Immigration as a traumatic experience, in the stories of immigrants' daughters

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Abstract

The paper intends to analyze the processes underlying identity building in girls with a migration background: namely, those subjects in which the adolescent period intertwines with the migration experience, and with the process of identity building. In fact, the construction of identity in immigrant youth is more complex, because the "identity crisis" overlaps with the "trauma" of the experience of migration. This paper aims to investigate how a traumatic situation, such as a migratory experience, may affect the mechanisms of identity building in adolescence. The essay summarizes the outcomes of a qualitative research conducted with a sample of 15 adolescent girls, daughters of immigrants, aged 15-20, living in Florence and Madrid, in an interdisciplinary perspective, using Grounded Theory as a method of investigation, and a semi-structured interview as a data collection tool. Respondents reported that their situation is doubly complex, due to their status as "migrants" and as adolescents, and as women as well. In fact, especially for girls, the change caused by migration is gender-generating: it therefore leads to the development of new forms of "being women", differentiating both from the dominant models of the culture of origin, and from those of the immigration country.

Keywords: adolescent girls, migration background, traumatic experience, gender identity, qualitative research.

Abstract

Il saggio intende analizzare i processi sottesi alla costruzione identitaria nelle ragazze con background migratorio; quei soggetti in cui il periodo adolescenziale si intreccia con il vissuto dell'esperienza migratoria e delle dinamiche identitarie. Infatti, la costruzione dell'identità nei figli dell'immigrazione è ancora più complessa, poiché la "crisi identitaria" si sovrappone e si intreccia al "trauma" dell'esperienza migratoria. Il saggio vuole

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[3] The paper was elaborated jointly by the two Authors. In particular, paragraphs 1 and 5 were written by Clara Silva, while paragraphs 2 and 3 were written by Giada Prisco. Paragraph 4 was written jointly.

comprendere come una situazione traumatica, quale è un'esperienza migratoria, possa influenzare i meccanismi di costruzione dell'identità nell'adolescenza. L'articolo presenta i risultati di una ricerca qualitativa condotta su un campione di 15 ragazze, figlie di immigrati, con un'età compresa tra i 15 e i 20 anni che vivono a Firenze e a Madrid, in una prospettiva interdisciplinare, utilizzando la *Grounded Theory* come metodo d'indagine e l'intervista semi-strutturata come strumento di rilevazione. Le intervistate hanno riferito che la loro situazione è doppiamente complessa a causa del loro status di "migranti" e di "adolescenti", e anche di "donne". Infatti, soprattutto per le ragazze, il cambiamento provocato dalla migrazione è generatore di genere, nel senso che porta a elaborare nuove forme di vivere il proprio "essere donna" differenziandosi sia dai modelli dominanti della cultura d'origine sia da quelli del paese d'immigrazione.

Parole chiave: ragazze adolescenti, background migratorio, esperienza traumatica, identità femminile, ricerca qualitativa.

1. *Immigration as a traumatic experience: adolescents with a migration background*

The experiences of suffering endured by immigrants are studied analytically in their pathological implications, especially in the case of refugee children or adolescents, or asylum seekers, affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) syndrome, or other similar severe diseases (Angel, Hjern, Ingleby, 2001; De Bellis, Van Dillen, 2005; Perreira, Ornelas, 2013). This is a delimitation of the concept of "trauma" within well-defined psychiatric borders, which in many cases leaves out a wider area of experiences, situations and behaviors not directly attributable to an established disorder, or to an experience of violence, or deprivation, so marked as those affecting subjects who directly witnessed wars or deportations, a sudden loss of loved ones due to violent or tragic causes, or even subjected to torture. For some time, however, the literature on migration has used the concept of trauma to define a wide range of experiences that have left a mark in the experience of immigrants, representing real existential nodes, hard to dissolve, especially for children and adolescents (Baubet, Moro, 2009; Moro, 1998; Nathan, 2007). In this sense, migration, understood as a trauma, must be considered as a real rupture between a before and after, which requires a reworking on the part of those who have lived it. This re-elaboration of the migratory experience, facilitated by an adequate educational support able to leverage the ability for individual resilience, allows the inscription by the subject in his/her own biography. In this way, immigration, with its result of suffering, is assumed as a stage of an existential path with positive implications, and not as a wound incapable of healing (Motti-Stefanidi, Masten, 2017).

This traumatic condition and the connected need for reworking of one's migratory experience today concerns a growing number of adolescents, who leave the context in which they lived their childhood to reunite with previously emigrated parents, or find themselves forced to leave on their own without the accompanying of an adult, but also those who, despite having been born in the country of emigration of their parents, experience situations of serious unease related to their own family history. Migrant adolescents today represent a varied reality, composed of subjects with very different stories, but they are all united by often painful experiences experienced either in the country of origin, or during the migration journey, or even in the land of destination, often because of the stereotypes and prejudices they are often victims of.

In a psycho-pedagogical perspective, those minors who have a secure attachment to a caregiver, and more generally, an experience marked by psychic well-being in the pre-migratory phase, are facilitated in reelaborating their own story. In the case of children who are reunited with their parents, and therefore find themselves having to enter into a close relationship with their parents much later than those who have not been separated from them, we would be facing forms of weakening individual characteristics, in some ways similar to those who have witnessed situations of deprivation and violence such as refugees, or refugees' children (Mazzetti, 2008). This would explain why, within the "universe" of second generations, scholastic and social integration paths of the reunited ones are very often difficult and characterized by setbacks and critical moments. However, similar difficulties are encountered in those adolescents who have not been separated from their parents or because they were born in the emigration country of the latter or because they followed their parents' emigration when they were very young. Both these two types of adolescents, both those who were separated from their parents and must resume a broken relationship when they were a child or very young, and those who do not carry such a separation experience, must in fact face the complex demand of biculturalism, or better, of transculturalism, which their own condition imposes on them (Mancini, Porretti, 2017).

Even when the socialization of adolescents takes place entirely in the context of immigration of parents, and they arrive at compulsory school by mastering language and codes of the country they live in, they often experience the "stigma" of the immigrant, the different, the other, conveyed by the indigenous peer group, by adults – sometimes educators and teachers included (Silva, 2002).

Social isolation, humiliations, and racist behavior suffered increase their vulnerability, in a step of their life, such as adolescence, in which they are already fragile, generating loss of self-esteem and depressive states, therefore making their scholastic and social integration even more difficult. To the abovementioned difficulties, we must add the inevitable task, for adolescents, of elaborating their own identity, while learning to reconcile different cultural worlds, the one of their country of origin and that of the society of destination (Ambrosini, 2004; Portes, Rumbaut, 2001).

2. *Adolescence and identity*

"Identity" is a polysemic and complex concept referring to a central dimension of self-consciousness, which is the awareness of the specificity of one's own being also in relationships with others. In fact, it is one of the fundamental dimensions of human personality. Several studies have established that identity is not an a priori fact, but the result of a (sometimes, difficult) process of appropriation and definition of one's personality, in relation to the environments in which one is inserted. A process at the center of a multi-perspective system of representations, in which the individual feels accepted and recognized by others for his/her own characteristics. Today, we find ourselves «immersed» (Melucci, 2010, p. 108)[4] in a process of identification, in which identity is no longer a permanent datum, but an "in progress" dimension, due to the continuous transformations throughout life, in dialogue with the historical, social and cultural roots of the contexts individuals interact with, within a dynamic framework of renegotiation.

The identity process is therefore marked by a strong dynamism, occurring in a phase of the biographical parable of each individual, such as adolescence. This age of transition between the condition of being a child and that of an adult, is configured as a sort of "internal migration" from the quiet and protected dimension of childhood, towards a situation of decisional autonomy. It is a very difficult and delicate phase, in which the individual is called on to give a peculiar form to «his/her identity» (Aime, 2014, p. 14).

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[4] From now on, unless otherwise specified, the translation of words, terms, and sentences taken from sources published in Italian (original version, or translated in Italian) is by the Authors, Editor's Note.

Any reflection on the concept of "identity" cannot therefore neglect the adolescence phase as a privileged terrain for a comparison between theoretical dimension and practical comparison. The same semantic space of the notion of adolescence (to be read as an age of psycho-physical development) implies in itself a conceptual bond for which: on one hand the reflection on identity cannot ignore this specific biographical segment of the individual; on the other hand, the study of the adolescent phase cannot exclude "building the self", as the "plot" of the personal story.

It follows a common epistemological root that makes adolescence and identity two specular subjects united by the same belonging to the elusive and the complex. From a heuristic point of view, this is very important: if the identity process is configured as one of the main areas of investigation of educational research, then adolescence, given its epistemological inseparability from identity, becomes one of the main areas of study. Hence, the close link between educational research and adolescence becomes the basis for any reflection on the issue of identity.

Adolescence has been compared to a storm, to an earthquake that upsets the safety of the individual, losing the coordinates followed until then (Mancaniello, 2018). It is a phase of rupture of the previous ties that insists on a re-definition of the self and initiates the true formative process, opening up to the several possible scenarios of definition of individuals. Adolescents feel abandoned in the labyrinth of their growth, littered with the ruins of childhood and buildings so that they still do not understand the possibility of development. What characterizes adolescents, however, is a genuine desire for truth and discovery. They want to know the original matrix of their own desires, because they know nebulously that the sense of identity derives precisely from their mastery: one is what one desires. Here then it is more than fair to identify adolescence in relation to the process of identity as «the age of potentiality» (Barone, 2009, p. 107) and possibilities.

The identity issue cannot therefore be fully understood without recalling, even briefly, studies on the relationship between adolescence and its reflections on human subjectivity. This is a path that starts from the dawn of the twentieth century, when the American psychologist and educator Granville Stanley Hall defined adolescence as a period of transition, of maturation towards adulthood, in which the formation of personality is linked to the outburst, to the liberation from primordial instincts (Hall, 1904). Hall's approach developed within a multidisciplinary framework that embraced both the psychoanalysis of A. Aichhorn and A. Freud (Freud, 1958) and the analytical psychology of L.S. Vygotsky and A.N.

Leontiev. The dialectic between these different contributions highlights a fragile balance between growth and trauma. On one hand, the focus was on the perturbation charge of the adolescent phase, on the influence it had on identity development and on the defense mechanisms put in place by the individual in order to overcome his own evolutionary turbulences (under penalty of identity crisis). On the other hand, external influences were emphasized on the individual, on personal training as an appropriation of historical and cultural products, on cognitive development because of the historical-cultural context in which it was inserted.

On this basis, the process of individual change could only take place through relationships with other individuals (putting language as the first vehicle of interrelation) and socio-cultural exchange became the main variable and the first catalyst of the disturbances typical of adolescence. The focus, however, was centered on the relationship between the adolescent crisis and the formation of individuality, between identity development and the social context, between identity development and cultural variables. Following the anthropological research of Margaret Mead (1943), Erik H. Erikson (1950) was the first to identify a coexistence and an interaction between the psychological and social aspects in the processes of identity development, going on to define identity as a process of integration of the ego (Erikson, 1968). Moreover, the developments of Erikson's thought about the inseparable connection between individual and context did not only involve the psychological sphere. Suffice it to mention the hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur ([1990], 1996), or the interactionist sociology of H. Blumer (1969), G.H. Mead, and E. Goffman. On this basis, the identity process found its essential driving force for development in social relationships and phenomena intended as a trigger for a dynamic process of personal construction (G.H. Mead, 1934).

The link and dialectic between the individual and the context as an engine of personal development and training is not only the central point of the link between adolescence and identity but also a privileged perspective for "reading" the identity of girls and boys with migratory experience (Rumbaut, 1997). In fact, very often, young people with migration backgrounds are faced with a context that first appears as foreign to the canons elaborated within the family areas and then imposes itself as a place in which they must respond to their own identity maturation (Biagioli, 2018, see in particular pp. 170-171). Under such conditions, the identity process sees its complexity increase almost exponentially, imposing new scenarios without precedents, whose fluidity is given by

the very condition of being a "migrant adolescent". With respect to the issue of identity, immigrant girls and boys are in a condition of double disadvantage compared to their indigenous peers. First of all, they must achieve their own social and personal identity, solid and defined, in a situation that is in itself indefinite, as they are linked to the difficult re-elaboration of the family experience in immigration (and therefore in diversity with respect to the generational roots in arrival environment) before the look of a context that tends to emphasize their "diversity" (Aparicio Gómez, Tornos, 2017). Secondly, the disadvantage of the young migrant generations is given by the lack of fixed reference points and by an existential fluidity, given by the new situation, devoid of examples or passages within the family and placed before questions whose answer must necessarily be found through a proper path, exposed to the confrontation with the host society. This is an arduous path made up of daily crises and evolutionary turns, choices and traumas in view of the construction of a more solid identity that does not betray either its own past or its present (Dusi, Messetti, González Falcón, 2015). The immigrant adolescent is thus necessarily immersed (or submerged) in a multicultural universe whose many nuances necessarily affect, and with unsubstantiated results, the development and formation of the person.

Hence the need to explore the ways in which adolescents with a history of migration build their identity by straddling multiple cultures; a topic, this one, investigated in a gender perspective (Oso, Ribas-Mateos, 2013), placing at the center of our research the daughters of immigrant parents in two different European socio-cultural realities (Portes, Vickstrom, Aparicio Gómez, 2013). In this study we extend previous research and we situate our results within intersectionality theory which considers the multiple dimensions within which adolescent girls exist, including gender, age, developmental stage, socioeconomic status and migration experience. For the girls who participated in this research, all the above dimensions are an important part of their identities.

3. *Aims, method, and ethical framework*

Following a qualitative approach, the study collects the findings of some research on the topic of identity building in girls with migration background. Specifically, the paper focuses on the condition of 15 girls, daughters of immigrants, aged between 15 and 20 living in Florence and Madrid. We used a "purposive sampling" to identify and select suitable

participants. This allowed us to define specific criteria for being able to participate in the research. Inclusion criteria were: aged between 15 and 20 and with at least one foreign parent (a parent born in another country). The selection was made strategically with the aim of achieving heterogeneous variation of experiences among the informants and of generating wider and richer reflections. For this reason, we considered girls with different migratory background (left-behind adolescents, girls reunited with their families, daughters of mixed couples, girls born in the host country, etc.).

The research is carried out in an interdisciplinary perspective, using Grounded Theory in a constructivist key as a method of investigation (Glaser, Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) and the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool (Atkinson, 1998). For these girls, having the opportunity to have a say and the chance to tell their story, was a way of re-assigning a new meaning to their experiences, a moment to take care of themselves, a space to recover the relationship with their inner self. Nonetheless, an answer to a natural need, indispensable especially during the intense adolescent period. For us, having given them their say is configured as a methodological and pedagogical device essential for the understanding of their experience. The topics dealt with during the interview mainly concerned: the training path, the family biography in migration, the migratory journey lived directly/indirectly, the relationship with friends, the scholastic world, any difficulties encountered in the path of growth, prospects and expectations for the future and the comparison between cultures, between different reference values. These are some of the questions used in the interviews:

– How do you feel about being raised in a different country than the one in which your parents grew up?
– What does it mean for you to be a girl with migration background? Have you ever had problems with other people due to your foreign background?
– Do you feel different from girls born and raised in Italy/Spain?
– Do you feel you belong to your parents' country?
– Do you think the situation of girls with a family history of migration is different from that of an Italian/Spanish girl, daughter of Italian/Spanish parents?

Interviews were conducted anonymously for the privacy of the interviewees, and each of them, or their families in the case of minors, was

Tab. 1. Sample size and demographics: the participants' and their families' demographic characteristics

	Age (15-20)	Birth place	Parents' country of origin	Residence	Reason for migration (parents')
1.	20	Morocco	Morocco	Madrid, Spain	Family reunification
2.	16	Italy	Morocco	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
3.	15	Italy	China	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
4.	16	Spain	Poland	Madrid, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
5.	19	Dominican Republic	Dominican Republic	Madrid, Spain	Family reunification
6.	17	China	China	Florence, Italy	Family reunification
7.	15	Bolivia	Bolivia	Madrid, Spain	Family reunification
8.	20	Peru	Peru	Madrid, Spain	Family reunification
9.	16	Spain	Dominican Republic	Madrid, Spain	Economic and job opportunities
10.	19	Italy	Germany and Italy	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
11.	15	Italy	Philippines	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
12.	17	Egypt	Egypt	Florence, Italy	Family reunification
13.	15	Italy	Albania and Italy	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
14.	15	Italy	Romania	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities
15.	16	Italy	Republic of Congo	Florence, Italy	Economic and job opportunities

carried out with the signing an authorization to process the data collected. The girls who participated in the research did not receive any compensation and all participants were given written information about the aim of the study. The conversations collected are around 45-60 minutes in length and all the interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder, transcribed *verbatim* and, in the case of interviews conducted in Spain, faithfully translated into Italian (Tarozzi, 2013). After completing the transcription work of the first interviews, excluding any information that could identify the participants, the material collected was analyzed to bring out, in an inductive way, the first "categories" (open coding). In this phase, after having read the interviews several times, the most significant phrases and concepts were identified, assigning to each element a label. The approach used aimed at identifying similarities and differences by constantly comparing the words expressed by adolescents. The interviews were conducted, transcribed and analyzed by the first Author but the entire process was signified by joint discussions among the Authors. Memos were written throughout the entire analysis and included thoughts about codes, categories and concepts. Each interview was conducted, transcribed and analyzed before the next interview was carried out. Because of the vastness of the material collected, for the archiving of documents and for data analysis, we used *NVivo* software (version 12.0), particularly suitable for qualitative research. The *NVivo* software was used in conjunction with manual coding during the data analysis to help with the management of the data.

4. *Outcomes*

In order to reflect pedagogically on the identity paradigm of subjects of immigrant origin and to be able to grasp their peculiarities, it is necessary to adopt a privileged observation point able to enhance the specificities of which boys and girls with migratory background are bearers.

4.1 A double challenge: identity building and trauma of migratory experience

Focusing on the adolescent phase means starting from the assumption that it represents for all boys and girls, a crucial period of identity formation, a moment of fragile and delicate transition, a journey, a challenge

in which they try to attribute a new meaning to their identity (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, Berman, 2001). However, as already highlighted in the first paragraph, it cannot be denied that the challenges of adolescent sons and daughters of immigrants are even more complex than native teenagers, since the "trauma" of adolescence overlaps and intertwines with that of the migratory experience (Erentaitė, Lannegrand-Willems, Negru-Subtirica, Vosylis, Sondaitė, Raižienė, 2018).

We, all teenagers have a fight against ourselves. My fight, let's say, has been double because first you are a teenager who seeks her values, her personality and then you also want to confirm and want to belong to something. While an Italian teenager sees confirmation in society because they are all the same… And finds security in seeing her peers doing the same things, thinking in her own way. What other foreign and immigrant teenagers live is to find securities elsewhere. If I do not find it in society, because if I have certain ideals and society has others, I must fight to believe in mine and find security in something. This extra safety says. So, an additional difficulty. Because it is a further search for who you are (17 years old, living in Florence, translated from Italian by the Author).

With great lucidity and self-awareness, this interviewee confirms what has long been affirmed by several researchers, with reference to a double task that an immigrant teenager undertakes in relation to the elaboration of his/her identity (Silva, 2002). Some studies trace this "double commitment" to the migratory experience, seen as a crucial event that deeply marks the individual involved (Ricucci, 2010), and which produces a series of identity fractures due to the sudden transition from a familiar context to another that is completely foreign and devoid of references (Silva, 2006, see in particular p. 34). Others, believe that for immigrants' daughters and sons, the migratory experience does not necessarily become a painful experience, but rather a strenuous experience (Favaro, 2004, see in particular p. 15), in which they find themselves carrying out a slow and constant work of mediation and comparison between the demands of the external world and those of the internal world. In this case, some of the interviewees live this family background as a cumbersome and traumatic experience. Girls and boys who undertake two journeys at the same time, one outside, the one towards migration, and one inside, the one looking for their own self. Certainly, young "immigrants" find themselves having to exist in a "middle ground", in a condition between «belonging and extraneousness» (Ambrosini, 2004, p. 39). We often create multifaceted identities, not anchored exclusively to the origins,

but based on multiple memberships, in perennial transformation, which lead to a continuous mediation between traditional instances and values and new points of reference.

> When I go to Morocco, I'm a little bit...I'm a bit fraught because yes, I find my roots, but I also find things that I do not feel I belong to and the same here. When I'm in Italy, I'm torn up because I find my roots here too but in some things, I feel completely different and out of place (16 years old, living in Florence, translated from Italian by the Author).

Some girls and boys with migration backgrounds may feel themselves "squashed" between different worlds; "prisoners" of a "double absence" (Sayad, 1999), in which the need for a re-description and re-definition of the self is an urgent and indispensable requirement. The subjects who have encountered the migratory experience during their growth process (directly, having undertaken the migratory journey or indirectly, having been born in the country of arrival), often experience a fracture between the "before" and the "after", between "there" and "here"; lastly, between "them" and "us" (Soto, 2018). The concepts and words used by girls to describe their situation are: "I feel halfway", "I feel out of place everywhere".

> I don't know, my blood, my roots are Dominican but I was born here too. You cannot deny either one. I do not know, it's like having the opportunity and the experience of being able to live both. So, I'm like...I'm a bit of both ...I'm everywhere and nowhere. I like both, I would not change them, I would not leave either. I feel 50-50, half Dominican and half Spanish (16 years old, living in Madrid, translated from Spanish by the Author).

From these testimonies, we can perceive how adolescents are constantly immersed in a process of redefining their identity in search of a balance that must be continually defended and negotiated. They find themselves having to deal with the challenges of adolescence in an environment where they try to conform without "betraying" their family background (Levitt, 2009). The path of construction of the identity of adolescents with migration background is a journey between loss and discovery, between rupture and re-composure, which is born and consolidates thanks to the possibility of recognizing oneself in a group, of building an "other", and "new", social identity, which shares aspects of the culture of the past and of the new group of belonging (Berry, Phinney, Sam, Vedder, 2006). For them, they intertwine the plots of family

requests for conservation of values; the memory and nostalgia of friends and relatives of the country of origin; and also, the need to respond to the dilemmas of adolescence and the desire to be recognized as protagonists of the context they live in (Remotti, 2010, see in particular p. 97).

4.2 *Migratory trauma is "gender-generator"*

Teenage challenges take on different nuances based on gender (Schwartz, Montgomery, 2002), which is intertwined with the migratory experience (direct or indirect, experienced or suffered). In fact, especially for women, the change caused by migration «generates gender, in the sense that it leads to the development of new forms of living a woman's being, differentiating herself from the dominant models of the culture of origin and those of the immigration country» (Silva, 2011, p. 153) (translation, original text in Italian). Girls with migration background tend to elaborate cultural models that are neither of their parents' culture nor of their host culture. Their identity is divided between cultural models and opposing affective requests: those whose parents are bearers and those of the destination country (Tarabusi, 2015, see in particular pp. 51-52).

I did not get along with my parents because I wanted to go out at night. And your parents…You know it's hard, because our religion is very different. A girl should not go out, a girl must be covered, a girl cannot smoke, drink or do anything. Since I grew up here and I've always had Spanish friends...I mean, I lived like a Spanish girl. And my parents did not. I want to live my life, I want to try everything and my parents do not accept it (20 years old, living in Madrid, translated from Spanish by the Author).

As emerges from the interviewee's words, the intergenerational conflict, is harsher in the case of daughters because it happens around the role of women in society and at the borders of their freedom and autonomy, and makes their condition more difficult (Qin-Hilliard, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Qin, 2006; Dion, Dion, 2004). Their experience is marked by renunciations and losses and by the progressive awareness of the need for an indispensable "existential transition" for the re-acquisition of a freely chosen identity as an indispensable factor for an autonomous construction of one's own life. From this point of view, the identity of the girls who are daughters of immigration can be defined as «the narrative form of an infinitely fragmented multiplicity and of contradictory

existential currents and crossroads» (Beck, It. transl. 2008, p. 46), who, often, may not find a mirror in the parents' experience.

I prefer to talk to the psychologist who can understand me better than my mother. I don't know...It's difficult for her to understand what I live here. Also because her adolescence was not my adolescence at all. She did not live this thing. My mother lived a different adolescence, she lived an adolescence where she felt good about what she had, she was happy with the friends she had, she felt she belonged to the society in which she lived (16 years old, living in Madrid, translated from Spanish by the Author).

In this interview, a central element of the specificity of the immigrant adolescence is perceived, namely the fact that, unlike their parents, children with migration background cannot count on a sense of socially shared belonging and therefore it is very difficult for them to make a productive comparison of meaning with the experience of their parents. This generational discontinuity becomes an element of further fragility in relation to our society, dominated by the request for individuation, addressed to individuals (Bauman, 2012) and particularly problematic for adolescents in general. Adolescents, therefore, who seek to build their own Self, individualizing (to distinguish themselves) and identifying themselves (to recognize and to be recognized) reel between the multiple cultural references and the different possibilities of belonging at their disposal (Schwartz, Meca, Cano, Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, 2018). The results of this self-construction, when it is lived in a conscious way, produce self-esteem and satisfaction (Di Vita, Calca, Vinciguerra, 2009):

I have spoken both languages since I was born, I frequent the two countries at the same time. And this is something that I really like because this union has produced a good result. I feel I am a good result of this mixture (16 years, living in Florence, translated from Italian by the Author).

Positive self-perception, also based on the awareness of possessing specific skills and sensitivities, such as bilingualism (Tarabusi, 2012, see in particular p. 35), is not accompanied by the recognition of the host society and this is certainly a further obstacle to the construction of a solid self by adolescents.

I was born in Italy, I feel Italian, I speak Italian like other people, I live in Italy, I go to school in Italy. What harm could I do to Italy? What could all the

Filipino, Chinese, Moroccan, etc. girls do? (15 years old, living in Florence, translated from Italian by the Author).

Hence their warning as a sort of foreign body of society (Dal Lago, 2004), with the consequent devaluation of the contribution that they can give to its cultural, economic and social growth. This tends also to empty their scholastic path meaning, weakening that "planning push" that in adolescence represents a fundamental factor to guarantee a balanced development.

5. *Discussion, and conclusions*

As widely supported by scientific literature, and as emerges from our analysis of the interviews, to conceive identity in a univocal way means to devalue the individual, his/her person, to lose his/her richness and specificity. A plural identity, rich in multi-memberships, is an added benefit: a precious baggage to keep. Being able to recognize oneself in many belongings, without having to renounce any of them, without having to be "a prisoner of a single essence", allows the subject to free her/himself from a limiting and oppressive logic and to truly be her/himself (Colombo, Leonini, Rebughini, 2009). We need to forget the idea of a static and immutable identity linked to a single territory, to a single language and culture to embrace the concept of mixed, blended, plural and multicultural identities (Lamphere, 2016).

The building of the self-image that immigrants' teenage daughters try to carry out is difficult, complex, and characterized by a thousand difficulties that make the outcome of this construction not at all obvious. Hence the need for a specific contribution of pedagogy in the elaboration of models of educational intervention aimed at supporting adolescents with migration background in their difficult journey in the construction of their complex identity and a sense of belonging that makes them feel part of society where they live without renouncing the link with the family's cultural background for this.

Educational models which must also be developed from a gender perspective, given the specificity of the challenges faced by immigrant adolescents in their daily lives in relation to the construction of their gender identity. These risks, even more than their male peers, not to find in the family context models that allow them to hold together elements of the culture of origin with others of the society in which they grow

up. This is because sometimes their parents struggle to understand that daughters born and raised in the migratory context cannot comply with the role that women assume in their countries of origin. The socialization experienced in the country of immigration strongly marks their experience; it therefore cannot be neglected in favor of an uncritical and unreflective assumption of traditional models that continue to be the references of their parents.

From the data collected in our research, it emerges that, compared to their parents, in the building of their identity, immigrant girls are called on to make a definitely greater effort and commitment, with higher risks of defeat. In any case, at the same time, in managing to complete this laborious "struggle", they find themselves having built an identity that is certainly richer – more plural, marked by a greater cultural openness – which projects them beyond the borders of the country of origin, and also the one they live in.

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