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). I wished to allow for the elucidation of participants' personal accounts and experiences in a natural, conversational context. Whilst I used the interview schedules, my approach was very participant-centered and I assumed the role of discussion facilitator. Initial questions were open and general, with follow-up questions becoming more focused. The questions I asked were neither highly structured nor ordered, and the wording was not tightly controlled. Suitable probes were formulated in advance and used in order to encourage the participant to explore all possible aspects of particular issues. I also encouraged participants to raise any issue of interest or significance to them at any time.

As it is evident from Table 12, update requests were sent to participants, and individuals responded to various extents. The update requests were focused on:

- "Update on receiving new asylum-seeking children with dis/ability" (Spring 2015; November 2015);
- "Update on diagnosis and possible certification of dis/ability" (Spring 2015; November 2015);
- "Update on experiences of integration and transition in the reception systems" (November 2015);
- "Update on migration status" (November 2015);
- "General Update" (Spring 2015; November, 2015).

I was also in touch several additional times with the participants over the course of the study with reminders about meetings, and to provide updates on the progress of the research.

*5.4.2 Constructivist Interviews*

A constructivist perspective differs from conceptions of the interview as either a mirror of reality or a mere account served up to answer a question. A constructivist approach views interviews as emergent interactions in which social bonds may develop (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theorists attend to the situation and construction of the interview, the construction of the research participant's story and

silences, and the interviewer-participant relationship as well as the explicit content of the interview (Charmaz, 2009). Interviewing in constructivist grounded theory implies attention to a 'silent dialogue' (Olesen and Whittaker, 1968), which ensues about the interview itself. This dialogue arises particularly when: sensitive topics arise during the interview; the research participant believes that the interviewer might define him or her negatively; or the interviewer reveals sighs of being disturbed about or uninterested in the content of the interview. At these points, the researcher and research participant may construct and negotiate meanings that influence what can and will be said.

From a constructivist grounded theory standpoint, asking few interview questions allows the research participant to tell his or her story without the researcher preconceiving the content, or the direction the interview will take. According to Charmaz (2014), such strategy is particularly useful during early interviews but can change as the researcher moves back and forth between data collection and analysis.

Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes going into emergent phenomena and defining their properties. By taking the phenomenon apart, researchers can build explicit 'what' and 'how' questions into the data collection (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). Grounded theorists can use these questions to begin to shape a subsequent theoretical analysis. These questions elicit content that becomes the grist of the analysis and leads toward explicating processes. Hence, the lines between what constitutes data collection and what constitutes analysis blur (Charmaz, 2014). Credibility is not simply a property of the data as separate from the analysis. Starting with 'what' and 'how' questions brings an analytic edge to the data collection, even in the very early stages of research, and maintaining the grounded theory emphasis on process helps the researcher to link events that otherwise might seem disparate. Adding 'when' questions move the data collection toward specifying conditions under which the studied phenomenon or process occurs or changes. From a constructivist perspective, such patterns develop as one grapples with interpreting the data.

*5.4.3 Analysis I*

Classical Grounded Theory (GT) emphasizes identifying and analyzing a single basic social process. The researcher aims to identify participants' main concern and the strategies used by participants to resolve or process this main concern. As such, data collection and analysis is directed towards the identification of a core category, dimensionalising this core category in terms of its properties, identifying sub-categories and their properties, and explicating the relationships between various categories (Glaser, 1998; 1992). In a constructivist GT approach, there is less prescription about identifying a single concern or basic social process; the emphasis is firmly on what works in the context of one's data and wider study, and on theorizing around a core category (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). Further, the interpretive analysis of the data gathered in a constructivist GT pays attention to the participants' accounts, as "rich, detailed and complex tapestries into the wefts and warp of which are woven personally held and more widespread cultural values and meanings" (Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003, p. 142).

In a GT study, data collection and analysis are, to a large extent, concurrent activities. Analysis was undertaken on a continual basis throughout this study. Throughout the first round of interviews, data analysis was on going through re-listening to the audio-recordings, note taking, different coding strategies – using gerunds to code for action and processes in order to "show how people enact injustice and inequity" (Charmaz, 2011, p.367)-, and memoing emerging themes and puzzlements. Memos are "informal analytic notes" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162), written about one's data and codes from early in, and throughout, the research process.

> "Memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue. Memo-writing creates an interactive space for conversing with yourself about your data, codes, ideas, and hunches." (ibid.)

The analysis of all data collected in round one and round two interviews was conducted manually, i.e. not using any qualitative analysis software package, such as NVivo. The decision to not use these software was motivated by the need to feel closer to the data gathered, and by the sense of greater creativity in creating codes, categories and sub-categories in the analysis process. The decision was taken

following the approval of Prof. Kathy Charmaz, in relation to the possibility of not using such software, and in particular NVivo, in constructivist GT studies[26]. The initial analysis of the first round of interviews (October-December 2014) consisted of the following steps, all of which are central to GT:

- *Immersion*: Reading and re-reading of transcripts whilst listening to audio-recordings.
- *Initial coding*: Line-by-line coding, recorded on transcripts, using gerunds (in order to focus on process and action) where possible to identify and 'name' units of meanings. Codes were recorded on transcripts and later on a different file. The constant comparative method was used to revisit the data, again drawing on the constant comparative method.
- *Memoing*: Memos were written on significant and frequent codes to explicate the properties (and their dimensions) of emerging categories, concepts and processes. *Clustering*, a prewriting technique to understand and organize codes and emerging categories facilitated the memo writing practice. The configurations of clustering – writing the central category or process, then circle it and draw spokes from it to smaller circles to show its defining properties, and their relationships and relative significance- provided an image of how the topic in this study fits together and relates to other phenomena (see Charmaz, 2014, p. 184). Frequent codes, concepts and processes included:

    1. Promoting Social Integration;
    2. Lacking Systemic Networking;
    3. Disclosing Access to Education;
    4. "Playing the Disability Card".[27]

Further analysis and memoing resulted in the identification of four broad categories, each of which has its own properties, shown in Table 13.

[26] Opinion shared by Prof. Kathy Charmaz during the summer school in qualitative research methods in education, entitled "Grounded Theory for Social Justice with Kathy Charmaz", and organized by the University of Trento, Italy, 18-21 June 2014.
[27] In-vivo code.

**Table 13. Categories and their Properties following Initial Manual Analysis**

| | Category | Properties |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Promoting Social Integration | • Providing autonomy (finding a job+ house+ learning Italian);<br>• Recognizing children's rights;<br>• Fighting housing discrimination;<br>• Facilitating access to healthcare (mental health services). |
| 2 | "Good theoretical model, bad management"[28] | • Highlighting fragmented "emergency responses" to refugee children's integration;<br>• Lacking systemic networking of local services;<br>• Lacking monitoring and coordination between services and institutions (dysfunctional system). |
| 3 | Thinking about child's best educational interests | • Highlighting educational discrimination;<br>• Schooling as disabling experience;<br>• Lacking teachers' training and knowledge on forced migration;<br>• Schooling as a means to find a job (getting out of welfare support). |
| 4 | "Playing the Disability Card" | • Using dis/ability to get welfare benefits;<br>• Marginalising dis/abled asylum-seeking and |

[28] See note 13.

| Category | Properties |
| --- | --- |
| | refugee children;<br>• Disclosing ambivalence in pathologising/not pathologising forced migrant children. |

These provisional categories were explicated (in terms of properties and their dimensions) through writing memos. This process also helped me to ascertain whether they should be split or merged and to see what ‘gaps’ remained- both within and between categories. This initial work was completed in January 2015, before my stay in London, for my study abroad period to fulfil the European PhD title. This work then fed directly into the design of the interview schedule for the round two of interviews and for the Theoretical Sampling.

This first analysis was delineating a model of “neoliberal” integration of the population of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth, whereby the notion of autonomy in a period of economic crisis, referred mainly to the importance of not benefiting of the Italian welfare system for a period of time superior to two years. In such social context, the discourses circulating among the professionals interviewed showed a contrasting attitude towards the disability labels attributed to asylum-seeking teens, and in particular a dismissal of the authenticity of the disability[29].

*5.4.4 Analysis II*

The second round of interview took place in the period between March and October 2015. The participants included both professionals and asylum-seeking and refugee teens. In the light of the emerging categories, in the initial analysis process, I have changed some of the sections of the interview schedules for the professionals and the

[29] See Migliarini, V. (2016, 08/04) *"Playing the Disability Card": Untangling Race and Disability in Asylum-Seeking Children's Education in Rome.* Paper presented at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved [07-09-2016] from the AERA Online Paper Repository.

asylum-seeking participants. The manual analysis of round two interviews followed the main steps outlined in Analysis I.
Further, at this point of the analysis, two types of memo were developed for each significant 'issue': 'descriptive' and 'conceptual', and this was done variably at category, sub-category or concept level. Within each descriptive memo, all of the data in a particular emerging concept was summarized participant by participant. Then, properties or dimensions of the category, sub-category or concept were identified. Similarities and differences on the issue in terms of participant group (professionals or asylum-seeking and refugee children) were noted.

A conceptual memo was then developed in which key points from the descriptive memo were summarized, and raised, through free-writing, to a more abstract, conceptual level. Possibilities, questions, and hypothesis were developed with regard to potential relationships between properties of a category, and also between categories. Questions typically asked of the data within memos were: 'what factor(s) may have led to this happening? And 'what seems to have happened as a result of this?'. Such questions initially focused on possible cause and effect type conceptualizations. To consider such questions, I revisited again the data to explore the possibilities. Again I used clustering to consider possible conceptual relationships regarding all significant issues pertaining to the emerging theory. Memoing and clustering essentially bridged the gap between coding and conceptual development. At the end of this phase, descriptive and conceptual memos had been developed on each of the following:

1. Promoting Social Integration;
2. Building Networks of Support;
3. Granting Access to Education and Healthcare;
4. Lacking Coordination with Schools/Educational Institutions;
5. Labelling as a Strategy for Educational Integration;
6. Lacking teachers' Training on Forced Migrant Children's Issues and Trauma;
7. SENitizing Forced Migrant Children;
8. Emerging of Racial Imaginary;
9. Disclosing Racial Stereotypes;
10. Being in a Limbo;

11. Performing the ‘Good Asylum Seeker’;
12. Tracing Significant Educational Pathways;
13. Living in a ‘Segregated Bubble’/Being Naïve about Discrimination

### *5.4.5 Theoretical Sampling*

After round one and two of interviews, as illustrated in Table 12, I wished to discuss my emerging analysis and interpretation with my participants and to fill any conceptual ‘gaps’ in the data, both within and between categories. This was achieved through theoretical sampling. In order to pursue this strategy, a number of update requests were sent to participants and individuals responded to various extent. Unfortunately, it was impossible to have updates by all the participants, especially the asylum-seeking and refugee teens, due to their busy schedules and commitments. As well as filling any conceptual ‘gaps’, I used update interviews to:

- Get an update from the participants about how they were getting on in their job or in their integration process;
- Further build on the researcher-participant relationship;
- Share my emerging findings and some initial interpretations with participants and obtain their feedback on same; and
- Ascertain how ‘fitting’ of their experiences my outlining of emerging findings was to the participants, and to check if anything of importance to them had been omitted.

As particular issues were discussed, I asked further questions, and probed and sought clarification where necessary in order to close ‘gaps’ in the emergent analysis. I also explained some of my emerging interpretations, particularly those which related to social integration, ‘SENitizing’ processes and intelligibility of asylum-seeking teens’ educational expectations. These update or follow-up interviews served to further elucidate the emerging findings, and provided a meaningful way for the participants to engage with the development of my analysis and the research more generally.

After the update, or follow-up, interviews I wrote ‘revised memos’ for each participants, which facilitated “abductive reasoning” (see Charmaz, 2014, p. 200), and

the making of inferences about the empirical experience. Following this stage, I started the processes of sorting, diagramming and integrating the memos. Sorting has helped me to organize logically my analysis, and to create and refine theoretical links that prompts to make comparisons between categories. Diagramming provided me a visual representation of categories and their relationships. Memos were integrated around each single category, in order to make the relations between the categories intelligible and move towards the developing of a theory.

*5.4.6 Development of the Theory*

The descriptive and conceptual memos served as the basis for conference papers and presentations (Migliarini 2016a; b). Through the sorting, diagramming and integrating of memos (see Charmaz, 2014), I distinguished between emergent significant categories and their properties (concepts and their dimensions) for the 13 aspects noted previously in paragraph 5.4.4, as follows:

- 1, 2, 3, 4 were grouped into a category termed: *Promoting Neoliberal Integration*, with ‘building networks of support’, ‘granting access to education and healthcare’, and ‘lacking coordination with schools/educational institutions’ becoming properties of the category;
- 5, 6, 7 were grouped into the category named: ‘*SENitizing’ and Disabling Refugee Children*. Properties of the category, in this case, were ‘labelling as a strategy for educational integration’, and ‘lacking teachers’ training on trauma’, which serves to illustrate the reasons for the process of ‘SENitization’;
- 8, 9, 13 became *Discriminating Discourses* with ‘disclosing racial stereotypes’ and ‘living in a segregated bubble’ as the main properties;
- 10, 11, 12 were grouped together to form the category *Performing Discursive Agency*, with significant properties such as ‘tracing significant educational pathways’, and performing the good asylum seeker’.

Throughout the above process, I simultaneously sought to identify participants’ main concerns. I found that, essentially, both groups – the professionals (in accordance with the general purpose of the service where they were operating) and the asylum-seeking

and refugee children and youth - were concerned with finding suitable strategies to integrate within the Italian society. However, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, this meant something different to each group. Part of the process also involved identifying the core category, through which the main concerned was achieved. I began to conceptualize the discourses of both groups of participants, seen in the categories and concepts identified above, as constituting different forms of *integrating through disablement*. Thus, the five categories noted above are, essentially, strategies in which the participants engaged in order to fulfill their job requirements or to maximize their living experience within the Italian society. As such, they become sub-categories to the core, which is 'Integrating through Disablement':

Core category: Integrating through Disablement

Sub-categories: Promoting Neoliberal Integration
'SENitizing'and Disabling Refugee Children
Discriminating Discourses
Performing Discursive Agency

The following chapters will examine the relationship between concepts, concepts and subcategories, and sub-categories and the core category.

### 5.5 Ethical Considerations

The ethics and politics of doing research on race related issues in education have been greatly disputed, specifically the extent to which a partisanship stance – more commonly identified as bias- may be said to articulate with and inform legitimately to corrupt and invalidate the entire process of research (Leicester and Tylor, 1992; Troyna and Carrington, 1993; Troyna, 1995). Antiracist research has been repeatedly accused, by "Methodological Purists", as Troyna (1995) defines them, of presenting biased and distorted interpretations of events in education, which owe more to their political and ideological convictions than to the data they provide in their work. More simply, it is believed that some antiracist researchers contaminate their data for

political and ideological purposes. In his response to this accusation, Troyna (1995) argues that a 'partisan' approach to research implies recognizing that research takes place in social settings where power relations are stratified by class, race, gender, age and other structural characteristics. In such unequal world, researchers have the potential to exacerbate and reinforce inequalities within and beyond the research process. Partisanship enquiry, instead, attempts to contribute towards social change in and through the research activities (ibid.). Identifying with Troyna's (1995) argument, I adopt a 'partisan' standpoint in this study, and in so doing I make my reflexivity, my positionality as a researcher, and my values explicit and openly incorporated into the research agenda and accountable to the readership.

I made a deliberate effort to establish a good rapport with all participants and to engage them on a genuinely friendly, and yet, professional basis throughout the study (Fontana and Frey, 2005). From the outset, I emphasized that their views about the study were not only very welcome, but a vital part of the research. I made it clear that I was very grateful for their time and participation. I encourage them to remain in contact with me, and to keep me up to date on how they were. Some did this and I am happy to have developed a genuinely friendly and on-going relationship with some of the participants, especially within the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth group, outside of this research study.

All participant details and data produced are held strictly confidential. Hard copy recordings (files and notes) will be destroyed within six months of the end of the research project. Electronic copies of transcripts will be kept in Word format; however, they will be fully anonymised. Pseudonyms have been employed throughout to protect participants' identity.

As stated above, variables including class, gender, ethnicity, age, professional and migratory status inevitably shape the research process overall, and one must remain open to the likelihood of researcher impact on participants and on the data obtained. I would be regarded as White, female, middle-class and of the majority ethnic group, and these identity features would be taken by the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth involved in my research as immutable. In line with Rollock's (2013) critical reflection on how 'race' and political positioning and experiences of racism

has an impact on the research engagement and on participants' perception and positioning of the researcher – especially for Black scholars-, I also thought about how my Whiteness might have affect the impression and the attitude of Black asylum-seeking and refugee participants during the fieldwork. I thought that if in my place there would be a Black researcher, then the asylum-seeking and refugee participants would have felt more at ease, or might have created a better connection. However, as Phoenix (1994) argues, sharing a racial identity does not necessarily equate to matched perspectives. Within the research context, a shared racial identity does not inevitably guarantee ease of access or rebalance unequal differences in the distribution of power between researcher and participant (Rollock, 2013).

All the asylum-seeking and refugee teens were boys, while the professionals' participants were balanced between males and females. Throughout the study, gender-issues were not evident, and all the participants reported that they felt the research topic was important to evaluate and re-think the current state of forced migrants' social integration in the city of Rome.

### 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed, and provided a rationale for, the procedures adopted throughout the study. At this point I believe that it is crucial to note that as the reader proceeds through the analysis chapters he/she will expect to find a great length of, and to learn a lot from, asylum-seeking and refugee children's narratives. The evident unbalance between professionals' and forced migrant children's reported discourses, is due to a number of factors. Firstly, access to refugee children was problematic and linked to the permission guaranteed by the professionals. Secondly, significant attention has been given to the disabling and SENitizing processes operated by the White Italian professionals in the integration-style inclusion pathways of forced migrant children. Thirdly, the setting in which the interviews with asylum seekers and refugee children took place (i.e. the reception centers or foster care homes, under the indirect surveillance of White Italian professionals) reinforced and reproduced the subjectivating and self-disciplinary power of forced migrant children. Under the normalizing and hierarchical gaze of the Italian professionals, provoking their self-

surveillance and thus acting and producing utterances in particular ways in order to make themselves and others particular sorts of persons, asylum-seeking and refugee children's answers were brief and most of the time acting the "good asylum seeker" as accountability mechanisms open each up to assessment and expulsion (see Youdell, 2011).

Having clarified this, for the sake of readers' attention and interest, the following five chapters present the grounded theory and related findings. Chapter six presents the overall grounded theory, and explores the core and sub-categories on a conceptual level. Chapter seven, eight, nine and ten examine the sub-categories in more contextual detail, using quotes from participants to highlight key points.

# Chapter Six: Conceptual Overview of the Grounded Theory

> "Assertion about what theory should mean for a grounded theory, and that, of course, complicates assessing the extent to which grounded theorists have produced theories. Some observers look at what researchers have done in the name of grounded theory […] and find that most studies are descriptive rather than theoretical. Granted, description entails conceptualization but a theoretical rendering of the data is also analytic and abstract."
>
> (Charmaz, 2014, p. 242)

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conceptual overview of the grounded theory. The theory identifies a core category ('Integrating through Disablement') through which participants' main concern is resolved. Four sub-categories are noted, each of which is employed by participants as a strategy in attempting to fulfill their job requirements or to maximize their living experience within the Italian society, in accordance with what the Italian State, and its apparatuses, are explicitly asking them to do. The four sub-categories are: promoting neoliberal integration, SENitizing and disabling refugee children, discriminating discourses, performing discursive agency. This chapter will consider the relationship between the core categories and sub-categories and concepts.

## 6.2 Core Category and Sub-Categories

To an extent, identifying participants' main concern was challenging in this study. For quite some time I considered that the two participant groups had different main concerns, i.e. the professionals operating to fully respond to the requirements of their roles and to those set by the recent immigration law as far as forced migrant children are concerned, while the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth wanted to get their documents and finally leave the reception system. I was not unduly concerned because, as previously noted, in constructivist GT one does what works in the context of one's data (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). Upon further analysis and

reflection, however, I began to see that there was an underlying theme to the participant groups' differential foci. Both wanted to fulfill the objective of 'integrating', and make the most of their educational, social and working life within the Italian society. However, primarily as a result of significantly different levels of stakes for both groups, what 'integrating' and 'making the most of their life in Italy' meant to each group was significantly different, and this is a key point underpinning the theory and the study's wider findings. For the 'professionals', integrating meant providing the asylum-seeking and refugee children with inputs to language and (preferably vocational) educational courses, which would help them in finding a 'proper' job, and consequently a 'proper' house; all of which would get them rapidly out of State's welfare support. For the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth 'integrating' involved learning Italian and continuing their education beyond the pre-established vocational pathway, in order to finally fulfill their own aspirations and dreams.

The core category is that of 'Integrating through Disablement', and it is through various forms of strategizing that participants are able to achieve this objective. The strategies employed are several and are operationalized in accordance with their perception of the situation in which they are involved. The strategies (presented as sub-categories) are:

1. Promoting Neoliberal Integration
2. SENitizing and Disabling Refugee Children
3. Discriminating Discourses
4. Performing Discursive Agency.

Each of these will now be discussed.

### 6.3 Promoting Neoliberal Integration

Within the frame of contemporary globalized societies, characterized by new strategies of capitalism such as flexible accumulation, contract and part-time work, smaller batches of production and exportation of labor to 'Third World' nations

(Giroux, 1997; Leonardo, 2002), and by forms of marketization of education with a focus on accountability mechanisms, consumer choice and individualization of the learner (Youdell, 2006), the relations between 'newcomers' and 'host society' seems to be inevitably influenced by such capitalistic and neoliberal transformations. As the analysis chapters of this thesis attempts to demonstrate, forced migrants are considered as units of production within the mainstream White Western societies, having an "exchange value" and thus not being seen entirely as human beings. In this context, 'Promoting Neoliberal Integration' was the seemingly strategy used by the Professional Participants to describe the objective of their work, and a reference model that asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth should follow. The concept of promoting neoliberal integration was derived from Professional Participants' reports on the reception system within the city of Rome. This was explored during analysis and it provided a very useful starting point for conceptualizing participants' various orientations to the current immigration and integration policies. Three elements constituting 'neoliberal integration' were identified as follows:

- *Learning Italian as a Second Language*: This means enrolling to special language courses for migrants in order to get the Certification of Level A1 or Level A2, which is now a compulsory requirement for accessing the job market[30].
- *Finding a job*: This means giving priority to vocational education courses that would facilitate access to low-paid jobs (i.e. baker, construction worker, cleaner, pizza maker, and so on), but technically with a 'regular' contract.
- *Finding a house*: This means being able to have a 'regular' job contract, and a 'regular' salary to be able to rent a house.

[30] The Ministerial Decree of the 4th of June 2010 [available in Italian at: http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/dm4_06_2010.pdf] that modifies the rules for obtaining the long-term residence permit, and the Presidential Decree n.179 of the 14th of September 2011 [available in Italian at: https://www.lngs.infn.it/images/direzione/14Sett2012_DPR_179.pdf] that focuses on the renewal of the standard residence permit, establish that for the renewal of both types of residence permits for foreigners living in Italy it is necessary to demonstrate Italian language proficiency of at least level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Although all the refugee service agencies intend to provide educational support, healthcare, social and legal assistance to forced migrant children and youth, the strategy of 'neoliberal integration' prevails over the promotion of children's wellbeing. Professionals do not seem to be interested in knowing whether the children and youth may be happy through such process of integration, and they do not seem concerned with rendering intelligible children's educational aspirations. In this sense, the strategy of 'promoting neoliberal integration' fits Oliver's (1990) argument that capitalism itself benefits of the disabled forced migrant children or disabled forced migrant children as they themselves perform an economic function as part of the reserve pool of labor and an ideological function in being maintained in their position of inferiority. 'Promoting Neoliberal Integration' aligns with recent migration policies, which render migrants and forced migrants as weak subjects, whose weakness is expressed mainly by their uncertain or 'irregular' social condition, inevitably reflected on their employment position (Pugliese, 1989). In the perspective of a 'neoliberal integration', discriminatory social practices towards migrants and forced migrants are evident in the actions of the State's executive apparatuses: the common power of bureaucracy, doubled by the sense of superiority that move business-as-usual racism, which will render rules even more restrictive. Forms of ghettoization, evident in the housing struggle, accompanied such discriminatory practices. Hence, in the operationalization of Professional Participants, 'promoting neoliberal integration' implies to automatically locate migrants and forced migrants, including children and youth, in the condition of having fewer rights and fewer opportunities, compared to Italian citizens (Tabet, 1997).

As a result of their uncertain migratory status, and other factors concerning their personal stories, asylum-seeking and refugee participants interpreted and oriented themselves in particular ways towards the 'neoliberal integration' imposed on them. They considered *Learning Italian as a Second Language* as essential for finding a job, but also for *socializing* and *interacting* with young Italians. All of the asylum-seeking and refugee participants considered *Finding a Job* essential, but not just the manual low-paid jobs that they are normally offered to them; they would like employment that would allow for *furthering* their *education*, *going to university* and finally accessing 'white collar' jobs (e.g. being a doctor). Finding proper

accommodation was also a priority for forced migrant teens, preferably in big cities, close to their own communities but also with the possibility of interacting with young Italians. Figure 2 shows the participants' three orientations and the variation to neoliberal integration, as expressed by the asylum-seeking teens.

**Figure 2. Three Orientations**

General orientations to 'neoliberal integration' were influenced by migration status and participants' expectations, which can be conceptualized as a continuum ranging from 'wanting', 'expecting', to 'feel obliged'. Positioning on this continuum is strongly influenced by professional role, time and life experience, experiences in reception centers and educational institutions, and the nature of motivation for integration.

Figure 3 provides a summary of the key elements and the properties of the subcategory 'Promoting Neoliberal Integration'.

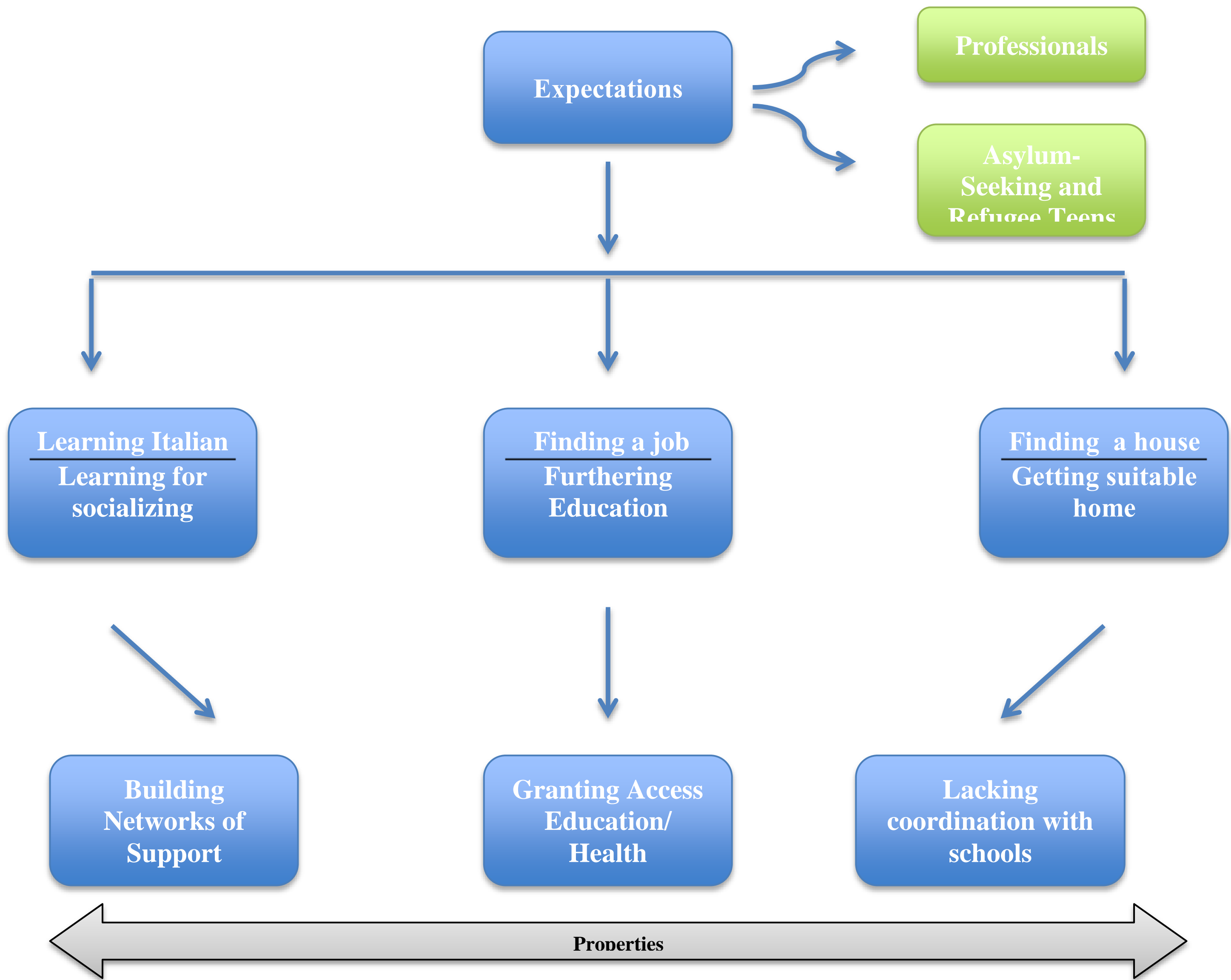


**Figure 3. Promoting Neoliberal Integration**

### 6.4 SENitizing and Disabling Refugee Children

Asylum-seeking and refugee children's integration within educational and social institutions, and more generally within Italian society, was in part achieved through processes of 'SENitization' and disablement of these subjects. This sub-catgory incorporates a range of different actions and procedures that have highly normalizing effects. SENitizing and 'Disabling'[31] is about defining and posioning subjects as less 'able' or different from a pre-determined, standardized 'norm'. As such, it is essentialy about marginalizing subjects located at the interstices of multiple differences (e.g. dis/ability, race and migratory status).

Forms of 'SENitizing' and 'Disabling' were identified in the data, as the result of lack of teachers' training on forced migrant children's trauma and –in some cases- illiteracy, and simultaneously as strategies to maintain educational 'homogeneity' and *status quo*, for the sake of schools' achievement standards. The underlying motivation for the various forms of 'SENitizing' and 'Disabling' was to focus on the individual 'deficit' discourse, and to reproduce learning as an individual practice, without bringing about educational change in inclusive terms. However, the need to maintain the individual 'deficit' discourse in educational and social settings played out in different ways depending on the particular context, the kind of refugee service agency, the professional role covered and the perception of forced migrant children's dis/ability and behavior. The more the asylum-seeking child was perceived as having a 'problematic behaviour', and thus to be 'unfit' to the Italian context, the more the disabling processes were significant. In most cases, asylum-seeking and refugee participants were made unaware of such disabling process.

Very little information was provided to Asylum-Seeking and Refugee participants about the 'testing' procedures used to confirm the disability diagnosis. Interestingly, in some cases Professional participants adopted strategies of 'exoticization' of the disability, in the hope that they would understand such medicalizing procedures. Through processes of 'exoticization', elements of traditional culture were adopted by the Professionals – often with the help of White European cultural mediators or

[31] The term "Disabling" is here used instead of "Disablement" because of the Constructivist Grounding Theory initial coding with gerunds (see Chapter 5).

cultural anthropologists - to exemplify the nature of the 'disability problem' for the population of forced migrant children, based on the unspoken assumption that people coming from outside Europe are not enough culturally equipped to understand the science of Psychology and Neuropsychiatry.

This sub-category considers a number of examples of SENitizing and Disabling procedures, as well as their apparent functions and implications. An important example is that of labelling, and this can be related to lack of teacher training and to the strategy for educational homogeneity. The Professionals' 'using standardized material' was more linked to the lack of training, while 'accessing quality education' was more related to the strategy to reproduce educational homogeneity. Figure 4 provides a summary of the key elements of this sub-category:

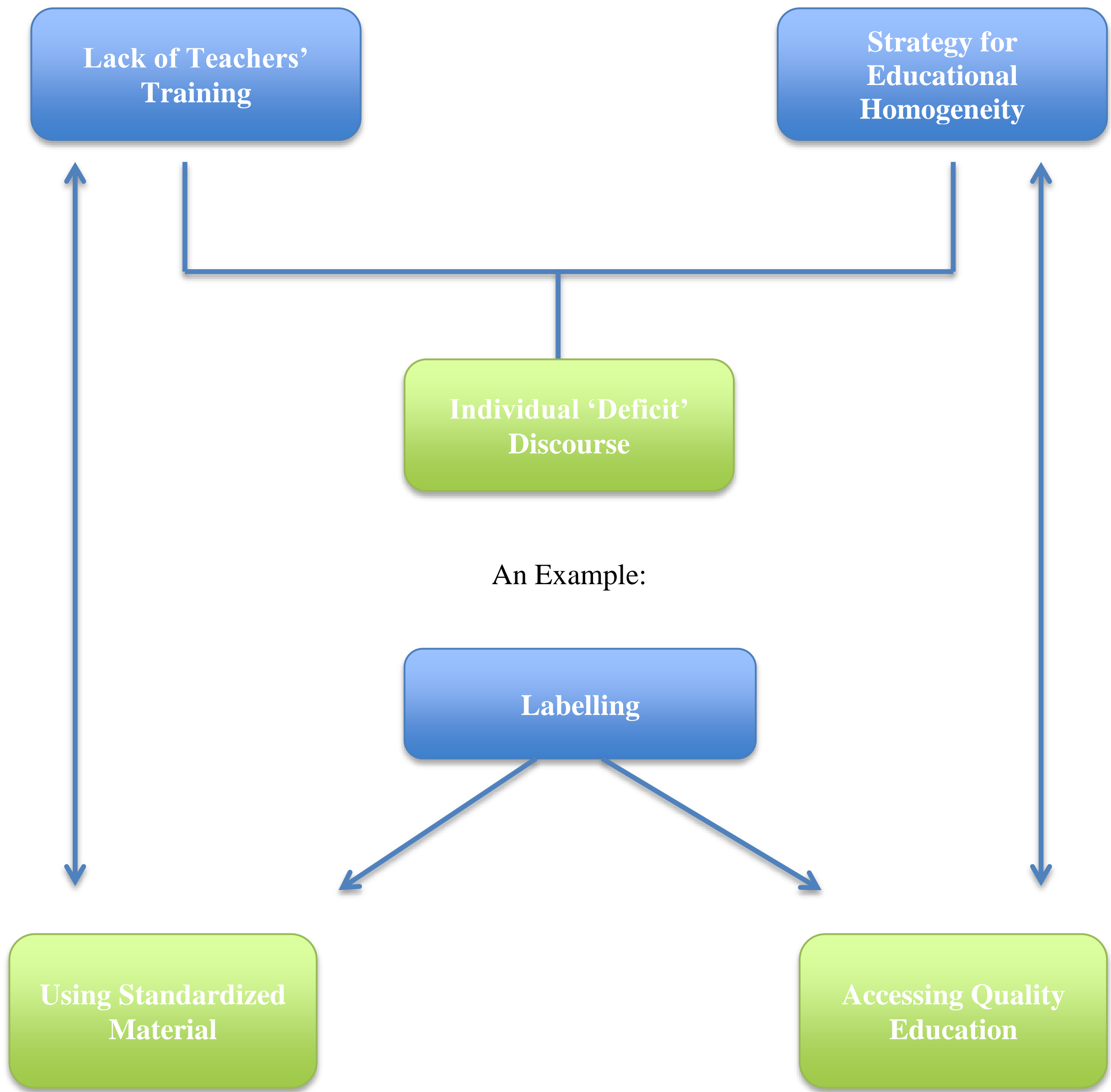


**Figure 4. SENitizing and Disabling Refugee Children**

## 6.5 Discriminating Discourses

'Discriminating Discourses' is another strategy employed mainly by the Professional participants in order to assist in fulfilling the SENitizing and 'Disabling' processes previously described. The emergence of discriminatory and racial stereotypes in relation to asylum-seekers and refugees, which reflects a rather homogenous racial imaginary of White Italian Professionals, seems to legitimate the racist social, educational, economic and political organization promoted by existing forms of 'integration'. This sub-category focuses on Professionals participants' racial consciousness (and the lack of it), as well as Asylum-Seeking and Refugee teens' perception of discrimination.

The central aspect of 'Discriminating Discourses' is that of *fear*, articulated by the Professionals', and underpinned by the monsterization of forced migration influx, and the consequent consideration of refugees as *terrorist*. Fear, or initial fear as argued by some Professionals, seems to be fuelled by a general sense of ignorance in relation to the forced migration phenomena, prior to taking up the professional role within the refugee service. Through subjectivating processes that SENitize and disable asylum-seeking and refugee teens, *fear* is transformed in acceptance of these subjects as *people*. Thus, only through discriminatory discourses that hegemonically 'othered' and 'downgraded' them, it seems possible that asylum-seekers and refugee children become recognized as human beings. Most of the Professionals participants affirm *to be not racist but*, despite their discourses seem to be charged of racial stereotypes, cultural essentialism and medicalization of the trauma, in the sense of attributing 'deficit' to certain cultures rather than others (i.e. the Syrian and Afghani refugees although they might suscitate more fear for their personal attitude, they can be seen as a 'model minority' as they are smart and they integrate easily; whereas the West African refugees are illiterate, more ignorant but docile and 'easy to engage' in therapy) (Bradbury, 2013b).

In opposition to such racial stereotypes stand asylum-seeking and refugee teens' discourse on discrimination. To them, discrimination and racism sound like unknown concepts. Their being naive is certainly justified by the fact that they are kept in segregated centres, in suburban areas of the city, and they rarely move out – if not to

go to school or to training-, and so their interaction within Italian society is very limited, and as a consequence their perception of racism. Figures 5 and 6 provide a summary of this subcategory.

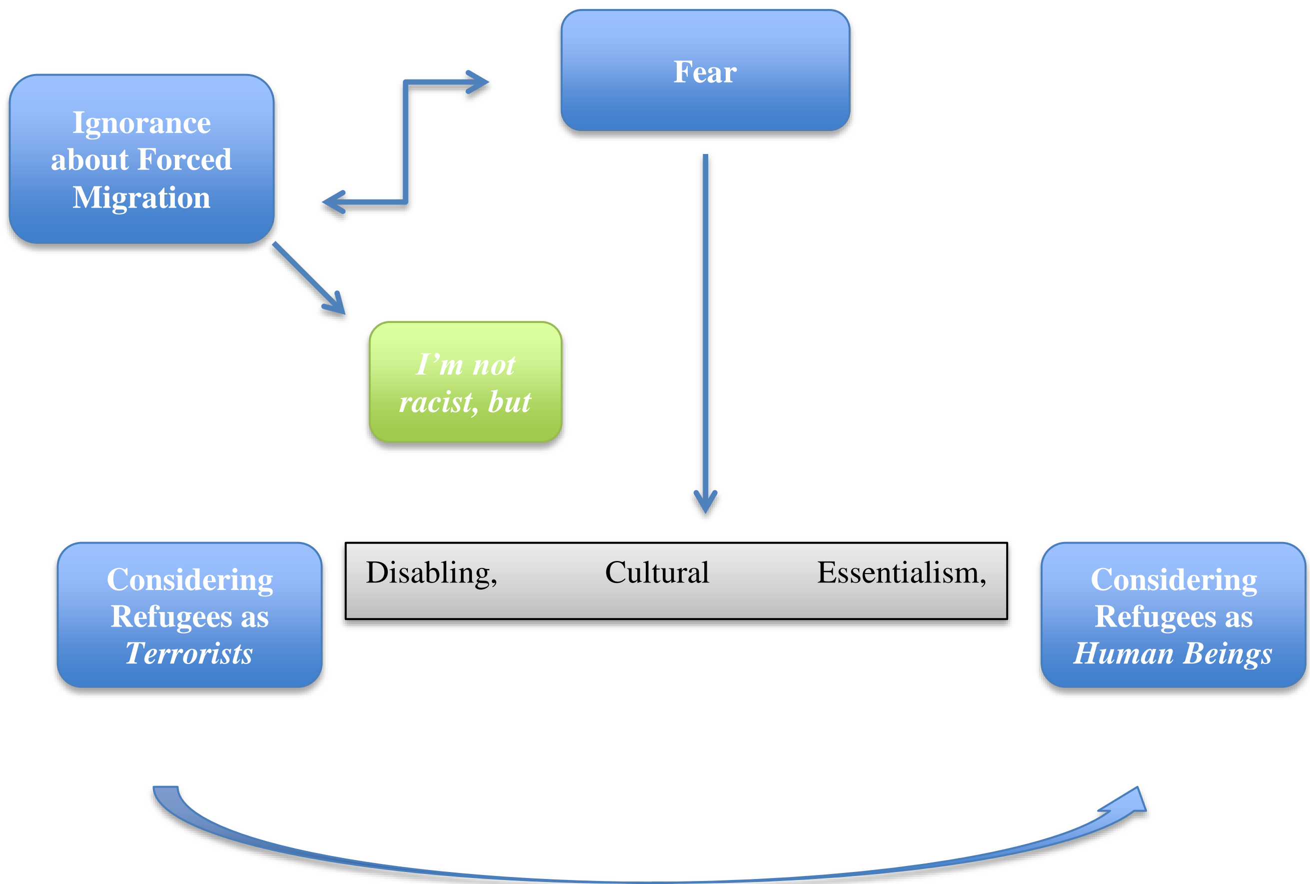


**Figure 5. Discriminating Discourses- The Professional Participants**

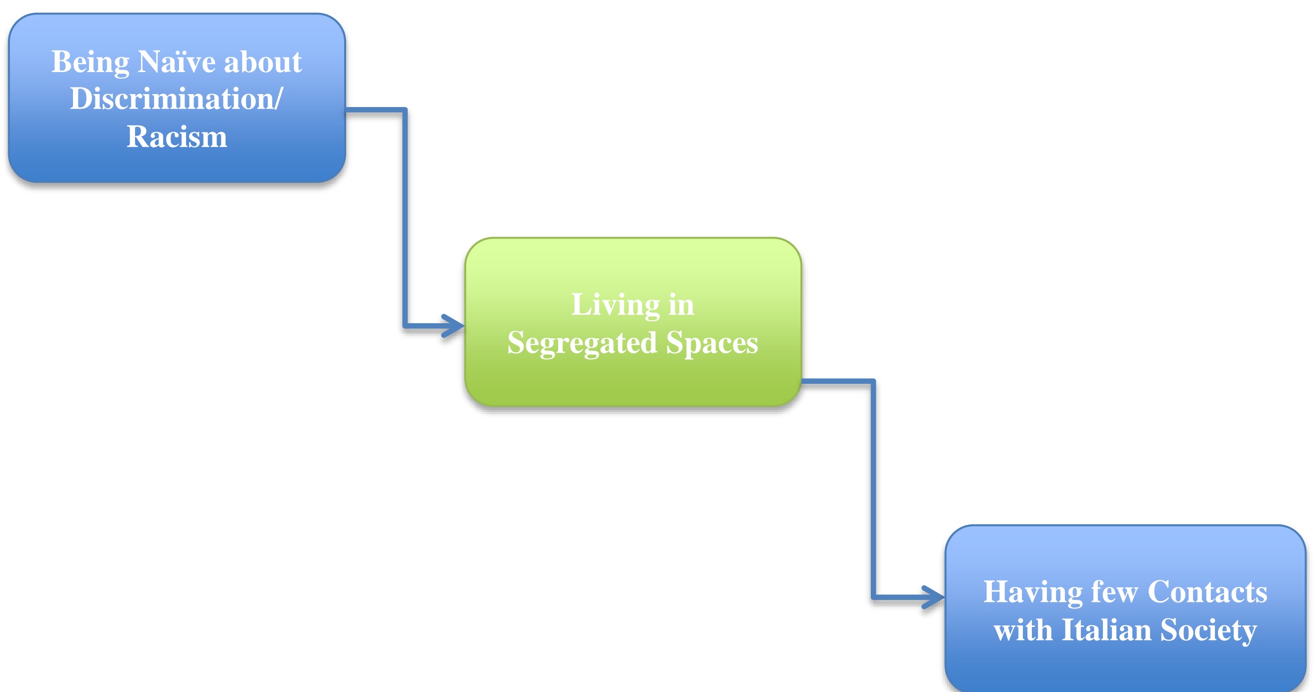


**Figure 6. Discriminating Discourses - The Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children Participants**

### 6.6 Performing Discursive Agency

An important strategy for Asylum-Seeking and Refugee participants to achieve their main concern of integrating was that of ‘Performing Discursive Agency’. It was very important for the participants to recite the role of ‘the good asylum seeker’, particularly before the audition to the Territorial Commission, and thus accepting model imposed by the Professionals. Similarly, the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee participants felt the need to challange the prevailing constitutions of asylum-seeking subjects, to unsettle hegemonic meaning, and to render intelligible their educational aspirations through discursive agency. The passage between ‘performing the good asylum seeker’ to ‘performing discursive agency’ was not immediate during the interview. Certain conditions were required for discursive agency to be performed. These conditions related to participants’ perceptions of me (the researcher), their level of trust towards my role and research, and understanding of the broad social context outside the service agency.

Three steps were identified in this sub-category, from ‘performing the good asylum-seeker’, to ‘understanding social context’, to ‘performing discursive agency’. Movement along the three steps, from wanting to integrate according to pre-determined integration processes, to having significant knowledge of social and educational settings in Rome, to constitute themselves and their educational aspirations differently, depended on participants’s very own perception of the context outside the forster care home. In each step, there was an examination and a weighing-up of the features of the context. Based on the level of confidence the asylum-seeking participants felt in terms of their understanding of the Italian society, and their perception of what was rewarded, participants constituted themselves again differently and in particular ways. Figure 7 provides a summary of the key elements of this sub-category.

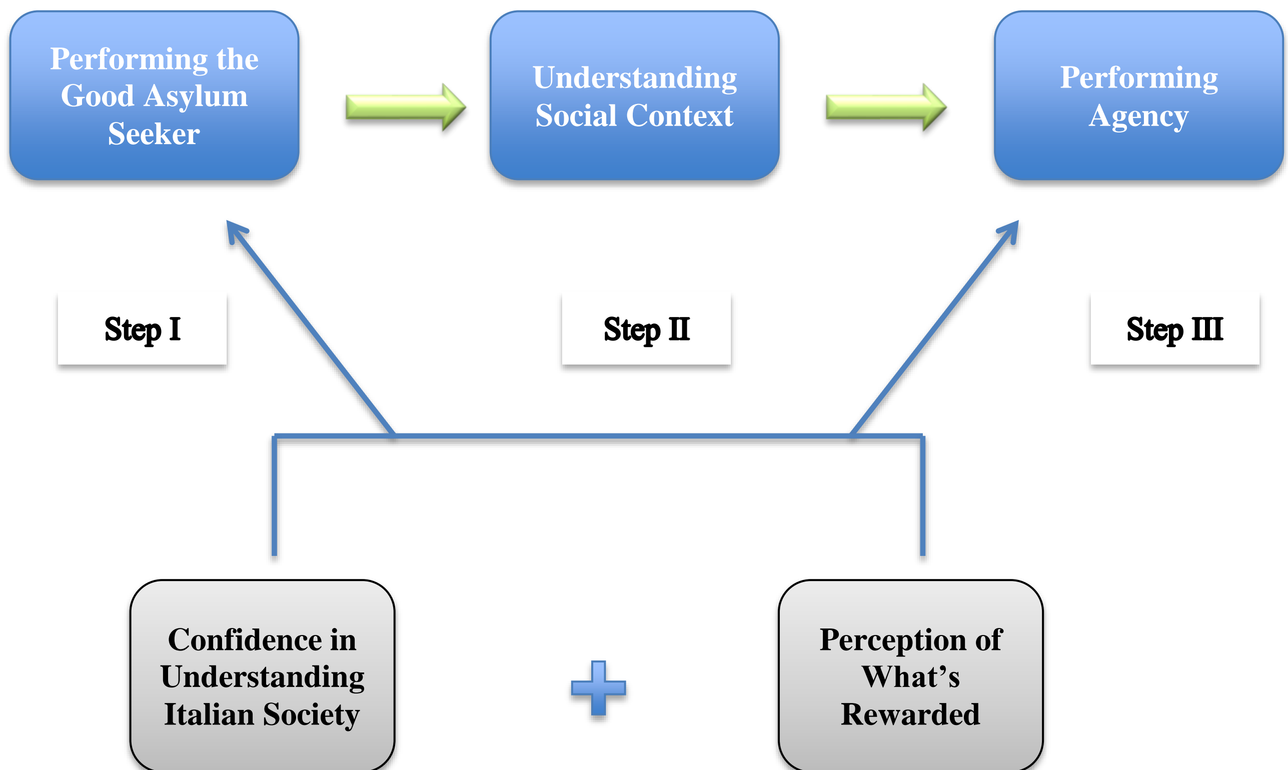


**Figure 7. Performing Discursive Agency**

Figure 8, overleaf, provides a summary of the core and sub-categories of the grounded theory.

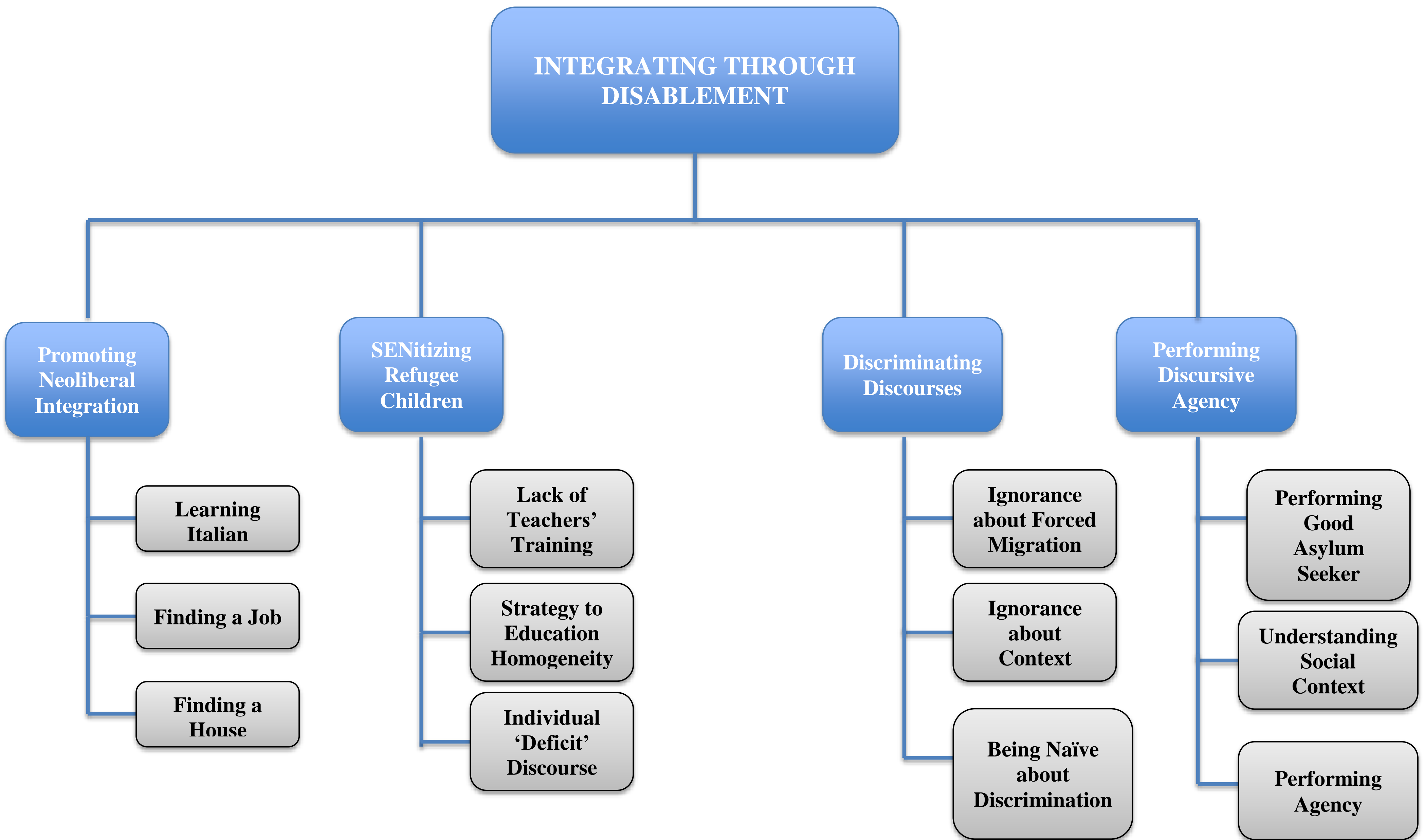


**Figure 8. Conceptual Overview of the Theory**

# Chapter Seven: Promoting Neoliberal Integration

> "[…] Integration for us is to promote social inclusion, ehm which means finding a job, learning the language, getting into a profession, finding a house and getting out of the government's shelter […]."
>
> (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

## 7.1 Introduction

As outlined in chapter six, 'Promoting Neoliberal Integration' is a strategy used by the Professional participants to describe the general purpose of the services in which they operate, as well as the normative model to which asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth should comply. This sub-category is now explored in more detail through an examination of participants' experiences, and with a specific focus on 'learning Italian as a second language', 'finding a job' and 'finding a house', as the elements that forced migrant youth should pursue to become 'autonomous'. The ambivalent and confused use of 'social integration' and 'social inclusion' in the Professional participants' discourses is carefully interrogated. Actions that reinforce the 'neoliberal' character of existing policies of integration and that further contribute to the marginalization of dis/abled asylum seeking and refugee youth, as 'Compartmentalizing Networks' or 'Distancing from Educational Institutions', are also analyzed.

## 7.2 Neoliberal Integration: the Italian way to become 'autonomous'

Previous research has noted that the social integration of refugees in Italy is a "polysemous and multidimensional" concept, which has been introduced with the purpose of guaranteeing equality of opportunity to 'vulnerable' categories such as forced migrants (Catarci, 2011). The heterogeneous use of the notion of social integration, a scarcely analytical concept that does not allow for a punctual investigation of the processes that promote such dimensions, seems to be reflected in the contradictory Italian migratory and social policies, especially in the aftermath of

the 2011-2012 "North-African Emergency" (Catarci, 2011). As such, social integration seems to be based more on assimilationist assumptions or the so-called "one-way process", whereby forced migrants are asked to fit in and comply with the cultural aspects, the capitalist mode of production and the hegemonic social hierarchies of the host society. Besides *material conditions*, including social and economic mobility, access to training and housing, social integration entails *cultural aspects*, social participation and the possibility to establish relationships to be cultivated in autonomy (Ambrosini, 2008; Zincone, 2009). However, I have found that most of the Professional participants in this study did not consider the social, cultural and political dimensions of integration, as well as refugee children and youth's wellbeing, happiness and personal life expectations in the new country. The emphasis on the material conditions and on the economic aspects is well expressed by Participant D, operating in a refugee agency focused on the implementation of social integration:

> " […] The first need is definitely […] job training; because not all refugees are bearers of social needs. The main demand at the beginning is assistance with the application for international protection. The second request is for work, and even Italians don't find work growing on the trees, you know? But we try to give better information and orientation than that provided by the local career services […]." (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

Similarly, Participant X emphasizes the importance of offering education (oriented to job-training), only if the children decide to "cheat on the street context" and to be part of the integration program offered by the service – providing shelter and social support to unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children at risk of sexual and labor exploitation.

> "[…] When they [the children] start coming to this place more frequently, they have a formal protection and they can, they can start to interrupt their relations with the street. […] When they fall in love with us, as we say in a cute way, […] we can start introducing them into new pathways, training, jobs and also psychological rehabilitation in some ways."
> (Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

As it is evident in Participant X conceptualization, "training" and "jobs" seem to be more important for asylum-seeking and refugee children's integration rather than "psychological rehabilitation", and all that relates to their identity and well being, even if the children targeted by Service 2 are practically living in the streets of Rome. However, at a later stage of the interview, Participant X seems to be critical of the current models of integration in the city of Rome, and in doing so he highlights their contradictions and weaknesses and, most crucially, their devastating effects on asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth. As a result of current integration processes, said Participant X, most asylum-seeking and refugee children in Rome might as well go back to "street street".

> "[…] The problem is that we do not have a real migration policy that would encourage a young refugee to integrate in the society, to find a proper job, to find a stimulating cultural environment, and to find a decent house. […] After all this they [refugee children] either go back to "street street", like the Afghans, or they find a place in occupied buildings, like squats, ehm like the people from Eritrea." (Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

Processes of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth subjectivation, as well as their possibility to make their 'self' again differently, are influenced by the model of *de facto* 'neoliberal integration', driven by the economic assets of the Italian society (Harbert, 1988). As such, the Professional participants in this study use the idea of autonomy, and the process of becoming *autonomous* not as referring to the promotion of social justice, equality and respect of refugees' right, but as a synonym for "getting out of the welfare system as soon as possible". I have decided to use 'neoliberal integration', as opposed to social integration, to conceptualize how current forms of refugee integration rest on the emergence of new forms of capitalism (neoliberalism) and the consequent unequal mechanism of wealth distribution, social organization and control, and on the consideration of Whiteness, schooling and ability as properties (Harries, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2015), therefore reinforcing and reproducing material inequality.

Autonomy, in this schema, is reached through three elements: *learning Italian as a second language*, *finding a job*, *finding a house*. Arguably, the rhetoric of autonomy positions education, employment and housing as means to avoid refugee children and

youth disorientation within the Italian society, and their consequent exploitation, and as powerful tools to cultivate adults who will secure Italy's status within the global knowledge economy and who will serve domestic interests as part of the labor force. As Participant F articulates:

> "We promote social inclusion because these teenagers arrived close to their 18th and so they have a short time to get the documents, a proper house, a job, and get autonomous. […] They [unaccompanied asylum-seeking children] seem to have arrived in another dimension, different from how they have imagined it, and then they don't know how to get around here. We try to guide them into the reality here, we send them to school to learn the language, to get qualifications to get a good job […] we help them to be autonomous within the Italian society." (Participant F, Prof_Serv3.1)

In order to avoid asylum-seeking and refugee children "getting lost", relying for a long time on welfare state support, or ending up as 'outcasts', it seems essential to 'orient' them within the Italian system and society and in the building of a new consciousness about what they are expected to do and which path to follow. Achieving autonomy, through (mainly) vocational education qualifications, language learning, low-skill employment and precarious forms of housing is not just an improvement carefully designed by the Italian government to equalize the opportunity of refugee children and youth in education and society, indeed it can be seen as the result of the complex operation of White Supremacy or, as Harris (1993) puts it, of Whiteness as a property – which functions to allow White people a set of privileges that are inaccessible to Black or minority people. This means that asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth have to learn as quickly as they can their place within the hierarchy of 'others', or better within the "hierarchy of hierarchies" (Miller, 1987). Only by accepting the new reality, described by Participant F and by most of the other Professional participants as in stark contrast with the one imagined, only by following Professionals' advice on how to re-build their lives through the carefully standardized and pre-determined steps of social integration –mostly designed by White male professionals-, can asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth become "respectable subjects" (Garner, 2007) – a concept that will be further explored in chapter nine.

*7.2.1 Learning Italian as a Second Language*

Asylum-seeking and refugee children, accompanied or unaccompanied, arriving in Italy in compulsory education age (i.e. pre-school and primary school age), are supposed to enroll to any mainstream public schools according to their area of residence, and preferably close to the reception center hosting them:

> "[…] The children are normally placed in schools next to the reception center. There are not special schools for refugee children. There are schools with more foreign children because they are in neighborhoods where more foreigners live. These schools have projects and experimental programs." (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

Contrary to their peers in compulsory education age, asylum-seeking and refugee teenagers, who constitute the larger group of asylum seekers underage[32], are obliged to attend language classes and the course to get the middle school diploma (*Terza Media)* in 'segregated' public institutions, organized to provide adult education for all - but as a matter of fact the attendance of migrants outnumbers that of Italians-, also known as *Centri Territoriali Permanenti* (CTP) and more recently renamed *Centri per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* (C.P.I.A).

Most of the Professional participants working in foster care homes and reception centers for unaccompanied forced migrants encourage the teens to learn Italian in such institutions, as part of the educational training offered by current model of social integration.

> "As for the schools, we are mainly in contact with the CTP in our area, and they are really qualified, […] it is a service for adult migrants, but because we send teenagers they have a schedule that works for them, in the morning or in the afternoon […], they get a language certificate […]" (Participant A, Prof_Serv3.1)

Importantly, the 'segregated' nature of CTP and CI.PI.A is clearly express by Participant Ps2, a psychotherapist working in a mental health service for forced migrant victims of extreme violence:

[32] For an overview of the percentage of unaccompanied asylum seekers youth, see the data published by the *Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali* in 2015, available at: [http://www.lavoro.gov.it/AreaSociale/Immigrazione/minori_stranieri/Documents/Report%20di%20monitoraggio%20dicembre%202014%20(2).pdf].

> “ […] The kids we see are kids that go in special schools to get the *terza media* and they are not included in normal public schools, they are in class with all migrant students where they do special programs to obtain the diploma, sometimes they do it in few months, they don’t do it in three years […]. In normal schools you could get second-generation migrants, the children of refugees, while our refugees don’t go in normal schools because they don’t speak Italian. They are not included in classic school pathways […].” (Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv6.2)

So for the first generation of asylum-seeking and refugee teenagers, it seems impossible to be integrated in mainstream public secondary schools, due to a combination of aspects: lack of language knowledge, disrupted educational background and the pressure to find employment to repay the expenses of the trip to Europe. The very existence of CTP and CI.PI.A is justified by the recent introduction of integration policies that make language learning and middle school education a compulsory requirement for migrants and forced migrants. On this matter, Participant V observes:

> “For what concerns the teaching of Italian, 4 years ago it was established that all migrants should master level A2 in order to get the residence permit and to be able to work […], so for the young people this certification becomes important […].” (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

The rise of such institutions as a mechanism of both social provision and social control seem to play a key role in structuring both perceptions and experiences of migrants and asylum seekers, and facilitated the exclusion of forced migrants from the mainstream of social life (see (Oliver, 1990). Within this, the ideological dimension of individualization of education and of the ‘deficit’ discourse associated to the refugee children and teens’ educational abilities have been as important as the physical provision of segregated establishments. Such processes of individualization are the direct product of recent forms of capitalism and neoliberalism, which have posed the accent on diversity (in his various forms) as an individual problem and which have reaffirmed the dominant role of White medical and social professionals.

Some of the services considered in this study directly provide Italian courses with the help of qualified teachers and educators, and rely on the CI.PI.A only for the final exam to obtain the level A1 and A2 certificates. This provision seems important especially for reception centers and foster care homes located in the suburbs of Rome

and far from any accredited institution. Having a language course inside the center helps asylum-seekers and refugee teens to reduce the time they would spend on public transport to reach the schools, and other issues they might encounter on the way (late buses, not having a ticket pass and so on). Importantly, Participant V states:

> "[…] Being part of the network of schools for migrants (Scuole Migranti) we are constantly working to get better organized to respond to migrants' needs at local level. We have an agreement with the CTP Mandela so we take the kids there for their Italian certifications. […] As a matter of fact we are the only school of Italian in central Rome that remains open in the summer, so we receive many children and youth […]". (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

However, in order to have a language course *in loco*, refugee service agencies must have additional funding that is not always easy to obtain. For such a reason, many centers were forced to drop this service and send the students back to the CI.PI.A.

> "From the social point of view, things are better now, I mean things are better at the local level and not at the institutional level. Locally we have now a good network between the foster care home and schools for example. We now offer language courses and training within the foster care home […] but the problem is that the municipality does not have the economic resources […] so a lot of foster care homes in Rome have closed because they didn't have the money." (Participant L, Prof_Serv7)

Only those services that can rely on internal funding seem to be able to continue the language courses, as Participant V argues:

> " […] In 2011 in the center M., we have started to do Italian classes because it was an important need for all the kids that arrived from foster care homes or from the neighborhood […]. From 2011 thanks to the European Funding we have activated a series of courses of Italian language to respond to the needs of young migrants. […] When the EU funding finished we have decided to continue with the Italian school, organizing it better adding some days for the classes and now we start from September […]."
> (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

Participant L further stresses the difficulties that asylum-seeking and refugee teenagers encounter in accessing language courses, even in the CI.PI.A, and education more generally due to the serious lack of European and non-European funding to pay for the salary of teachers. Such issue clearly represents an obstacle to the already fragile and contradictory model of social integration.

> "Also for them [asylum-seeking teens] it is difficult to continue studying, even Italian and to have access to training especially because the big companies offering training for this population have run out of funding […]"(Participant L, Prof_Serv7)

Given the external pressure they receive from the Italian Professionals, asylum-seeking and refugee teens interviewed in this study consider learning Italian as an important daily activity. Some of those taking classes inside the foster care homes highlight the difficulty of mastering the language, but also the patience and flexibility of their educators/teachers:

> "At the beginning it was very hard, but now I understand but slowly slowly. The teachers have a lot of experience to help us in studying […]." (Djibril, AS_Serv7)
>
> "Ehm for me it was not so hard in the beginning, because Italian is similar to French so I understand quickly and I know how to speak, even if I don't speak properly and I still do a lot of mistakes […]. When we finish level A1, we'll start the A2 and we will learn to write in Italian […]." (Yakub, AS_Serv7)

For many of the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth participants, learning Italian was not merely a means to find a job or to become autonomous, it was also a way to build significant relationships with their Italian peers. As Papis nicely puts it:

> "Yes I'd like to speak Italian better. I don't have any friends here you know? Ehm I think I'd like to learn Italian to talk to boys of my age and going around Rome"
> (Papis, AS_Serv3.1)

Interestingly, another asylum-seeking participant stresses the importance of speaking Italian correctly to be able to ask for direction to people in the street and to reassure them when they run away scared of being stopped by a Black immigrant:

> "You know I think that learning Italian would help me a lot especially in not getting lost in the streets. One time I got lost and I stopped a person and I was asking to help directing me to the bus stop, but he run away. Ehm, I think he might have been scared of me [laughs], I mean as a Black immigrant, maybe if I would have speak in Italian he would have another impression […]." (Adrame, AS_Serv9)

Adrame's as well as other asylum seeking teens' accounts show how mastering the Italian language constitutes a central aspect of the acceptability process within the local communities, and generally the society.

*7.2.2 Finding a job*

The current organization of work, social relations, employers' attitudes and the presence of the so-called "Black job market" within the Italian society has highly influenced the perception of migrants and forced migrants and has posed new problems for their employment. The media has often portrayed how unaccompanied asylum-seeking teenagers and adults have been exploited by Mafia organizations in the agriculture sector in the southern part of Italy[33], but also as street vendors (especially in the case of Egyptians, who mainly sell fruit in the streets or when they have the possibility –through their relatives already living in Italy for a long time- they manage to find employment in fruit shops) and in prostitution. The paucity of economic resources destined to refugee service agencies significantly reduces the possibility for young asylum seekers to further their education, do more qualifying training courses and being able to access well-paid jobs.

Professional participants' discourses highlight how most of the opportunities available to asylum-seeking and refugee youth rest on professional courses and training for low-skilled jobs, such as mechanic, gardener, baker or pizza maker, construction worker, or –in the best case- interpreter or cultural mediator inside the reception centers. For example:

> " […] We encourage refugees to do these internships with different employers, with whom we have structured contacts, but oftentimes we find ourselves knocking at different doors, for example asking mechanics ehm do you want a trainee? Because we understood that's the way to make it work as quickly as possible". (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

> "We connect also with vocational schools in Latina and they offer us courses to become a baker, a gardener and this is very useful for the boys, as they find jobs in these sectors quite easily […]". (Participant L, Prof_Serv7)

[33] For the latest enquiry on the situation of asylum-seekers in the south of Italy, see: http://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2016/09/12/news/sette-giorni-all-inferno-diario-di-un-finto-rifugiato-nel-ghetto-di-stato-1.282517

Frequently, Professional participants attribute asylum-seeking and refugee teens' employment in low-paid and low-skilled jobs to their lack of schooling and poor training in the country of origin. Asylum-seeking and refugee teens' human capital remain largely ignored, and judged as non-transferable, let alone their educational aspirations. The effects of the economic crisis, in these last five years, have brought employment institutions and Professionals operating in refugee agencies to quickly match the educational level of forced migrant teens at the arrival with the first (low-paid) job that is available, in order to achieve autonomy as soon as possible. Participant Z argues:

> "[…] As we started to have a lot of illiterate children and teens. […] So for many of them it's just easy to find a job selling fruit for example".
> (Participant Z, Prof_Serv8.2)

Professionals' discourses on the lack of transferability of young forced migrants' skills has a significant impact - in terms of subjectivation- on the population of young asylum seekers. For this purpose, I have found the opinion of Chérif and Dembelé, two asylum-seeking teens, as being of great interest:

> "I would also love to have a job like X [referring to a social worker in foster care home], or be a baker, I'd like to be trained to be a baker before […]".
> (Chérif, AS_Serv9)

> "First I'd like to study, because if you don't have a degree to find a job in Italy is very difficult. I'd like to learn how to make pizza. But when I'm going to continue my studies seriously, I'm not going to work to make pizza anymore […]".
> (Dembelé_ASServ7)

The most relevant effect of Professionals' discourses on refugee children and teens is that the latter interiorize a model of integration that wants them as low-skilled workers, suppressing their very own educational and career expectations in the new country.

*7.2.3 Finding a house*

Finding 'proper' accommodation after the residence period in foster care homes is perhaps the most complex requirement that the current model of 'social integration' imposes on young asylum seekers and refugees in their transition to adulthood. The issue of housing does not pertain only to the city of Rome, where perhaps it is more problematic due to living costs and the high percentage of refugees, but it extends to the whole of Italy. As Professional participants in this study articulate, the possibility for young refugees to rent a house after spending up to two years in reception projects is strictly linked to the possession of a regular job contract of, at least, six months. The above discussion has shown how asylum-seeking and refugee teens are usually located in low-paid jobs, which very rarely give them the opportunity of a regular job contract and consequently a regular salary, thus preventing them from the possibility of getting accommodation autonomously. As a result, the destiny the most young refugee children face once they are forced to leave the foster care home is either being homeless and living in the "street street", as Participant X has argued, or accessing through the help of members of their own community occupied buildings (squats) – a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common in the city of Rome.

> "[…] We try to help families of refugees that try to rent an apartment, I mean it's not easy, the landlords always want some guarantees, like the money, the job contract, then if they see that they are foreigners they have more resistance in renting them the flat. […] We had a project last year to reduce housing discrimination against refugees."
> (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

> "[…] After having been in the government's shelter, a lot of refugees go back to the street."
> (Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

> "[…], Housing you now it's a big problem now, because with the new legislation those living in occupied houses they are not eligible for residence and therefore they cannot exercise a series of rights, not that of health of course […]".
> (Participant C, Prof_Serv6.1)

Prevented from the possibility of having a regular contract and of renting an apartment, young refugees who manage to find a place in occupied buildings are even stripped of the right to residence, and the right to health care assistance. As a result of the requirements of the model of 'social integration', young refugees reaching

adulthood and leaving the reception system become officially marginalized. Despite such evident institutional discrimination that refugees are facing in the city of Rome, some of the Professionals criticize the occupied houses; and I have found Participant D's disgust about squat interesting, as it seems located elegantly far from the grounded reality that forced migrants have to deal with:

> "Being in a occupied building is one of the worse thing for the city, because when one person gets used to lived in occupation you can never get her out […]. Occupied buildings are disgusting, I mean you can't, you can't live there. There are entire buildings, such as the one in Anagnina, Collatina and Via Curtatone close to Termini Station, that are completely occupied and there are also families with children." (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

Independent and autonomous accommodations that young refugee can access, as well as most of the foster care homes, are usually located in the suburbs of Rome, or what (Tosi Cambini, 2015) has called the *space of racism*. Usually they are far from some essential services (i.e. school, hospitals, social services, healthcare centers), which are difficult to reach with public transport. Such process of 'ghettoization' of young (and adults) refugees is the result of a carefully planned institutional mechanism of social control of the 'other's' bodies, whom should be rendered "partially invisible" (ibid., p. 159). When it is not possible to remove them completely from the urban context, these 'bodies' are located far from the White mainstream Italian population's sight in what I call the 'segregated bubble', with limited contacts with the external reality- whether places or people. Interestingly, some of the Professional participants in this study, mostly those who operate in healthcare and educational services, appear to be critical of this legal segregation but do very little political lobby to change the situation:

> "As a matter of fact we are the only school of Italian in central Rome that remains open in the summer, so we receive many children and youth, but the problem is that they then get moved to other places of the city or even in other cities and this is problematic for their education and also for us […]". (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

> "An important element to be considered is that these teens live far away from here, and because they are of colour they get on the bus and they don't have tickets because reception centres cannot pay for their transportation, and so they are subject to control and this is traumatizing for them, it puts them again in a dangerous situation and unfortunately

> our crazy bureaucracy does not seem to be able to solve this problem […]”.
> (Participant CM1_ Prof_Serv 6.2)

> “ Sometimes they don’t come to therapy because they are scared of being checked on the bus […].”
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv6.2)

Overall, despite the fact that they wished to find comfortable accommodation, asylum-seeking and refugee teen participants did not make housing a priority, perhaps as they were more occupied trying to figure out educational and job possibilities. However, as one Professional Participant noted, their transition from foster care to autonomous accommodation can cause further distress for young refugees, especially on those who have been suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or that have been diagnosed with a disability.

> “I have my theory, you know, maybe it’s just my paranoia but I think that this boy lived a very bad reception in the first place and so he would see leaving the shelter as something very bad that would lead him to psychological problems […].”
> (Participant A, Prof_Service3.1)

Given the current model of asylum-seeking and refugee ‘social integration’, based on three strategic components of *learning Italian*, *finding a job*, *finding a house* to reach ‘autonomy’, disability appears to be a further intersectional element that, together with migratory status and race, constitutes an obstacle to the full achievement of integration. Thus, the institution of community care, mental health services specifically for forced migrants, coupled with process of medicalization and disablement (as we will see in the following chapter), can be seen as strategies to overcome the obstacles for young refugee social integration in the city of Rome, and in Italy more generally. Disability as preventing ‘neoliberal integration’, and as the ‘cause’ for young asylum-seekers’ marginalisation is well articulated by Participant G when he refers to asylum-seekers affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

> “[…] The chronicization of the disorder means that it evolves negatively. And what does this mean in practical terms? It means that children or young people cannot get integrated, they cannot learn Italian, they can’t progress in their courses, on the contrary, these experiences become a

> further trauma, as they go to the Italian class and they cannot follow, so they feel different from the others and so they quit, they go to work as mechanics and because they suffer from dissociation, sometimes they get distracted and so the employer treat them badly and they are fired, and so on. […] So you see? If you don't deal with their trauma at an early stage they get marginalised, especially children and young people […]" (Participant G, Prof_Serv4)

It is in the very intersection of disability with other shapers of identity that the current model of 'neoliberal integration' shows its very own assimilationist character. Here it is possible to see how neoliberal integration emphasizes having a whole person represented by what he or she cannot do (Connor, 2016), rather than what he or she can, and the priority for the raced/disabled young asylum seeker to be assimilated within pre-determined normative social and cultural standards. As Butler (Butler, 1997) would put it, asylum-seeking and refugee inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency (pp. 83, 84).

### 7.3 Compartmentalizing Networks

The multidimensional nature of 'social integration' processes of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth requires the creation of networks between different services, for two reasons: firstly, integration entails a shared responsibility among multiple agencies within society; secondly creating connections between different services offer a more global approach to the person's different needs (Catarci, 2011). For this reason research shows that the construction of effective opportunities of social integration should involve educational services (schools, professional training services, CI.PI.A. and language centers), employment services, health and social services, and finally cultural services (Ambrosini, 2008; Catarci, 2011). Partnerships and the construction of networks for the coordination of interventions and for sharing projects among individual organizations, citizens, forced migrant representatives and local institutions is a fundamental commitment to achieve social integration. However, the Professional participants in this research emphasize the "bad management" of coordination among the different services in the city of Rome, and how new local policies actually prevent the effectiveness of networking. Participant Z explains:

> "[…] We should really co-ordinate better, but you know, the policies at the local level don't really help you much in this, […] nowadays it's so hard to build a solid network locally […]".
> (Participant Z, Prof_Serv8.2)

Participant N, working in a mental health service for migrant children, also shares this view and highlights how the lack of economic resources has a significant impact not only on the coordination between refugee service agencies, but also on the training and competencies of professionals:

> "[…] Italy is not a country for children because a lot of resources have been taken off from schools, health and social services, so even if we have good theoretical models [referring to paediatric neuropsychiatry] in the end these models are not applied because we don't have the economic resources and thus the services don't have all the professional competencies required […]. […] There is a lack of monitoring and […] absence of co-ordination, so I contextualize our service so that you understand that it is not our fault, but we operate in a difficult context for co-ordination".
> (Participant N, Prof_ Serv5)

Similarly, Participant X talks about "fragmented intervention" in the integration of unaccompanied and 'vulnerable' asylum-seeking and refugee children:

> "There is no systemic approach to unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children at local level. The local health services do not have long-term projects to deal with mental health problems of unaccompanied children, they do not have the training or the competencies. […] What we have is a series of fragmented intervention, and I mean if you are an unaccompanied refugee children you are already internally fragmented and this disorganized system at local level just make your situation worse. […] I mean if you go to the local health service and you start talking about ethno psychiatry they look at you and say, "What are you talking about?" […]."
> (Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

The lack of a systemic coordination between social, educational and health services designed for refugees and resulting in the compartmentalization of existing networks mirrors the neoliberal and individualistic approach of looking and solving only one refugee problem at the time. Participant Z explains clearly such 'sectorial' dynamics:

> "The networks are a resource beyond the institutions, and the associations try to lobby politically and on this there is a lot of connection […]. The weak points are that these networks are sectorial,

> they last for each single problem at the time and then we lost it as a new problem comes up […]".
> (Participant Z, Prof_Serv8.2)

The compartmentalization of partnerships and coordination among the services at the local level seems to have a negative impact on the lives of young asylum-seekers and refugees in the city of Rome and reinforces the 'neoliberal' character of integration. It seems to contribute to their, already critical, sense of confusion, uncertainty and disorientation with respect to future life plans, education and wellbeing within the Italian society. The fragmented coordination among services does not pave the way for asylum-seeking and refugee youth autonomy, as the model of social integration proposes; on the contrary it leaves them in an institutional "limbo", where they never fully understand rules and practices, and yet they are expected to follow the 'protocol'. In some cases, as Participant T and Participant O argue, the lack of partnership and communication between services can lead to aggressive behavior in young asylum-seekers and refugee that feel extremely frustrated and nervous about not understanding certain procedures of social integration:

> " […] All the services in Rome are separated from each other, I mean they do their job but in the end you don't have an overall view […]"." Communication can be very complicated between the lawyer, the social worker, but we have to understand that they have a lot of people, they have to deal with a lot of people, as there are very few specialized professionals".
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv6.2)

> "Yeah and as a result of this bad communication boys can get frustrated and angry, and they can have an aggressive reaction with the social workers or with other people living in the foster care home […]".
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv6.2)

While the Italian state formally requests young asylum seekers and refugees to 'fit' within the society through the three strategies described so far, and while the Professional participants attribute forced migrant youth's 'incapacity' to integrate to factors such as illiteracy and disability, it seems the very lack of coordination between refugee service agencies and the scarce communication among Professionals prevent processes of integration, while generating 'deviance' and marginalisation.

Looking more specifically at the kind of networks built by the Professional participants in this study, and according to the purpose of the service in which they operate, it is possible to trace their connections mainly with reception centers, legal services for presenting the asylum request, local health services and some mental health centers, training and vocational agencies and, to some extent, with the CI.PI.A for the language tuitions.

> "Yes we co-ordinate with other reception centers, […] also because they send us people [refugees and asylum seekers], and we support them [the reception centers] in some things, such as the administration […]."
> (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

> "[…] Our work here is to create a network with schools and local services, and to make sure that this network works. As for the schools, we are mainly in contact with the CTP[34] in our area, and they are really qualified, […]."
> (Participant H, Prof_Serv3.2)

> "We receive migrant children from foster care homes, or from Rome Municipality. Social workers contact us directly […]."
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv6.1)

> "We are very lucky because our service is big and we have the area of cultural mediator that is very important and works a lot also in the local health services, so we do have a lot of contacts. Throughout the years the youth center has created too many contacts with local social services, cultural services, health services and reception center […]. The positive aspect is that there are many services for asylum seeking and refugee children from the medical point of view I think that they work pretty well […]. But still we have a puzzle approach, some problems of communication."
> (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

For what concerns the networking with schools and public institutions, the data show that Professionals working in foster care homes or in reception centers for young refugees tend to establish more significant cooperation, even if this is mainly based on enrolling students to courses and professional training without establishing a relationship with teachers, and passing on crucial information on the stories of forced migrant children and youth.

> " We connect mainly with schools, especially with a comprehensive school in the area which includes early years education and secondary school, and we started language and IT courses with them […]. We also connect with another school in Aprilia, ehm thede schools send us teachers to our centre that are able to give certifications of Italian level A1 and A2 and they offer courses for the terza media so a lot of our children do the course here. […] We connect also with vocational schools in Latina and they offer us courses to become a baker, a gardener and this is very useful for the boys from Bangladesh, as they find jobs in the farm quite easily […]. I almost forgot, there was an organisation of dentist from Latina that would send doctors here to assist the children for free […] but now they stopped because there is no more money to support the project […]".
> (Participant L, Prof_Serv 7)

In addition to the superficial collaboration that foster care homes have with healthcare and mental-health services for young unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, they tend to be also detached from educational institutions, as they limit their cooperation to passing on basic information on children's stories to school personnel.

### 7.4 Distancing from Educational Institutions

A dysfunctional mechanism in the current process of 'social integration', and one that makes it even more neoliberal, is the progressive distancing of most of the refugee services considered in this research from formal and informal educational institutions. The literature shows how education, training and lifelong learning more generally can have a crucial role within the reception system and social integration for the transferability of young refugees' skills and competences (Catarci, 2011). The acquisition of social competencies, or soft skills, characterized by the capacity for social interaction, personal development, cultural understanding and the possibility for social participation, is fundamental for a successful integration of young asylum-seekers and refugees (Morrice, 2007). Moreover, it has been largely argued that education and training constitute the main tools to counter social exclusion, especially in the case of young forced migrants (Catarci, 2011; Morrice, 2007; Schwartz, 1995). Though at different levels, the Professional participants in this study showed that they were not able to maintain significant relationships with educational institutions, resulting in further confusion in the life plans of young refugees. I define 'significant relationship' as the capacity to communicate clearly among different professionals, and passing crucial information on the migration and life history of each young

refugee, for a correct interpretation of his behavior and learning style, and to avoid jumping too fast to conclusions of 'disability' and learning difficulties.

The lack of coordination between medical professionals, for example, and educational institutions maintains teachers' ignorance on trauma related to the life and journey experience of young asylum seekers and refugees, and their incapacity to give continuity to the work on –for example- PTSD symptoms. As Participant G, a medical professional, argues:

> " With the numbers of refugees that have experienced violence, we don't have the luxury of not doing [as medical organization] ad hoc interventions in schools, such as the ones you get for Italian kids. I mean, in a class with all Italian children, if one of them has a problem the teacher is able to recognize that something is wrong and so the parents go to the school they child might get into a therapy, the same attention should be given to refugee children."
>
> "[…] I'm sure you are familiar with ADHD, well dissociative behavior has some similar characteristics, from the psychodynamic point of view. For ADHD there are now specific learning models, the same should be done for children with dissociation."
> (Participant G, Prof, Serv_4)

Despite Participant G stressing the importance of a synergy between medical professionals and teachers for the elaboration of pedagogical material adapt to the learning needs of forced migrant children and youth, much work is yet to be done to facilitate such interaction among professionals working in this sector.

Participant N seems to highlight the same sense of frustration, when she affirms that they have very little coordination with all the services in Rome, and especially with the school, that merely send the children to the service with a diagnosis that should be certified. Only in very few cases, Participant N was able to spend time inside the schools where refugee children were enrolled to observe their behavior and to have constructive exchanges with the teachers:

> " […] Absence of co-ordination, so I contextualize our service so that you understand that it is not our fault but we operate in a difficult context for co-ordination. […] We don't have direct contact with teachers, I mean we receive phone calls from the school saying that there is a boy with a certain diagnosis and they send it here to confirm it or not, but we

> don't have many meetings with the teachers to explain them the exact meaning of migratory trauma, for example […]".
> (Participant N, Prof_Serv5)

The lack of coordination between various Professionals, operating in the migration sector, imposes the resilience of "standardized" test materials for the recognition of the disability, and does not allow for creative conversations on how to change such biased testing processes.

> "Last Thursday we saw, with a cultural mediator, a boy from Egypt. He is 16 years old and he came here because of a suspected dyslexia, but we don't have a specific diagnostic material ehm standardized, so we had to do an evaluation with some classic tests, the Cornoldi's[35] tests, with the help of the cultural mediator and with tests in Arabic and more or less we have confirmed the hypothesis of the previous diagnosis of dyslexia […]." (Participant N, Prof_Serv5)

Other mental health services for refugees who have been victims of extreme violence, and who play a key role in understanding the psychic issues of refugees and consequently in healing their trauma, do not seem to have a significant coordination with schools and educational institutions that most of their patients attend. The Professional participants working in these mental health units argue that they could not pass on to the school personnel any information about the stories of forced migrants for privacy reasons, but at the same time they also did not do much to help teachers recognize a behavior that could be a symptom of PTSD, for example.

> "[…] We don't have much relationship with schools, we only get children from foster care homes. We don't even follow very well their educational pathway. […] If the child starts the therapy with us, and we realize that he/she is not studying then we contact the social workers and we make some proposals […]; sometimes social workers in foster care homes have lots of children and youth and they are overwhelmed with work […] sometimes social workers say that the children don't understand them, they don't know how to manage the dialogue with these kids you know? […] You have to speak to these children, you have to be clear with them in order to avoid misunderstandings and causing anxieties in children".
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv6.2)

Another Professional participant within the same service (Service 6.2) stresses the importance of extending their knowledge, as a psychotherapist working on extreme

[35] Cornoldi C. e Colpo G. (1995), *Nuove Prove di lettura MT per la Scuola media Inferiore*, Firenze,OS e Cornoldi C. e Colpo G.(1998): *Prove di Lettura MT per la Scuola Elementare -2*, Firenze, OS. The tests are in Italian. It does not exist at present a translation in any different language.

trauma, to schoolteachers and personnel, as this kind of training would benefit teachers' perception of the learning problems that refugee children and youth can have:

> "Yes, trauma affects their achievement, […], there might have been situations in which the teachers would not understand the psychological problems of the children [….]. We don't talk to the teachers directly; we work with the children so that if they have something wrong they will be able to find their own strategy to express it. […] We are thinking of extending the training on PTSD in forced migrants beyond the social workers, and the teachers are a category that we did not think about, but you are right because teachers have a lot of contact with this kind of people. Actually, teachers don't know the difference between the kinds of migrants […]".
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv6.2)

In other instances, medical and health services have been in contact with schools in order to provide medical information to the teachers, who started the process of 'othering' refugee children due to the health-related paranoia, and the fear that forced migrant children would spread diseases:

> " […] It doesn't happen much [co-ordination with local schools], only when teachers have specific requests, like when they are scared of infectious diseases, then we do targeted interventions".
> (Participant C, Prof_Serv6.1)

The lack of a significant partnership among medical professionals, psychotherapists, neuropsychiatrists and school personnel seem to reinforce the neoliberal character of refugee integration, as it fuels the labeling business and the disabling dynamics which will be discussed in the following chapter and it reinforces a medicalized and individualized perception of disability.

### 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the sub-category of 'Promoting Neoliberal Integration' in detail. I have shown how the widely recognized model of 'social integration' of young refugees within the Italian society, based on three elements 'learning Italian', 'finding a house' and 'finding a job', is neoliberal in its very own character. I have also shown the tensions between academic definitions and characteristics of 'social integration' and its practical implementation', through the critical analysis of actions such as

compartmentalizing networks and distancing from educational institutions. As such social integration appears to be etymologically different from the notion of inclusion and inclusive practice, even if the Professional participants in this study have used these two concepts interchangeably. In response to the Professional participant confusing use of the above concepts, figure 8 provides, visually, important difference between integration and inclusion that should be kept in mind for further reflection.

In the following chapter I move to analyse critically the dynamics of disablement and 'SENitization' of asylum-seeking and refugee children, which –to some extent- can be seen as the direct product of the confusion between integration and inclusion.

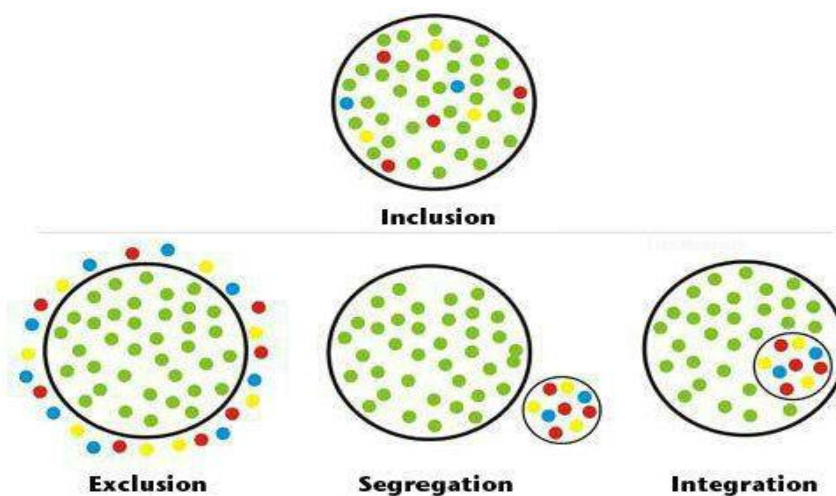


**Figure 9. Integration vs. Inclusion[36]**

[36] Taken from http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2014/01/02/inclusion-what-it-is-and-what-it-isnt/

# Chapter Eight: SENitizing and Disabling Refugee Children

> "The pattern of exclusion introduced by the eugenics movement blended beliefs regarding the genetics of disabilities with beliefs regarding the racial inferiority of non-White peoples. Using the mental testing movement as the main vehicle for applying the gospel of efficacy to education […], education became committed to the goal of sorting children."
>
> (Harry and Klingner, 2014)

## 8.1 Introduction

The sub-category of ''SENitizing and Disabling Refugee Children" incorporates a range of different procedures articulated in the Professionals' discourses, which involve positioning subjects as less 'able' or different from a pre-determined, standardized 'norm'. In this chapter, the different kinds of "SENitizing and Disabling" actions I identified in the data, as well as their apparent functions and implications, are explored. "SENitizing and Disabling" is essentially about developing systems for sorting students into relatively homogenous boxes, while marginalizing those subjects located at the interstices of multiple differences. As Harry and Klingner (2014) argue, Special Educational Needs (SEN) policies and procedures became the ploy to contain those subjects whose differences were perceived to be too extreme to serve in the mainstream. The underlining motivation for SENitizing and Disabling was to meet the challenge of an increasingly heterogeneous student and social population by institutionalizing the concept of 'individual deficit', and in so doing to reproduce learning as an individual practice, without bringing about educational change in inclusive terms. Special Education seems to be then the "institutional practice […] to contain the failure of public education to realize its democratic ideals" (Skrtic, 1991). It seems important to note the difference between processes of SENitizing and of Disabling, especially in relation to the consequences that these have on the disablement of young asylum-seeking and refugee learners. While the attribution of Special Educational Needs (SEN), which includes not only physical, behavioral, intellectual disadvantages and social and emotional issues, but also economic, social and linguistic disadvantages (see D'Alessio, 2014), affects mainly the educational life

of forced migrant children, “Disabling” - or otherwise disablement- processes have an impact also on their individual and social lives.

A significant form of “SENitizing and Disabling” of asylum-seeking and refugee children was identified in this study as labeling, through the use of standardized testing material. Here, labeling relates to (and it is a consequence of) lack of teachers’ training on forced migration and it is often perceived by professionals as a ‘normalizing’ way for forced migrant children to access quality education. Harry and Klingner (2014) affirm that labeling is the result of the “sticking power of the notion of intrinsic deficit” (p. 18). Labeling theorists (Becker, 1969; Goffman, 1963) have long point out that when an official designation becomes “reified”, it is interpreted as a definition of the person, and it overshadows, even excludes, the numerous traits, abilities, and nuances of the individual. Such labels become, as Goffman (1963) said, the “master status” by which the individual is defined, and they can be seen in the construction of various aspects of identity, including ‘race’, gender and disability. Besides the damage done to the individual by internalization of the label, there is also the possibility that the classification system can operate like a straitjacket, limiting the interpretation and insights of professionals (Harry, Klingner, 2014). These negative effects are particularly likely in the practice of the mental health professions, as we will see in this chapter, because of the overwhelming appeal of science as the basis of psychology and psychiatry, both of which have had a powerful influence on the conceptualization of special education (ibid.).

### 8.2 Medicalizing Disability

In the context of the internationally celebrated policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* (i.e. school integration), which envisaged the participation of all pupils, with or without disabilities, in the process of learning and indeed in society, disability seems to be still individualized and medicalized. The resilience of a medical language and attitude towards disability, and of the concept of normality within teaching, learning and social practices, is particularly evident in the case of forced migrant students within Italian educational and training institutions. Here they seem to be increasingly exposed to processes of ‘SENitization’ (Bocci, 2016), and have to address issue of

stigmatization of difference, not to mention the impact on teachers' and educators' expectations regarding their school performances. The educational and social experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee children within the Italian context contribute not only to demonstrate how the social construction of disability depends heavily on race, but also how teaching, learning and social practices have not been radically transformed in inclusive terms- thus reinforcing the neoliberal character of existing integration pathways.

An interesting example of the medicalization of disability, operated by the professionals in refugee services considered for this research, is the essentialist view of disability that perhaps can be best summarized by the following comment:

> "It is almost impossible to find asylum seekers children with disability in reception centers here, as you know ehm they cannot come by boat on a wheel chair."[37]

The data gathered through the Professional participants' interviews show how widespread is such view. As Oliver (1990) would argue, this essentialist approach reflects categories of disabilities based upon medical or social scientific constructions and divorced from the direct experience of disabled people. In place of these medical/psychological accounts where disability is understood as medical classification or 'functional limitation', a 'social model' of disability suggests that all disabled people experience disability as a 'social restriction', whether those restrictions occur as a consequence of inaccessible built environments, questionable notions of intelligence and social competence, the inability of the general population to use sign language, the lack of reading material in braille or hostile public attitudes to people with non-visible disabilities (Oliver, 1990). The majority of the professionals in the refugee services considered in this study did not embrace the social model of disability, and as a matter of fact, foster care homes and other educational and social services referred the 'disability cases' to specialised medical services. Participant D's argument expresses clearly such distinction between educational/social services, oriented at the promotion of social integration and healthcare services:

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[37] This was the opinion of the coordinator of Service 3 during an informal conversation in which I explained the purpose of my doctoral research, and in which I requested to interview professionals and young asylum seekers.

> "[…] We help them [refugees] to find a job or a house; we are not specialised for disability, we only have a counselling office […]. Then, clearly besides the job issue, there are a series of problems that through our counselling service we can try to understand and to work on them. If you are jobless for a long time them maybe you have an unresolved trauma that make you do silly things, you know, like not going to work for three days or arguing with the employer".
> (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

Interestingly, Participant D's account fits well the perception of disability as a functional limitation against the strict requirements of neoliberal integration (see Finkelstein, 1980). As such, young disabled asylum seekers and refugees may be unwittingly excluded by daily practices of integration-style inclusion, heavily based on mechanisms of economic production and profit. In these terms, disability – intersected with 'race' and migratory status- remains indispensable as an instrument of the state in controlling labour supply (Stone, 1985).

Participant X offers a further example of the medicalization of disability within refugee services in the city of Rome. Importantly, Participant X reinforces and reproduces a medicalised view of disability while working in a service providing support for extremely vulnerable asylum-seeking children:

> "[…] We have two issues in respect to this [disability], the first one is ethical, the second is technical. The ethical issue relates to the fact that is not correct to deal with the psychological traumas of unaccompanied asylum seeker children in a drop in service. They do not stay with us for a long time, so the kind of intervention that we do is promote resilience and not a therapeutic environment. Plus they are still sort of travelling so they are not open to talk about their issues. Very often the request for asylum comes up together with their problems, which may be post-traumatic stress disorders, learning difficulties and so on. […]"
> (Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

Participant X's account makes clear, through a social scientific justification, that an institution already managing a marginalised group of children and youth (i.e. forced migrant teens outside of the reception centres) cannot possibly take into consideration the issue of disability. A further specialised "therapeutic" institution is needed to respond to raced/disabled asylum seeking children and youth. Participant X's argument seems to support the sorting and categorising of disabled asylum-seeking

children, and consequently their marginalisation not only from the mainstream of social life, but also from the mainstream of refugee services.

When not relegated to external specialised institutions, asylum-seeking and refugee children's disability may be managed within the foster care centres hosting them, but it always appears to be confined to medical or therapeutic figures:

> "[…] Our psychologist would set up sessions once or twice per week, each of one hour, for those who have problems or sleeping and eating disorders. […] I mean you remember the boy that you interviewed […], well he has a speech-sound disorder but also he never went to school and he has emotional issues. Another example, a boy from Cote D'Ivoire, ehm he was victim of torture and his body was heavily marked and so the way he used to carry himself was highly influenced by the torture […]. A lot of asylum-seeking children, especially from Mali, have eating and sleeping disorders […]."
> (Participant H, Prof_Serv9)

Only one psychologist for the whole foster care home is in charge of dealing with the trauma or mental issues of asylum-seeking teens, and with a limited weekly schedule. Despite the fact that Participant H, during the course of the interview, argued in favour of the social model of disability, recognized migration as the first trauma of asylum-seeking children, and highlight the active contribution of non-medical figures, such as educators and social workers, he did not state clearly how the latter operate, or what their view on disability might be.

The referral of forced migrant children and teens' disability to local specialised medical institutions in Rome generates a great deal of ignorance among the Professionals on young asylum-seeking and refugees' social restrictions. This ignorance can be detrimental for children's motivation in enjoying daily activities and practices that the Italian state expects them to do, and can have negative consequences on the interpersonal relations that the children and youth establish:

> "So I'm thinking, there is a boy that is here with the family and he goes to secondary school. He is deaf but he never said something to us, nobody told us, but he always comes with the auditory apparatus. […] He came to our service to attend Italian classes; he is a very sweet boy. This is a situation actually in which we did not investigate much, ehm but I think he continues to have auditory issues. I don't think it's just the problem of not knowing Italian, ehm even when he speaks with other fellows of his community he has difficulties. He writes and read perfectly and he has problems only in speaking and listening. […] It [the auditory apparatus]

> had it on both sides, and it is not a matter of unwillingness of learning Italian, I think he has this auditory problem. We should have investigated further, ehm for example on the school that he attends, to know which approach they use with him." (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

The boy's deafness is completely ignored by the teachers and educators in service 8.1, which provides mainly cultural and educational support to young migrants and forced migrants, even if his disability is clearly affecting his proficiency in the Italian language, and his schooling experience. What it is interesting is that the Professionals did not show support of any sort to help him to make his school experience – also beyond the educational service- as a positive one. Participant V actually recognized the *laisse faire* approach the professionals working with her in the service had with this boy only when she was prompted to answer my questions on disability. Participant O and Participant T highlight how the ignorance of non-medical professionals about issues related to forced migrant children's disability may result in complicated and conflicting relationships:

> "[…] Sometimes social workers say that the children don't understand them ehm they don't know how to manage the dialogue with these kids you know? […] You have to speak to these children, you have to be clear with them in order to avoid misunderstandings and causing anxieties in children".
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv6.2)

> " I think it's a matter of training, and knowledge of children's problem, but also the level of stress influence the attitude of social workers. […] Some of them are overwhelmed with work and they go in burn out. Because they [social workers] live there with the children basically, so they see them always and they have to have different roles in just a day […]."
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv6.2)

A social model of disability should be extended beyond the individual professionalism, and the specialist training of professionals in relation to various disabilities, precisely because educators, teachers and social workers spend a significant amount of time, and in some cases they live with young asylum seekers and refugees.

It is perhaps in the healthcare services available to migrants and forced migrants, where doctors have the powerful role of allocating and sorting subjects in the 'need-

based' system, that disability is seen even more as a clinical concept. Participant G, the manager of a former health centre for the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has spent a great deal of the interview to explain the medical practices and interventions to recognize and control PTSD symptoms in asylum-seeking and refugee youth:

> "The majority of refugee children and youth […] manifested explosive signs, that in psychiatry are called positive signs, ehm positive in the sense that they are manifested, but then you also have signs that are called negative, that you can't see, they are not manifested, nonetheless they are not less intense or problematic, and most of the time people having negative signs suffers in silence. […] And so the way in which the alert system by the majority of refugee organisations works is based only on positive signs, that are quite peculiar of the PTSD […]".
> (Participant G, Prof_ Serv4)

Particular attention is given to the 'deviant' behaviour that, according to Participant G, characterises young refugees with PTSD traits:

> "The most common symptoms that we found in young refugees are those that characterise the hyperarousal syndrome […]. People suffering from hyper arousal are in constant state of tension, are always on the point of exploding, they feel threaten, and as a consequence, they get defensive. It was very frequent among the young refugees that we saw in our centre. Outburst of anger is very common, and so is self-harm, but not for all. For example, self-harm is not common among refugees from Africa, is much more common among the Asians, the Afghans. Self- harm happens when they are in a status of dissociation, also known as somatic dissociation. […] Other behaviours are that, for example, the children talk to themselves, they might sleep under the bed, they might not talk to anyone for a long time, and so on […]"
> (Participant G, Prof_ Serv4)

Participant G's argument recalls an essentialist view of disability and of culture, as he associates different manifestation of trauma and suffering to particular race and refugee groups. The description of trauma and its effect on the subject in culturally essential ways is common for the medical professionals in health services for refugees, and it results in the formulation of discriminatory discourses, as we will see in more details in chapter nine.

In addition, Participant G emphasizes the importance of identifying and curing the disability, or mental health issue, in time to avoid refugees' marginalisation from society:

> "The lack of it [early identification of PTSD complex] has devastating consequences at individual and social levels, I mean there is the individual suffering, young refugees cannot participate socially and they have a discontinuous life, and the collective suffering, a sort of suffering for our society, for our welfare, I mean the number of refugees with PTSD complex increases and if they are not treated properly they become a problem of the national health system for the reception centres, they cannot leave the centres and so on […]".
> (Participant G, Prof_Serv4)

Identifying, sorting, curing and controlling the deviant behaviour underpins the idea of refugees' neoliberal integration as 'success'. As such, young asylum seekers and refugees are constituted along axes of ability, effort, conduct – axes that themselves interact with biographical identities through discourses of race, religion, disability, migratory status, gender, special educational needs and so on (Youdell, 2006). Privileged biographical identities are recuperated and deployed within organisational discourse to constitute the 'bad asylum seeker' or the 'unacceptable asylum seeker' (ibid.).

Despite the widespread consideration of disability in a medicalised and culturally essential way within the context of refugee agencies in Rome – characterised by the paucity of mental health services for forced migrants, both adults and children-, much more awareness is needed about the usefulness of an adequate and capillary medical and psychological support for PTSD among forced migrants, especially if young children. As a matter of fact, there is only one centre in the whole city of Rome that is specialised in such kind of support for the migrants, and for this reason access to it might be a lengthy process.

## 8.3 Labelling for Quality Education or for Educational Homogeneity?

Alongside the medicalization of disability, a further procedure legitimating and reinforcing young asylum seeker and refugees' 'SENitizing' and Disabling is that of labelling. As data gathered through interviews with Professionals suggests, labelling young forced migrants as having –mainly- Special Educational Needs (SEN) can be attributed to lack of teachers' training and knowledge about refugees' stories and traumatic experiences, and their tendency to refer such students to psychologists and neuropsychiatrists, using 'standardized' materials in the certification of disabilities. The overrepresentation of young asylum-seeking and refugee children in Special Education is a new phenomenon, which follows the recent introduction of SEN policies by the Italian Ministry of Public Education (MIUR), forty years after the passing of the internationally celebrated policy of *Integrazione Scolastica*. As we have seen, this policy already envisaged the participation of all pupils, with or without disabilities, in the process of learning. However, SEN policies have been officially introduced in the Italian context to bring justice and equity for all those learners experiencing school failure and that could not be provided with educational support and provision, in the hope to achieve inclusive education.

Inclusion and inclusive education in relation to students, and especially young asylum-seeking and refugee students, identified as having special educational needs are by no means straightforward concepts. The literature shows a transformatory agenda of activists and educators (Allen, 2002; Armstrong, 2003; Barton, 2001) and the recuperation into and repackaging of inclusion and inclusive education in policy and professionals' discourse concerned with drawing the 'socially excluded' into particular (normative) forms of economic, political and social participation/ production (Armstrong, 2003). As this research also shows (particularly in the analysis of neoliberal integration presented in chapter seven), notions of inclusion and inclusive education have been absorbed into the lexicon of mainstream/generalist education where these have been incorporated into the language of SEN and used interchangeably with, or instead of, the much the notion of integration (Armstrong, 2003). The extent of this integration-style inclusion of young asylum seekers and refugees is in practice often constrained by the everyday institutional processes of

mainstream schools that, in the absence of a transformatory effort, inevitably exclude supposedly included students (see Beratan, 2008b).

The contrapuntal logics of SEN policies in the Italian context, which tend to focus on the individual 'deficit' rather than rendering the educational system –its context and methods- inclusive, are particularly evident in the discourses of Professional participants in refugee services, considered in the present study. Firstly, the majority of Professional participants show a significant inclination to "the culture of referral" (Harry, 2014, p. 103), which can be defined as the attitude toward and beliefs about children who were not doing well in the general education or social programs, as well as beliefs about special education:

> "[…] Then I make an assessment and I refer him to a proper mental health institution and government shelter […]."
> (Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

> "The majority of refugee children and youth that we used to get in the centre were those referred to us by different refugee organizations and institutions that manifested explosive signs, that in psychiatry are called positive signs, positive in the sense that they are manifested […]."
> (Participant G, Prof_Serv4)

> "I'm thinking of the boy from Cameroon […]; he was here with us, he had some psychological issues, I think depression. After he left our organisation he was referred to the ASL[38] then to a psychiatric centre, I dunno what was the diagnosis but then they put him in a foster-care specialised for mental diseases".
> (Participant F, Prof_Serv3.1)

> "We receive migrant children from foster care homes, or from Rome Municipality. Social workers contact us directly […]."
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv6.2)

Participant N, a paediatric neuropsychiatrist working in a hospital specialised for the migrant population in Rome, offers a rich and detailed account on the referral, and how the schoolteachers or the educators are normally initiators of such process. She also mentions her personal activities in the schools that have referred the children, and her relationship with the family (when present) of the children:

[38] The local health service.

> "My work deals with behavioural problems, learning difficulties and development issues, so speech problems, psychomotor impairment and so on for children and for teenagers and also for unaccompanied and refugee minors […]. There was a forced migrant girl in the first year of Middle school that had socialisation issues and learning difficulties. In the beginning she was sent here by the school because of her learning difficulties […] so I met the teachers, the social worker, because her family lives in a occupied building, and after these meetings I met the family with the cultural mediator […]. During the first meeting with the family only the dad wanted to be present, but then thanks to the work of the cultural mediator we managed to engage her mam too, and we started working on family roles, and at school we encourage the girl to play with groups of Italian children, and we manage to offer her homework support […]. We also work to create a better atmosphere in the classroom, distributing the "Carte del Viandante" with children's drawings related to the migration experience to also understand the girl's expectations from her schooling experience […]".
> (Participant N, Prof_Serv5)

Participant N discourse seems to reinforce the widespread perception of the neuropsychiatric and psychological assessment as the "idealised rock" of special education, the point at which hard science determines whether a disability is present (Harry and Klingner, 2014, p.111). It also shows how traditional psychology is a "soft" science, in that when a referral actually get considered – as in the case of the forced migrant girl above- there seems to be "soft places" that inform, influence and at times distorted the outcomes of conferences on special education eligibility and placement: school personnel's impressions of the family, a focus on intrinsic deficit rather than classroom ecology, teachers' informal diagnosis, dilemmas of the disability definitions and criteria, and philosophical positions (Harry and Klingner, 2014, p. 111).

Between the lines of Participant N's discourse it is possible to see the power of school personnel's explicit belief that 'dysfunctional' families (e.g. a patriarchal forced migrant Muslim family living in a squat in central Rome) are the direct cause of children's school difficulties. Such power seems to have also affected referral, assessment and placement outcomes of the forced migrant girl. While Participant N, as the neuropsychiatrist, was accorded the greatest status in placement deliberation, it looks as if teachers' judgement is a significant and influential factor in assessment outcomes. As it is possible to see in Participant N accounts, the two patterns above seem to converge, in that although the neuropsychiatrist's judgement is almost always

definitive, there is a considerable team pressure on psychologists to meet their colleagues' expectations (see Harry and Klingner, 2014). Finally, Participant N's therapeutic philosophy appears to be based on the ecological approach to the girl's learning difficulty, and sustained by a strong motivation to dismantle the "labelling business". However, Participant N confirmed the diagnosis of learning disability, and she seemed to have adopted various strategies, both inside and outside the school context, in the attempt to "protect" the 'vulnerable' girl from falling through the cracks of the educational system (see Harry and Klingner, 2014).

Importantly, Participant N's ecological view and anti-labelling attitude appears rather different when describing the case of an unaccompanied asylum-seeking boy from Egypt, sent to the hospital unit by the schoolteachers, who have informally diagnosed him with dyslexia:

> "Last Thursday we saw, with a cultural mediator, a boy from Egypt. He is 16 years old and he came here because of a suspected dyslexia but we don't have a specific diagnostic material standardized, so we had to do an evaluation with some classic tests, the Cornoldi's[39] tests, with the help of the cultural mediator and with tests in Arabic and more or less we have confirmed the hypothesis of the previous diagnosis of dyslexia within a situation in which the boy never went to school nor his parents, so it is hard to establish if the disorder is caused by environmental or structural factors […]. This evaluation is anyway useful because it gives the boy, his family and his teachers at school a strategy and an indication to develop a individualized education program, to prepare him for a certain autonomy […]".
> (Participant N, Prof_Serv5)

Participant N's discourse in the above passage highlights the interworking of some identity markers (i.e. gender, age, race, disability, migratory status) and their impact on the SEN assessment and placement; shows the "fine line" between intrinsic and environmentally induced deficits; reveals the contradictory philosophical orientation of the neuropsychiatrist; sheds light on the attitude of labelling forced migrant children as a way to guarantee them the same quality education as Italian students; and most importantly shows the arbitrariness of the certification process.

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[39] Cornoldi C. e Colpo G. (1995), *Nuove Prove di lettura MT per la Scuola media Inferiore*, Firenze,OS e Cornoldi C. e Colpo G.(1998): *Prove di Lettura MT per la Scuola Elementare -2*, Firenze, OS. This material is in Italian, there are no versions translated into other languages.

The assessment and SEN placement of the Egyptian boy was certainly influenced by the fact that he is a boy, a teen, an Arab, a forced migrant and coming from a family history of poor schooling background – all elements that render him as a potentially difficult subject to 'fit' in mainstream educational settings. Alternative forms of educational support and socialisation, adopted by Participant N for the previous girl, seem to have been dismissed *a priori* in the case of the Egyptian boy in virtue of the immediate assignment of a label. The intersectionality of his identity markers have rendered him not only a 'bad student' but also an 'impossible learner' (see Youdell, 2006).

Although Participant N was initially uncertain about the intrinsic versus environmentally induced deficit, reflected in her statement that,

> "[…] We try to look at whatever is around the child, and we consider the child is the result of different components individual, relational, this was revolutionary […]"

she eventually contradicts her very own anti-labelling and anti-stigmatizing attitude, when assessing the dyslexia with standardised texts in Italian, with a quick and superficial translation of the Arabic cultural mediator. Participant N formally complains about the limitation of standardized Italian tests, as many psychologists do in other socio-cultural contexts (see Harry and Klingner, 2014), but her preference for the Cornoldi's tests seemed – rather hypocritically I would add - to be intertwined with her views of the relationship between testing contexts and children's cultural and linguistic experiences.

Participant N seems to pay merely "lip service" to the 'good theoretical models', underpinning the anti-segregation policy of *Integrazione Scolastica*, that she had described in the interview, by confirming the teachers' initial diagnosis of dyslexia. The arbitrariness of assigning to the Egyptian boy a categorical disability was motivated by the pressure of "becoming autonomous" imposed by the current neoliberal model of integration, and by a significant concern for the boy to 'fit' the educational homogeneity of the school system.

A further example that shows Professionals' belief in Special Education labelling as a way for "saving" young asylum-seekers and refugees and for guaranteeing them with access to quality education – but indeed masking a scope for educational homogeneity- is offered by Participant Z a teacher and an educator operating a youth recreational service open to all children and young people in central Rome:

> " […] I can tell you my experience in school and here, my experience in the school where I work, a vocational training school that prepares young people to become factory workers, inside my school that are a lot of foreign students, both migrants and asylum seekers, […] I mean in my school we train factory workers and thanks to the learning disabilities we managed to provide for them appropriate education […]."
> (Participant Z, Prof_Serv8.2)

Thus, a widespread belief among Professional participants in this study seem to be that labelling young asylum-seekers and refugees as having Special Educational Needs, and the consequent individualisation of learning, would improve the child's rate of progress, enable him to access a good quality of education and finally being transformed into a more acceptable learner.

### 8.4 "Playing the Disability Card": Rendering Dis/abled Asylum Seekers less 'Authentic'

In the context of an increasingly diffused model of neoliberal integration of migrants and forced migrants, which has had a significant impact on reforms in education and society, and of an "on-going emergency" of young asylum seekers in the Italian context – accompanied by a significant reduction of funding for the reception of asylum-seeking and refugee children-, disability is seen by some of the professionals in this study as a convenient means for obtaining welfare benefits. While most of the professional participants considered SENitizing and Disabling forced migrant children as a procedure to essentially maintain educational homogeneity without transforming the school curriculum in inclusive terms, Participant A, Participant F and Participant G discredited children's disability – especially those that are 'less evident' and related to the sphere of mental health. In so doing they rendered disabled young asylum seekers and refugees as 'less authentic' than their forced migrant peers. Particularly Participant A expresses such a controversial interpretation of young asylum-seekers'

disability when referring to a young Black boy and asylum seeker diagnosed with depression, named here Deion. The boy's behaviour was seen as 'problematic', and according to Participant A he –as many others do- was "playing the disability card" to obtain a place to sleep and welfare benefits, given the 'suspiciously' long course of his depression and the apparent invisibility of the disability:

> "I'm thinking of the boy from Cameroon […]; he was here with us, he had some psychological issues, I think depression. After he left our organisation he was to the ASL[40] then to a psychiatric centre, I dunno what was the diagnosis but then they put him in a foster-care specialised for mental diseases. He told us that they gave him a pharmacological therapy and now he's better. When he left us it was a trauma for him, because of his depression; while he was here he was fine, we had created a welcoming environment, but he couldn't manage to be sent away from here. […] Now we think he's much better. We normally keep a close relationship with the teenagers that leave our organisation, a lot of time they come to visit us […]".
>
> "In that case [the case of the boy from Cameroon], the problem was less visible and the symptoms of the depression came out at a later stage. During the school he was perceived as distracted and unmotivated, always sitting at the back of the classroom with his hat and headphones, listening to music. This, we think, was caused by the bad reception he had before coming to our organisation. When I used to go to talk to the teachers at the school, the depression issue would not come out. Ehm, I have my theory, you know, maybe it's just my paranoia but I think that this boy lived a very bad reception in the first place and so he would see leaving the shelter as something very bad that would lead him to psychological problems. […] And so this [the depression] might have become a way to obtain or negotiate or deal with the social worker a place to sleep".
>
> "The disability was a card to play to obtain welfare benefits, because neither him or his sister knew where to go to sleep […]. The disability has become a means to obtain benefits; I mean I'm sure that there are children that they really need support, but there are others that are yeah a bit sneaky".
> (Participant A, Prof_Serv3.1)

As reported by Participant A, none of the professionals working in the services where Deion was hosted was able to identify clearly the origin of the depression and to actually create a supportive network to prepare him for the difficult transition into adulthood and into a new reception centre. Therefore, the presumably good networking with other local services, promoted by current models of social integration, does not seem to be applied in practice, and especially when there are cases of disability. Participant A argues that the intervention to deal with Deion's depression was limited to the period in which he was hosted in the semi-autonomous

[40] The local health service.

foster care home. Although Participant A reported that the boy was feeling better during the time in the foster care home, no mention was made about the kind of actions that the team of professionals would implement to handle the depression. Importantly, Deion was attending a local mainstream middle school, but none of the school personnel was raising the problem of the depression or was motivated to further investigate his behaviour and find a suitable solution. In Participant A's account, the teachers reported Deion's behaviour as being lazy, distracted and "always sitting at the back of the classroom". Their reaction to the boy's attitude seems to fit within the argument of Gillborn *et al* (2016) argument, which highlights the contested nature of disability and racism in education where Black students find themselves denied access to reasonable accommodations for impairments. Thus, in this case it seems that in addition to giving labels, racism can withhold them.

Deion's lack of social, cultural and economic capitals (see Harry and Klingner, 2014; Gillborn *et al*, 2016), and the general improvisation-style reception of forced migrants in Italy, has lead him into a pharmacological treatment to 'normalize' his behaviour. While rendering his disability a convenient tool for welfare benefits, the White Italian professionals have displayed their technology of subjection, and consequently subjectified him as a 'potential' deviant. In such a schizophrenic neoliberal context, the use of pharmacological therapy still remains the only solution to make a depressed asylum-seeking Black boy less 'dangerous' for the Italian society. Thus, by being perceived as 'sneaky', Deion is rendered outside the educational endeavour and the idealistic model of the citizen, ready for the job market competition and for being part of a healthy and strong population (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2013).

### 8.5 Constructing Illiteracy as a Learning Disability

The literature shows how difficult it can be to differentiate between normal second language acquisition and learning disability (Gonzales, Brusca-Vega, Yawkey, 1997; Ortiz, 1997). This distinction is particularly problematic for asylum-seeking and refugee children, who might not be strong in either their native language or Italian. Professional participants in this study reported that a high number of unaccompanied

asylum-seeking and refugee children in Rome's foster care homes and reception centres have had a disrupted schooling in their country of origin:

> "[…] Lately we have realised that most of the children arriving to Italy are illiterate, or they just speak their local dialects […]. So we have a very serious language issue, which has gone worse these days. "
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv 6.2)

> "[…] I have to admit that the kind of French changes in accordance to the type of education they had. A French spoken in the street is different from the standard French, so sometimes I really have to interpret what they are saying, I have to guess what they are saying. Instead a person that has studied knows French better […]."
> (Participant CM1, Prof_Serv 6.2)

The current situation of Italian schools and educational institutions, increasingly affected on the one hand by neoliberal reforms (e.g. focusing on standardised high-stake tests, and school accountability), and on the other by the significant lack of economic resources and pre-service and in-service teacher training, seems to generate school staff confusion and ignorance about forced migrant children's stories and educational backgrounds. As a result, most of the teachers and educators in public institutions tend to construct refugee children's illiteracy as a learning disability, which appears as the easiest solution to get extra classroom support while leaving the curriculum untouched. Interestingly, most of the Professional participants in this study attribute this disabling process to schoolteachers and personnel:

> " […] There are schools that have projects and experimental programs for refugee children. Ehm but obviously there are some difficulties, because teachers are not trained you know I think that if you go to interview the teachers there, they might say, we don't have any money here!"
> (Participant D, Prof_Serv1)

> "I mean, in a class with all Italian children, if one of them has a problem the teacher is able to recognize that something is wrong and so the parents go to the school they child might get into a therapy, but I don't think the teacher can give the same attention to refugee children, the teacher don't know about their trauma, the fact that they might not been to school and so they start saying that a refugee child might have learning disability […]."
> (Participant G, Prof_Serv 4)

> " […] It's true that sometimes teachers say they [asylum seeking children] have dyslexia or learning difficulties when they are simply illiterate, so instead of solving the illiteracy issue, teachers attribute 'labels' that have a certain influence in forced migrants' lives […]."

> (Participant O, Prof_Serv 6.2)

> "I'm very upset about it [constructing illiteracy as learning disability]. I find it very superficial, incoherent and not honest at all. They do it I mean even the psychologists do it, really […]. I mean the fact that we have the Integrazione Scolastica the de-segregating law this is just on paper. I am also very shocked that the normal classes still go on with only the teacher speaking and the pupils are obliged to listen, there is no discussion […]. […] Frankly, I believe that the Italian teachers they cannot make it I mean they have to get more tools to deal with these issues […]".
> (Participant L, Prof_Serv 7)

> "[…] There are many children that are illiterate in their own language and this requires a great commitment for the teacher. It is often a challenge to teach them for mainstream teachers, as they do very slow progress, and also most of the Italian teachers they do not know how to tackle illiteracy, and even contemporary teaching style have been challenged and so the EU has tried to develop new methods […]. We also had to get organised to teach this target of children, as they do very slow progress […]".
> (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

The above professionals' accounts reveal how in constructing asylum-seeking and refugee children learning disability teachers miss critical factors such as consideration of the students' native language, the effects of the traumatic journey they have experienced on their learning, and the number of years in formal schooling in their country of origin. Interestingly, Participant L gives a more critical view on the construction of learning disabilities, and she emphasizes how the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* fails asylum-seeking and refugee children, actually contributing to forms of micro-exclusions in mainstream educational settings (see D'Alessio, 2011).

Despite the stigmatization of schoolteachers as being confused and discriminatory against forced migrant children, it should be noticed that the majority of the Professional participants interviewed did not cooperate with schools, and thus they did not help the school personnel to get insights on the stories and life histories of refugee children. Only some of the professionals got in touch with educational institutions, but not all:

> "Yes, we are very aware that trauma affects their achievement, but their [the refugee children's] relations with teachers is always been positive […]. There might have been situations in which the teachers would not understand the psychological problems of the children [….]. We don't talk

> to the teachers directly, we work with the children so that if they have something wrong they will be able to find their own strategy to express it".
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv 6.2)

Like Participant T, many others in this study decided not to share their work and knowledge on forced migration with school personnel, despite the current model of social integration emphasizes the cooperation between educational and reception services.

However, when prompted to reflect on the importance to train teachers on forced migration, in order for them to offer a better and a less discriminatory service to the educational and social community, there was a general agreement:

> "[…] We are thinking of extending the training on PTSD in forced migrants beyond the social workers, and the teachers are a category that we did not think about, but you are right because teachers have a lot of contact with this kind of people. Actually, teachers don't know the difference between the kinds of migrants […]".
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv 6.2)

> "[…] What I believe though is that being migration an increasing phenomenon, teachers in special schools and in normal schools should be trained more on migration issues, cultural differences and on the problems that forced migrant children may encounter […]".
> (Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv6.2)

As we have seen for other forms of labelling, even in the case of learning disabilities teachers' informal diagnosis were made arbitrarily and had a considerable effect on forced migrant children and teens.

## 8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined in some details the various "SENitizing' and Disabling" procedures operated by Professionals participants in the study. I highlighted how the main motivation for SENitinzing and Disabling of forced migrant children in Rome was to meet the challenge of an increasingly heterogeneous student population. At the same time, such procedures have their opposite in the professionals' use of discourses of authenticity to dismiss young asylum seekers' disability (see Bradbury, 2013). I have shown that labelling asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth as

having Special Educational Needs and that disablement processes by White Italian professionals have significant consequences on the educational, social and personal lives of forced migrant children and youth. Labelling through the use of standardized material in Italian can be seen as the result of school personnel's training and knowledge on forced migration issues, and it has been considered the only possible solution for refugee children and youth to access quality education, as the Italian citizens. At times of economic restrictions and neoliberal reforms of society, inevitably affecting the process of refugee integration, disability can also be seen as a way to obtain welfare benefits from the Italian state, and therefore considered as inauthentic in the case of forced migrants. I have also attempted to show how disability cannot be perceived merely in medical terms, or as the product of forced migration; indeed disability should be understood as a social construction that has profound psychological effects and significance in people's lives. The next chapter will focus on the (often unconscious) discriminatory discourses of Professional participants.

# Chapter Nine: Discriminating Discourses

> "Black people are the magical faces at the bottom of society's well. Even the poorest whites, those who must live their lives only a few levels above, gain their self-esteem by gazing down on us. Surely, they must know that their deliverance depends on letting down their ropes. Over time, many reach out, but most simply watch, mesmerized into maintaining their unspoken commitment to keeping us where we are, at whatever cost to them or to us."
>
> (Bell, 1992)

## 9.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the sub-category of 'Discriminating Discourses'. Discriminatory discourses, articulated by Professional participants in this study, function as a legitimization of SENitizing and Disabling processes of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth. The focus on professionals' discourses is justified by the need to more accurately capture ways that the ideology of refusing to acknowledge 'race', racism and ableism – as normalising and interdependent processes that maintain and reproduce White supremacy - functions in the Italian society. Particular attention is given also to the voices of children seeking asylum, exploring their own views of discrimination in the context of the city of Rome. By putting together the accounts of White Italian professionals and that of Black 'Sub-Saharan' asylum-seeking and refugee children, I hope that this chapter emphasizes the tensions and the controversial power dynamics between the new colonizer (i.e. institutions and refugee agencies) and the new colonized (i.e. forced migrants). Professional participants' "discriminating discourses" seem to reflect a colour-blind, also recently conceptualized as "colour-evasiveness" by Annamma *et al.* (2016), racial ideology that had seeped into various institutions in the Italian society, and importantly into education policies and practices.

A central aspect of 'Discriminating Discourses' is *fear*, instilled by the élite discourse of the media on migration influx and fuelled by the widespread ignorance on the forced migration phenomena, both of the general public and of the majority of

professionals prior to be appointed in their roles within refugee agencies. *Fear* constitutes the starting point of hegemonic processes of SENitizing and Disabling, through which young asylum seeking and refugees are transformed from potential '*terrorists'* to actual *human beings*. Other hegemonic, indeed neo-colonial or *Orientalistic* -borrowing from Said (2003)- processes of 'Othering' entail the "exoticisation" of young asylum seekers' disabilities and the construction of their illiteracy as a learning disability, when confronted with the supposed 'superiority' of Italian/European education. This seems to demonstrate that bodies that do not fit into a norm are identified as problems, and once branded, the differences are viewed as deficits and marked as abnormal. Once a person is labelled with differences or disabilities, there is justification for segregation in the name of remediation (Annamma *et al*, 2016).

### 9.2 Fear, Color-blindness and "Racism without Race" Italian-Style

What has been elsewhere identified as the invisibility of White privilege, in the Italian context it seems to be accompanied by the concealment of racism and, of course, 'race'. The failure of much of the Italian academic research to analyse and deconstruct the genealogy, pervasiveness and the use of "race figures" – to be intended as the imaginary representations of the colonial 'Other'-, blocked the collective and individual examination of race relations and indeed the relation with Blackness, since the end of World War II (Giuliani, 2015). Concealment processes of 'race' and "race figures" can be interpreted as the product of the rejection of fascist language, triggered by the new antifascist hegemony that had labelled it as "obscene", particularly in relation to the colonial empire, the nation and the 'race', while translating such inheritance in 'acceptable' discourses in the context of post-fascist Italy (ibid.). The refusal of the semantics of the latest fascism (related to the marriage between the regime and Arianism and to the racial laws, culminated in the 1939 *Manifesto della Razza* – the 'race' manifesto-), argues Giuliani (2015), has led to a dissimulation trend both in the colloquial and the scientific language, without a real process of investigation and deconstruction of "race figures" that until then were concentrated in the idea of nation and national sentiment.

If the genealogy of "race figures" is subjected to concealment, Whiteness is the invisible aspect: its neutrality indicates the willingness to render invisible not only the legacies of a self-description as White, which has structured the nation's constitution process since the liberal era, but also the result in terms of privileges that such description translates (Giuliani, 2015). The invisibility of Whiteness, and the concealment of 'race', then produce not only a single state of 'exclusion', but a set of prismatic positions of greater/lesser proximity to the hegemonic condition: 'Othered' and racialized subjects are not simply excluded from White privilege, but the tensions that define their citizenship status are located between lines of internal exclusion, differential inclusion, segregation and their eventual promotion within the social and racial hierarchies (Giuliani, 2015). The ghettoization of young and adult asylum seekers, refugees and migrants into reception centres in the suburbs of big Italian cities, and their consequent social and educational discrimination, offer an interesting example of such exclusionary dynamics. Furthermore, the limit of "differential inclusion" is set on the Italian coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, as we can see from the institutional practices that disciplines the reception of migrants in Lampedusa (ibid. p. 7). On the migrants and refugees' bodies in Lampedusa, and more generally within the Italian territory, a "line of color" is traced and this defines the phenotypic absorbability (or not) of specific race figures within the nation's colour (Cuttitta, 2012).

Apparently, the invisibility of Whiteness, 'race' and racism in the Italian context leads to a –seemingly appropriate- colour-blind racial ideology, conceptualized as "race is irrelevant" or "race does not exist"[41], and therefore it should be disregarded. This colour-blind racial ideology can be considered as the product of the Italian controversial history of colonialism, fascism, and the country's political and military role during World War II. Despite the post-WWII scholarly attempts to argue that "race does not exist", and as the pioneering studies on Italian colonialism by Angelo del Boca (1976-1984; 1986-1988), and the collective work of young researchers in Bologna resulting in the editorial project *La Menzogna della Razza* (1994) demonstrate, 'race' never disappears from the Italian history. Intended as material discrimination or discourse, 'race' manifests itself in a violent way as phenotypically

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[41] See Camilla Hawthorne and Pina Piccolo (2016), http://africasacountry.com/2016/09/anti-racism-without-race-in-italy/

inscribed in the faces of migrants from Southern Italy, or in the skin of the *mulatto* children, born through sexual relations between Italian women and African-American soldiers during their mission to free Italy from fascist domination (Giuliani, 2015). The contemporary legacy of such neglected history of 'race' is visible in the interpretation that recognizing 'race' is problematic, and therefore the solution is to discount it.

Professional participants' discourses in this study are located in such background. They encapsulate a color-blind racial ideology, with the purpose of reproducing Whiteness as at once normative and invisible (Leonardo, 2012), as well as being characterised by pervasive anti-Islamic discourses 'post 9/11' (Lipman, 2004):

> "Ehm I didn't have lots of information [on migration] because I was never really interested in national and international politics, so I had very vague information. I was *reluctant*, *I mean I was really scared in the beginning for the people coming from the Middle East*, and so Afghans and Iraqis, *because they have a very specific attitude, ehm they are closed ehm they keep a distance*, and also I was scared because the 9/11 events were so close when I started to work in the service, and I was very influenced by that […]. Then during my work, I got to know better the African population, that constitutes the majority in our service, and generally speaking with them I feel very well. *I never had prejudices towards people who are different* and that's why I was facilitated in approaching them […]".
> (Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv 6.2) [Emphasis added]

The 'fear' of refugees from the "Middle East" recalls the idea of the *risky bodies* whose presence on the national territory must be controlled, and if possible, prevented (Giuliani, 2015). Participant Ps2 'fear', reverberating on the personal and professional spheres, also seems to fit well within the rhetoric of risk and economic crisis, which is rather common among the professionals in this study, and the Italian population more generally. Such widespread consensus on 'risk' and 'crisis' rearticulates the Italian national identity, the European collective identity, the relationship between the State and the 'bodies', and finally the privileges that accessing Whiteness guarantees, both at the national and global levels (Amoore, 2008).

By describing two groups of refugees (i.e. those from the "Middle East" and those from Africa) in an essentialist way, Participant Ps2 not only traces a colour and a

racial line that –interestingly- locates sub-Saharan refugees as more 'absorbable' within the Italian therapeutic and social contexts, compared to the ones from the "Middle East", but also she medicalizes refugees' trauma to the point of attributing an individual 'deficit' to the Afghanis and Iraqis. The last sentence of Participant Ps2's account shows how her 'fear' of refugees from the "Middle East" coexists, and to some extents legitimates, the ideology of "racism without race", which I define here as colour-blind Italian-style. It is exactly this 'fear' that follows the quest to do away with the term 'race', which becomes substituted with terms such as 'difference' or 'alterity', disregarding that both posit a normative state of being against which "the Other" or "the different" stands out[42].

A commitment to colour-blindness swept through Italy, and colour-blind rhetoric was taken up heartily in the field of education as evidenced by several education policies and practices that utilize colour-blind language (MIUR, 2007; 2014). Educators have grown to embrace colour-blind ideology as demonstrated by the amount of colour-blind approaches to educational research, policy analysis and teachers' education discourses (Catarci and Fiorucci, 2015). A commitment to colour-blind racial ideologies in Italian education conflated acknowledging 'race' with being racist, and therefore the implications for educators have been to refuse to recognize 'race' is to be morally superior. As a result, the White Italian professionals in this research seem to hide behind the façade of colour-blind discourses:

> "[…] You could see it [good level of integration] when you hear children saying oh you know I have a new Chinese classmate and his name is Giovanni. And you think like, Giovanni? *I don't think there is this difference that we talking about*."
> (Participant D, Prof_Serv1) [emphasis added]

> "[…] I find it difficult to answer to this question. I feel like I cannot answer because living with them in the centre I do not feel racism or discrimination. From what I hear from them, *Italy is a nice place, it's not racist*, except some cases. They say that *Italians are good people and very welcoming* […]".
> (Participant L, Prof_Serv7) [emphasis added]

> "[…] Here in the service we had young boys, asylum seekers, that have PTSD symptoms and we helped them to find the right kind of support, […]

[42] See note 1.

> we tend to consider all of them as *human beings, you know, we don't see the differences* […]".
> (Participant Z, Prof_Serv 8.2) [emphasis added]

> "Well, as I was saying before, I knew very little about immigration, *so what has changed is the way in which I consider them* [the forced migrants] *now, ehm I see them as human beings you know? Ehm I don't see them as different* […]".
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv 6.2) [emphasis added]

It is clear that the Professional participants do not see, or are not willing to see, the operations of race, racism and Whiteness, or as Bergerson (2003) summarizes:

> The underlying problem is that whites do not want to consider race and racism as everyday realities, because doing so requires them to face their own racist behaviors (sic) as well as the privileges that come from being white. (p. 53)

These discourses seem to fit also Leonardo's (2012) argument that for most people the best way to rid society of racial discrimination is to stop making distinctions based on 'race', which is more of a slogan than a sign of a genuine engagement of racism. Unfortunately, research on migrant and forced migrant children's education, school achievement, discipline and school choice (to name just a few) in the Italian context illustrates that 'race' does matter, with racism impacting on the above factors (Catarci and Fiorucci, 2015). The present study also contributes to show how 'race' and migratory status of children seeking asylum has a significant influence on special education status, as we have seen through the SENitizing and Disabling processes in the previous chapter.

For the purpose of the analysis on the colour-blind Italian-style racial ideology presented here, it is important to mention that recently, scholars in the field of Disability Critical Race Theory in Education have carefully scrutinized the concept of "colour-blind" and defined it as a problematic term that do not accurately depict the problem of refusing to acknowledge 'race' while simultaneously maintaning a deficit notion of people with disabilities (Annamma *et al*, 2016). Colour-evasiveness, rather than colour-blind ideology, resists positioning people with disabilities as problematic as it does not partake in dis/ability as a methaphor for undesired (ibid). The racial ideology of denying the significance of 'race' should not be equated with blindness because it is an inadequate descriptor. The inherent ableism in this term equates

blindness with ignorance, but inability to see is not ignorance; in fact, blindness provides unique ways of understanding the world to which sighted people have no access. DisCrit encourages to resist the urge to position blind people as deficit (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2016). By identifying the ideology of 'race' as irrelevant, scholars critiquing 'race' and racism are perpetuating non-recognition (Gotanda, 1991). The ways ableist language perpetuates non-recognition allows for the subordination of dis/abled people and misses the intersections between being socially constructed racially as the other and disabled (Annamma *et al*, 2016).

Additionally, informed by narrow understandings of blindness by sighted people, colour-blindness implies passivity. Yet this ignores the power of White supremacy, and Whiteness situated within it, to actively evade discussions on 'race'. Research has found that there are purposeful rhetorical moves employed to avoid the discourse of 'race', racism, and racial inequities and maintain White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Rios, López, and Morrell 2014). By naming this racial ideology as colour-evasiveness, it is possible to demonstrate the social construction of 'race' and ability, while simultaneously confronting the social and material consequences of racism and ableism. Thus, using an intersectional framework, we can all strenghten our critique of a racial ideology that rejects the recognition of 'race' through confronting the (un)spoken norms lurking within concepts of 'race' and racism (Annamma *et al*, 2016). The shift to colour-evasiveness, judged useful even for the Italian context, allows for both comprehensively situating the conceptualisation and critique of color-blindness as well as thoughtfully considering how to move the underlying ideology further expansively. Having clarified the concepts of colour-blindness and colour-evasiveness, I now focus on the 'exoticisation' of asylum-seeking and refugee children's disability.

### 9.3 'Exoticising' Refugee Children's Disabilities

A further property of the sub-category 'Discriminating Discourses' can be found in the 'exoticisation' of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth, operated by some medical professionals in this research project. This practice is applied to give meanings and facilitate understandings between different cultures in relation to

disabilities, and yet it seems to extend the meaning of difference between the 'civilised' medical culture and the 'primitive', that is to say between the 'first' and the 'third' worlds (Willinsky, 1998). Rooted in Eurocentric cultural and medical perspectives, some of the professionals seem to believe that, due to their illiteracy and disrupted schooling backgrounds, young asylum-seekers and refugees may not understand the complexities instilled within 'typically' Western sciences like psychology or neuropsychiatry. It is common, then, for medical professionals to co-operate with cultural anthropologists and cultural mediators to translate, and transpose, the purpose of the psychological therapy within refugee children's traditional cultures. Participant N's account offers an interesting example of such practices:

> "[…] The fact that we have an *anthropologist* is very important for the service, since a lot of *labelling stems from a Western approach to mental health*, and I mean this can be useful to co-ordinate with local services, but not to establish a trust relationship with the families and with the refugee children […]. Like in the case of the boy from Nigeria with *behavioural problems*, ehm I mean we have created a *positive relationship with the family, and especially with the mother, when we told her that the boy is the reincarnation of his ancestor,* and she said it was true*, so she trusted us* […]. So you see we try to put the person at the centre, *we try to recognize the traditions of different cultures as equally important, to create a good relation and to not pathologize the children* […]".
> (Participant N, Prof_ Serv 5) [emphasis added]

Throughout the interview, Participant N has demonstrated a contradictory attitude, characterised by the willingness to dismantle the "labelling business" of forced migrant students in Italian schools and the actual attribution of SEN labels to provide children with a strategy for 'autonomy' (i.e. as a strategy to fulfil neo-liberal pathways of integration). The passage above captures these tensions and shows her attempt to criticize the over-attribution of disability to migrant children, due to a Western medical model, while highlighting the importance of cultural anthropologists to transpose Western disability categories into elements of migrants' traditional culture. However, it is not clear how Participant N reconciles the position of identifying with forced migrants' cultures of origin with the demands, the decisions and the structures, not only of the social and health services, but also of the Italian society as a whole. Significantly, Participant N does not provide further information on how the Nigerian boy and his family has coped with the above diagnosis, during the time following the therapeutic treatment. Thus, we are left wondering how such transposition of

behavioural problems into the traditional aspects of Nigerian culture can actually help the boy and the family navigating the Italian educational, social and medical system, and whether there could be a more sensible model to understand the origin of the boy's behaviour and avoid easy labelling.

Other participants, operating in mental health services, use reference to 'magic' practices within refugees' culture of origin in order for the 'illiterate' unaccompanied asylum-seeking teens to understand the purpose of psychotherapy:

> "Ehm then we realised that with these *illiterate children* is *very difficult to carry out the psychological therapy*. *They just can't do it*, so we have to adapt our therapeutic techniques and we have to start from their experiences, from their realities, *we have to start from the ground* and talk about concepts that they can understand. *If you start talking about psychotherapy they won't understand, perhaps you could mention something related to "magic"*, otherwise they'll start asking you why they are here and when they can get papers […]. Thanks God we have the cultural mediator that explains everything to them and that makes them understand that the therapy has nothing to do with their legal papers […]".
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv 6.2) [emphasis added]

Between the lines of Participant O's discourse, it is possible to extrapolate what Willinsky (1998) has framed as the educational legacy of European imperialism. Such legacy seems to unconsciously shape professionals' idea of education, science and psychology, and it continues to play a small but significant part in what the professionals have learned and will learn of the world, and of forced migration in particular. The imperialistic vision of Participant O is evident in the dichotomy between the enlighted science of psychology, and the 'exotic' practices supposedly pertaining to illiterate subjects coming from formerly colonized countries. Participant O seems to automatically downgrade young asylum-seeking and refugee children's intellectual resources, by affirming the difficulty that the White Italian professionals find in having to explain psychology and psychotherapy to *illiterate* forced migrant children and youth. In response to such intellectual deficit, Participant O adopts a sort of hypocritical sense of empathy towards refugee teens, manifested in her utterance "we have to start from the ground". It seems as if figuratively, and maybe practically, she locates herself and her identity as a White, Italian professional, in a higher scale of intelligence and knowledge.

Additionally, Participant O reduces the cultural mediator to almost a neo-colonial tool, who has to present the European culture to fellow citizens through the filter of "exoticised" aspects of his/her own culture. In Participant O's conceptualisation, the practice of exacerbating exotic aspects of asylum seekers' culture of origin seems a compulsory requirement for cultural mediation, which –substantially- has to perpetuate the hierarchical *status quo* of the *metropolitan colonizer* (i.e. Italian institutions) and the new colonized (i.e. forced migrants) (Giuliani, 2015). In the perpetuation of unbalanced power relationships between colonizer and colonized in the host society, asylum-seeking and refugee children's culture is discredited and simultaneously 'exoticised' and used for strategic forms of 'neoliberal integration'.

Interestingly, Participant CM2, a West African cultural mediator, presents a significantly different account on how he explains issues related to psychotherapy to asylum seekers and refugees in the service where he works:

> "*I explain to the people I meet here about the service and what the therapy is about* […], *I tell them the doctors here will give them advice to continue their lives, respecting their privacy*, […] and if they trust them they would feel better […]. I tell them that we also have psychiatrists and that if they have sleeping problems they might give them some medicine to help them […]. I explain everything we do here because we don't have psychology ehm I think people have no idea or information about psychology […], *sometimes I tell them the psychotherapist is a conciliator* […]. You know, *I am really committed in making the patients understand that our service is a serious one.* […]". (Participant CM2, Prof_Serv6.2) [emphasis added]

Participant CM2 has been working in service 6.2 for four years approximately. Because of his identity and personal migration history, he was himself exposed to some forms of racism, and suspicion in relation to his capacity to do his job. In fact, he was the only one, among the professionals and cultural mediators, to undergo a formal job interview and probation period for its position. While most of the White Italian medical professionals joined the service "by chance", or through "personal contacts", Participant CM2's work and approach to cultural mediation have been scrutinized for at least two months, as he reported. Despite this, he has been the only one avoiding  making reference to exotic aspects of forced migrants' culture: he stated that for the sake of his job he provided a clear account of what psychotherapy is and

what the asylum seekers and refugee teens (and adults) should expect from the therapy. When attempting to give a definition of the psychotherapists to forced migrants, he used the term "conciliator", and he stressed the importance of building a relationship of trust with the therapist. From what he reported, Participant CM2 seems to me professional, competent and on top of his duties, even if the stories that he hears, often from fellow citizens, are controversial and could put him in a difficult situation because of his own proper nationality and origins. Finally, Participant CM2's discourse seems automatically to fall outside any pre-defined imperialistic and Eurocentric ideologies, that flourish among other professionals in mental health services.

It seems useful to note that Professionals' attempts to explain disability and psychotherapy to forced migrant children and youth through 'exotic' elements, thanks to the help of cultural anthropologists or cultural mediators, does not seem to lead to the dismatling of a medicalised and individualised aproach to disability. As Oliver (1990) argues, where anthropologists have discussed disability, it has been within a framework derived from health and illness, and dominated by the medical model, with- of course- few exceptions (see Edgerton, 1976; Farber, 1968). This is because most anthropologists have internalised the personal tragedy theory of disability and have therefore seen disability as a non-problematic category and not one to be subjected to critical analysis. The central problems, therefore in trying to provide an adequate and empirical account of disability cross-culturally, stem from the paucity of existing material and the location of what material there is within personal tragedy theory and the medical model (Oliver, 1990).

### 9.4 Refugee Children's Illiteracy and Italian Educational Supremacy

A further and significant property of the sub-category "Discriminating Discourses" is represented by the issue of asylum-seeking and refugee children's illiteracy, and disrupted schooling backgrounds. In this section of the chapter, I will focus on Professional participants' interpretation of the causes of children's illiteracy, highlighting their Eurocentric and discriminatory perspectives. In the Italian system of

“differential inclusion”, forced migrant children who are able to adapt fast to cultural and educational norms, such as the Afghans, or in few cases the Syrians, can be identified as “model minorities” (Gillborn, 2008; Bradbury, 2013b).

Most of the Professional participants agreed that in the last 3 years, the influx of asylum seekers into Italy, and more generally into Europe has significantly changed. According to them it is more rare to encounter refugees “by definition”, a supposedly well-educated person escaping from political persecution. Since 2012, a significant amount of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have entered in Italy, and other European countries, and their arrival now seems a permanent feature of migration into the E.U. The reasons that have pushed these children to escape from their country of origin seem to be different from those spelled out in international refugee policies:

> “[…] When we started the majority of forced migrants were adults and children were much less. Lately, especially in the last two years, we have more children than adults, it’s the very migration flux that has changed, ehm *we have much less intellectual people*, coming from cultural and political background, ehm *like the typical asylum seekers*. This used to happen in the beginning. Now the migration flux is made of young teenagers that escape from war, rebels, ehm for issues related to their racial, ethnic and religious background, rather than for political reasons.”
> (Participant T, Prof_Serv 6.2) [emphasis added]

> “[…] We see many more minors than before, ehm they have stories of family violence, for example if the father dies they stay with the uncle and the uncle abuses them […]”.
> (Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv 6.2)

When they were asked to describe the main characteristics of these new influx of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Italy, most of the participants affirmed that they come mainly from Sub-Saharan African, although there seems to be a significant number of Afghans, and that most of the children have a ‘poor schooling’ background:

> “ We have realised that the *teens from Sub-Saharan Africa*, which flee persecution in their country and thus they have the condition to request for asylum, *they are illiterate*, ehm most of them *they didn’t go to school*, because they were facing dangerous situations back at home […]”.
> (Participant A, Prof_Serv 3.1) [emphases added]

> "Lately we have realised that *most of the children arriving to Italy are illiterate, or they just speak their local dialects*, so our cultural mediators that speak African dialects are here everyday […]".
> (Participant O, Prof_Serv 6.2) [emphases added]

> "[…] The socio-cultural level of the children is very low, they have never been to school and so for them is very hard to 'mentalize' the therapy […]".
> (Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv 6.2)

> "Most of the children we see they speak a French spoken in the street, ehm because they didn't go to school, and so it is different from the standard French, so sometimes I really have to interpret what they are saying, ehm I have to guess what they are saying. Instead a person that has studied knows French better […]."
> (Participant CM1, Prof_Serv 6.2)

Illiteracy is here justified by the children's impossibility to have a continuous education, due to the social and family obstacles they had to face in their countries of origin, and it seems to be measured by their impossibility to speak European languages, such as French. The question of asylum-seeking and refugee children's illiteracy is rather new; it represents a big challenge for the professionals working in refugee agencies and for Italian educational institutions. As Participant V argues:

> "[…] There are many children that are illiterate in their own language and this requires a great commitment for the teacher. […]."
> (Participant V, Prof_Serv8.1)

Under the pressure of neoliberal reforms in education, that put an accent on school accountability, students' performance and achievement, Italian teachers do not seem to be able to cope with the issue of forced migrant children's illiteracy. Teachers' lack of training on forced migrant children's issues, and their impossibility to find alternative learning strategies to face refugee chilren's illiteracy in mainstream educational settings does not seem an isolated case. It can indeed be inscribed in the general purpose of much of Italian integration policies that encourage the inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs in mainstream classrooms and to include 'difference' in school, rather than render educational settings inclusive (D'Alessio, 2014).

At this point, it seems compelling to reflect on the collective imagination of White Italian professionals in refugee services in Rome, in relation to the reason why refugee children are illiterate. Most of the answers given were concentrating on the country of origin of the children, and on the specific area within the countries. Even if it was not spelled out clearly by the majority of the professional participants in this study, it seems clear that illiteracy is due to the fact that they come from countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, and might have received a Muslim education, and because they come from suburban and rural areas. Perhaps the answer that better frames this Eurocentric perception is given by Participant O:

> "[…] They are illiterate or *they've studied at some Islamic schools*, which *are not of good quality*. So we have a very serious language issue, which has gone worse these days. Ehm then we realised that with these illiterate children is very difficult to carry out the psychological therapy." (Participant O, Prof_Serv 6.2) [emphasis added]

Participant O's discourse recalls Said's (2003) argument of the problematic representation of Islam in Western ideas, and what he emphasises as the distance between the real and the imagined. Taking this idea through Butler's conceptions of performativity and subjectivation, radically unsettles this real/imagined divide. It does so by exposing Orientalism as constitutive of subjects, as performative, as subjectivating (Youdell, 2012). Thinking about Orientalism as discourses steeped in historicity helps to expose how the scientific rationale of colonial Africa, the religious rationale of Crusades in the near and Middle East, and the empire's deployment of these in the construction of the Orient as the Occident's exotic Other and the Oriental as in the proper service of his colonial master, all suffuse contemporary Western discourses of Islam, as in the case of Participant O (Youdell, 2012, p. 204). The 'Savage Arab' or in this case the 'Savage Muslim African', in contemporary discourse is in need of Westernizing, 'democratizing' and alphabetizing (ibid.). And these are needs heightened to epidemic levels in post- 9/11 discourses of terror, as we see from the testimonials of Italian professionals on "neoliberal integration" of refugee children.

These discourses are sustained by the current neoliberal ideology in education, characterised by the marketisation of education, the accountability mechanism, apparent consumer choice and the individualisation of the learner (see Apple, 2001),

generating micro and macro educational and social exclusion of forced migrant students. The nature of such exlusions is best described by Participant Ps2 account:

> “ […] The kids we see are kids that go in *special schools* to get the terza media and *they are not included in normal public schools*, they are in class with all migrant students where they do *special programs* to obtain the diploma, sometimes they do it in few months ehm they don’t do it in three years […]; *Young refugees don’t go in normal schools because they don’t speak Italian and because they are illiterate*. They are not included in classic school pathways […].
> (Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv 6.2)

Despite the radical de-segregation policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* the concept of ‘educational homogeneity’ is left unchallanged, the *status quo* of the existing educational system is maintaned, and the exclusion of bodies and minds that do not fit the European norm is realized.

No matter how ‘scary’ or ‘illiterate’ refugee children from the “Middle East” can be, it seems that in the discourses of White Italian professionals there is ‘intelligible space’ for some students from Afghanistan or from Syria to be constituted as “model minority” (Gillborn, 2008; Bradbury, 2013b). The term “model minority” has a longer history in the U.S., and is usually applied there to ‘Asian Americans’, particularly the Chinese and Japanese communities. In this chapter the discussion of model minorities builds on David Gillborn’s (2008) examination of this concept, and on Alice Bradbury’s (2013b) study exploring teachers’ use of discourses of authenticity in relation to minoritised students.

According to Gillborn (2008), there is a disposable character to model minorities, a fluidity in which groups of pupils can be intelligible as ‘model’. The author argues that some groups may no longer be seen as ‘model’ when they no longer serve the interests of powerholders’ (p. 146). Within the ‘model minority’ discourse, Professional participants in this study tend to stereotype Afghans and Syrian children as being more “smart”, and as having “proper behaviours” in relation to the neoliberal integration pathways promoted by the Italian government:

> “Last year we had a boy from Afghanistan, he arrived in Italy at age 17 and now he’s 18. He left Afghanistan when he was 11 or 12; he made his journey by land and he stopped in Iran where he worked for an Italian

company producing socks in order to get enough money to continue travelling. It was his mum who forced to leave Afghanistan, as she was scared of the Taliban, who are well known to kidnap boys on their way to school, and so he left and he arrived here alone. He has lived his teen age years all alone […]". He lived his teenage years alone, always fighting to obtain things, but when he arrived in Italy, *he studied, he did the "terza media" and now he's working in Parioli*[43]*; he has already a contract he knew English so it was easy for him to learn Italian*. […] *It's very beautiful when you see these people as if they are born once again, and how well they integrate*. […] *He was very problematic in the beginning, but he knew how to make his own choices* to build his own future […]".

(Participant O, Prof_Serv 6.2) [emphasis added]

"[…] I'm thinking about a positive ending of the therapy, ehm and I remember the case of another Afghan boy, he was a teen when we started to seem him, he had a positive family history, but his dad was killed because he used to own land, and since he was the oldest brother, he would risk to be killed as well, the mother than passed away and he had only a younger sister left in Afghanistan, he was having PTSD, he didn't have a personality disorder but he used to cut himself while sleeping. […] After few months of therapy this problem was solved, and he managed to study, to get the terza media and a job. […] We see him from time to time and now he's really in good shape, totally different from the first session of therapy […]".

(Participant Ps2, Prof_Serv 6.2)

"[…] We met a Syrian man who had five children and his wife in Egypt, he came to Europe to open up a possibility to stay and then bring all of his family over. He told me - I'm not staying in Italy! He was very prepared, knew lots of information. *Syrians are very smart, they know a lot of things about Europe, they come with an IPhone, they go online, search for information, they don't waste time*".

(Participant H, Prof_Serv 9) [emphasis added]

Afghan children and youth are perceived as being determined in their choice to build their future in the host society, as displaying proper behaviours and attitudes – even if at times they seem "distant"-, and as having a proper work ethic. All in all, they seem to be obedient to what the Italian state is asking them to successfully integrate. Syrians, a group of refugees that tend mainly to transit within the Italian territory in their travels towards Northern Europe, not only are phenotypically absorbed into the nation's colour, by virtue of their Mediterranean brownness, but they are also considered as "smart". Through the display of their technological possessions and cultural knowledge, they homologate rapidly to Western capitalistic cultures and

[43] A residential neighbourhood in the centre of Rome.

values.

Obviously, these stereotypes disguise structural inequalities suffered by refugees from the Middle East. As reported by the Professional participants, Afghan refugees they tend to work in restaurants as waiters, and thus they still occupy low-paid employment positions. As Bradbury (2013b) argues, the consequences of the ‘model minority’ discourse can also be significant for those students who do not fit the stereotype, including those having special educational needs, whose barriers to learning may not be recognized. It seems important to know that there can be “no ‘model minority’ without the concomitant stereotype of the lazy and unintelligent Black other”, and in this case of the Black and “relaxed” Sub-Saharan young refugee (Lee, 2008).

### 9.5 “Living in a Segregated Bubble”: Refugee Children’s Perceptions of Discrimination

Given the nature of discriminatory discourses emerging from the data collected with Professionals in refugee agencies, I felt the compelling need of exploring the very own voices of Black “Sub-Saharan” asylum seeking children and teens on their perception of discrimination in the relation with the Italian community in Rome. Not surprisingly, my identity as a White, middle-class, female researcher has generated suspicion in them, and a lot of their answers reflect their attempts to “perform the good asylum seeker”, who accepts passively all the aspects of the host society and avoid to “create trouble”. It is also worth noticing that these children were already inhabiting the “space of racism”, where their unwanted bodies have been confined in the suburbs of Rome to avoid as much as possible contacts with Italians (Tosi Cambini, 2015). As a result, their description of their perceptions of discrimination were rather limited.

When facing the controversial issue of discrimination during the interview with the asylum seekers, I had to give practical examples of discrimination, as they did not seem to understand the meaning or the practices. After giving them enough time to reflect on them, they provided me with vague answers, for example:

> "No, up to know I've never experienced discrimination. Up to know I did not have this problem, I've never heard someone talking badly about my origin. When I go out and the people ask me where I am from and when I say Mauritania, they simply answer that it is very far and nothing else".
> (Yakub, AS_Serv 7)

> "No, I was never discriminated".
> (Dembélé, AS_Serv 7)

Yakub and Dembélé are two teens that have been living in a foster care home close to a small provincial town in the outskirts of Rome. They told me that they leave the house autonomously only if they have to see the doctors. They have educational and training programs inside the centre, so they do not need to go to the city to go to school, and if they have to sort out legal bureaucracy the social workers of the service accompany them. Thus, their actual contact with the Italian society is extremely limited.

Coming from the same service, Djibril offers an interesting account of discriminatory practices in the first reception centres where he stayed in Sicily. His answer shows also the hegemonic and symbolic violence and intimidation of both Italians and fellow forced migrants onto the newly arrived:

> "I heard about this problem [discrimination] many times, but still it didn't happen to me. […] I heard about this problem when I was in Sicily; they [fellow citizens and Italians] told me to be quiet and not creating problems as I was recently arrived in the centre ehm, they told me many things but up to know I never experienced discrimination".
> (Djibril, AS_Serv7)

Thus, it seems that in order to avoid racial assaults, newly arrived young Black asylum seekers are told by those who have been in Italy for longer to exercise self-surveillance on their attitudes and behaviours.

Not all the "Sub-Saharan" young children seeking asylum that I interviewed, however, had such an apparently superficial view of discrimination. Papis, a young asylum seeker with disability from Senegal points out:

> "[…] It is difficult [to find friends] ehm, you know ehm they don't talk to me, people here don't talk to me a lot. Nobody talks to me on the bus […] I donno, maybe it is for this I don't go to central Rome […]" (Papis, AS_ Serv 3.1)

Papis' account show how difficult it is for some asylum-seeking children to foster their feelings of inclusion, as they have problems in finding friends and as they perceive that most of the Italian teens do not want to talk or build a relationship with them. Similarly, Mohamed affirms:

> "Yeah, it never happened to me to be discriminated directly ehm but you know ehm people here may be scared of us, ehm because we are migrants ehm because we are Muslims, you know. Sometimes it happens that they stare at me in the street, some other time they ignore me […]". (Mohammed, AS_Serv 9)

Mohammed depicts of the discrimination by the Italian society may be based on intersectional elements of 'race', religion and migratory status, making DisCrit, an essential conceptual frawork to dismantle the interworking of such factors. Mohammed's account recalls the hypervisibility/invisibility dichotomy, to which the "Othered" and "racialised" bodies can be subjected (Giuliani, 2015), and the "racial microaggressions" described by Solorzano (1998) and Rollock (2012). Racial microaggression are brief, everyday interactions that send denigrating messages to people of colour because they belong to a racially minoritised group. Compared to more overt forms of racism, racial microaggressions are subtle and insidious, often living the victim confused, distressed and frustrated and the perpetrator oblivious of the offense they have caused (Rollock, 2012). As in Mohammad's case, microaggressions can manifest in subtle acts such as ignoring. The prevalence and incidence of these racial microaggressions remains a key marker of the continuing power and privilege of Whiteness in educational practice and wider society as they continue to wound, constrain and denigrate the validity of the presence of persons of colour (Rollock, 2012). As the author argue, these very acts are 'missed' as being racist not just because of their subtlety but because of an inherent misconception that 'nice' people cannot be racist (Rollock, 2012).

Such views about discrimination of asylum-seeking children and youth have an impact on how they imagine their integration in the Italian society- an imagination that can be co-opted by dominant neoliberal models:

> "I still have some times to figure it out but maybe I'll go to Rome to continue studying, ehm I would also love to have a job like X [referring to a social worker in foster care home], or be a baker ehm I'd like to be trained to be a baker before leaving here, you know this is going to be helpful to find a job then […]".
> (Ibrahima, AS_Serv 9)

> "I don't think it's going to be difficult to find a job here or interacting with other people that ask you where you are from. I think it's going to be easy, we can talk ehm it depends on the people ehm but I don't think it's going to be hard. *When we'll turn 18 we find a job, another place to sleep and we'll speak Italian well and we have to behave well, we have to show respect for every person. This way we could have everything we want. We show respect, we know how to speak, how to behave, this way we could be happy".*
> (Yakub, AS_Serv7) [emphases added]

It seems clear from the above accounts that in order to be integrated in the Italian society, without possibly been discriminated, children have to play the "good asylum seeker", thus reiterating the three pillars of existing pathways of social integration: learning Italian, finding a job and, in this case "behaving well", having an obedient attitude.

## 9.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the sub-category of 'Discriminating Discourses', which functions to legitimate discursively processes of SENitizing and Disabling of asylum-seeking and refugee children in the Italian context, and in Rome more specifically. Exploring the discourses of White Italian professionals in refugee agencies has highlighted a colour-blind racial ideology that refuses to acknowledge the operations of 'race', racism and ableism, with the purpose of reproducing White supremacy. Importantly, the chapter has also highlighted asylum-seeking and refugee children's naïve views on discriminatory processes and actions. Forced migrant children's discourses, and their performative attempts to play the "good asylum seekers" demonstrates the powerful process of White domination in the Italian society. The

next chapter, will deal with the last sub-category “Performing Discursive Agency”, and it will address more in depth subjectivating and performative processes of forced migrant children.

# Chapter Ten: Performing Discursive Agency

> "Discursive performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make […]. Generally speaking, a performative functions to produce that which it declares."
>
> (Butler, 1993)

## 10.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the sub-category "Performing Discursive Agency", named after Butler's (1997a) insightful concept. As we have seen more in detail in chapter three, Butler (1997a) calls discursive agency the capacity to name and so constitute that results from subjectivation. Discourse and its effect ultimately exceed the intent of free will of an agent, but the performatively constituted subject can still deploy discursive performatives that have the potential to be constitutive. Butler (1997a) suggests that as a politics these practices involve decontextualizing and recontextualising. This "performative politics" (Butler, 1997a, p. 127) offers significant promise for a post-structural politics of change. She imagines discourses taking on new meanings and circulating in contexts from which they have been barred or in which they have been rendered unintelligible, as performative subjects engage a deconstructive politics that intervenes and unsettles hegemonic meanings (Butler, 1997a). Insofar, the analysis of the data gathered shows how young asylum-seeking and refugee participants' main concern is that of *Integrating*. For this purpose, they are willing to play the role of the "good asylum seeker", especially before the audition to the Territorial Commission for refugee status. Similarly, asylum-seeking and refugee participants felt the need to challenge the prevailing constitutions of young forced migrant subjects, in their attempts to render intelligible their educational aspirations, through discursive agency. Some of the Asylum-Seeking and Refugees participants' discourses that I have interrogated here are performative politics, as Butler (1997a, b) puts it, which both re-inscribe and unsettle hegemonic meaning. While the Professional participants, as the analysis of the data presented in previous chapters demonstrates, are involved in discourses and practices of Whiteness that

subjectivate raced-dis/abled-religioned forced migrant children and youth, these children are involved in practices of insurrection as they are subjectivated (see Youdell, 2012). However, certain conditions were required for discursive agency to be performed. These conditions related mainly to forced migrant participants' perception of me (the researcher), their level of trust towards my role and research, and understanding of the broad social context outside the service agency.

I identified three steps in the process of performing discursive agency: performing the 'good asylum seeker', understanding social context, performing discursive agency. Movement along the three steps, from wanting to integrate according to pre-determined "neoliberal integration" processes, to having a certain amount of knowledge of Rome's social and educational settings, to constitute themselves and their educational aspirations differently, depended on participants' very own perception of the world outside the foster care home. Based on the level of confidence the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth felt in terms of their understanding of Italian society, and their perception of what was rewarded, they constituted themselves again differently and in particular ways that will be shown in this chapter.

### 10.2 Performing the 'Good Asylum Seeker'

The emerging interpretation of the data gathered through the interviews with asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth highlights the (often) intolerable effects of refugee children's education and social integration and the contribution that can be made to this by Butler's work on the subject and the subject's potential to act wilfully (see Youdell, 2012). As we have seen in Chapter Three, Butler adopts Foucault's notion of discourse as productive and uses this alongside the notion of the performative to consider the production of gendered subjects (Butler, 1993). The performative, Butler tells us, is "that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler, 1993, p. 13). Furthermore, she argues that the subject must be performatively constituted in order to make sense as a subject. Whereas this subject appears, at least at the level of the everyday or common sense, to precede his/her designation, this apparently pre-existing subject is an artefact of its performative constitution (Butler, 1993).

In developing this notion of the performatively constituted subject, (Butler, 1997a) refers to Althusser's (1971) notion of subjection and Foucault's (1988a) notion of subjectivation to elaborate an understanding of production and constraint. For Althusser (1971) 'subjection is achieved through the action of the "ideological state apparatuses" (p. 136). These ideological state apparatuses are understood as representations of ideas, outlooks and beliefs that are imaginary. For the author, ideology, ideological state apparatuses are inextricably linked with the subject. The subject, Althusser argues, is constituted by ideology, which constitutes the individual as subjects. This transformation of the individual into a subject and the 'obviousness' of subjecthood are key functions of ideology (Althusser, 1971).

According to Foucault (1988a), the person is subjectivated he/she is at once rendered a subject and subjected to relations of power through discourse. That is to say that productive power constitutes and constrains, but does not determine, the subjects with whom it is concerned. In particular, Foucault (1990) shows how the subject is subjected to relations of power as he/she is individualised, categorised, classified, hierarchized, normalised, surveilled and provoked to self-surveillance. These are technologies of subjection brought into play within various institutions. This is not because, as Althusser (1971) would argue, such institutions are ideological state apparatuses, but because "institutions improvise, cite and circulate discursive frames and coterminous technologies that render subjects in relations of power" (Youdell, 2012, p. 199).

Considering Althusser's and Foucault's accounts of subjection together, Butler affirms that:

> "Subjectivation denotes both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection- one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency […]. Subjection is, literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production." (Butler, 1997b, p. 83-84, original emphasis)

It is this very notion of subjectivation that fits with Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants' discourses in the first step of performing discursive agency. Within the host society, they become autonomous subjects (in neoliberal terms), only if they depend on the three pillars upon which social integration is based, *learning Italian as a second language, finding a (low paid) job and finding a house*:

> "[…] Right now I'm doing the Italian course and the *terza media.* I still have to figure out what I want to do, but I know I *have to find a house ehm a place to stay*, maybe when I live here [the foster care home], I'll go to Rome, I'll go to the immigration office so they can help me to find a proper job […]. *I'd like to find a job as a baker, so that I'll be ok, I won't be nervous about my future* […] I don't think it will be difficult to find a job here and to talk to people […] but you know *we need to speak Italian very well, we need to behave and to show respect to Italians, if we show respect and if we learn how to talk with Italians we will not have any problems* […]."
> (Yakub, AS_ Serv 7) [emphasis added]

> "[…] Now I feel really confused and I feel a bit lost, I've nowhere to go. Also I'd like to study in this country, I'd like to stay. Ehm *right now I'm studying Italian, the A2 course, then I don't really know but I have to find a place to stay, and a job* […]."
> (Dembélé, AS_Serv 7)[emphasis added]

> "Since I came here […] I started school, now I'm still in school, learning Italian. I did the A1 course and now I'm doing the A2. I still don't know what I'm going to do when I turn 18, but *I'm studying Italian*. […] Before I leave here [the foster care home] *I'd like to do a course to bake pizza, or as a baker. You know, this can help you so much to find a job here* […]"
> (Djibril, AS_Serv 7) [emphasis added]

> "[…] Since I came to this centre, I have been attending school. I did the *terza media* and now I'm attending a course to become electrician. *In five years time I hope that I will become an electrician and that I will find a proper job and a house to have a better life you know* […]."
> (Ibrahima, AS_ Serv 3.1) [emphasis added]

> "Now I want to go to school, I want to learn, I think *I want to be a mechanic* […]."
> (Papis, AS_Serv 3.1) [emphasis added]

Yakub, Dembélé, Djibril, Ibrahima and Papis are among the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee youth participants that have been waiting for their audition to the Territorial Commission for the refugee status. Importantly, their accounts were gathered at an initial stage of the interviews, when they were still nervous about the interview and

about my role as a person coming from 'outside' the foster care home. Most of them share a sense of confusion about their future life in a new country, which seems to be justified by their young age and their superficial knowledge of the Italian society. Despite the uncertainty about their life plans, they seem to recite all the part of the 'good asylum seeker' discourse, in order not to encounter problems or conflicts with the Italian society. All of them argue that it is essential to go to school to learn Italian, to master the language to find a proper job. They all accept to do vocational training courses that would lead them to low-paid jobs, such as baker, pizza-maker, electrician or mechanic. They do not seem to have better aspirations, or perhaps their aspirations are influenced by the "neoliberal" discourses of White Italian professionals. I find it interesting, how such neoliberalism reverberates on Yakub's argument about self-surveillance of his behaviour, and of forced migrant children's behaviour in general. According to him, if young asylum seekers show a high level of self-surveillance of their emotions and behaviour and if they always show respect for the host society – even when this society discriminate against them-, then they will be perceived as decent *human beings* and they will manage to integrate.

Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants' statements seems to recall Butler's (2004) argument, deriving from Foucaultian scholarship, that regulatory power not only acts upon pre-existing subject but also shapes and forms that subject; moreover, every juridical form of power has its productive effects; and to become subject to a regulation is also to be brought into being as a subject precisely through being regulated (p. 41). Butler intends to show here how subjectivation can be an effect of discourse and, more specifically, the performative offers political potential. She suggests that whereas the subject needs to be named in ways that make sense in discourse in order to be *"recognizable"*, by being subjectivated the subject can subjectivate another (Butler, 1997a, p. 5).

The following paragraph explores the second step of the process of performing discursive agency, that is "understanding social context" outside of the realm of foster care homes where Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants are 'confined'.

### 10.3 Understanding Social Context

As it has been argued in previous chapters, the majority of asylum-seeking and refugee children live in foster care homes in the suburbs of Rome. These areas are not very well connected with public transport, and the idea of spending hours commuting by bus from their foster care homes to Rome's city centre prevents children and youth to go out and explore the city, to meet people and, thus, to get a better understanding of the social context in which they now live. Buses are the only types of public transport that forced migrant children and youth can afford, given the limited amount of money that they receive as part of their monthly "pocket money[44]", and the complex financial bureaucracy that professionals in the centres have to face to provide children with metro passes. As Participant CM1 argues:

> "Those who are already refugees they have their transportation card, but those who are asylum seekers they don't, […] this is a silly thing that then get mixed with the racism of Italian authorities, that are used to check first people of colour."
>
> (Participant CM1, Prof_ Serv 6.2)

Most of the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants find extremely hard to move around, even to go to school or to training courses. Consequently, they seem to prefer spending their "free" time in the foster care home, chatting online with fellows from their own communities. As Papis affirms,

> "[When I don't go to school] I don't do anything, I surf the Internet, I look at the pictures of my friend. I miss my friend. I only had one good friend and I lost it in Libya. I don't have other friends, good friends".
> (Papis, AS_ Serv 3.1)

Developing friendships, fostering feelings of inclusion and forming a community where forced migrant children and youth could feel accepted and not judged by stereotypes seems hard, given their 'segregation' in suburban areas. After one year of residing in Italy, they still know very little about the Italian society, and all the knowledge they have is filtrated by the discourses (of Whiteness) of the Italian

[44] A daily or monthly amount of money that asylum-seekers and refugees, hosted in reception centres, receive either in form of cash or in their debit cards. The pocket money, which is important for forced migrants to buy phone credit or other essentials, is managed by Ministry of Interior, and distributed to the migrants locally through the refugee service agencies where they are hosted.

professionals in the centres. Current social integration pathways do not seem to minimise at all the distance between asylum-seeking children and youth and host society:

> " […] Italy is beautiful, you know? But I don't know much about it you know? Sometimes it is difficult, people here [foster care home] only helped me with the documents, but I don't know much of the rest, of what is out you know? In this centre here, there is nothing, I only eat and sleep."
> (Papis, AS_Serv 3.1)

> "I don't go out very much. I just stay here, I know only around here, ehm I mean around the centre. Sometimes I take a walk, but I don't go very far, I don't know Rome so much, and I don't have many Italian friends, just I know the people in the centre and that's it […]."
> (Adrame, AS_Serv 9)

> "[…] Rome? I dunno much about Rome, I don't go often there, I stay here [in the centre] almost everyday […], I don't have many reasons to get out of here."
> (Mohammed, AS_ Serv 9)

At times, the only journey outside the foster care homes that forced migrant children and youth undertake is the one to visit the doctors in the local hospitals or health services. As the data indicates, most of the time asylum-seeking children understand the reason for periodical check ups, and how the Italian healthcare system works, as the doctors would speak in English or French and would spend time in providing them with thorough information:

> "[…] Yes, they [professionals in the centres] take you to the hospitals for the check ups. You do your blood test to see if everything is ok with you and then they give you your health ID card. I went to Rome many times for these reasons, at least I get to know other places […]. I felt ok with the doctors you know, they were not like others that just put you under a machine. They explained me everything, a little bit in Italian, a little bit in French."
> (Yakub, AS_Serv7)

> "I went to Rome more than one times, maybe 3 times for health check up, the doctors said everything was ok. He was speaking a bit of English, at that time I was not speaking Italian so I did not understand much about the Italian health system […]."
> (Djibril, AS_Serv7)

There are some exceptions in which professionals in foster care homes did not explain the children, especially those diagnosed with a disability, the motivation behind the monthly trips to the hospital and the related medical treatment. This lack of clarity on the side of the professional seems to generate confusion and resistance among the children and youth. As Papis argues:

> "The doctors? The doctors are crazy, they know nothing, they never explain me the things. I don't want to go to the doctors, I want to stay here or going somewhere else […]"
> (Papis, AS_Serv7)

Asylum-Seeking and Refugee children participants in this study seem to have also little awareness about their asylum rights and a significant lack of knowledge of the institutions responsible for processing their asylum request, starting from the Territorial Commission or even the local *Questura* (Police headquarters). Professionals operating in foster care homes have a discontinuous communication with children and youth about the legal support they need, and most of the time children are left without important information on how to obtain their documents, or on how to renew or change them once they will turn 18. Normally, the professionals in the centres deal with legal bureaucracy for the asylum request, and rarely engage children and youth to participate in such essential process:

> "I didn't know anything about this thing of the asylum request, they just told me I had an appointment, that I had to do that thing, that I had to go to the Questura and so on. But then they [the professionals] did everything, ehm I didn't know anything about the Commission […]."
> (Mohammed, AS_Serv9)

> "Ehm about the asylum request ehm I didn't know much about it, the people of the centre here helped me, I don't know what is the procedure to get my document, they told me that we had to go to the Questura one day, ehm they give me an appointment."
> (Adrame, AS_Serv9)

Mohammed and Adrame, like many other asylum-seeking teens, have limited knowledge about their rights – and importantly about how to claim their rights- as asylum seekers, and about their future rights and obligations once they will have their refugee status confirmed. The lack of communication by the Professional participants on such crucial issues does not provide an effective support for asylum-seeking and

refugee children to become autonomous subjects in the Italian society. Given the lack of education they have about legal practices and other civic issues, one can wonder how independent they will be during their transition into adulthood. Professional participants pass on to asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth a form of privileged knowledge. In fact they seem to be policing the boundaries of knowledge in relation to the Italian society effectively and use it as a form of power. Such privileged knowledge is part of hegemonic processes of White domination, which subjectivate these children as 'dis/abled', 'ignorant', and therefore to be marginalised.

Despite the ignorance in which Professional participants would like to inscribe forced migrant children and youth, these children and youth render themselves again differently. While the Italian state would like them to be 'vulnerable' subjects, occupying pre-established low-paid and low-skills job positions, Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children participants deploy discursive performatives that have the potential to be constitutive.

### 10.4 Performing Discursive Agency

By thinking of agency as discursive- as being the product of being inaugurated in and by discourse and so able to join its citational chains- Butler moves beyond an understanding of intent and agency that is the property of an a priori, rational, self-knowing subject but *retains* a subject who can act with intent (Youdell, 2012, p. 201, original emphasis). Butler (1997a) argues that as a politics the performative practices involve:

> "Decontextualizing and recontextualising […] terms through radical acts of public misappropriation such that the conventional relation between [interpellation and meaning] might become tenuous and even broken over time." (p. 100)

Through the "performative politics" practices the sedimented meanings of enduring and prevailing discourses might be unsettled and reinscribed; subordinate, disavowed or silenced discourses might be deployed in, and made meaningful in, contexts from which they have been barred; and challenges to prevailing constitutions of subjects

might be deployed self-consciously through the discursive practices of subjects who are themselves subjectivated (Youdell, 2012). These concepts seem to be crucial to frame the following Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants' accounts:

> "*I'd like to study Medicine in Rome*, I *like studying*. First *I'd like to study, because if you don't have a degree to find a job in Italy is very difficult*. So I need to study so I can find my personality and also I'd like to study so I can learn to speak Italian very well. *I'd like to learn how to make pizza. But when I'm going to continue my studies seriously, I'm not going to work to make pizza anymore; I want to study to find a better job, not to make pizza.* But I need to work to pay for my studies, so and I'm very new to this country and also, I'm still young, so *I've to study and get some money to take care of myself* […]."
>
> "*I always imagine that I would become a doctor*, because *I like Medicine and I like science and arithmetic when I was in Nigeria*. I'd like to study these subjects, I dunno if it is possible because I don't have money to pay for my education."
> (Debélé, AS_Serv7) [emphased added]
>
> "I wish I could attend University. I'd like to study languages, yes I like to study more English and French [...]."
> (Djibril, AS_Serv7)
>
> "I didn't think about it but I'd like to go to University, if I can. I like studying ehm yes me too I'd like to study languages. Back home I studied French and English, but I'd like to specilize more in Italian and Spanish [...]."
> (Yakub, AS_Serv7)

Importantly, educators and social workers in service 7 made great efforts to explain in details elements of the society and to deal with forced migrant children's emotions with a higher level of empathy. In addition, and compared to other professionals in the rest of the services considered, they had the capacity to render asylum-seeking life expectations intelligible. For this reasons, Dembélé, Djibril and Yakub were put in better conditions to deploy discursive agency to challenge the normalizing ways in which forced migrant children are constituted.

Through Butler's notion of subjectivation, discursive agency, performative politics, and politics of hegemony, it is possible to understand how discoursively constituted and constrained subjects deploy discursive agency and act within and at the borders of the constraint of their subjectivation (Youdell, 2012). Furthermore, it seems possible to challenge discourses of poverty, intelligence, ableism, racism and Whiteness that legitimate the view that Dembélé, Djibril, Yakub and all the other asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth should necessarily attend vocational training courses, in

order to occupy low-paid job positions in the Italian labour market. Butler's notions can help to see where discursive interventions might enable new discourses - such as Dembélé's, Djibril's and Yakub's willingness to further their education and attend University- to be rendered intelligible or enduring discourses to be unsettled within educational and social settings.

Thus, these ideas have significant implications for education, specifically targeting forced migrant children. With this undersanding of subjectivation, as Youdell (2012) points out, the student is so because he/she is designated as such. Indeed, whereas these designations appear to describe preexisting subjects, understanding these designations as performative reveals that it is the very act of designation that constitutes these subjects as if they were already students (ibid.). The political challenge, is then to intercept these subjectivating processes in order to constitute students again differently (Youdell, 2012).

## 10.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the three steps process of performing discursive agency, highlighting Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants' discourses. While at an initial stage of the interview, forced migrant children and youth were performing the role of the "good asylum seeker", due to their low level of trust towards me and due to a superficial knowledge of the Italian social context, in certain cases space was provided as to render some of their educational and future aspirations intelligible, thus challenging prevailing notions and description of 'asylum seeker and refugee' among the White Italian professionals. The particular analysis offered in this chapter, thanks to the deployment of Butler's concept of subjectivation, discursive agency and performative politics, adds another layer of understanding to existing analysis of enduring patterns of raced-dis/abled educational inequality and exclusion. Yet, it is not a pessimistic analysis – these theoretical tools insist that the potential to act with intent and, therefore, shift meaning is inherent to the contingent nature of discourse and the discursive agency inherent to subjectivating processes. The forced migrant children's performative politics are the defences that these subjectivated subjects engage in when their discursive agency is worked against the prevailing discourses through which they are subjectivated. As Youdell (2012) argues,

performative politics does not entreat us to identify the subjectivation and then move on to design a corresponding performative insurrection. Rather, these are "politics in subjectivation", enacted at any moment of constitution (ibid. p. 209). The next chapter concludes this dissertation.

# Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

> "The issue of equality [...] is not just a distributional one, it is also an issue of ensuring equal respect for all groups and individuals. This demands that the culture, lifestyle and values of minority and other groups are given full and equal recognition within a given education system and that systems for equalizing the distribution of power are also introduced. The issue of equality is not just about getting working-class or other marginalised groups and individuals 'in and out of the system' successfully; it is about changing the nature of education itself in both its organisation and its curricular substance."
> (Lynch, 1999, pp. 302- 303)

This concluding chapter has three sections. The first identifies the various ways in which the study contributes to the field. The second section makes a number of recommendations. In the following section I consider the quality of the study, and note some limitations. Finally I end by identifying a number of possible directions for future research.

## 11.1 The Contribution of this Study

It seems important to reiterate that the claims I am making are based on an in-depth study of 27 participants in 9 refugee services in the city of Rome, in Italy, over a three-year period. This study contributes to the field in a number of ways, through its topic and focus, its methodological approach and focus on conceptual development and its findings. Each of these will now be considered.

### *11.1.1 Topic and Focus*

The study contributes to the field through its focus on:

- Asylum-seeking and refugee children educational and social experiences within current Italian models of "integration-style inclusion", and intersectional analysis of 'race' and disability- a neglected area to date in Italy;

- Macro and micro exclusions of SENitized and disabled forced migrant pupils in mainstream educational settings, and their early educational channelling into vocational schools and low-paid professions, while previous research has focused mainly on the educational inequalities of refugee children, thus concentrating only on the migratory status from an intercultural or special education perspective (Catarci, 2011; Catarci, Fiorucci, 2015; Bocci, 2016);
- The impact of disability on the recognition of the refugee status of children, as well as on the quality of health and social assistance they receive from refugee agencies and health services in Rome;
- The subjectivating effects of the discriminating discourses of White Italian Professionals operating in refugee services, and the discursive agency performed by young asylum seekers, which enables them to break hegemonic meanings on forced migrant children –generally defined as 'vulnerable'-, to render intelligible their educational expectations, while performing the "good asylum seeker", thus doing whatever the Italian State ask them to do, at convenient times;
- Showing the operations of 'race', racism, ableism and White Supremacy, thus contributing to shed light on 'race' relations in the Italian context – a topic that has largely been superficially and sporadically dealt within Italian educational research.

### *11.1.2 Methodological Approach and Conceptual Development*

The use of grounded theory (GT) for social justice research and with students from under-represented groups is a relatively new departure (see Charmaz, 2011). Green *et al.* (2007) note that GT research has not focused to any great extent on diversity phenomena and claim that the method has potential to illuminate the field, and so this study provides a useful contribution in this regard. With its rejection of an objectivist ontology, its emphasis on the researcher-participant relationship, the co-construction of the analysis and theory, and its facilitation of a more empowering, participatory approach, I have found that *constructivist* GT offers an appropriate, and useful, methodology of researching *with* marginalized and under-represented groups (as well as with students in general).

This study also contributes to the field on a conceptual level. Through the use of GT, it has contributed to an 'under-theorised' area. In the Italian context, research on the education of asylum-seeking and refugee children tends to report and describe integration experiences from the perspective of the professionals in refugee agencies (Catarci, 2011), while elsewhere it is dominated by practitioner discourses that attempt to describe what constitutes good educational practice (Mott, 2000; Remsbery, 2003; Rutter, 1994, 2001, 2006). Often in these relevant studies, theory is typically employed in a traditional *a priori* manner, that is, it is used at the outset to guide and frame the whole research process, from project design through analysis and reporting. In this study, by employing constructivist GT, I did not have a pre-determined conceptual or theoretical framework. I abstained from assuming that the work of a particular scholar(s) would be relevant, but I was inevitably influenced by the literature and previous research and thus I made use of the notions of "senitizing concepts" (Blumer, 1969) and "theoretical agnosticism" (Henwood and Pidgeon, 2003). While senitizing concepts are points of departure for studying the empirical world while retaining the openness for exploring it, theoretical agnosticism implies a critical stance toward earlier theories that neither denies nor accepts their potential relevance for the researcher's study without rigorous scrutiny. This stance concurs with the position of requiring extant concepts to earn their way into a grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

The theory derived in this study offers one way of bringing together the views of Italian professionals and young asylum seekers and refugees on their experiences of integration. The core category of Integrating (however defined) enabled participants to achieve their main concern of making the most of their educational, social and working life within the Italian society, which as we have seen, for the professionals meant providing the asylum-seeking and refugee children with inputs to language and (preferably vocational) educational courses, which would help them in finding a 'proper' job, and consequently a 'proper' house; all of which would get them rapidly out of State's welfare support. Instead, for the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth 'integrating' involved learning Italian and continuing their education beyond the pre-established vocational pathway, in order to finally fulfill their own aspirations and dreams. The subcategories of the theory provide us with a conceptual framework to explore *the impact of globalization and new forms of capitalistic*

*economy on the relations between hosting society and forced migrant children* (through Promoting Neoliberal Integration), *the normalizing effects of processes of SENitizing and Disabling of asylum-seeking and refugee pupils, which have the intent to promote integration maintaining educational homogeneity* (through SENitizing and Disabling Refugee Children), *the discriminatory discourses of Italian professionals and the asylum-seeking and refugee children's perspective on discrimination* (through Discriminating Discourses), as well as forced migrant children and youth's *capacity to perform "the good asylum seeker" and discursive agency that would constituted the forced migrant subject differently from hegemonic perspectives* (through Performing Discursive Agency).

The concepts of Promoting Neoliberal Integration, SENitizing and Disabling, and Performing Discursive Agency offer new and useful ways of conceptualizing and understanding refugee children integration pathways in the Italian context, and their behaviors –as well as those of the professionals- within social and educational realms. Whilst the impact of a neoliberal economy on refugee reception, as well as the over-representation of migrant children in Special Education Needs categories in the Italian context, have been hinted at in the literature (e.g. Sassen, 2014; Bocci, 2016), I have found that neoliberal models of "integration-style inclusion" of asylum-seeking and refugee children, and their consequent disablement within educational mainstream settings and in the Italian society to be of major significance in terms of their subsequent educational pathways, social experiences and sense of belonging. Further, I have conceptualized these strategies and traced their possible roots, through the concepts of compartimentalizing networks, distancing from educational institutions, labeling for quality education, medicalising disability, racism without 'race', and performative agency.

The concept of Neoliberal Integration, or conditional inclusion as Tomlinson (2017) recently defines it, provided us with a useful tool to examine participants' the various orientations the current immigration and integration policies proposed by the Italian government. The impact of neoliberal economic reforms on educational and social policies targeting marginalised students has been reported in previous research in the English-speaking context (e.g. Ball, 1990; Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1998; Apple, 2001; Leonardo, 2002; Youdell, 2006). However, within the Italian context,

neoliberal integration of refugee children has not previously been subjected to conceptual analysis. Conceiving the integration as 'Neoliberal' is useful in that it allows us to bring together numerous, slightly different, perspectives on what the State and the Italian professionals- subject to the forces of a global economy- are proposing, and on what forced migrant children are expected to do to be considered as actual human beings in the host society. I have distinguished between Learning Italian as a Second Language to Find a Job and Find a house from Learning the Language for Socializing, Furthering Education and Getting a Suitable Accommodation. Insofar as I can discern, previous research has not focused – either descriptively or conceptually- on the perspectives and strategies for integration of asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth. In this study I have begun to identify some of these neoliberal characteristics of social and educational integration, and sought to understand them by drawing upon concepts of inclusion and inclusive education from the perspective of the Disability Critical Race Theory.

Asylum-seeking and refugee children's integration within educational and social institutions, and more generally within Italian society, was in part achieved through processes of 'SENitization' and disablement of these subjects. Forms of 'SENitizing' and 'Disabling' have been identified as the result of lack of teachers' training on forced migrant children's trauma and –in some cases- illiteracy, and simultaneously as strategies to maintain educational 'homogeneity' and *status quo*, for the sake of schools' achievement standards. The underlying motivation for such processes was to focus on the individual 'deficit' discourse, and to reproduce learning as an individual practice, without bringing about educational change in inclusive terms. However, the need to maintain the individual 'deficit' discourse in educational and social settings played out in different ways depending on the particular context, the kind of refugee service agency, the professional role covered and the perception of forced migrant children's dis/ability and behavior. Again, while recent reports from the Italian Ministry of Education signalled the increasing phenomenon of disability certifications among migrant students, this study has explored the disablement of asylum-seeking and refugee pupils specifically within the school and out of school environments, and specifically looking at the reception centres and refugee agencies.

The three step process in "Performing Discursive Agency" is useful in that it allows us to see that wanting to integrate according to pre-determined integration processes, to constitute themselves and their educational aspirations differently is a *process*. We can also see that there are contextual contextual factors which influence the extent to which asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth perform discursive agency. I have noted how the capacity to demonsrate agency and to consititue themselves differently depended on participants's very own perception of the context outside the forster care home, and on the inclusive work done by the social workers and other professionals in refugee agencies. I have shown that forced migrant children's performative politics are the defenses that these subjectivated subjects engage in when their discursive agency is worked against the prevailing discourses through which they are subjectivated. Thus, there is a clear need for the Italian professionals to understand forced migrant childen's aspirations and potential to act with intent.

Of course, my conceptualisation is but *one* conceptualisation. Working from within a constructivist framework, I am highly cognisant of the fundamentally interpretive nature of social research. What I have perceived as significant in the data, what and how I have interpreted and conceptualised, what I have brought forth to the theoretical sampling stage, and how the overall theory has been constructed, have all been influenced by my own historicality. Further, I regard what I have produced, not just as constructed, but as in part *co-constructed*, involving as it does the interpretations of my participants. Notwithstanding, I am confident that the theory contributes new and valuable ways of thinking about "integration-style inclusion" models and about refugee children's educational experiences in the Italian context.
In constructivist GT, theory focuses on *understanding* more than explaining. The focus is not on trying to ascertain causality; rather, indeterminacy and provisionality are emphasised. Whilst I have attempted to trace the genesis and implications - conceptually and practically - of some concepts in specific contexts, I do not claim to have identified general 'causality'. Rather, I have considered possible relationships between factors which I have interpreted as interacting with other factors. Other interpretations are, of course, possible.

Conceptualisation is not the only goal of a constructivist GT approach. It is also important to situate one's theory in context (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006), and this can be partly achieved through 'thick' description. Along with the brief conceptual overview in chapter six, I have, therefore, also provided a detailed exploration of each sub-category, with quotes from participants to illuminate the analysis. A more contextual rendering of the analysis is thus achieved.

*11.1.3 Findings*

Through its findings, the study contributes to the field in the following ways:

1. *Current models of social and educational integration of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in Rome are merely concerned with drawing them (i.e. the socially excluded) into normative forms of economic, political and social participation/production*. The discourses of the Professional Participants in this study show that notions of inclusion and inclusive education have been absorbed into the language of mainstream/generalist education, where these have been used interchangeably with, or instead of, the criticised notion of integration. The ways in which the Italian State expects forced migrant children to reach 'autonomy' (i.e. learning Italian, finding a job, finding a house), through a system of reception based on compartimentalized netowrks and detached from educational institutions that shows the impact of a neoliberal global economy on the relation beween host society and newcomes, and hints to the complex operations of White Supremacy as asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth have to learn as quickly as they can their place within the social hierarchies. However, the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children participants' perspective on integration is one based on learning Italian to be able to socialise, find a job to be able to sustain the families in the country of origin but also to further their education.
2. *Within the frame of the policy of* Integrazione Scolastica, *the inclusion of asylum-seeking and refugee children in Rome's schools has been incorporated within the medicalised language of SEN, resulting in processes of SENitizion and Disabling of this group of learners*. The over-

representation of forced migrant children in Special Educational Needs and disability categories mirrors the absence of a transformatory effort in the teaching and learning practices of mainstream Italian schools, which inevitably produce forms of micro-exclusions of supposedly included students. Such processes have a significant (and negative) impact on the educational experiences and on the social lives of young refugees within the Italian society, that one would not expect from a country that has been having a de-segregation law for the past fourty years. The notion of 'special' is regularly detached from the educational needs to which it is purported to apply and come to signify the abnormality, deficit, deviancy, and repugnance of the student him/herself (Corbett, 1996). The strategy of labelling refugee children with a disability is used by the Professionals in this study as a positive strategy that would guarantee these learners with 'quality' education, and that would help them in reaching their full autonomy. Interestingly, in some cases – especially related to emotional and behavioral disturbs- Professional participants thought that refugee children were "playing the disability card" to obtain welfare benefits, and thus delay their transition towards autonomous life in the Italian society.

3. *The concealment of 'race' and the invisibility of White priviledge within the Italian context, which blocked the collective and individual examination of race relations and indeed the relation with Blackness, produces discriminatory discourses and racial micro-agression among the Professionals operating in refugee agencies and that are supposed to support and faciliate forced migrant children inclusion*. Italian education policies are characterized by a "color-evasive" racial ideology that is particularly evident in Professional participants' narratives, which reproduce Whiteness as at once normative and invisible, as well as being characterised by pervasive anti-Islamic discourses 'post 9/11'. At the same time, refugee children in this study are rather disoriented in relation to discrimination, because they live in a "segregated bubble" with limited contact with the Italian community while living in the foster care homes, and because they are trying to reconcile with their own perceived Blackness. In other words, they were not confronted with their racial identities until they embark in such a difficult journey to reach Europe.

4. *Asylum-seeking and refugee children are not 'vulnerable' subjects as the italian policies and Professionals would like to see and think about them*. Despite their limited knowledge of the social context and of the Italian educational system, forced migrant children and youth are able to perform discursive agency, rendering intelligible their life, social and educational expectations. The forced migrant children participants in this study have been able to disrupt hegemonic narratives about who the refugee is and about what he/she is supposed to do and study in the host society. In so doing, they have excercised performative politics and they have contributed to reinscribe the very own meaning of asylum-seeker and refugees, while showing that they are not 'impossible learners'. The interviews and the research process have represented an important site of 'counter-politics' (see Youdell, 2011). Having explained young forced migrant about the research project and a little bit of the Italian higher education system, and having also discussed in some cases the finding with them, I believe it helped them in framing more clearly their educational expectations, and in knowing more the Italian context.

## 11.2 Recommendations

A number of reccommendations can be made.

*Reforming Refugee Children Reception and 'Integration' Models*

As noted above, the current system of refugee children reception is urgently required to change in more inclusive terms, to enable them to have more in-depth knowledge of the host society and to render intelligible their educational and social expectations. A more solid network should be built between refugee agencies and professionals operating within them; one that would reduce the distance with local schools and other educational institutions. Only by expanding and ameliorating the communication between agencies and between professionals, it would be possible to have inclusive reception practices. This would reduce the current "puzzle approach", which seems to cause tensions, misunderstandings between professionals and refugee children, and the "re-traumatization" of the children, who seems to be

left in a "limbo" within the Italian society, in favour of acquiring a more holistic perspective on forced migration and on the story of every single refugee child.

*Introducing Pre- and In- Service Professional Training from an Intersectional and Anti-Racist Perspectives*

If the purpose of current models of refugee children's reception within the Italian society is that of inclusion, then refugee agencies firstly should undergo a more selective recruitment process, avoiding as much as possible to have professionals that are doing this job "by chance"- as the great majority of the Professional participants in this study affirm. Secondly, before taking up their positions they should be offered the possibility of having pre-service training, especially if operating in healthcare services that take on forced migrant children with disabilities. The training should not only be focused merely on the knowledge of the reception system in Rome, or on the policies and law regulating asylum. Instead, it should be focused on an intersectional anti-racist discourse, whereby race relations, White Supremacy and priviledge and the colonial and neo-colonial legacies of current migration influxes are openly debated among the Italian professionals. It would be ideal to encourage the participation in the pre-service training of professionals that are not Italian and that might be refugee, who are given the chances to discuss and criticize current models of reception from a non-Eurocentric point of view. The in-service training should continue to be focused on such issues, while also dealing with the strategies for the resolution of daily issues related to the single refugee child's story. Finally, while there is a urgent need of training Italian professionals on anti-racism and on the social model of disability (especially in relation to the issue of the over-representation of refugee children in Special Educational Needs), it seems urgent to provide an adequate network of medical and psychological support for the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among asylum-seeking and refugee children.

*Adopting the Social Model of Disability in response to the application of SEN Policies for Forced Migrant Children*

Labelling migrant and forced migrant children as having Special Educational Needs, or as having a disability should not be considered as a strategy to offer them quality

education within mainstream school settings. On the contrary, this seems to produce and reproduce micro-exclusions of students at the intersection of multiple differences. All the Italian professionals operating in refugee agencies, and not only teachers and educators in schools, should consider adopting a Disability Critical Race Theory perspective to actively contributing in stopping the production of educational inequalities of 'diverse' students. Within this perspective much more attention should be given to the kind of support offered to these students, rather than to their 'deficits'.

*Tracking Participation and Educational Progress*

I would suggest that a system be implemented to track the participation and educational progress of all students, at individual level, in all sectors of education, in such a way that the data can be disaggregated in relation to specific groups, in terms of 'race'/ethnicity, gender and disability. These data should be used to explore patterns of educational progress and to identify both enabling and constraining factors. They would also allow us to explore better the impact of initiatives, such as the implementation of an inclusive model of education based on DisCrit, introduced to combat educational disadvantage.

## 11.3 The Quality of the Study and Limitations

Whereas the terms 'internal validity', 'external validity', 'reliability', and 'objectivity' are used to judge the quality of more quantitative-based research, terms such as 'credibility', 'trustworthiness' 'dependability', and 'plausibility' are more appropriate in qualitative and GT studies (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is important that a grounded theory 'fits' the substantive area from which it has emerged, and in which it may be used (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Fit, work, relevance, and modifiability are the four key criteria that a GT study should meet according to Glaser (1978, pp. 4-5). The four criteria identified by Charmaz (2006, pp. 182) are not dissimilar. They are: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. In terms of *credibility*, she points to the:

- necessity of having achieved 'intimate familiarity' with the context and subject of the research;
- extent to which data is sufficient to support claims made;
- degree to which systematic comparisons have been made;
- range of observations covered by the categories, and the extent to which there are 'logical links' between one's data and one's analysis.

I have become 'intimately familiar' with the context and research subject and believe that my data are more than sufficient to back up the claims which I have made. Analysis has been systematic, intensive, thorough and very detailed throughout the research process. The key concepts and categories (and their interrelationships) of my theory are supported by a large and wide range of incidents and observations.

On the issue of *originality*, Charmaz considers the 'freshness' of the categories, the extent to which they offer new insights, the originality of the conceptual rendering of the data, and the social and theoretical significance of the work. Charmaz also asks researchers to consider the contribution to the field of one's grounded theory, particularly in terms of how it may "challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices" (ibid., p. 182). I considered this study's contribution to the field in section 11.1.

In terms of resonance, Charmaz emphasises in particular how fully the experience examined has been portrayed, and if the researcher's GT makes sense to the participants or similar individuals. Lather (1986), citing Reason and Rowan (1981), claims that returning to one's participants with initial findings should become a standard part of a research design that purports to be in any way 'emancipatory'. Whilst my focus is more on the participatory than emancipatory, the study is still positioned "... at the non-alienating end of the spectrum" (Reason and Rowan, 1981, p. 248, in Lather, 1986, p. 67). Further, returning to participants with one's initial findings assists in establishing 'face validity' and thus data credibility (Lather, 1986). Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 147) also emphasise that to be 'valid', the researcher's interpretation needs to be "*authentic* for the individuals involved and *communicable* within the group (that is, that they are mutually

comprehensible)". They argue that "it is only when the theorist and those whose actions he observes come to agree that a theoretical interpretation of those actions is 'correct' that the theory can have any validity" (ibid., p. 92). I would argue that my participants' experiences have been fully portrayed, and through the theoretical sampling and participatory stage, the emerging GT was discussed with participants and they reported that it 'fit' their experiences and was meaningful to them. However, the end result has not (yet) been shared with participants. Analysis was fully completed in the Fall 2015 and given the time and resources available it was not feasible to return to all participants formally a second or third time to discuss my final interpretations. However, I will be send each participant a copy of the dissertation and will invite their comments and questions, and will meet them if they would like to discuss anything.

Finally, in relation to usefulness, Charmaz asks if one's interpretations can be used by people in everyday life, if one's analysis has suggested any generic processes and/or further research and how the research has contributed to knowledge. I believe that the findings of this study suggest ways of better engaging 'raced' and disabled asylum-seeking and refugee children (see section 11.2). I note directions for future research in section 11.4.

*Limitations*

This research was conducted in Rome, with a sample of 27 participants selected from 9 refugee services and all findings need to be interpreted in that context. Whilst one cannot generalize from one 'case', there is no reason to suppose that significantly divergent results would have been found in any other Italian cities. In chapter five I noted that the asylum-seeking and refugee children population in Rome is likely to be similar to that residing in other Italian cities in terms of educational and social experiences. All the participants volunteered to participate, except for some cases of forced migrant children, who were not previously informed by the professionals in the center about the interview, and so they were 'forced' to give their assent on the day of the interview. Research involving human subjects is, however, always at the mercy of those who volunteer. As long as one is transparent about recruitment procedures and rationale, the reader is adequately informed to evaluate the claims being made.

The Professional participants in this study are more than the asylum-seeking and refugee children and youth. In itself, having interviewed only 10 forced migrant children may constitute a limitation of a GT study, as having access to more of their experienced would have allowed for a better understanding of their perception of integration, discrimination and disability, and would have demonstrated better their discursive agency.

A significant limitation to this study is evident as a result of the refusal that I received to carry out observations and interviews with children and professionals in the department of paediatric neuropsychiatry of a hospital for migrants in Rome, where the certifications of disability are done. This would have contributed to show how disability is constructed for migrant children, and what the actual benefits of labeling might be at the individual/social/educational levels, in the aftermath of certification.

I did not have the time and the resources for visiting all the foster care homes and the refugee agencies in Rome, also because a significant number of Professionals refused to participate in the interview, due to their busy schedules. However, those who decided to participate in Round I and Round II interviews have provided me with a general perspective of the reception systems and its challenges in the Italian capital.

### 11.4 Directions for Future Research

An important action would involve returning to both groups of participants with the final version of my findings for further theoretical sampling and to discuss their views. I would be particularly interested in their thoughts about SENitizing and Disabling, Discriminating Discourses and Discursive Agency. Would the Italian Professional participants feel that they have ‘misrecognized’ the importance of these realms? In retrospect, would they change their behavior in terms of their engagement? Do they have any regrets? Or would they report that they understood their actions and the likely consequences but still chose to engage in the way they did? If so, why?

Would the Asylum-Seeking and Refugee children participants feel freer to express their views on discrimination within refugee agencies and Italian schools? Would they feel more confident in expressing what they did not like and what their educational aspirations are? Also would they think more deeply about discrimination and its effects in terms of future life chances in Italy?

Bringing participants from both groups together for a group discussion about the findings was outside the scope of this research. However, it would certainly be useful and illuminating to attempt to do so as part of an active, collaborative, participatory methodology for a future research study. If carefully facilitated, it would have the potential to contribute to mutual understanding through dialogue.

It would be useful to track Professional Participants, but especially Asylum-Seeking and Refugee participants over the next several years, through their educational programmes, job training and migratory statuses. How would their initial expectations and dreams about the Italian society change?

Much work remains to be done to explore inclusive education pathways for disabled asylum-seeking and refugee children, an area that has been just timidly approached. An important focus would be on the potential impact of serious anti-racist education policies and of a social model of disability for their academic development and retention. It is hoped that the paper has contributed also to the international educational research and to Disability Studies in the U.S. by showing how the 'special needs' and individual 'deficit' rhetoric continues to dominate the educational discourse despite the existence of a radical desegregation policy.

### 11.5 Final Considerations

Since when this research commenced (January 2014), Italy is experiencing a constant arrival of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Italy, after embarking in the perilous routes traversing the Sahara desert, and then experiencing hardship in Libya before the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean sea. Many people have lost their lives in the Southern costs of Italy, with a peak in 2013, where around 300 people

were found dead on the shores of Lampedusa. In that occasion, the President of the Republic honoured the dead by recognizing them the Italian citizenship, a privilege that is hardly recognized (and only after ten years of hard work) to those asylum seekers that are rescued and step foot alive in the Italian soil.

Alongside changes in the migration influx, which seems to be characterized by an increasing presence of unaccompanied children, Italy has been invested by a process of "monsterization"[45] of forced migration, characterized by xenophobic and racist campaigns by far right political parties (such as *Lega Nord*), but also by the centre-left anti-establishment party *Movimento Cinque Stelle*. The racist assumptions within their political discourses and agendas are increasingly reflected in the attitudes of Italian citizens, who (in various cases) has tended to boycott the reception and inclusion of forced migrants- including children.

Issues of 'race' and disability continue to have significant salience in the education of refugee children and in their social inclusion. Further attention needs to be paid on the operations of White Supremacy in the Italian context and on the yet to be discussed genealogy of 'race' and racism, which have clear consequences in current social relations between Italians- including professionals working in refugee services-, and forced migrants. Despite the implementation of intercultural education policies, for two decades now, and of *Integrazione Scolastica*, significant inequalities continues to be played out and reproduced within the socio-educational realm, which may be limiting for the asylum-seeking and refugee children in the future. Indeed, the ability of these systemic inequalities to reconstitute and relocate to ensure their perpetuation demonstrates their high level of persistence and adaptability. For this reason, this study proposes the application of an intersectional approached, such as that of Disability Critical Race Theory enriched by Butler's notion of subjectivation, to fully account for 'race'/ethnicity and disability, as well as social class and the many other systems of oppression that students experience in schools.

[45] Quoted from David Gillborn presentation at an academic seminar on 'race' equality in education, organised by the Runnymede Trust at the University of Birmingham, in February 2015.

Bernstein (1970) once remarked that “education cannot compensate for society”. Certainly sustained solutions to structural inequalities in wider society cannot be found *only* through education. Cochran-Smith (2004, p. 19) agrees that educators cannot “fix the problems of society”, or “substitute for social movements aimed at the transformation of society’s fundamental inequities”, she nonetheless contends that our work “has the potential to contribute to those movements in essential ways by being part of collective projects and larger communities for social justice”. Hopefully this study has engaged in a inter-continental critical dialogue on the longstanding inequities that present themselves in education. If it has demonstrated anything, it is that we have much yet to talk about, especially in the Italian context.

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## Appendix I: Letter of Invitation to Participate

**Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione**

Roma,….

Alla Cortese Attenzione …..

Cortese ….,

Con la presente chiedo …….

Valentina Migliarini, dottoranda del XXIX ciclo nel curriculum Teoria e Ricerca Educativa, presso il dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione dell'Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, è impegnata in un progetto di tesi di dottorato europeo sotto la mia supervisione dal titolo *Theorizing Intersectional Positions within the Education of Dis/Abled Asylu-seeking and Refugee Children in Rome: a Grounded Theory approach*. Il progetto di ricerca, in parte svolto presso lo UCL Institute of Education dell'Università di Londra, mira a esplorare l'esperienza educativa e di accesso ai servizi sanitari dei minori richiedenti asilo e rifugiati in stato di disabilità (da intendersi nella definizione dell'OMS - Disabilità, Bisogni Educativi Speciali, Disturbi Specifici dell'Apprendimento, Svantaggio socio-economico e linguistico), nella città di Roma.

La dott.ssa Migliarini è disposta ad accettare indicazioni dalla vostra direzione in merito allo svolgimento degli incontri, nel rispetto delle regole del servizio e della sensibilità e privacy dei singoli individui.

In attesa di un cortese riscontro , rimango a disposizione per ulteriori chiarimenti riguardo al progetto dottorale.

Con i saluti più cordiali,

prof. Marco Catarci

Professore Associato di Pedagogia sociale e interculturale presso il Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, Università degli Studi Roma Tre

# Appendix II: Interview Schedule

**Professionals**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Informazioni Iniziali** | - Può descrivermi brevemente di cosa si occupa la sua organizzazione? |
| **Minori Rifugiati con Disabilità** | - Fra i rifugiati che accogliete nella vostra organizzazione qual è l'incidenza dei minori rifugiati? Che età hanno nella media?<br>- Che tipo di servizi offrite ai minori rifugiati?<br>- All'interno della vostra organizzazione quali sono le figure professionali che si occupano dei minori?<br>- Quali sono i bisogni principali dei minori e come questi bisogni sono cambiati nel corso del tempo?<br>- Tra gli utenti del vostro servizio, vi sono principalmente minori rifugiati che arrivano in Italia con un nucleo familiare o non accompagnati?<br>- Quanti dei minori con cui entrate in contatto nella vostra organizzazione hanno una disabilità (fisica/"disagio mentale")?<br>- Che tipo di approccio hanno alla disabilità gli operatori della vostra struttura?<br>- Ci sono bisogni specifici anche dei minori rifugiati in condizione di disabilità?<br>- Quali sono state le disabilità maggiormente riscontrate nella vostra struttura?<br>- Quali strumenti utilizzate per la valutazione della disabilità? Sono culturalmente diversificati? |

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| **Minori Rifugiati con Disabilità e Coordinamento con servizi e istituzioni territoriali** | - Come avviene il coordinamento fra la vostra organizzazione e le istituzioni scolastiche e sanitarie del territorio di Roma per l'inserimento scolastico dei minori rifugiati con disabilità?<br>- Quali sono le problematiche maggiormente riscontrate nell'inserimento dei minori rifugiati nelle scuole?<br>- Quali le problematiche nel ricevere l'assistenza sanitaria delle ASL?<br>- Secondo lei, dal punto di vista dell'inserimento scolastico il personale docente e i dirigenti scolastici considerano più l'aspetto della disabilità o lo status di rifugiato?<br>- Quali sono gli aspetti che lei cambierebbe nel coordinamento fra i diversi servizi presenti sul territorio? Quali quelli che invece rendono il coordinamento efficace? |
| **Supporto alle Famiglie Minori Rifugiati con Disabilità** | - Quali sono le percezioni di disabilità delle famiglie e dei minori che ricevete nella vostra organizzazione?<br>- Quali sono i vostri interventi per aiutarli a comprendere le differenze culturali nella percezione della disabilità e il loro status migratorio?<br>- Quali sono, se esistenti, le attività informative e di supporto per facilitare la transizione verso l'inserimento scolastico e l'accesso ai servizi sanitari?<br>- Com'è vissuta dai minori e dalle famiglie la transizione dalla presa in carico nei vostri centri all'inserimento nelle scuole e la relazione con il personale delle ASL? |
| **Questioni Finali** | - In un momento di crisi economico-politica come quella presente, quale sarebbe, secondo lei, la strategia migliore da attuare per rendere più positiva |

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| | l'esperienza educativa dei minori rifugiati e poi facilitare il loro inserimento nei contesti formativi e professionali?<br>- Che percezione ha di una possibile doppia discriminazione sulla base della provenienza e della disabilità?<br><br>- Ha avuto modo di entrare in contatto/lavorare direttamente con nuclei familiari di rifugiati o con minori non accompagnati?<br>- C'è qualcos'altro che ritiene di poter aggiungere sulla questione dell'integrazione dei minori rifugiati con disabilità? |

**Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children**

| | |
|---|---|
| **General Information** | - What is your name?<br>- Where are you from?<br>- When did you arrive to Italy?<br>- How long have you been here in this centre?<br>- Are you an asylum seeker? |
| **The journey and integration within Italian society** | - Can you tell me what you remember about your journey to Italy?<br>- Can you tell me a bit about your life experience in Italy? In which services have you been, if you can remember?<br>- Do you like Italy? Are you happy about the reception conditions?<br>- During the reception have you ever felt discriminated for who you are /where you come from/your religion or your culture?<br>- What do you think it should be modified in the reception? |
| **Access to educational services** | - Do you go to school?<br>- Which programs/courses are you attending?<br>- Are you happy? Do you like what they teach you?<br>- Do you think that the programs are |

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| | culturally sensitive and that teachers take into consideration your cultural backgrounds?<br>- How do you find your classmates or course-mates?<br>- Have you ever felt discriminated while at school? |
| **Access to health services** | - Have you seen a doctor here in Italy? If so, in which circumstances (if you want to share your experience)?<br>- Can you tell me a bit about your experience within the Italian health services?<br>- Did you have specific health issues, because of your journey to Italy?<br>- Do you like the health system here? Are you happy about the doctors?<br>- Have you ever felt discriminated? |
| **Final Considerations** | - How do you see yourself in 10 years?<br>**Thanks for your time!** |

# Appendix III: Interview Schedule for Round II Interviews

| | |
|---|---|
| **Questioni Iniziali (personali)** | 1) Potresti descrivere brevemente come hai deciso di diventare mediatore culturale in questo servizio per i richiedenti asilo?<br>2) Quando hai manifestato il primo interesse per questo tipo di lavoro? Puoi ricordare cosa pensavi allora (quali erano le tue opinioni)? C'è stato qualcuno che ti ha influenzato? Se sì, in che modo?<br>3) Puoi ricordare un evento, o più di uno che ha influenzato la tua decisione di lavorare in quest'ambito?<br>4) Potresti descrivere che tipo di persona eri quando hai deciso di intraprendere questo lavoro? |
| **Questioni intermedie (legate al servizio)** | 1) Potresti descrivere brevemente il lavoro che svolgi in questo servizio? In cosa consiste la mediazione culturale nella terapia svolta in questo servizio?<br>2) Potresti descrivere, in linea generale, quali sono le caratteristiche del richiedente asilo/rifugiati che accedono a questo servizio?<br>3) Quali sono, secondo te, gli aspetti più critici nello svolgere il servizio di mediazione culturale per questa categoria di migranti e quali quelli più positivi?<br>4) Come ti relazioni con i minori che sono analfabeti o anche con gli adulti che sono analfabeti?<br>5) Quali sono gli aspetti più importanti della cultura d'origine a cui fai riferimento in relazione per aiutare i richiedenti/rifugiati (soprattutto minori) ad integrarsi nella società Italiana?<br>6) Quali sono le figure professionali con le quali tu t'interfacci maggiormente all'interno del servizio? Quali, invece, quelle al di fuori di questo servizio? Mantieni delle relazioni con il personale scolastico (nel caso dei minori) o con professionisti all'interno di servizi formativi? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 7) Pensi che il tuo ruolo sia fondamentale all'interno di questo servizio e in generale nei servizi per richiedente asilo nel Comune di Roma?<br>8) Come potresti definire il coordinamento fra i diversi servizi e le diverse professionalità, che operano per l'integrazione dei rifugiati, nella città di Roma? Quali sono, secondo te gli aspetti positivi e quali quelli negativi?<br>9) Potresti descrivere una giornata tipo, o anche una sessione terapeutica tipo, all'interno di questo servizio in cui sei chiamato/a a svolgere la mediazione culturale?<br>10) Puoi ricordare uno o più pazienti il cui percorso è stato difficile? Puoi ricordare uno o più pazienti il cui percorso è stato positivo? Come li descriveresti? |
| **Questioni finali** | 1) Potrei chiederti di descrivere qual è stata (o quali sono state) la lezione più importante dal punto di vista professionale che hai appreso lavorando in questo servizio?<br>2) Che tipo di persona/mediatore sarai fra 5 anni? Come potresti comparare la persona/la professionista che speri di essere e la persona/professionista che sei adesso?<br>3) Potresti descrivermi come pensi che questo servizio potrebbe essere fra cinque anni? Pensi che potrebbe cambiare in meglio o in peggio?<br>4) Alla luce di questa tua esperienza professionale, quale consiglio daresti ad un mediatore che si accinge a lavorare in un servizio per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati?<br>5) C'è qualcos'altro che vuoi aggiungere per farmi capire meglio il tuo ruolo professionale all'interno di questo servizio?<br>6) C'è qualcosa che ti piacerebbe chiedermi? |

## Appendix IV: Extract of Interview Transcription with Asylum-Seeking Children

***Group Interview with Three Asylum Seeking Minors in a foster care home***

*OK, chi vuole cominciare? Il registratore lo mettiamo in mezzo così riusciamo a registrare bene le voci di tutti.*

Yakub[46] si offre volontario, e prede la parola.

*Ok, allora, se vuoi puoi cominciare a raccontarmi del tuo viaggio, come sei arrivato qui ehm e da quanto tempo sei in Italia.*

Yakub: Ehm io sono venuto qui con la barca ehm in Sicilia. Il viaggio è durato diciotto giorni, vengo dalla Mauritania. Dopo che sono arrivato a Sicilia, poi dopo due giorni sono arrivato qui a Roma, il 16 Maggio 2014. Ehm sono arrivato a Roma Termini e un'altra persona che volevo che mi aiuta, lui mi ha portato alla Polizia di Roma e la Polizia mi ha portato qui alla Pergola, il 20 Maggio. Sono qui alla pergola da 11 mesi ehm quasi 11 mesi, manca poco per il mio compleanno.

*Quanti anni avevi quando sei arrivato?*

Yakub: 17 anni. Qui io sto facendo il corso d'Italiano di A2 e la Terza Media e uno l'ho fatto prima, quando sono venuta qui, avevo due mesi. Poi il viaggio è molto difficile, pericoloso; non abbiamo scelta perchè abbiamo bisogno di qualcosa; perchè avevo tanti problemi nel mio paese, con la mia famiglia, con mio zio. Dopo che sono venuto qui, ho parlato con lui per lui mi mandato miei documenti, e lui mi ha detto no, mi ha detto "non posso mandarti I tuoi documenti perchè tu devi tornare qui prima, perchè quando sono venuto qua io non avevo detto che volevo andare in Italia, perchè qundo sono venuto qua io non avevo mai detto che volevo andare in Italia perchè non volevo che lui lo sapesse e dunque lui mi ha detto no e io restare qui due o tre mesi.

[46] All names of the asylum-seeking minors have been changed for ethical reasons.

Tutti i giorni lo chiamo e lui non mi risponde. Alla fine penso che non ne vuole sapere e allora io ho detto che voglio fare la richiesta d'asilo e lui m'ha detto sì.
*Oltre a tuo zio, in Mauritania tu hai contatti con i tuoi genitori?*

Yakub: no, i miei genitori sono morti quando avevo undici anni, nel 2008. Io mi sono trasferito con lui a casa sua. Stavo con lui e stavo studiando la terza media. Alla fine non mi sentivo bene, ehm volevo non volevo continuare a studiare perché avevo tanti problemi in scuola e con lui, sì, non va bene a scuola, quando vado a scuola non mi sento bene; poi ho deciso di lasciare la scuola per venire qua e mia vita, perché quando stavo qua sarà pericoloso, forse avrei continuato a studiare, avrei fatto università, ma volevo solo migliorare la mia vita perché mia vita era pericolosa, che ho detto che devo andare da una parte per il mio futuro ehm vorrei stare tranquillo.

*Vorresti continuare a studiare qui in Italia?*

Yakub: Sì lo voglio ehm adesso devo capire cosa fare, dopo ehm non so una casa, ehm io ho un amico, un fratello qui che ha un posto dove posso andare ma non lo so, o forse quando esco vado a Roma, via Assisi, per le persone che hanno fatto richiesta di asilo politico. Vado di là se trovo un modo per studiare tranquillo, sennò cerco un lavoro e sto tranquillo.

*Ok, ok grazie. Vuoi raccontarmi tu la tua storia?*

Dembelé[47]: I don't speak Italian sorry.

*Puoi spiegarlo e raccontarlo in Inglese.*

Dembelé: I arrived in Italy with the boat not long ago and I was in Sicily and then they brought me to Rome. I don't remember the day I arrived in this place, but I arrived in June ehm so I'm here about ten months now. I left my country Nigeria because I had a problem there, I lived there alone, I don't have none there, I don't

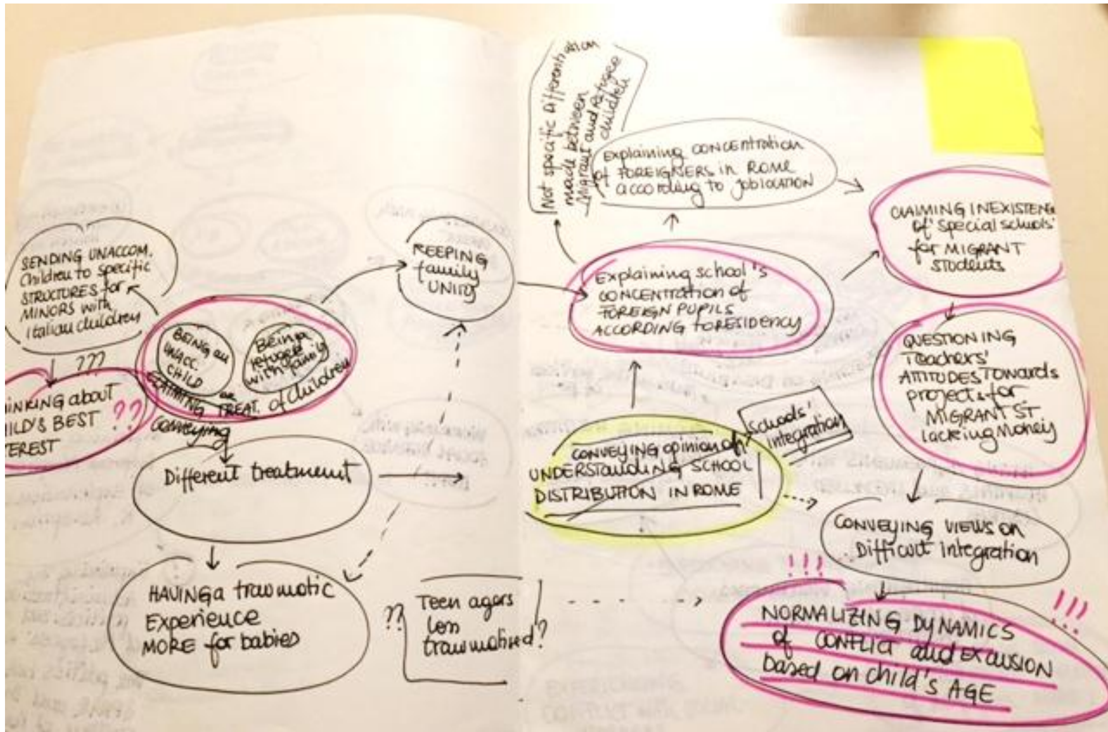
[47] Dembelé has speech and sound disorder.

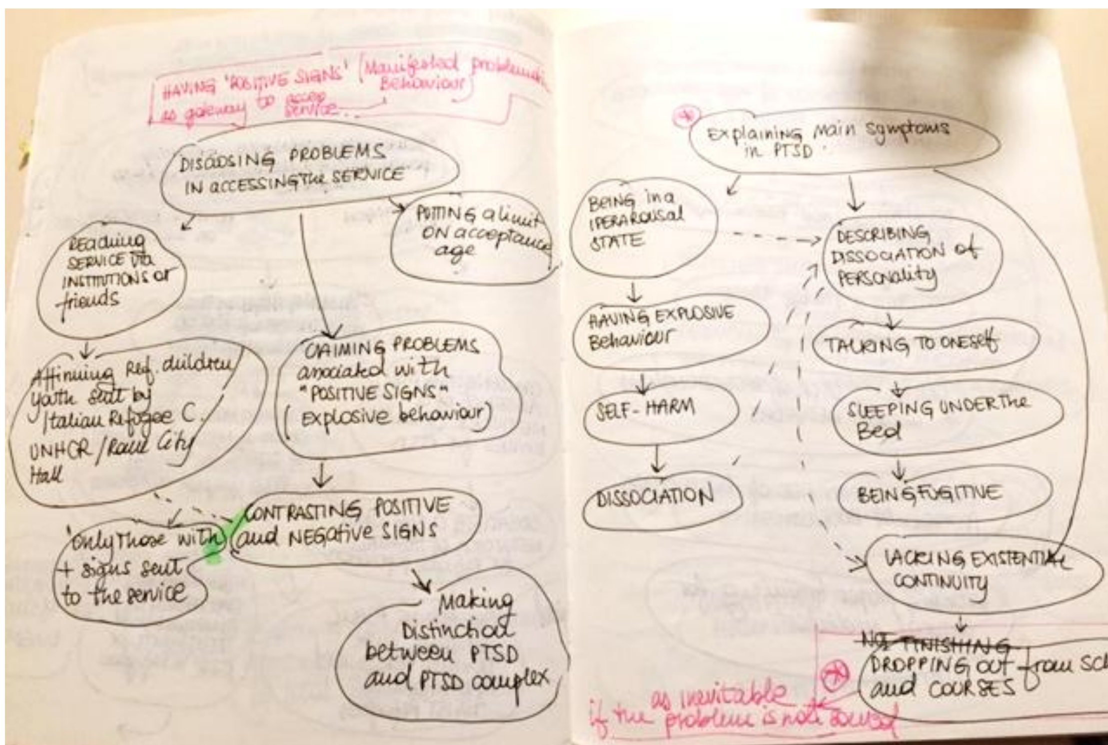
have anywhere to stay so I had to runa way from my country, I was in a friend house for sometimes.

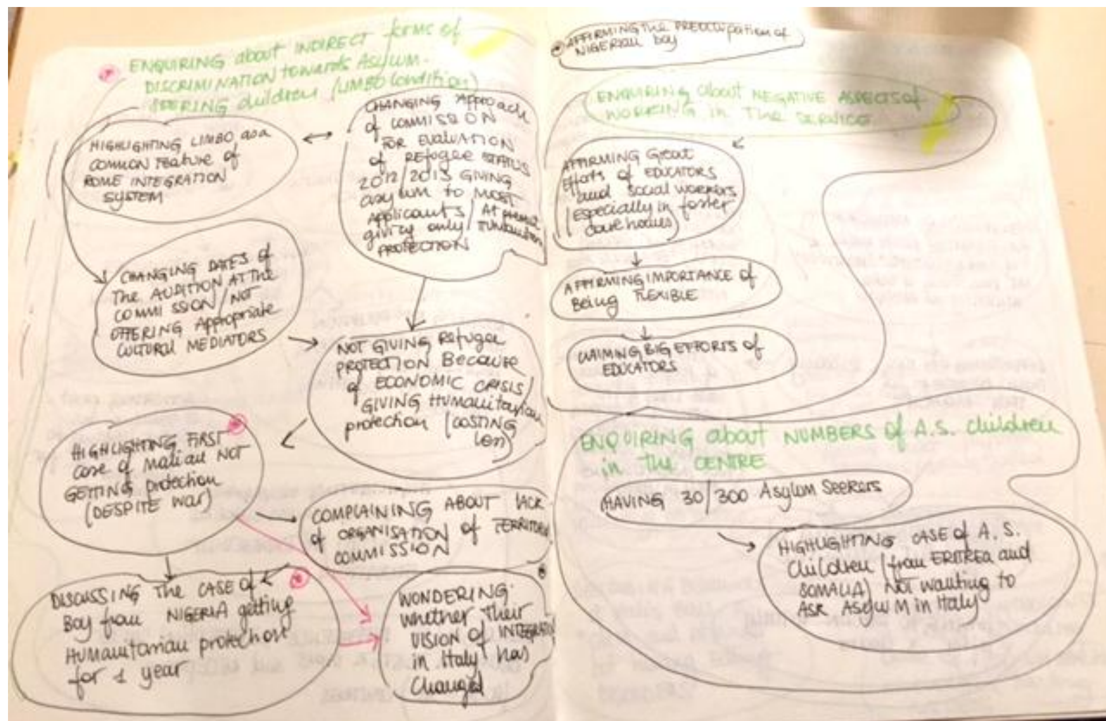
*How long was your journey?*

Dembelé: The journey was about a year or so, I can’t remember properly.

## Appendix V: Examples of Clustering during Analysis




ENQUIRING about INDIRECT forms of DISCRIMINATION towards ASYLUM-SEEKING children (LIMBO condition)
HIGHLIGHTING LIMBO as a COMMON feature of ROME INTEGRATION SYSTEM
CHANGING Approach of COMMISSION FOR EVALUATION of Refugee STATUS 2012/2013 GIVING asylum to MOST applicants / At present giving only Humanitarian PROTECTION
CHANGING DATES of The AUDITION AT THE COMMISSION / NOT OFFERING Appropriate CULTURAL MEDIATORS
NOT GIVING Refugee PROTECTION BECAUSE of ECONOMIC CRISIS / GIVING Humanitarian protection (COSTING less)
HIGHLIGHTING FIRST case of Malian NOT GETTING protection (DESPITE war)
COMPLAINING ABOUT lack of ORGANISATION of TERRITORIAL COMMISSION
DISCUSSING The CASE of Boy from NIGERIA getting Humanitarian protection for 1 year
WONDERING whether their VISION of INTEGRATION in Italy has changed
AFFIRMING THE PREOCCUPATION of NIGERIAN boy
ENQUIRING about NEGATIVE ASPECTS of WORKING IN THE SERVICE
AFFIRMING Great efforts of EDUCATORS and social workers (especially in foster care homes)
AFFIRMING IMPORTANCE of Being FLEXIBLE
CLAIMING BIG EFFORTS of EDUCATORS
ENQUIRING about NUMBERS of A.S. children in THE CENTRE
HAVING 30/300 Asylum Seekers
HIGHLIGHTING CASE of A.S. Children (from ERITREA and SOMALIA) Not wanting to ASK ASYLUM in Italy

# Appendix VI: Examples of Memos

## *Early Memo-* Organization V
## Group Interview[48]

**Accessing the service**

*Participant E: " Here we facilitate access for those children or teenagers that are in reception centres, ehm so we schedule appointments for them, we do the screening for infectious diseases, which is the first requirements for them to be able to stay in the reception centres […]. We provide access even to those who are not yet registered to the national health system, by granting them the registration on a temporary basis […]. The same ehm happens for the families with children that are living in occupied buildings […]. We have specific projects for refugee children, [...] access to the pediatric department and to pediatric infectivology services are in co-operation with the pediatric hospital in Rome […]".*

*Participant N: " Ehm I would say that with regards to pediatric neuropsychiatry you really don't have the green light in accessing services, ehm there is an instrumental access for example if you have to do a scan, an MRI or something like that […]. In addition the waiting list to get into specific therapy such as speech therapy can be of one or two years, so you have to be really lucky or you have to have a serious issue to be able to get into these services quickly […]".*

Access to the service was the first issue discussed by one of the interview participants (Participant E). Participant E described the service as open to a population of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and undocumented migrants, adults and children. The service is well-known within the city of Rome for conceiving health as a human right, and therefore is often seen as a model for the local health services (ASL). Participant E argues that particular attention is given to the access to health of children. There is a planned access for asylum seekers children in reception centres and refugee children. A range of social and health support services are available within the centre for

[48] Service promoting health of migrants and forced migrants. The interview was undertaken with an educator and a pediatric neuropsychiatrist working in the pediatric department of the centre.

asylum seekers and refugee children that usually arrive at the centre with a social worker from one of the reception centres.

The centre offers health assistance also to those 'irregular' families with children, living in 'occupied' buildings.

While access to health services, such as screening for infectious diseases, MRI and scans is facilitated, Participant N argues how difficult and time-wasting is to access specific services for mental health. Participant N explains how this can be interpreted as an instrumental access to health services, where a collaboration exists with a big pediatric hospital for issues related to infectivology, but bureaucratic issues exist for accessing particular services linked to mental health or pediatric neuropsychiatry. Participant N mentions the example of children waiting to get into speech therapy.

**Good theories, bad management**

*Participant N: "[...] Italy is not a country for children because a lot of resources have been taken off from schools, health and social services ehm so even if we have good theoretical* [referring to pediatric neuropsychiatry] *ehm in the end these models are not applied because we don't have the economic resources and thus the services don't have all the professional competencies required […]. […] There is a lack of monitoring and […] absence of co-ordination, ehm so I contextualize our service so that ehm you understand that it is not our fault ehm but we operate in a difficult context ehm for co-ordination".*

Participant N contextualizes the service within a dysfunctional system of co-ordination between local health services and other institutions. Participant N quotes the results of a recent CRC report to reinforce the idea that Italy does not provide sufficient access to educational, social and health services to children, particularly migrant children. This lack of access is felt as a violation of basic children's rights, particularly visible in the lack of monitoring of access and in the absence of a synergic effort to guarantee it, especially for specific group of children, such as refugees.

Participant N exposes a frustration of having "good theoretical models", with particular reference to the Italian school of pediatric neuopsychiatry (see Bollea and the efforts of desegregating society and educational institutions and to avoid the pathologization of children), but not having the economic resources to put them into

practice. Participant N claims how funding has been taken away from educational, social and health institutions and as a result the organisations working for children do not have the different professional figures to do a proper job, especially when it comes to pediatric neuropsychiatry. Participant N highlights the impossibility of doing a proper job. Participant N seems to attribute the bad management of migrant children in difficulty, and the impossibility of avoiding the so called "labelling business", to the lack of economic resources *tout court* and not, for example, to the willingness of professionals to undertake more efficient training or to mobilize against the economic cut. It could be possible to wonder whether Participant N is adopting an excuse or choosing a shortcut to tackle this problem (i.e. it's always very easy to blame the lack of economic resources to do a proper job, but since she talks of a 'revolutionary model' by innovative and radical neuropsychiatrists, then they could have done something together).

As a result of this "lack of economic resources", the only evaluation that the centre can do is an evaluation based mainly on children's social relations. Nothing can be done deeper than that because of the lack of a trained psychologist and of other figures within the group of professionals working in centres for refugee children.

Almost as a form of fictional resistance to such dysfunctional system, Participant N explains the nature of the approach that she uses within the centre where she works, to deal with forced migrant children. She defines the approach as systemic, one in which children are not pathologised but seen as actors, as active subjects of their personal stories and issues. Participant N clearly deploys the literature about the School of *Via del Sabelli* (Search for some references) and Bollea to justify the approached used. In conclusion, she argues that co-ordination between services at local level is problematic, since there is a lack of common view on children's trauma and disorders among the professionals, as well as a lack of monitoring of access especially to health services.

Practical Interventions - The Egyptian boy

*Participant N: "Ehm my work deals with behavioural problems, learning difficulties and development issues, ehm so speech problems, psychomotor impairment and so on ehm for children and for teenagers and also for unaccompanied minors".*

*"Last Thursday we saw, with a cultural mediator, a boy from Egypt. He is 16 years old and he came here because of a suspected dyslexia ehm but we don't have a specific diagnostic material ehm standardized, so we had to do an evaluation with some classic tests, ehm the Cornoldi's[49] tests, with the help of the cultural mediator and with tests in Arabic and ehm more or less we have ehm confirmed the hypothesis of the previous diagnosis of dyslexia ehm within a situation in which the boy never went to school nor his parents, ehm so it is hard to establish if the disorder is caused by environmental or structural factors [...]. This evaluation is anyway useful because it gives the boy, his family and his teachers at school a strategy and an indication to develop a individualized education program, ehm to prepare him for a certain autonomy [...]".*

The participant talks about an example of practical intervention, or of practical application of the theoretical model that she has been talking (and indeed continued to refer to throughout the interview). Participant N talks about the example of a teenage boy from Egypt that was sent to the centre with a "supposed" diagnosis of dyslexia. Interestingly, Participant N argues about the lack of "specific diagnostic material" for children of different cultures and speaking a different language. The concept of "standardized material" remain quite ambiguous (standardized for who? The Italian population or the migrants? If referring to migrant population, is it possible to standardize an instrument for different subjects, from different culture, with different origins of the disorders?).

In order to evaluate the situation of the Egyptian boy, Participant N affirms that classic tests, in Italian, and some Arabic tests have been used. Participant N relied on the help of the "translation" of a cultural mediator, for the texts in Arabic. After a consultation with the cultural mediator about the results obtained through the Italian tests and the tests in Arabic, she confirmed the diagnosis of dyslexia, since she argues that the boy had a clear difficulty in recognizing even the letters in Arabic. Thus, despite the anti-labelling theoretical framework that Participant N highlights throughout the interview, she confirms the diagnosis and thus attributes the child a disorder. Almost as if Participant N wants to hide this "libelling business", she admits that she doubted about the causes of this dyslexia, given the fact that the child has

[49] Cornoldi C. e Colpo G. (1995), *Nuove Prove di lettura MT per la Scuola media Inferiore*, Firenze,OS e Cornoldi C. e Colpo G.(1998): *Prove di Lettura MT per la Scuola Elementare -2*, Firenze, OS.
Please note that the tests are in Italian. It does not exist at present a translation in any different language.

never been to school, or his parents, and that the family has never invested in education. Despite her doubts, Participant N quickly affirms the importance of such evaluation to equip the boy, his family and the teachers at school with a 'strategy' to 'cope' with his 'disorder'. One can clearly wonder about the kind of helping strategy the labelling will offer the Egyptian boy, given the fact that he might be seen already as different, as suspicious (see other interviews). Thus, there are a number of contradictions that emerge from the discourse of Participant N, in describing the practical application of the 'inclusive' Italian model. First of all, she talks about a "revolutionary" anti-labelling model, and when asked to make crucial decisions, which will have an impact on the life of the boy in Italy and on the kind of support that will get from different services, Participant N chooses a shortcut and she quickly confirms the diagnosis of dyslexia. Interestingly, Participant N does not question the fact that the tests to measure dyslexia were in Italian, and she mainly relies on the fact that the boy could not even recognize the letters in Arabic. One can ask, how can a person that has never been to school read and write properly? Why is there such expectation from the Egyptian boy? Why Participant N did not really take this into account and recognize that the question of bilingualism is adding to the lack of schooling of the boy?

It seems quite clear that when it comes to the practicality of dealing with cases of migrants or forced migrant children, Participant N pays "lip-service" to the "revolutionary and inclusive" Italian model. To hide this contradictory position, and to appear as someone that has reflected on such a dilemma, and that avoid coming to quick conclusions, Participant N affirms how the diagnosis, and the very process of evaluation, has its usefulness in providing the society and the boy himself with a strategy of dealing with a disorder. One can doubt about whether this strategy is really going to make a change in the course of the life of this boy, if it is going to make him happier, at ease within the Italian society, or if this strategy is going to help him succeeding in schools and in finding a proper job, and thus becoming- as Participant N affirms- more "autonomous" (whereby autonomy is defined as being financially stable and not relying on the welfare system). Is this labelling not going to trigger a double form of exclusion? Reference to autonomy is made even in this interview (see other interviews). Participant N's perception of autonomy, as that of the rest of the interview participants, seems to have a strong neoliberal basis. Instead of indicating the different services that the boy can access or the different therapies that the boy

needs, in order to be properly supported, Participant N is already thinking about the autonomy. It would be interesting to explore whether the same kind of discourse of autonomy would have been made if the person diagnosed were an Italian teenager. (Important to look at the literature that she has mentioned about the inclusive Italian model).

Practical Intervention - The girl from Morocco

*Participant N: " [...] There was a girl from Morocco in the first year of Middle school that had socialisation issues and learning difficulties. In the beginning she was sent here because of her learning difficulties [...] ehm so I met the teachers, the social worker, because her family lives in a occupied building, ehm and after these meetings I met the family with the cultural mediator [...]. During the first meeting with the family only the dad wanted to be present, but then thanks to the work of the cultural mediator we managed to engage her mam too, and we started working on family roles, ehm and at school we encourage the girl to play with groups of Italian children, and we manage to offer her homework support [...]. We also work to create a better atmosphere in the classroom, distributing the "Carte del Viandante" with children's drawings related to the migration experience ehm to also understand the girl's expectations from her schooling experience [...]".*

The description of the practical intervention for a girl from Morocco seems to be completely different from that of the Egyptian boy. Participant N explains the networking work that she has done, organising meeting with the different professionals taking care of the girl (the social worker, the teachers and the cultural mediator). Again, particular attention is given to family roles and relationships. Except from the very first impression of the family hierarchy given by Participant N, one in which the mother seemed to be subjected to the dominant role of the father, thus having a bad impact on the social skills of the girl, very little has been said on the nature of the intervention to address the family roles. A bit more has been said about the kind of support offered to the girl at the school level. She has been encouraged, although we do not know really how, to socialize more with Italian classmates, and the teachers have been monitoring her learning, and offered her homework support. Intercultural work, to some extent, has been realized by the teachers and Participant N through the use of the "Carte del Viandante" that consist of children's drawing of the

most significant things they remember about the migration journey. Although, this kind of intervention seems quite sensible and more aware of the difficulties that the children can encounter during the migration, as well as the expectations about the new context of life, very little has been said about its efficacy in facilitating the socialization of the girl as well as her well being in the classroom. Participant N does not offer examples of successful friendships and bonds made by the girl.

It seems important to note the different approach adopted by Participant N in the case of a girl of 11 years old and a 16 years old boy. One can doubt about whether the Egyptian boy was thought to be potentially more problematic, and therefore granted with less attention and labelled immediately as having a disorder, while the learning difficulties of the girl are left in the background, and a lot has been said about the approach to create a good atmosphere in the classroom (explore more the literature on boy vs. girls in the classroom).

**Dismantling "disabling students" attitude**

*Participant N: " Ehm you try not to pathologies children, and that is why I was asking you what do you mean by 'disability', because the work that I'm doing is to try not to labelling them as different ehm as disabled [...]. There is quite a lot of literature and articles from Mara Beneduse on the integration of migrant children as disabled children. Ehm not knowing how to deal with this diversity, it has been treated as a disability. [...] There is an article by Levi that says that there has been an abuse of labelling children as having behavioural disorders [...], I mean it is not possible! [...] We have to change perspective and understand the culture that has produced these problems [...]".*

*"[...] I mean you obviously have situations such as that of the Egyptian boy* [mentioned before], *where ehm I mean that boy must have had specific problem ehm but then you have to consider the fact that he has never studied and he did not know even the alphabet in Arabic pretty well and that is why we confirmed the hypothesis that there was a structural problem, perhaps linked to a trauma [...]".*

Participant N puts forward this discourse of not migrant children in schools as disabled children, which she finds in much of the Italian literature in the field of

psychiatry and in the field of educational anthropology. Participant N asked for a clarification of my use of the term disability and she argues for a change in perspective, for a more sensitive approach that consider the culture of the children as having a possible impact on the disorder. She argues how the literature (especially the work of Levi) has highlighted an abuse of the labelling process, in which migrant children have been most of the time considered as having behavioural and developmental issues. Interestingly, this polished and articulated discourse and the literature, with which she identifies, contrasts with the examples of practical interventions that she offers. It is almost like she is trapped between an ideal model that has inspired her studies and her career and the reality of things. She seems to find in different moment a justification, or better the easiest way out of the problem, to her practical actions of labelling – as in the case of the Egyptian boy.

In the second paragraph of the quotation, Participant N returns to the issue of the Egyptian boy and she argues that he might have had a problem (i.e. she is trying to find a problem and highlighting it in order to make a –perhaps right- decision, that should be then taken into consideration by the schools or other institutions that will "take care" of the boy), but insists on highlighting environmental factors in a contradictory way. Participant N seems to have rushed into the labelling business, especially because she states that the Egyptian boy never went to school and was not able to properly recognize the Arabic letters. One can ask, how can someone be dyslexic if he/she never attend school? The controversial attitude of Participant N is a clear example of how a professional can pay lip service to a theory or a model of inclusion, and not actually put it into practice. It would have been probably too complicated for the system as a whole to avoid the labelling business, and to make a practical decision that would really consider the culture and the environmental factors.

*Participant N: "[...] Ehm we try to look at whatever is around the child, and we consider the child is the result of different components ehm individual, relational, ehm this was revolutionary [...].*

*[...] The fact that we have an anthropologist is very important for the service, since a lot of labelling stems from a Western approach to mental health, and I mean this can be useful to co-ordinate with local services, but not to establish a trust relationship with the family [...].*

*[…] Like in the case of the boy from Nigeria with behavioural problems, ehm I mean we have created a positive relationship with the family when we told them that the boy is the reincarnation of his ancestor, and she said it was true, so she trusted us […]. So you see we try to put the person at the centre, we try to recognize the traditions of different cultures as equally important, to create a good relation and to not pathologies the children […]".*

Participant N concludes the interview repeating the centrality of a neuropsychiatric model, such as the Italian one, that takes into consideration the environmental factors as possible cause for a disorder, and that starts the process of healing precisely from there. Once again, this discourse sounds like a mantra, almost like an impossible aspiration, or at best, something in which she really believed as a student but she cannot apply fully as a professional. Perhaps she applies it to different extents and according to the subject to be treated (see Egyptian boy versus girl from Morocco). Participant N uses a very radical language, in recognizing how the vast majority of psychiatric disorders and mental health problem pertains mainly to a Western tradition. However, this strong statement does not seem to be sustained by a radical intervention on the patience. In fact, Participant N argues that this revolutionary view of dismantling the Western thinking about mental health should be used exclusively to engage with the children and their families, but not with the other local services, with which one should maintain the labelling business. So if on the one hand this inclusive and critical theoretical framework inspired her, on the other her practice is not oriented in dismantling the system as a whole. Therefore, she adopts a very personal approach to treat her patience, which leaving the system (i.e. the practice of other health services unchallenged). One instance of this contradictory attitude can be found in the last statement, where Participant N mentions the case of the boy from Nigeria with behavioural problems. Participant N gives an example of recognition of other cultures and tradition to build a relationship of trust with the family of the boy (which presumably preludes to the therapy). She argues that she recognized that the child is a reincarnation and that the mother agreed. It could be asked how Participant N reconciles this position of "going native", with the demands, the choices and the structures not only of the social and health services, but also of the Italian society as a whole. How would such a position really help the mother and the boy navigating the Italian system? What are the benefits for them? What are the benefits for Participant

N? Is there another more sensible model to really understand the origin of children behaviour and avoid easy labelling? (To explore more, even literature on etnopsychiatry and its efficacy).

***Early Memo Organization III Service 1***[50]

(After Clustering)

**On-going emergency of unaccompanied teenagers**

*"[...] Our foster-home is semi-autonomous and we provide support for unaccompanied asylum seeking and non-asylum seeking teenagers. We started working as foster-care for abandoned Italian children from early years up to age 10, but then we switch to migrant children to respond to the 2009 North Africa emergency, which it is still an emergency ehm and no one knows why [...]. We promote social inclusion because these teenagers arrived closed to their 18 and so they have a short time to get the documents, a proper house, a job, and get autonomous. This is clearly very hard but we tried to do our best."*

The "on-going emergency of unaccompanied teenagers" explains the origin, the shift and current purpose of the foster-care provided by the organisation. The foster care service was originally open for abandoned Italian children, and the professionals working in the organisation (social workers and educators) were trained to respond to this target. Amidst the increasing number of unaccompanied migrant children, following the 2009 North Africa emergency, the service switched to foster care for unaccompanied asylum seeking and non- asylum seeking children and teenagers. It is not clear, however, where the abandoned Italian children were sent, as a result of this shift, and if there was a period of co-existence between these two groups of children. In addition, no mention was made, by Participant F, about any professional training to respond to the needs of children coming from different cultural backgrounds, and which might have experienced a traumatic journey.
Participant F explains how the approach adopted by the organisation to deal with this *continuing emergency* of unaccompanied teenagers consists mainly of promoting

[50] Foster-care service for unaccompanied asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers teenagers in Rome.

social inclusion. Participant F articulates the concept of social inclusion as the ability children of finding a decent house, a job and to become autonomous (i.e. getting out of the government welfare support) in the shortest possible time. To achieve this goal, the organisation helps the children in their schooling and job training programs and offers psychological support (when needed), in co-operation with two external mental health centres for children and teenagers. Only one of these centres has a specific training on mental health issues faced by forced migrants. The idea of social inclusion presented here recalls the one articulated by Participant D and Participant X in earlier interviews (Organisation I, pag. 1). Once again, asylum seekers and refugees have to become hierarchically conditioned state subjects, who have to be motivated by understandings of global competitiveness, and the necessity to strategically adapt as individual to rapidly shifting personal and national context (Mitchell, 2003). Interestingly, the interview participants give the same definition of social inclusion, which has a clear neoliberal character, despite being from different refugee organisations. This common view of professionals, working in refugee organisations, on *social* integration of forced migrants, which in reality seems to be merely *economic*, is probably induced by the economic and political rhetoric of the Italian government.

Participant F affirms that the *emergency* of unaccompanied children is not ended. When he states that "no one knows why" he refers to the lack of government's measure to tackle the issue of unaccompanied migrant children through permanent measures of reception. Despite the bureaucratic issues that every organisation faces, due to the government failure to elaborate a more appropriate legislation, Participant F is satisfied with the kind of support and help that they provide to forced-migrant teenagers.

**<u>Getting lost in the Italian system</u>**

*"What we think they* [the teenagers] *need, ehm, most of the time they are lost in the Italian system, ehm they have no reference point within Italy, and sometimes they are unconscious of the journey they have made. They seem to have arrived in another dimension, different from how they have imagined it, ehm and then they don't know how to get around here. So we help them to understand the reality here, especially for*

*Egyptian boys, which come here with the expectation of working, because maybe they have heard from others that they have come to Italy and have made a fortune. But their expectations are not met and the first thing they ask is to be able to work. […] We try to guide them into the reality here; we send them to school to learn the language, to get qualifications to get a good job. They need this and also reference points, which we are, but we also want them to have different reference points. We help them building significant relationships […] we help them to be autonomous within the Italian society. […] The work that we do is also building their consciousness and their critical capacities, to make them understand why they are here and what they can do next".*

Getting lost within the Italian system represent the main need of unaccompanied teenagers, perceived by the professionals working in the organisation. Thus, cultural orientation is the main perceived need by the social workers. For this reason, they have structured the organization in different areas of intervention. Their response to teenagers' disorientation revolves around basic resources to survive in Italy: they encourage teenagers to go to school to learn language and to get a good qualification, which will lead them to good contract jobs. This will keep them out of illegal market circles and the exploitation often perpetrated by their own nationals and families already in Italy. The very fact that they send them to school appears satisfying to the professionals of the operation, that seem to gloss over discrimination issues that teenagers may encounter in schools, which has a significant weight in demotivating them to complete their degree (see later parts of the memo), and in general within the Italian society. Participant F states that they act as reference points for them, they try to establish significant relations with the teenagers, within and outside the organisation, so that they can quickly become autonomous. However, no detailed information was given about the very nature of the "significant" relationship.

Despite the description of some of the unaccompanied teenagers' expectations in the new country and their pro-activeness in imagining a new life and a new job, as in the case of Egyptian boys, no acknowledgement is made about their agency and resilience in a new context. On the contrary, they have been described as "lost", almost powerless, and in need to be constantly re-oriented into the *reality of Italy* (emphasis added). The main worry, expressed by the interview participants here, is to re-build the "consciousness" and their "critical capacities", as they seem to have a clear idea of

the why they find themselves in a new country. So, these teenagers (most of them arrive at an age close to 18) are here described as almost empty vessels, lost, passive and without or with a different consciousness, which has to be re-built and re-formed, because their critical capacities are not enough to survive.

The teenagers have to learn as quickly as they can their place within the hierarchy of "others", as established by the White mainstream society, or perhaps as argued in the Memo of an earlier interview (Organisation I, Participant D), they have to know their place within the "hierarchy of hierarchies" (Miller, 1987, pp. 152). This idea of orienting them into the Italian system, and building a new consciousness (about what they are expected to do and which path to follow to avoid being outcasts in the Italian society) recalls discourses of assimilation and subtle exercise of White mainstream power and supremacy that constantly needs to be re-affirmed. Only if they accept the new reality, which is described to be in stark contrast with the one they have imagined, only if they follow the social workers' advices in re-building their capacities and in the steps "carefully" standardized and pre-determined by the "Italian System" and applied by the White social workers, they will eventually become *respectable subjects* (emphasis added). The issues analysed here also fit into the idea of Whiteness as respectability of Steve Garner (2007), a notion that is articulated better below. It is important to note that the education pathway, for most of the unaccompanied teenagers, is based on specific short courses and training for certain kinds of jobs (usually low paid, that leave them in an unprivileged status). So the discourses of the interview participants (i.e. getting into school to have good qualifications and to get a certain kind of job), may contrast with the effective structure of the Italian society and the distribution of privilege. This seems to fit into a particular theoretical proposition that accompanies Critical Race Theory, which is interest convergence (see Bell, 1980b; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

According to Derrick Bell, considered as the "Father of Critical Race Theory" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 38), White people will seek racial justice only to the extent that there is something in it for them. Interest convergence is about alignment and not altruism. We cannot expect those who control the society to make altruistic or benevolent moves toward racial justice (Bell, 1980b). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) add that because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially), and working-class people (physically), large segments of the society have little incentives

to eradicate it. Similarly, the kinds of training and jobs offered to unaccompanied refugee teenagers within the city of Rome serve the interests of the White elites and working class, as they are low paid jobs that Italians are no more willing to do, and certainly do not correspond to the aspiration or even to the previous qualifications that the refugee teenagers might have achieved in their own countries. So the promise of "better paid jobs" out of the black corrupted market, which seem to be very promising and promoting justice for this group, are only reinforcing the neo-liberal hierarchy of the White mainstream Italian society.

*"Ehm, we found that there differences, according to our experience, between asylum seeking and non-asylum seeking teenagers, ehm and this is really related to our empirical experience [...] The teens from Sub- Saharan Africa, which flee persecution in their country and thus they have the condition to request for asylum, paradoxically, having lived a much more dangerous situation and a much longer journey, compared to the Bengali and Egyptians, they have more consciousness about the fact that they have to learn the language of the new country, they have to adapt quickly and be able to get around, and also be guided by social workers in reception centres that know all about the standards and the procedures to apply to achieve specific objectives".*

Interestingly, the passage above seems to reinforce the idea that, in the eyes of the White social workers, there are subjects that are seen as more inclined to be helped and guided (indeed as more passive), those who have the "conditions" to ask for asylum and subjects that resist more to the formal integration procedures. The former are defined as more "conscious", the latter as more pro-active and independent; characters that are seem to be perceived as problematic. The fact that the Bengali and the Egyptians have an extended network and they get information from relatives, friends and other migrants about Italy seems to be an obstacle to the standardized process of integration, as set out by the social workers.

The fact that Egyptians and Bengali use their own strategies to survive in a country, that most of the time does not offer the adequate means for living for migrant, is seen as not positive. It seems that these strategies used by certain groups are employed just to get States' benefit, and therefore criticised. The interview participants draw a significant distinction between 'good' and 'bad' migrants, 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants. Those who can be induced into the neo-liberal form of

integration, in this case the asylum seekers from Sub-Saharan Africa are seen as 'good', and 'deserving' to be integrated in the society. Those, like the Egyptian and Bengali, who deploy their strategies to live within a new country, and thus display a certain amount of resistance to be inducted within the neo-liberal thinking are to be considered as 'bad'. In fact, the interview participants judge negatively the misuse and abuse that many Egyptian teenagers have made of the status of "unaccompanied minor", giving to the Italian authority false age, all to get benefits from the Italian state- even thought the participants acknowledge that the procedure of getting the proper documentation is long, complicated and time-wasting.

These issues fit into the "Model Minority" discourse and the related issue of *authenticity* (Bradbury, 2013; Gillborn, 2008). The "Model Minority" discourse builds on Gillborn's (2008) CRT-inspired examination of this concept, and his argument that there is 'a disposable character to model minorities' (2008, p. 146); a fluidity in which groups of pupils can be intelligible as 'model'. Gillborn argues that some groups may no longer be seen as 'model' when they 'no longer serve the interests of power holders'. "Model minorities" thus function as a discursive tool to deny accusations of racism and divert attention from continuing racial inequities. As Stacey Lee argues, there can be 'no "model minority" without the concomitant stereotype of the lazy and unintelligent Black or Brown other' (Lee, 2008, p. ix). And so in the case of the interview Participant above, the model minority – represented by the teens from Sub-Saharan Africa-, cannot exists without the disruptive and 'bad migrants' (i.e. the Bengali and the Egyptians).

Teens from Sub-Saharan Africa are then, 'disposable minorities', who may only be temporarily constituted positively, but serve some purpose. The fluidity of "Model Minorities" recalls the central ideas of CRT and much other literature on 'race' is the historicity of the social construct of race – which racisms and racial terms are flexible and serve the political interests of the time. Omi and Winant's (2004) 'racial formation' approach, which takes neither a 'race as illusionary' nor a 'racial objectivist' position, takes into account 'the importance of historical context and contingency in the framing of racial categories and the social construction of racially defined experiences' (p. 11). Thus the relative positions of different groups within popular discourse are dependent on the expediencies of a particular time and place;

the movement of different communities into and out of ‘model minority’ status (Bradbury, 2013).

As it has been argued by Bradbury (2013), these teens from Sub-Saharan Africa, who have experienced recent conflicts, are constituted as ‘model’ through a web of discourses relating to good/bad migrants, assimilation, and religious moderation, in stark contrast with the Egyptian and Bengali teens that might be mainly Muslims. Assimilationist discourses of ‘good migrants’, who have aspirations and are hardworking, and keen to adopt ‘Western’ values, which are present in a policy context of ‘contemporary assimilationism’ (Gillborn, 2008), position these families as acceptable minorities in general (Bradbury, 2013).

These concepts shift the attention from a racist system and work powerfully to maintain a White idealised norm and deflect attention from race disparities in education and in society, more generally.

An interesting parallel can be drawn also with Garner’s (2007) idea of Whiteness as respectability. The author argues that,

> “Respectability orders the values and enables people to identify devalued behaviour (of Others) and valued behaviour. The latter is viewed as the norm for the white ‘us’, and is discursively created in speaking of the devalued behaviour. Moreover, deleterious social change can therefore be interpreted through the prism of individual responsibility and blamed on people of colour who are actually also on the receiving end of such change. As respectability is valuable only to those who lack it (Skeggs 1997), it becomes a particularly loaded idiom in which to discuss change, throwing up as it does a series of contingent and cross-cutting class, gender and racial hierarchies” (Garner, 2007, pp. 62).

Interestingly, one can also reflect on the possible influence that religion plays in the consideration of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants. Most of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are Christians, whereas the majority of the Bengali and Egyptians arriving in Italy are Muslims, and therefore can be easily associated to stereotypes linked to terror.

*“From Egypt, the typology* [of migration] *has characteristics that are similar to the kinds of disadvantage that we can find among the Italian working-class population living in the suburbs of the big Italian cities. So, these* [Egyptian] *boys ehm they understood how to negotiate to get things and ehm this is an anthropological fact and also real, ehm that explains how these boys are not to be considered as passive, but as*

*active subjects, them, their families, the conflicts with their family, the fact that they might or might not follow the advices of their families and friends, but anyway they know how to use and they think of using this to get the Italian papers and be regular. They know the procedure."*

According to the interview participants, the kind of disadvantaged faced by Egyptian unaccompanied teenagers, non-asylum seekers, is to be compared to the class struggle of the Italian teens in suburban areas of big cities. Thus, class is at forefront of the problems faced by this group, according to the interview participants. Within the dynamics described above no mention has been made about the racial problem. 'Race' and racism are not mentioned by the participants. This absence recalls the debates done by Critical Race Theorists. As Delgado (2001) suggests many modern readers believe that racism is declining and that class today is more important than race. Even if shocking racist incidents are less frequent, racism continues to blight the lives of people of colour, including people with status jobs like judges. Not to forget the racial versus class exploitation argument made by Mills (2004). Mills (2004) goes on to assert that 'race' has 'relative autonomy' and therefore racism is a system of oppression in itself (we might add 'for itself' in particular cases and forms). However, while class exploitation is primarily based on wages, the racialised subordinate population (R2) is either excluded from work altogether or recruited by members of the dominant group (R1) under different conditions from other workers. In the colonial system, non- whites are coerced to work, while white workers in the metropolis are compelled by the market to work. Mills maintains that: 'This is not a minor but a major and qualitative difference' (2004: 39). Moreover, the R2s are not part of the group to which democratic norms apply. The normative social justice claims are therefore not available to them as a matter of course, which means that following Rogers Smith (1999) 'racism is not an anomaly in the global system but a norm in its own right'.

**Explaining changes in schools' attitudes towards unaccompanied teens**

When talking about the changes in unaccompanied teenagers over the course of the years, the participants highlight the fact that the very first influx of children coming to Italy did not have the networks that they have now. A decade ago, they were much more in need of affection and needed more support to access the education system.

One of the participants affirms that in the past the organisation had to negotiate access to education for unaccompanied children, seeking or not seeking asylum. The teachers and the schools put a series of obstacles and found different excuses not to have this group of children in the schools. On the contrary, in the last two years there has been a significant change in schools' attitudes towards unaccompanied children, a change that seems to be driven by schools' economic and political interests- according to one of the participants. Thus, in recent years, various schools are enlarging their educational programs and lobbying with organisations for refugees' reception to get as much students as possible. According to one of the participant, there seems to be a certain degree of change in the attitude of schools' personnel towards unaccompanied teenagers, as well as a better relation with refugees' organisations. It would be of great relevance to understand why there has been a sudden shift in the attitudes of schools towards forced migrants children. Perhaps, the economical factors can be the driving force of this paradigm shift (an issue to be discussed when interviewing teachers).
Parallel to this is the increasing corruption in the administration of refugees and reception centres in the city of Rome, made more evident in the recent scandal of December 2014, which lead to the conviction of several politicians from leftist and rightist parties working for Rome City Hall, and the head of a charity organisation that used to receive more children and adult refugees than the number expressed by the regional law, only with the purpose to get more money from the Municipality, money that would go in the pockets of the charity organisation's administration. According to one of the participant this recent change and increasing corruption has the purpose to make the Italian economy growing thanks to forced migrants' exploitation. The corruption seems to have created an additional excuse for hostility and hatred against forced migrants and refugees in public opinion and in the population of the city of Rome.

Looking at how the system of corruption has invested forced migrants and the organisations working on their reception, and re-reading the words of Participant A in relation to this matter, with a CRT lens, it is possible to find yet another empirical example to Bell's (1980b) argument: no matter how corrupted and racist the White mainstream social system is, asylum seekers and refugees – in this case "the designated 'other'"- are "despised when things go wrong, as… [*They*] are scapegoat and sacrifices as distraction or catalyst for compromise to facilitate resolution of political differences or relieve economic adversity" (pp. 10).
In addition, the scandal seems to highlight the recurrent attitude among corrupted politicians and some service providers according to which migrants, and especially forced migrants, are considered as units of production within the mainstream White Italian society, having an exchange value and thus being not entirely human beings.

**<u>Networking with local services</u>**

*"[…] Our work here is to create a network with schools and local services, and to make sure that this network works. Ehm as for the schools, we are mainly in contact with the* CTP[51] *in our area, ehm and they are really qualified, […] it is a service for adult migrants, but because we send teenagers they have a schedule that works for them, ehm in the morning or in the afternoon […], they get a language certificate, ehm yes we do have a good relation with people working there, there is a lot of collaboration, because we want to know how the child is doing, we have to understand how the child is growing and what he is really learning, ehm both at the educational and behavioural level […]. We have meetings with the teachers to discuss the curriculum, or the teachers call us if there is a specific problem with one of them".*

The networking between the refugee organization and the local school seems to be solid and continuous. The organization prefers to send unaccompanied migrants in the local schools, which are schools in the northern suburbs of the city of Rome (a White working class area), rather than having to bus them in a specific school in central Rome, which is highly specialised in courses for migrants (both children and adults).

[51] *Centro Territoriale Permanente*: They are specific centres for migrant students that some schools have in Rome that deal with language learning, special schooling (short courses to get the middle school diploma), and job training.

The interview participant seems to highlight the pro-active attitude of the members of staff of the organisation in maintaining a constant relation with teachers, to make sure that the teenagers' transition to the school is smooth. They seem to be worried about the teenagers' well-being and so they enquire about their development and they engage in discussions with teachers about the suitability of the curriculum. However, no mention was made about how regularly these meetings with teachers are scheduled or how often they go to the school to actually have conversation with the staff. It seems that they might go occasionally or only when there is a specific problems with one of the migrant students.

*"[...] This is also our job, to engage teenagers with education, since not all of them want to go to school, I mean it's easy for us to say you have to go to school but not all of them want to go ehm."*

*"[...] Ehm sometimes it is difficult because you know, they come here and they now they can have shelter for two years so they only wait to have the documents. And this is part of the negotiation that we have to do, where they are not passive subjects, ehm but you know not everybody wants to go to school. [...] Sometimes this negotiation becomes conflictual and they* [the teenagers] *think that we want to impose the schooling on them, but you know these are the classic issues that a teacher would have to deal with in a poor, working-class suburb school, I mean they have to motivate the children to study to make them understand that education is a "weapon" for them* [the teenagers]".

*"[...] On the other hand, when you have institutional difficulties, I mean when it's not easy for a migrant child to get into the school, then we do a lot of advocacy with different institutions to make them aware of the legislation [...]".*

Here the schooling of migrant and forced migrant teenagers is tackled from two different angles: the difficulty of the teenagers and the institutional barriers. The interview participant talks about the negotiation with the teenagers that do not want to go to school or that are not engaged with studying. Once again the participant mentions the fact that these teenagers should not be seen as passive subjects, as if there is a general rhetoric that consider them as such. They are, the participant said, indeed subject capable of expressing their willingness to work and not to go to school,

for example. So once again, there is a discourse of “passiveness” and “activeness”. This discourse seems the preludes to a subtle form of judgement given by the White Italian mainstream against a group of migrants. Why is there such a surprise in affirming that they are not passive? Why does this assumption of unaccompanied migrant children being passive even exist in the White Italian mainstream society? Why is there such a surprise in the fact that they have a voice, a position and a clear opinion about what they want to do in the new country? Working may very well be a way to pay the debts they and their family has accumulated to pay the smugglers to reach Europe. So they might feel compelled to work to send money back to protect their families from loan sharks.

Another interesting aspect is that once again the same participants tend to reduce the schooling problems of unaccompanied migrant teens to those of the Italian working class teens living in the suburbs. The participant says that they have the same lack of motivation, but does not seem to consider the cultural difference and the acts of “micro-aggression” to quote from Delgado (2001) and Rollock (2014) that unaccompanied migrant teens may experience because of their race, within the school or in general in the Italian society- another important factor (together with the necessity to accumulate money to repay for their travel) that might keep them out of school. No acknowledgement is made about the ‘race’ issue or the discrimination that this group may face. The participants do not consider what Baldwin (1985) calls the cumulative effect of ‘the millions of details twenty-four hours of every day which spell out to you that you are a worthless human being’ (pp. 404).

Even if the discrimination issues seem to be glossed over by the interview participant, he affirms that when the school do not accept unaccompanied migrant teens presenting various excuses, they advocate for them and they push the school personnel to get informed on the legislation related to this particular group. So, on the one hand they are fighting for their right to education and on the other they do not seem to see or consider some of the real racial discriminations that the teens may experience. They adopt a rather colour- blind kind of advocacy, which fits the colour-blind attitude of the policies in Italy.

**Demanding for changes in local schools**

*"Ehm for me what should be changed is the fact that should consider the education of unaccompanied migrant children not on the basis of their economic and political interests but as a fundamental right […], teachers should be able to actively engage with these children, to motivate them and to have high expectations for them, so that they can really achieve important objectives. […]. Schools should take into consideration unaccompanied migrant teens needs more, they should have formal schooling and job training at the same time, without making them waste time […]".*

*"There is no common view* [on schooling of unaccompanied children]*, because at the end of the day the school is made by people, so the policies change and teachers have to adopt these policies and they have no freedom to organize education in accordance to migrant children's needs. It's more an issue of educational policies."*

*"We all the time have to negotiate the curriculum for unaccompanied teens, all the time trying to make the teachers understand their needs […]. They* [the teachers] *wanted that the teens would do the course to get the middle school diploma, instead we were trying to explain that doing a language course would have been better, otherwise they* [the teens] *wouldn't be able to understand the different subjects."*

*"Also the long summer break is not good, because sometimes I can happen that teens arrive in June and until September or October they can't go to school, so they are for four months without school".*

In the perception of the social workers of the organization, teachers lack of a common approach for the education of unaccompanied children (whether they are forced migrants or not). In particular, they focus on a critique of teachers' understanding of the needs, or better the perceived (by the social workers) needs of unaccompanied children. Both the interview participants acknowledge that this lack of understanding depends also from the education policies, which seem to limit the freedom of teachers in designing a curriculum more suitable for unaccompanied children.

Schools do not seem to take into account, the children's need to learn the language before actually getting into a formal course; they want them to do the formal schooling, when most of the time teens want to work also but do not have the training for it. In this sense, the social workers call for a radical change in the curriculum, which should also provide job training and language learning. Schools should also re-schedule the courses for migrant children and be more flexible on their access, and they should avoid the long summer break, which could have a negative effect on the teens. The social workers affirm that most of the time, teens that arrive in June have to wait a long time before being enrolled, and this may lead them to depression or to escape from the shelter and get into illegal activities.

According to the participants, teachers do not seem to have high expectations for unaccompanied teens. This fits very well in the wide and mostly UK/US based literature on school discrimination of Black and minority students (Bradbury, 2014; Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Rollock et al, 2015; Tate, 1997).

**<u>Playing the "Disability Card"</u>**

*"Ehm I'm thinking of the boy from Cameroon […]; he was here with us, ehm he had some psychological issues, ehm I think depression. After he left our organisation he was to the ASL[52] then to a psychiatric centre, ehm I donno what was the diagnosis but then they put him in a foster-care specialised for mental diseases. Ehm he told us that they gave him a pharmacological therapy and now he's better. When he left us it was a trauma for him, because of his depression; while he was here he was fine, we had created a welcoming environment, but he couldn't manage to be sent away from here. […] Now we think he's much better."*

*"We normally keep a close relationship with the teenagers that leave our organisation, a lot of time they come to visit us […]".*

*" In that case* [the case of the boy from Cameroon]*, the problem was less visible and the symptoms of the depression came out at a later stage. During the school he was*

[52] The local health service.

*perceived as distracted and unmotivated, always sitting at the back of the classroom with his hat and headphones, listening to music. This, we think, was caused by the bad reception he had before coming to our organisation. When I used to go to talk to the teachers at the school, the depression issue would not come out. Ehm, I have my theory, you know, maybe it's just my paranoia but I think that this boy lived a very bad reception in the first place and so he would see leaving the shelter as something very bad that would lead him to psychological problems. [...] And so this* [the depression] *might have become a way to obtain or negotiate or deal with the social worker a place to sleep".*

*"The disability was a card to play to obtain welfare benefits, because neither him or his sister knew where to go to sleep [...]".*

*"The disability has become a means to obtain benefits; I mean I'm sure that there are children that they really need support, but there are others that are ehm yeah a bit sneaky".*

The interview participants describe one of the few cases of forced migrant teenager with a disability (the boy has been diagnosed with depression). So they gave an example of a Black boy (coming from Cameroon), that has arrived in Italy alone, only with his sister, and that suffered (even before he had arrived to the organisation) of depression. Nobody, from the organisation, was able to identify clearly the origin of the depression and to actually create a containing network for when the boy would have had to leave the shelter (so the 'good networking with the local services, described by the participants earlier in the interview, do not seem to be so good, when there is a problematic aspect such as a disability). Their action was limited at the period in which he was there, and even if they have argued that he was clearly better, no mention was made about the kind of activities that they would do to deal with his depression.

At the school level (the boy was attending a local school), nobody understood the nature of his problem. In fact, the teachers described him as lazy, distracted and "always sitting at the back of the classroom with his hat and headphones, listening to music". The literature on school discrimination and exclusion is full of this kind of

depiction (Gillborn 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Rollock et al, 2015). No one in the school was actually raising the problem of the depression or was motivated to further investigate the behaviour of the boy and find a good solution.

Clearly, his lack of social and cultural capital and the absence of parents and the blindness of the Italian system has lead him to a pharmacological therapy (judged negatively by the social workers, than anyone did nothing particularly significant to make his situation better- despite the by would visit them and they claim to maintain a "good relationship" with those leaving the structure.

What we can see in the last quotation of one of the participant fits perfectly in the intersectional analysis, which constitutes Critical Race Theory. Because this boy was Black, coming as an asylum seeker from Cameroon, alone with no parents –except for his sister-, and because he had an impairment not immediately visible, such as depression, he was immediately accused of playing the "disability card" to get welfare benefits, or better just a place to sleep, as at the age of 18 he was still not very ready to be autonomous and being able to live in the new country.
Can we imagine the same kind of suspect or "paranoia" or indifference (from the school side), if he was a White working class abandoned Italian boy?