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The Italian community in Scotland and the question of European citizenship within school education

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore Italian emigration to Scotland from the perspective of the narrative reports of women who have run the matriarchal community over the last 30 years (B. Boyd Caroli, R. F. Harney, L. F. Tomasi 1978). Scientific literature shows how women have continued traditions in the family and how they are also the source of change. Theoretical assumptions consider that, in our societies, cultural processes are not only rooted in the minds and experiences that reproduced them over time, but are also something new, resulting from individual expectations and educational targets (R. Lynd, H. Merrell Lynd 1929 and 1937; N. K. Denzin 1970; J. Bruner 1996; J. Lynch 1992). The educational role of women gives rise to a crucial question in the context of migration, in the sense that they give meanings to the concept of European citizenship by educating children to be prepared for the knowledge-society. The qualitative longitudinal research presented in this paper reveals how Italo-Scottish families are composed of events from the past, marked by the migratory process, and from the present, a product of a progressive socio-cultural adaptation starting from childhood and school education. The face-to-face interviews led us to understand why Italo-Scottish women feel the responsibility of handing down a tangible sign of their contribution towards defining universal human dignity in the history of both Italy and Scotland. If the previous experience of migration anticipated the birth of multicultural society and globalisation, the new conditions of life challenge families of Italian origin living in Scotland, mainly in Edinburgh, to educate children and young people to becoming citizens of Europe.

Keywords: *Italian community, migration, Scotland, active citizenship, school education*

Introduction

This paper draws on data from longitudinal research into Italian women who emigrated to Scotland. The first part of the research began in Edinburgh in 1982-1983, the second was carried out in 2010-2011 with the same sample group of women, some of whom were interviewed in Italy and others in Edinburgh. It reflects on issues of integration with particular focus on culture and language maintenance in a pluralistic environment, and the role of women as both transmitters of tradition and source of change.

Assimilation, integration, accommodation

The first major question posed by the study was that of the 'integration' of Italians in Scotland. The word integration is used in its various meanings and we are referring to

the classic studies of Thomas, Znaniecki (1918-1920), and Zubrzycki (1956), meaning that an emigrated community is integrated with respect to the host society when adaptation to the language and culture has not created hardships and the people have been able to accommodate themselves into the new social context, thereby effectively setting themselves up with and in their professions, as well as successfully building up social relations to the point of likening, almost equating, the Italians to the Scots. However, this is an instrumental, functional integration required to live in the new society and that, as such, should be more appropriately called 'accommodation', reviving the distance of risk of assimilation. The line of continuity is thus: assimilation through full immersion into the target culture without maintaining the original language and culture; integration as a tendency to become part of the new society, by attaining economic success and high socio-political socialisation; accommodating, as a positive process, in which an attempt is made to balance the adaptation to the new society without forgetting one's origins.

In assimilation and integration, the Italian language and culture slowly disappear; in accommodating, there is a certain strength in the persistence in memories kept alive through maintenance of the language and culture. Various scientific studies show how women are the most important figures in the family as regards the linguistic education of the children. If the mother speaks Italian, or dialect, with her children, it is more probable that the language will be preserved and the children will want to perfect it.

We can say that the indicators of income, property ownership and employment often lead to education sliding into second place of importance. Furthermore, the spiritual distinction between integration at face value and integration from the heart, that is, between the socio-historic aspects of successful socialisation and the psychological-cultural aspects of an education to be planned, produce a scientifically relevant study. Italian emigration to Scotland has been governed by community matriarchy.

The woman is the cell that produces tradition and is also the source of change. From a linguistic point of view, Italian women in Scotland have made it their objective to instil maintenance of the language, despite its being dialect, as a fundamental cultural feature of identity and belonging. In instances where this has not occurred, grandchildren have progressively lost linguistic recognition, resulting in a weakening of their capacity to understand the close relationship between language and culture.

The meaning of language produced in the community

Emigration is traditional for Italian families and communities, who live abroad and constitute an historic-cultural identity; it is something learned at home and handed down to children and grandchildren, in hopes of keeping alive the memory of an important value that links past families to those of the present. Every woman interviewed, even the youngest, feels the responsibility of handing down a tangible sign of her contribution to defining universal human dignity to the history of Italy and, for some, the history of Europe. Emigration is not an isolated event in time, it courses through one's veins, is in the air one breathes at home, is heard in the way one speaks, is perceived in one's glance and is understood by one's gestures.

Scientific research is also an educational action, an education of oneself to look at one's own migratory experience with pride. The courage of those who decide to leave, face a practically unknown society and have only their own families to count on must necessarily produce a sense of admiration and esteem for that part of Italy that chooses to live outside national borders and only return periodically.

The cultural processes defined in today's society are not only rooted in the minds and experiences that produced them over time, but are also something new. The knowledge of an Italo-Scottish family is composed of events from the past that can be easily deciphered by means of historical documents and civil, social and political reports. Alongside these are events from the present, which, although not directly originating from previous generations, marked by the migratory process, are still the product of a progressive, socio-cultural adaptation, in which the predominant features become increasingly those of the society in which one's childhood was spent.

Mum and dad watch Italian television all the time, I don't. I do love seeing Italian films in the cinema and we have an annual Italian film festival in Glasgow as well. What we tend to do is not so much to meet all of the Italian community, instead we have many friends who were born here and whose parents were either second or third generation Italian or a mixture and we socialize a lot together. I don't particularly choose to pick up a book in Italian we all gravitate to English. I know, how bad! I am very European, actually. I feel very Italian in many ways. (50 year old in 2010, born in Scotland, third generation)

Words, speech and semantics

The first tool used to receive the narrative is speech. As Bruner notes, words, and how they are structured, are the best means we have for codifying and re-codifying human experience. The growing complexity of our social environment is a challenge of knowing how to arrange words and concepts so as to understand events and be able to manage them. That is why speech is understood as a precious human resource for establishing communication and cooperation that allow people to live, feel fulfilled and contribute significantly to the local context.

The ability to speak is fundamental for the person and community. Speech is the tool of thought with which the person remembers and organises his/her life and is acknowledged as part of the community of belonging. We communicate our knowledge and understanding of the world through a language that identifies us with the group to which we belong.

Languages are learned; speech is produced. A child only learns material signs from the outside, eagerly listening to discussions, accompanied by actions and gestures, and understanding sentences until it is able to express its own individuality through an inner creative capacity to transform thoughts into words. The narrations of migration point out the recourse to language not to the homeland; this may be both a social and political

necessity. The social dimension changes the language, which is continuously adapted to the needs of communication.

In English, one speaks of pidgin-English, indicating a type of speech derived from the encounter of European merchants with populations in West-African and the Far East. As noted by Messina (1963), pidgin-English 'designates the simplified English that arose in about the 1600s in the harbours of northern China, as a compromise between the language of the inhabitants and that of British merchants. This type of English was adapted to Chinese syntax and pronunciation (pidgin is a Cantonese corruption of business, or commercial, English)'. Linguistic hybridization is the result of combining words derived from various languages. In Europe, multilingualism concerns as much the presence of many States as the existence of various minorities.

In the interviews gathered, the language chosen by each woman to express herself varies; it may be Italian, or English, or dialect and the same syntax tends to use the rules of grammar freely and autonomously. We can speak of broken English as well as broken Italian as regards colloquial linguistic forms for daily use and the language spoken at home and in one's own familiar circle, which is imperfect from a grammatical point of view, but perfect and rich in conveyed content. Each woman communicates through the means of expression which best represents her identity. As noted by Boccafurni (2002) recalling Cipolla, a scholar of the dialect spoken in Cetraro in the province of Cosenza, dialect expresses a civilisation and the care to not rout this asset from local populations is derived from this awareness.

The idiom used by the Italo-Scottish women is not exactly a *métissage*, i.e. a combination of words of different cultural derivation. It is rather an imported, or revived, phraseology, borrowed and given back, over the course of time, in the form of speech shared in the family, group and community. Linguistic behaviour undoubtedly reflects the context in which a person lives, in addition to being conditioned by society and a particular historic moment.

Italians as ethnic minority

Studies on the integration of Italians in Scotland use the linguistic variable as a significant indicator. Italian belongs to the minority languages spoken in Scotland and preserved in families, especially those in which both spouses are Italian. As long as the language and culture continues to exist within Italian families living in Scotland, it will be spoken of as a linguistic minority. The preservation of language in families and communities identifies the ethnic minority. The use of dialect is the constant detected in cases, in which the women did not attend school regularly in Italy or have only completed a few years of elementary school prior to emigrating and the learning of standard Italian was cut short by the migratory process. Arriving in Edinburgh meant being introduced into the Italian community that used dialect, Italian and Scots.

In general, the women remained behind their husbands and children. Learning English was spontaneous, by imitation, and based on specific need and family business. It was a language that the women were seldom able to write or even use correctly at times. After

many years of living abroad, persons who try to recover a language, whether English or Italian, find themselves in serious difficulty due to a lack of a grammatical basis. They perceive themselves as too adult to begin studying again.

For older people, speaking dialect and Italian may be a form of pride, identification and cultural belonging, but the very young may associate it, especially dialect, with the initial conditions of poverty, the burden of which tends to be scaled down today. One interviewee, Rosa, states that they did not leave because they were poor, but to be able to develop in a way not permitted in the Italian countryside in 1950. The second generation acts as mediator between the dialectal linguistic culture of the parents and the prevalently Scottish culture of the children.

We could say that the linguistic evolution of an Italian in Scotland is expressed in a four levels typology, to which four categories of women belong. Each category is composed according to the linguistic form spoken prevalently in and outside of the home: dialect, first form; Italian, second form; Scots/English, third form. Partial or total understanding of all linguistic expressions is included in all categories. Even grandchildren, who do not speak dialect, can understand it.

1. Prevalently the dialect and Italian of mothers who emigrated during the post-war period
2. Prevalently the dialect, Italian and Scots/English of the children who represent second generation emigrants
3. Prevalently the Scots and English of grandchildren who represent third generation emigrants
4. Prevalently the Italian and English of those who learned the standard literary form of both languages, represented by women who purposely chose to refine the two languages, also through university studies.

During the interviews, the command language was determined by the women. Each woman chose to speak the language of preference to tell her own story. Substance and meaning prevailed over grammatical accuracy. Some apologised for using dialect rather than standard Italian and others apologised for not feeling comfortable in the use of Standard English. It is understandable that the degree of language mastery sought was not always achieved.

Attention to the language through reading, listening to the radio and watching television progresses in accordance with what is promoted by linguistic education in the family, at school, socially and in religious circles. Women read little or not at all due to a lack of time or trouble in understanding the written word; they feel insecure when reading, whether in Italian or English. In addition, not having newspapers at home reinforces the clear tendency of both young and old not to read. Some women have subscribed to the *Messaggero di Sant'Antonio*, a religion oriented Journal, from the time they were young and have never stopped reading it; they receive it regularly at home. Daily newspapers, magazines and books in Italian do not have a widespread distribution. In 1983 reading was mostly done by husbands. In 2010 reading is mainly English texts and, given the imperfect knowledge of the language, women feel discouraged to read.

There is a different attitude towards school between the first and second generations. By emigrating, the exclusivity of the family makes it necessary for children to learn Italian, and, hence, dialect, prior to starting elementary school.

The destiny of the dialect

Today, there is a growing tendency to send children to school, even starting with nursery school. About continuing with studies, even when encouraged by the school, some women considered further education useless, due to the fact that it would not have helped them reach the goals they wished to and had fully achieved:

‘Teachers encouraged me to go on with my studies but I did not need it for my job. I do not regret it’. (27 years old in 2010)

In the third and subsequent generations, the distinctive features, such as dialect, of the first generation become memories of the past; the language of the country of immigration of the grandparents is spoken almost exclusively; the culture of the grandparents and great-grandparents tends to fade, but sometimes it is maintained for scientific study as well as to recover and preserve family tradition; one identifies, preferably, with the system of living and values of the country, where one was born and grew up. From an social interactionism perspective, the family living environment, shaping of the personality of the youth and learning about the local culture are interdependent; this combination produces a significant identification for those generations whose forebears were emigrants.

Recent studies on the influence of family values, culture and heritage show how children’s ability to read and their capacity to understand are better and even excellent depending on the increase in opportunities to broaden their vocabularies, constant reading aloud and chances to make the community a learning environment. The family has considerable power in educating children and developing their sense of community and, thus, the knowledge of the family guides the children, who, in themselves, are a reason for exercising knowledge.

The fate of dialect as an oral tradition, without written evidence, is at risk of extinction among female Italian emigrants in Scotland. The possibility of reviving the dialect is contact with Italy and, simultaneously, the dialect represents the cultural heritage for entering the community of origin of the parents and ancestors. In some respects, dialect also exercises a function of entering into Italian and Standard English. Speech is made up of dialectal words introduced into Italian and vice versa, Italian words introduced into the dialect.

English words are suitable for conveying what cannot be expressed in Italian and cannot be translated into speech. From this, a composite speech is derived, in which one ought not look for ‘purity’ of language, because what is important is knowing how to communicate one’s own experience, by using words in one’s own vocabulary. Sentence construction is affected by the various linguistic origins.

Thoughts articulate the philosophy of life of persons, who choose words suitable for defining a new culture, Italo-Scottish, constructed within the meeting of many cultures: the culture of the village, Italian culture, Scottish culture, English culture and European culture.

Intercultural education and globalisation

In some way, the Italian women emigrated to Scotland anticipated two great contemporary phenomena, intercultural education and globalisation. It is possible to explain this referring to two testimonies. The first concerns the fact that emigration is a human event that produces a multicultural society. The second is related to the combination of local and global cultures in the process of globalisation.

In this society, it is necessary to decide on which model of human co-existence to choose. The most accredited schools of thought indicate intercultural as a practice of dialogue and understanding among cultures. The Italian community in Scotland systematically initiated this dialogue in the 1800s and, for over two centuries, has been master of an encounter of at least three cultures: the one coming from Italy, the one born and raised in Scotland and the one produced by the combination of these two, i.e. Italo-Scottish. This process anticipated an intercultural practice, which did not receive social and political legitimation until the 1990s, by razing the sense of shame that might have been generated by the migratory event, experienced as an escape from the homeland.

As for globalisation encountering the local situation, reference is made to the studies of Robertson from the University of Aberdeen. He writes:

The tendency to differentiate between the global and the local is a modern one, insofar as the conditions for the cognition and affect of locality have arisen concomitantly with, or as a result of, various developments that have been crucial in the incomplete (and, in some respects, disastrous) making of the contemporary world. These conditions include, inter alia, the genealogies of map-making, travels, pilgrimages and voyages of "discovery". Indeed, one of the pivotal themes in the most general discussion of globalization is that of investigating the differential genealogy of ideas such as the global, the local, the universal, the particular, and so on. This is a formidable agenda. Indeed we should move to these complex questions before more serious work is undertaken with respect to the buzzword-theme of globalization. To put it all too briefly and simply, the problematic of globalization/globalization is one of the most salient themes of our time and is of particular concern, or should be, to those involved in pedagogy. (Robertson, 2004, p. 62)

Here, Robertson should be evoked, since he offers a reading key that is worthy of note in understanding the social and cultural dynamics that extend across the lives of Italo-Scottish women, who live under ambivalent conditions between the rural areas they have come *from* and the society of expanded production and industrial work they have come *to*. When they return to Italy, the feeling of dual belonging, which was never denied, is revived. Local and global come face to face, are part of the same existence and, all things considered, are not a contradiction. They are rather the existential condition of

each of us, compelled to live between the values of family identity and the planetary tensions against culture, which one ought to know. Local/global or global/local antinomy is a false awareness and Robertson urges that the human condition be understood as much as possible.

Citizenship education and migration experience in Europe

The recovery of roots as a collective world identity constitutes an immensely educational moment that both Italian and Scottish institutions could revive enthusiastically. This would promote the substance of the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, which stressed the task of the European Union to 'respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and [omitted] ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced'. From here one may continue the Italo-Scottish experience.

The message emerging from the interviews stressed the fact that it is possible to reinforce the European dimension through teaching and learning the Italian language at all ages. Young people's knowledge of their own cultural roots could be developed better through bilingual experiences in Scottish schools. The education of linguistic skills in both languages could begin in nursery school, while cultural interest in Italy and its historic heritage, art and science could be enhanced through experiences of education for citizenship and the Italian, European and world constitutions, which would enrich European school curriculum. Ethnic belonging entails renewed education towards understanding the positive values inherent to the culture of parents and ancestors.

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