

## **'Second Generation Immigrants' or 'Italians with Immigrant Parents'? Italian and European Perspectives on Immigrants and their Children**

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*Abstract: This article provides a critical overview of the debate that is emerging on the so-called 'second-generation immigrants' in Italy. It will be argued that the concept 'second-generation immigrants' might not be a fortunate one. After briefly presenting the heterogeneous realities of immigrant populations in Italy, the article relates the Italian scenario to the wider global context of migration and identity politics, and ends by suggesting some ways in which the Italian debate can possibly be informed by experiences and research results from other European contexts.*

Keywords: identity, immigration, problematisation, second-generation immigrants

Nato in Italia Amir scritto sulla sabbia prendi il mio nome e lo traduci  
principe d'Arabia una voce che strilla da Roma fino a Taba in questa società  
fredda cerco aria più calda figlio dell'amore e del cuore di due persone un mix  
di sangue culture razze e religione so' qui come portavoce scendo in missione  
contro la disperazione che affligge troppe persone seconda generazione  
guardo mio figlio è la terza e te provi a sfiorarlo te salta la testa se non lo  
capisci che hai trovato la ricchezza noi pietre preziose in mezzo a tutta sta  
monnezza scrivo con la fame di chi non si rassegna prendo il vostro odio e lo  
trasformo in questa penna s.o.s. bilancio negativo se me chiamano straniero  
nel posto dove vivo.

Amir, Roman rap-singer, lyrics from song, 'Straniero in Patria'<sup>1</sup>

The topic of 'second-generation immigrants' is relatively new to Italy. The larger question of 'immigration' has loomed large since the early 1990s. Now, somewhat belatedly perhaps, Italians are starting to realise that immigrants also have children. An increasing number of Italians see continuous immigration into the country as a problem. To situate the

argument and alert the reader to the political context in which we try to analyse the issue of second-generation immigration, I would like to invoke just two recent episodes, as reported by the press. In March 2010 several young people were threatened and beaten up in the Roman neighbourhood of 'Magliana'. The newspapers (*la Repubblica*, 16 March 2010) called the victims '*bengalesi*', Bengalis (actually they or their parents were Bangladeshi), despite the fact that many of them were either born in Rome, or have lived there for most of their lives. These 'Bengalis' feel under threat from small 'gangs' of young Romans, often with ties to right-wing radical environments and associations, who wish to 'clean' Rome of foreigners. The young Romans go on raids during the night, and randomly select their victims among 'foreigners'. Rome is seeing more and more problems related to racism and violence towards these 'foreigners'. The 'Bengali community', as newspapers also call them (*la comunità bangla*), is asking the local authorities for help, and is making pleas for solidarity to their fellow neighbourhood citizens in the Magliana area. The day after the violent attack, a group of 'Bengalis' hung a large banner outside a house: '*No a razzismo*' (No to racism). However, many local 'Italian' residents feel that *they* are the real victims: they would never participate in acts of violence, but nor do many of them feel comfortable with the fact that so many foreigners have settled in their neighbourhood. Commenting on the no-to-racism banner, a resident said:

"This [banner] is an act of provocation. This neighbourhood is full of shops owned by foreigners, there was always integration here. We are not racist, but we are for the respect of the law. And often they [the foreigners] stay out late at night to make trouble and steal" (ibid).

This is Rome today. It is not the Rome of Piazza Navona and the charming streets of Trastevere that millions of tourists visit every year. It is the Rome in which Romans live. These episodes of violence and the reactions that follow from them, display a series of mechanisms that are fairly easy to describe: young people from the Roman peripheries gather around anti-immigrant attitudes and use the immigrant 'other' as a scapegoat for many of their frustrations. The immigrants (many of whom are not immigrants at all) gather as a group and ask for respect and recognition. The 'Italian' residents of the neighbourhood also come together as a category of 'us', and implicitly or explicitly accuse 'them' - the immigrants - of causing the problems. They are not racist, but... *This* sentence, '*We are not racist, but...*', is arguably one of the most globally pronounced refrains, and points to some very problematic aspects of cultural globalisation - the global spread of intolerance and the legitimisation of a 'benign racism' (Herzfeld, 2007: 256-60).

Such episodes routinely become part of local and national political debates. Most of Italy's right-wing parties are increasingly representing

themselves as the guardians of legality and defenders of a menaced 'Italian-ness'. In several speeches during the regional election campaigns in Spring 2010 Silvio Berlusconi told Italians that if the left-wing coalition should come to power, they would 'open the gates to foreigners; they [the Left-Wing] don't want immigration, they want an invasion of foreigners' (*Il Tempo*, 24 February 2010). That evidently functions as a real threat, a biblical nightmare scenario, symbolically created in the very enunciative act. The left-wing parties are increasingly representing themselves as the guardians of social justice and integration and defenders of a multicultural society, with equal rights and duties for everyone – of course with due emphasis on law and order as well. The Roman outskirts, the sprawl areas where the 'problems of integration' are most visible, are marked by a mixture of political radicalisation and a gradual loss of political/social engagement, an increasing indifference toward the 'system', the 'state' and the 'authorities'. Radicalisation and disengagement, while seeming opposites, together create a breeding ground for racism and intolerance (see also Cristini and Cesa-Bianchi, 2007). This is Rome, but the same story can be told about Turin, Milan and Italy's major cities of the centre/north (where migrants concentrate). It is fairly easy to describe the mechanisms involved, and possibly also to point to the social, cultural and economic conditions that favour them. It is far more difficult to break the chain. Maybe we have not really understood what is going on.

The racist attacks on the Bangladeshis are just one image to keep in mind. Another story, from the very same week, reverses victims and perpetrators: a group of seven second-generation immigrants attacked and beat up two young Italians at Piazza Euclide, in the centre of Rome's most distinctively upper-middle class neighbourhood, 'Parioli'. One of the victims was the fifteen-year old son of Rome's mayor, Gianni Alemanno, a former neo-fascist, now member of Italy's nation-wide centre-right coalition, and Rome's first mayor to come explicitly from the right since the fall of Fascism. The two boys managed to escape into a nearby bar from where they called the police, who arrested the seven boys. The second-generation immigrants stated that they made 'a mistake': they were seeking revenge for an attack they themselves had suffered the week before when a group of right-wing radicals from Parioli had beaten them up. That version is not unlikely, but it does of course tell us that some of the second-generation immigrants are themselves perpetrators as well as victims of violence. A growing number of so-called 'baby gangs' are spreading in Italy's major cities. These 'baby gangs' frequently recruit among disenfranchised second-generation immigrants (for further analysis, see Cannarella et al., 2008). The story about the two Parioli boys holds another lesson as well: not all acts of violence can be explained by reference to socio-economic conditions. Many of the Italian young people involved in gang-like acts of violence towards 'foreigners' actually come from Rome's

(and Milan's and Turin's and Genoa's) well-off areas. Far from being socially excluded, they rather seem to be bored, plagued by anomie. It also seems the case that many of the second-generation immigrants who develop 'anti-society' attitudes come from families that on paper are 'well-integrated', with legally employed parents, relative economic security and average or above-average levels of education.

So, Rome, this often so-tolerant city,<sup>2</sup> is changing its face. Where 'foreigners' were often met with a mixture of tolerance and indifference – and the two attitudes, while far from identical, often can and do work together – today attitudes toward immigrants and their offspring are increasingly polarised into 'for' or 'against' positions. The relevance of this symposium is clear enough: we are in a 'defining moment' for the new discourse on 'second-generation immigrants'. Italian society is undergoing rapid change toward a more multicultural society. This is a challenge, a promise, or a threat, depending on one's perspective. So far, however, discussions relating to this 'new immigration' – not so 'new' anymore!<sup>3</sup> – have almost exclusively focused on 'first'-generation immigrants. Yet Italian society will develop positively or negatively with this immigration not only according to how the integration of first-generation immigrants occurs, but also – and in the long term more importantly – according to the legal, social and cultural processes relating to the second-generation immigrants. *They* are the real test case for 'successful integration', after all. *They* are going to have the biggest impact on Italian society, over time. It is also a very fast growing population. People born in Italy, born of parents who were born somewhere else. Italian...but still immigrants?

The aim of this article will primarily be to push the discussion in a meaningful direction by critically discussing the concept of 'second-generation immigrants' and briefly presenting the heterogeneous realities of immigrant populations in Italy. In seeking to place the Italian scenario in a global context, I will end by suggesting some ways in which the Italian debate can possibly be informed by experiences and research results from other European contexts. First, however, a short mention of the numerical proportions of the debate is necessary.

### **The numbers and their future**

Compared with northern European countries, immigration into Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. At the level of policy-making, it is hard to say which 'integration model' Italy is following. It is certainly not the French model (integrate through citizenship), or the British multicultural model, and perhaps there is no overall model at all (for an analysis of Italy's policy-making on immigration, see Zincone and Caponio, 2006; see also Pratt, 2002). The same ambivalence is found at the social level. Some of this hesitance toward immigration might be related to the relatively rapid

(some would say 'dramatic') rise in the immigrant population. Immigration to Italy has taken place within a very concentrated period: the majority of Italy's immigrants have arrived in the new millennium. In recent years, immigrant numbers have gone up from approximately 1.5 million in 2003 to approximately 4 million in 2009, and approximately 4.6 million by the end of that same year. Numbers are contested, and do not include people without a legal residence permit. However, it is beyond doubt that Italy has gone well beyond the EU average for immigrant populations, which is currently at 6.2 percent. In Italy, at least 1 out of every 14 inhabitants is a foreigner (see Istat, 2009).

More than 50 percent of the immigrant population of Italy is now female, a clear shift of trend from the early days of immigration during the 1980s and 1990s when the majority of immigrants were male (ibid). In 2008, 72,472 children were born in Italy of immigrant parents (both parents). The numbers of immigrants born in Italy are going steadily upwards, and they will continue to do so over the coming decades: in 2006 approximately 400,000 persons figured in the statistical category 'second-generation immigrants' while in 2008 the number had gone above 500,000 (ibid). The majority of second-generation immigrants are still below the age of 18 (ibid).

What will Italy look like in 10, 20 or 40 years? Franco Pittau (World Press, 2009), statistician on immigration, claims that the estimated continuous growth of the immigrant population by approximately 250,000 persons per year is a conservative guess. It is more likely that Italy over the coming years will continue to receive more than 400,000 immigrants per annum. These numbers would bring immigrants and their offspring to well beyond 12 million people by 2050, an indeed dramatic demographic change. The numbers are good enough for right-wing extremists to argue that Italians will soon be a minority in their own country. If we take a 200-year perspective, such a claim is not completely unfounded. But it presupposes, of course, that immigrants will still be immigrants in six to eight generations from now. That is, that 'they' can never become Italian. This of course is not a realistic guess. At the same time, it is far from easy to predict how immigrants will in fact develop their identities, and what 'Italian-ness' may mean for future generations - if anything at all. What we do know is that the question will to a large extent be answered by immigrants and their off-spring. It will equally depend on how Italian society sees and categorises immigrants and their offspring.

### **The words we use**

When immigrants have children we call them 'second-generation' immigrants (abbreviated in the following as 2G immigrants). These 2G immigrants are different from their parents. They pose different challenges

to society: challenges of a legal kind, pertaining to questions of citizenship, and challenges relating to broader social-cultural processes of integration. The questions of 'assimilation', 'adaptation' or 'integration' change meaning from the first to the second generation. 2G immigrants have different expectations and experiences compared to their parents. They encounter different problems, if they encounter problems at all.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to discuss the term 'second-generation immigrants', inviting conceptual caution, and possibly conceptual innovation. Here I have to insert a personal comment. I am one of those approximately four-and-a-half million persons who have moved to Italy in recent decades: like many others I settled down, found work, married and had children. Yet I have never used the term, 'second-generation immigrants' for my children, nor would I do so in any other context than the writing of this paper. This deserves some reflection. My conceptual hesitance is certainly not only due to our inbuilt academic reflexivity toward terms. In my children's school, roughly 30 percent of the children are second-generation immigrants. I have never heard the term used by parents, teachers, or the children themselves.

Clearly, therefore, the term '2G immigrant' is primarily an analytical term, which is not always meaningful to the subjects defined by it. We do of course need analytical terms to think with, otherwise we cannot organise our data and we cannot delimit areas of debate. The question is: Who are 'we'? The answer is clear enough: academics, journalists, policymakers and statisticians. The concept certainly did not emerge as an act of self-definition, but rather as a need of the receiving societies to label and count immigrants and their offspring. Of course, some immigrants may eventually adopt the label as an emblem of self-identification. As Zinn and Berrocal (this issue) discuss, the notion of 2G immigrants is indeed spreading among 'G2' organisations and networks in Italy. This may of course be well enough. History is full of examples of categories of administrative ascription that in a short space of time turned into communities of belonging: here one need only think of America's 'Hispanic communities', where the term 'Hispanic' originally emerged as a census category, but now positively serves as a term of self-ascription.

It is certainly not our role to tell people how they should define themselves. The question, however, is this: is '2G immigrant' a good analytical concept? Good analytical concepts are close enough to 'reality' to make sense, and abstract enough to be useful for comparison. I would argue that '2G immigrants' fails on both counts. At least, the term does carry connotations that we need carefully to consider.

First of all, and to start with the first two words in the concept: what is a 'second generation'? 2G immigrants do not belong to the same 'generation' in any empirical sense of the word. 2G immigrants are not like second-generation iPods or second-generation theories of institutional

economics, phenomena that did indeed come around within a fairly delimited time period and as a reaction to and elaboration of something that had happened in a 'first generation'. Two persons born in Italy of immigrant parents in 1986 and 2010 would in all sociological surveys be counted as belonging to two different generations; yet at the same time they are both 'second-generation immigrants'. First-generation immigrants also do not belong to any generation. People who arrived in Italy in 1982 or 2007 are all 'first-generation immigrants'. There will be new 'first-generation immigrants' in 2060, and there will also be new 'second-generation immigrants' in 2060. This matters. For the life chances and the environment in which people grow up change. The term '2G immigrants' creates the false illusion of temporal simultaneity, shared identity and shared challenges across time and space. The 2G are second-generation compared to their parents – that is all we can say with certainty.

Second of all, second-generation immigrants in Italy today comprise nearly all nations of the globe. We are dealing with people from five continents, people with different religions, different languages, different class origins, different educational backgrounds. This makes it difficult, almost impossible, to make generalised statements about immigrants in general and second-generation immigrants in particular. It is part of the picture that immigration in Italy has been more diversified compared to northern European immigration. We cannot invoke the term with reference to any existing 'group' of people, unless we specify a particular sub-group. Much ongoing research in Europe does exactly that, comparing for example 'degrees of integration' of Turkish and Moroccan 2G immigrants in the Netherlands (Crul and Doornik, 2003; Crul and Vermeulen, 2003) or intergenerational mobility among Caribbean and Indian 2G immigrants in the UK (Platt, 2005). The latter research showed, for example, that Indians experience significantly greater upward social mobility than the Caribbean 2G. Some of this research into specific groups yields surprising results. A recent study carried out in Denmark surveyed 2G immigrants and their attitudes towards religion/politics, roughly focusing on the question: should religious leaders have a role in politics?, comparing answers by Pakistani and Turkish immigrants and their offspring and matching results against the Danish national average (Gundelach, 2009). While more than half of the surveyed Pakistani immigrants answered positively, Turkish immigrants and their children gave answers that were close to identical to those of 'ethnic Danes'. These data help us to avoid many of the simplifications that tend to characterise the immigration debate (here, the widespread idea that 'Muslim immigrants' represent a challenge to 'Danish secularity').

One must also invoke an even more trivial observation. Every single human being is part of a second generation. There is no reason a priori to deny that there *might* be some justification for singling out the 'second

generation' as a meaningful sociological category. However, we are all second generation to our parents. And here the point may in fact be far from trivial: we often forget that the 'problems' that 2G immigrants have are often quite similar to the ones all young people have. Which generation did not feel 'different' from their parents, having to develop a different set of values and attitudes in a world of change? The survey data presented by Vathi (2009) on Albanian 2G immigrants in Tuscany suggest that what second-generation immigrants identify as problems are more or less *exactly the same* as the problems identified by young Italians. We should watch out not to provide cultural explanation outside its domain of applicability. This is always a danger, but particularly so in a period in which almost everything that happens around us can so easily be 'culturalised' (see Thomassen, 2007, 2009).

Perhaps not surprisingly, in her comparison of Caribbean and Indian 2Gs, Platt (2005) argued that class origins are as important, if not more so, as predictors of outcomes than ethnic origins. Her research also indicated that ethnicity is a more important factor for men than for women. These (and many other) results should inform the research agenda in Italy as well. The moment we use the term 2G immigrant and apply it to specific outcomes, we run the risk of *somehow* assuming that this outcome (e.g. social mobility) of a specific group can be referred back to their immigrant status and their culture of origin (their 'ethnicity'). This may be the case. It may also not be the case. The current focus on cultural identity and ethnicity should not obfuscate the importance of class and gender for social mobility, self-identifications and types and degrees of integration.

The second part of the term, '2G immigrants' is the most problematic. Simply put, it labels people who are not immigrants as immigrants. This is certainly also why the category would never have emerged as a term of self-identification. If one is born in Italy, why would one label oneself 'immigrant'? The tendency to 'freeze' a whole category of people into a position that identifies them with their parents is part of a larger trend in Italian society and its dealing with 'foreigners'. The Roman rap singer, Amir, makes exactly this point in the lyrics of his song, 'Straniero in Patria', quoted above. In several interviews Amir has insisted on this point, trying to contest the vocabulary used by the growing number of journalists that perhaps correctly see him as a representative of Italy's new 2G immigration, yet systematically refuse to capture his single most important message: that 'Io non sono un immigrato' ('I am not an immigrant'<sup>4</sup>), as one of his most emblematic songs is called.<sup>5</sup>

A recent example from Italy's most authoritative wire service, Ansa, writing about the attack by seven 2G immigrants on Manfredi Alemanno, Gianni Alemanno's son, is emblematic (Ansa, 16 March 2010). In this case, the journalist in fact did *not* use the term 2G immigrants, but the wording reflects the very same logic of exclusion. In describing the seven young

men who attacked the two young Italians, the news agency writes "...a group of seven young guys [...], Italians but sons of immigrants..." The wording may sound innocent and also correct, but why the 'but'? In what other context would one ever find the expression, 'Italians but...'? Why not tie the sentence together with an 'and': 'Italians and sons of immigrants'? It is exactly this 'and' which ought to be so natural, yet is apparently so hard to pronounce. In the same short news article, it later says:

The police have thus identified the group of young aggressors all originating from (*originari di*) Cape Verde and the Philippines and the two young victims who had been mistaken for two other boys who a few days before had had a row with the group of young Italians of foreign origin.

In this one sentence, the semantic mess is exposed in full detail. The young men are Italians, yet they 'come from' Cape Verde and the Philippines; they are 'Italians of foreign origin'. The insistence on origin is far from casual: the wording is very typical in the Italian press and in popular speech, and denotes a continuous stress on 'blood' as denoting a person's belonging. There is thus a cultural pendant to the legal system of *ius sanguinis*: The country of the parents is where the children are 'originally from'. It is very likely that none of these seven young boys have ever been to the country which they 'come from'.

Had there been no problems connected to this debate, there would be little reason to discuss the terms. However, there does seem to be a problem which is intimately tied to the terms of the debate: many Italians instinctively consider 2G immigrants as 'foreigners' - as immigrants. This also makes it possible to make continuous reference to terms like 'guests' and 'host society'. The point is both theoretical and practical: the term '2G immigrants' reproduces difference; it locks a growing part of Italian society into a helplessly alienating category of standing outside 'ordinary society'. Probably this was never intended by anyone, but that might be one more reason why we might want to get rid of the term. Language has little power on its own; but tied to social processes of inclusion and exclusion it can make a difference.

These are strong reasons to stop using the term altogether. What other terms may replace it? 'Italians with immigrant parents' is a possibility. Even though people born of immigrants can only achieve full Italian citizenship at the age of 18, the term does seem more precise and far less problematic. The term gets rid of the erroneous immigrant label, and it gets rid of the fiction of 'generations' that do not exist empirically. It makes the assumption that these people are indeed Italians. This is a much safer assumption, for Italy is the territory in which they live, Italian is the language they speak (or one of them), it is the school system they know, the legal framework within which they live, and it is often the only country they have ever seen. Furthermore, even if they may hyphen it, being Italian

is certainly part of their self-definition. One could also suggest this alternative term: 'first-generation Italians'. It again makes the correct assumption, namely that this group of people is Italian. In contrast to '2G immigrants', the term is forward-looking and dynamic. I leave these as suggestions for further debate. In keeping with standard usage I more than hesitantly employ the term '2G immigrants' in the rest of this paper.

### **Mario Balotelli, Italy's most famous 2G immigrant: on being betwixt and between**

Many Italians came to know about their own country's *ius sanguinis* citizenship laws before the Olympic Games in 2008. The Italian national football team, always composed of very young players for the Olympic tournament, was badly in need of strikers, and the most promising young striker around was a player by the name of Mario Balotelli, who was then seventeen years old. The only problem was that Balotelli was not Italian. Balotelli had been adopted by an Italian family at an early age, but was born in Italy of immigrant parents. There were suggestions to speed up his 'naturalisation process' to make him eligible for the Olympics, but the operation was considered too complicated. Balotelli had to stay home, duly waiting for his eighteenth birthday in order to apply for Italian citizenship. Balotelli is now 'fully Italian', and he has indeed never lived in any other country and speaks no other language. Balotelli is no doubt Italy's most famous 2G immigrant, and his 'reception' says a great deal about how Italians perceive this growing group of people. Balotelli plays for Italy's richest football club, Inter Milan. Yet his name continues to be contested. Arguably, this is because Balotelli is considered 'hot-tempered' and with a difficult personality: he easily gets the opposing team's fans against him, and sometimes seems to enjoy it. However, part of the nation-wide hostility towards him around Italy's football stadiums is certainly related to racist attitudes. Balotelli should in some way stand as the supreme symbol of a successful 2G immigrant: he is young, handsome, uniquely talented, rich and famous, dates models and is a popular figure in Milan's VIP circles. Yet in many people's minds Balotelli is not *really* Italian.

In the run-up to the 2010 football World Cup, Balotelli's name was again circulating as a possibility for the Italian squad. But also here his 'Italian-ness' was cast into doubt. As Umberto Bossi, leader of the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) said during a political gathering, commenting on Balotelli's possible inclusion in the World Cup team:

"If it serves to fill a gap then that is better than losing", but "in Italy, with so much insistence on using foreigners, there are no longer any young champions". Concerning the lack of Italian players, Bossi added a positive note: "the moment is transitory and good Italian

players will eventually emerge” (Bossi as reported in *L’Unità*, 7 March 2010<sup>6</sup>).

To Bossi, leader of Italy’s third largest party and a crucial force in the current government, Balotelli is a foreigner, and Italy should rather use Italian players. Now, Bossi probably *does* know that Balotelli is Italian: yet he consciously employs his own race-based classification to determine who is Italian and who is not. And Bossi can get away with that because this is how many Italians perceive it as well. That perception is certainly related to the fact that Balotelli is black. Inter Milan, for example, has a series of ‘white’ Argentine players. Even though they all came to Italy after the age of twenty these players are often considered as ‘Italian as Italians’. This is for example the case of Inter Milan’s captain, the Argentine defender, Javier Zanetti, a legendary player also for the Argentine national squad. If Mario Balotelli, the ‘symbol of the 2G immigrants’ is persistently kept in this in-between space of being Italian/not-really-Italian, then one can only imagine the extent to which this remains the case for all those 2G immigrants who are *not* rich and famous.

#### **Assimilation versus heterogenisation: the ‘structures of identification’ in an age of global decline**

Italy is a world of its own. At the same time, Italy is not *just* its own world. There is much talk these days, in Italy and in all of Europe, about what kind of politics we need in order to secure a safe and painless integration process for immigrants. While I have no wish to take an explicit stance in these debates, I would like to propose a view that these processes are in fact only very partially decided by explicit policies. I am not suggesting that policies do not matter. In fact, politicians in all of Europe are increasingly (ab)using a larger ‘globalisation’ and/or an abstractly defined ‘Europeanisation’ process as ‘explanation’ for unsuccessful political processes, that are somehow ‘beyond them’, and that somehow undermine their otherwise good intentions. As academics, we should of course not accept this refuge into abstraction and externalisation: politics, after all, is about distributing resources, solving problems, and planning for a (better) future, and it is about being accountable for one’s decisions in that regard. Without accountability, there *is* no politics. Yet, the politics of integration are far too often talked about without reference to what one could call the ‘structures of identification’. In short, while both policies and social practices that lead to assimilation have their own history, and their often quite specific national trajectories, they tend to be strongest in periods of hegemonic expansion and economic growth (Friedman, 2004: 187).

This pattern becomes visible when considering historical trends. The recent historical period that without comparison saw the highest (relative

as well as absolute) number of people move across the world occurred between 1870 and 1914, the period of the 'Great Transatlantic Migrations' (Nugent, 1992). Tens of millions of Europeans left their homelands during that period (Hatton and Williamson, 1998). Current numbers of persons involved in migration are nowhere close to those seen in that period. Approximately 14 million people migrated from Italy alone between 1870 and 1914, settling in other European countries and in the Americas (for numbers and further discussion of Italian emigration, see Bevilacqua et al., 2002).

What happened to immigrants and their offspring in that period? It is extremely risky to generalise for such a vast period and with reference to different migrant groups and host countries, but there is consensus among migration scholars that this period, after all, was characterised by a high degree of assimilation: most of the pre-World War I migrants somehow assimilated into a new 'majority culture' within one or two generations – and even when they did not, assimilation often remained their aspiration. 1870-1914 was a period where the idea of homogenising 'national cultures' was much more positively viewed, if indeed 'viewed' at all. Many, if not most, people simply *wanted* to be 'homogenised', since becoming part of a majority culture was seen as linked to upward social mobility. This clearly related to the fact that the areas of Europe and America that attracted migrant populations were areas in economic expansion, with a forward-looking 'progressive' temporal-spatial horizon: there was a sense of that '*Neuzeit*' so well-described by Koselleck (1985), that modernistic experience of forward movement, the positive attitude whereby people were asked to 'leave behind tradition' in favour of something better and modern.

We are in no such period now, though, and 'modernity' has long since lost its innocence. On the one hand, the majority of people who come to Italy come here because they find more opportunities than in their homelands. However, they arrive with such ambitions in a country where any blind belief in progress is out of the question. In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, the question is rather how to 'stop the economic decline'. That is a significant historical shift in terms of life-expectations. Migrants arrive in Italy in a general socio-economic context that is marked by uncertainty and structural contingency. Europe's role as an economic centre is by no means guaranteed into the next couple of generations.

In a very general way, as Jonathan Friedman has argued so persistently (see for example Friedman, 1994), this hegemonic decline is a fundamental structural factor which has led to increasing awareness of 'cultural difference' and people's wish to preserve those cultural 'traditions' that they in earlier periods could not wait to get rid of. 1870-1914 was a period of rapid 'globalisation' and we say the same about today. Europe's place in that globalisation process has changed. So has the attractiveness of modernist, majority-nationalist cultures. This, alas, is a

structural tendency. In short, Italy is part of a declining economic 'centre' and it is a periphery of that centre. Rome, its capital, is even a periphery within Italy itself, an indeed 'reluctant capital' (Herzfeld, 2010). Such structural tendencies are necessary to think with as we try to tackle the issue of immigration and integration in a meaningful way.

### **From immigrant community to ethnic minority?**

What then is happening with immigrants and their identifications? There are many signs that we need to revise the 'gradual view' of integration which assumed that whereas the first generation of immigrants go through a rough period, the second generation is more integrated, while the third generation has become totally assimilated with nothing but a distant memory of a once 'home country'. Clearly enough, many immigrants in Europe, and maybe *especially* the second generation of immigrants, now wish to hold on to and develop cultural identities different from the 'majority culture' of the host nation. Earlier assimilation models predicted that it was a question of time before migrant and minority populations would either merge with the 'normal' majority culture or become marginalised altogether (Kymlicka, 2002: 327). This assimilation paradigm no longer functions according to its own predictions. Or, at the least, it does not function *always* and *everywhere*.

Why is this so? The most well-known theoretical framework to address this question is no doubt the segmented assimilation theory developed by Portes and Zhou (1993) in the 1990s to account for the American development of diversified identities. Segmented assimilation theory is based on the recognition that American society is now (in contrast to the first half of the twentieth century) extremely diverse and segmented. Thus, it is argued that different social and ethnic groups are available to which the new immigrants may assimilate, and that as a result they may take divergent assimilation paths. These paths include conventional upward, or 'straight-line' assimilation, downward assimilation, and 'selective acculturation' (ibid). In other words, some kind of assimilation is taking place, but it is not necessarily assimilation to a national majority culture. The theory is not unrelated to the approach of the Chicago school of urban studies, which argued, back in the 1920s and 1930s, that the 'urban ecology' of American cities was very much linked to settlement patterns along lines of class and ethnicity (Burgess, 2002). The relevance of this perspective needs to be explored also for the Italian case. While Italy, with a few exceptions, has not seen the emergence of clearly identifiable 'ethnic neighbourhoods', the fact that many ethnic or national groups specialise in specific sectors of the Italian economy does suggest that integration into the Italian context takes place to some degree via ethnic networking.

The fact that many immigrants today maintain closer links to their countries of origin is also due to communication technologies. Maintaining strong links to one's home country was simply more difficult a century ago than it is today. The internet is certainly crucial here. However, for quite a few immigrant groups it is apparently not the most important means of communication, and often this is simply because people in the home country do not have internet access. It is noteworthy how many immigrant groups in Italy gather around call centres that have blossomed all over the country, but especially in the larger cities. During my observations in two of these centres in Rome I noticed how often larger groups of people will stand outside the centre waiting to get the latest news from the single person who is actually making the call. In this way the phone centre enables people to keep contact with family members and friends in the home country but it equally functions as a centre of aggregation of ethnic communities here in the city; and the same can be said about the many internet points that are almost exclusively used by immigrants and tourists (see also Kruse and Hum, 2007). Another kind of communication that has become easier is money transferring; and here again, Italy has seen an explosion of banks that specialise in international transfers. The Italian/global remittance economy is clearly very big, although nobody knows exactly *how* big.

Identity formation among 2G immigrants hugely depends on the larger society and its dealing with foreigners. As Safi (2010) shows for the French situation, immigrants' dissatisfaction (i.e. their self-declared 'life-satisfaction') in many cases does *not* diminish over time and across generations (see also Meurs et al., 2006). The problems of integration that the first generation experiences are to a surprising degree experienced once again by the second generation. Indeed, feelings of discrimination may *increase* between the first and the second generation (ibid). Such feelings might of course relate to one's expectations. There are sound reasons to expect that such observations will resonate with the Italian setting as well. Whereas first-generation immigrants from economically less-developed regions expected to take jobs that natives would not, and accepted that they would do so, this will most often not be the case for the second-generation immigrants, who have grown up in Italy, and who, rightly, anticipate having similar life expectations as other members of their cohort. The first generation may have experienced discrimination, but they may also have been more willing to 'accept it'. To a surprising degree, however, discrimination along racial lines is inherited (ibid). Simply put, 2G immigrants, in contrast to their parents, expect to be treated like anybody else in Italy. Yet these expectations may not match their experiences, especially as long as the 'host society' keeps categorising them as immigrants. In the 2G literature, there is much focus on being 'culturally split'. However, if 2G immigrants sometimes have to seek a compromise

between their personal aspirations and their parents' expectations, this compromise is also one negotiated in the context of one's peer groups, outside the family environment; in other words, it may be that the real 'tension', or 'split' is not at all between two generations, or between one or the other 'culture', but between a person's *expectations* and a person's actual experiences in society. Perhaps we are creating a 'cultural split' as a false analytical assumption, not realising that what 2G immigrants want is a normal life: the 'split' is *that* discrepancy between 'rhetoric and reality' (Rumbaut, 1997) and no cultural or generational cleavage.

### **Confrontational identities?**

It seems unlikely that the 'melting pot' model will ever be adequate for Italy and its incorporation of immigrant communities. Distinct identities will continue to exist and develop. Will such 'distinct identities' stand in conflict with prevailing values and norms of European state societies? Will immigrant communities develop strong ethnic communities, and if so, could this be a problem? The most pessimistic view of what is going on was perhaps the one presented by Robert Leiken in his *Foreign Affairs* article, 'Europe's Angry Muslims' (Leiken, 2005). Leiken argued that radical Islam is spreading across Europe, particularly among 2G immigrants who are disillusioned by the failure of integration and are taking up jihad against the West - and this includes the country in which they live and which in many cases has made their own upward social mobility possible. Leiken focused his article on the security threat this scenario poses for the US ('They are dangerous and committed - and can enter the United States without a visa'). For Europe, such a development would not only pose a security threat but a challenge to the very social fabric of meaningful human relations. It would mean a permanent civil war between mutually exclusive religious/ethnic groups.

Is this what is going on? It would be very naïve to deny that radical anti-society and perhaps 'anti-West' attitudes are present among certain sectors of the 2G immigrants, and possibly also in Italy. The 2005 street riots of Paris were one signal that the 2G immigrants are *less* satisfied with French society compared to their parents, who in theory should have been through the first round of discrimination and 'paved the way' for their children. It was a 2G immigrant Dutch Muslim, born and raised in Europe and apparently 'well-integrated', who brutally murdered the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004. In general, radical, politicised Islam seems to have more appeal among the 2G immigrants than among the first generation, and this certainly deserves attention.

We know too little about what happens to 2G immigrants in Italy and the types of identities they are developing (but see Ambrosini and Molina, 2004; Colombo, 2005; Colombo, 2007; Colombo et al., 2009; Valtolina, 2006).

In particular, we still know too little about how Islamic religion is being interpreted by 2G immigrants (but see again Zinn this issue; see also Abdel Qader, 2008; Frisina, 2006, 2007). This is all the more so since to analyse intergenerational mobility and types/degrees of integration between generations, one needs longitudinal data that are, as yet, simply not available. This issue, therefore, might be another small step towards setting this research agenda in Italy. Future scholarship should also recognise the need for European and global comparative dimensions, and especially learning from research on 2G immigrants in countries like America and the UK where the issue has long been a recognised research domain, with a shared conceptual/theoretical field of discussion and the more or less systematic gathering of comparative data.

### **Lessons from elsewhere: identifying the variables of ‘success’ and ‘failure’**

We still know very little about why some immigrant groups fare better or worse in specific European countries. We also do not know the extent to which processes of integration are helped or worsened by existing policies within the area. ‘Integration’ and similar terms in Italian and other European languages are extremely fuzzy, and this complicates the situation. In Italy the term is indeed frequently used, in the press, in television debates and in policy documents, but the term takes on almost opposite meanings according to context.

A key methodological question here concerns how we measure ‘success’ (Cellini and Fideli, 2003; Golini, 2006). Is economic income the main variable? This has often been the assumed standard in national and European surveys that measure successful integration: to measure the earnings and hence standard of living of immigrants (first and second generation) matched against those of the native populations. Other indicators often used include ‘degree of education’ or ‘educational status’ (for a comparative analysis of Britain, Canada and the United States, see for example Rethon et al., 2009; on school performance of 2G immigrants in Italy, see for example Bosisio et al., 2005; Queirolo Palmas, 2006). It is often assumed that if educational levels go up, it will be a question of time before the immigrant groups will also reach a socio-economic level equal to the native populations. However, data from Scandinavia indicate that even while educational status goes up, it still does not translate directly into success within the labour market: in several European settings the ‘school-to-work’ transition is still harder for 2G immigrants than for members of the population on average (for a Swedish case study, see Rooth and Ekberg, 2003). Also here, however, specific ethnic groups perform very differently (for one such comparative analysis, see Van Ours and Veenman, 2004), as one must also expect in the Italian setting.

Much research on immigrants builds upon the (mostly hidden) assumption that the ultimate goal should be to bring immigrant populations 'on level' with the national average. One might, however, question this assumption. There are many immigrant families who fare rather poorly when matched against national standards, yet according to their own perception may have done very well. This suggests that we need to include multiple variables, objective and subjective, when measuring the 'level of integration'. Some scholars do of course focus their measurement on subjective factors, such as the research subjects' self-declared 'happiness', what is sometimes referred to as 'life satisfaction measures'. These can be obtained via statistical surveys among targeted groups and sub-groups and can again be used in the context of longitudinal analysis. However, in Italy no research team has so far established a research paradigm that has produced reliable longitudinal data, and in general it is hard to identify any Italian consensus regarding shared concepts and methodologies. As long as this remains the case, the debate will continue to suffer from lack of precision.

In general, survey statistics do seem to be the preferred approach used by a growing number of those in Italian sociology departments who investigate immigration. Surveys solicit answers to pre-defined questions that respondents cannot deviate from. This approach needs to be further integrated with a larger body of qualitative research, based on field-work, life stories and open-ended interviews (for a good example of such an integration, see Marchetti, this issue). The contributions to this symposium work in the direction of helping us to understand how different groups and individuals among the 2G immigrants actually perceive the terms and fundamental questions pertaining to this debate, and those perceptions should frame what policy-makers address.

### **Lessons from elsewhere: gender and 2G immigrants (are boys the real 'problem'?)**

As stressed from the outset, 2G immigrants are not a 'group' and even when one does single out specific immigrant communities such as the 'Indian', 'Turkish' and 'American' communities, one is making another risky generalisation. One factor that needs careful attention is of course gender. In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, when the media talks about immigrants being 'split between two cultures' the focus is predominantly on girls/women. This is especially so when the debate concerns Muslims – which it happens to do very often in popular discourse. Italy has witnessed a few 'Islamic honour killings' – most recently in 2009 when an eighteen year-old girl named Saana was brutally killed by her father, apparently because he could not accept that she had gone to live (unmarried) with a 31 year-old Italian man. Saana has become yet another symbol of the dramatic

conflict between two cultures: young girls who are torn between their parents' Muslim moral codes and the 'Italian way of life'. This and other stories have taken up a lot of space in the Italian press; they have served to show how girls in particular are torn between a 'patriarchal' native culture and a more 'liberal' Italian/European culture. Boys, it seems to be implicitly assumed, can more easily be 'traditional' and at the same time experience that 'freedom' which allegedly is anathema to 'female values' in many Muslim Mediterranean/Middle East countries.

It is beyond the scope of this article to embark upon discussion of the role of Islam in crimes of honour, though it should of course be noted that honour killings have been historically widespread in the wider Mediterranean area (the concept of 'crime of honour' was only removed from the Italian penal code in 1981). Italy sees many homicides connected to jealous men who are as Italian as can be. The question I want to raise here is another one: Is it true that girls/women have the biggest problems of adaptation in this cultural 'encounter' between a traditional 'native' culture and the Italian setting?

There are data from other European settings that indicate otherwise. In most European countries 2G males have significantly lower levels of education compared to the national average; females, on the contrary, tend to have a *higher* average level of education (for Denmark see for example Egelund et al., 2008; for a recent comparative analysis that confirms this trend in Europe, see Rothon et al., 2009). In most European settings, girls outperform boys very significantly on several 'scores', although these scores once again differ a great deal between the different immigrant groups. It should not be forgotten that the rates of criminality which in many European countries continue to be relatively high for immigrants and their offspring can be mainly attributed to boys. I hypothesise that contrary to popular stereotypes some of the problems relating to integration of 2G immigrants in Italy are specific *male* problems: they have to do with males not being able to define a proper role, and this seems to be the case even if they are on paper more 'free'. We need studies of gender roles as perceived and enacted by the immigrant parents, and we need micro-level studies of gender-mediated inter-generational transmission of values.

### **Academics and their research subjects: the problem of problematising**

There is one final point I would like to make with reference to European debates and their relevance for Italy: the problem of problematising. The term 'problematisation' was central to the work of Michel Foucault, and perhaps his key methodological device. In one of his last lecture series (on 'parrhesia'), Foucault (2001: 171) summed up his methodological approach (and to an extent his entire work) this way:

What I tried to do from the beginning was to analyze the process of 'problematization' - which means: how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a problem. Why, for example, certain forms of behavior were characterized and classified as 'madness' while other similar forms were completely neglected at a given historical moment; the same thing for crime and delinquency, the same question of problematization for sexuality.

During the last twenty years, immigration has indeed been problematised in every single European country, and with almost the same kind of negative connotations that in earlier periods discursively created 'madness' and 'delinquency' as a problem for society to 'deal with'. We should be aware of this trap, as we should be aware of the terms and frames of problematising which we, often inadvertently, reproduce. While being part of a larger question, the simple point I would like to invoke here is that practically all the information and 'knowledge' that circulates about second-generation immigrants concern 'problems'. In the Scandinavian context, most research on 2G immigrants seems to fall within these overall categories: income gap (and other forms of socio-economic disadvantage), ethnic-racist attitudes toward immigrants, suicide, and schizophrenia. In Great Britain, security and terrorism is a more prominent subfield of investigation, and may soon become so in Scandinavia as well.

One should not discredit any of this research: if there are more suicides among 2G immigrants than the average, it is indeed perhaps a problem. What is very striking, though, is the almost total absence of research that focuses on positive aspects. To invoke again the Danish scenario, this is extremely paradoxical, for several surveys actually show that things are going pretty well. A recent report provided these numbers: between 2001 and 2008, employment among non-Western 2G immigrants went up from 45 to 57 percent. Educational levels also went up (and especially for girls). 61 percent of immigrants stated that their friends are either Danish or both Danish and immigrant, against 49 percent in 2001. Between 2001 and 2008, the share of immigrants and their offspring who marry other immigrants went down from 63 to 31 percent (Jørgensen, 2010; see also Lassen, 2009). 2G immigrants excel in key sectors of the Danish economy, and increasing numbers of them are starting up their own businesses.

These are very clear indicators of successful integration. However, in exactly this time period, the question of immigration and 2G immigrants received an increasingly 'bad press' in Denmark. Here, unfortunately, journalists and academics are seemingly caught in the same trap. Journalists prefer 'problem stories', because they sell. Academics are equally drawn towards 'problems'. This is certainly tied to the logics of funding: authorities (city councils, states, the EU) typically fund projects that identify a social problem which the project must diagnose, analyse and

then propose new policies for. Taken together, this has created the almost immediate nexus between 2G immigrant and 'problem'. This tendency is of course strengthened by the growing political concern with immigration, and in particular with the rising popularity of political parties that have anti-immigration attitudes high on their agendas.

The necessity of hearing the 'good stories' is not only an ethical command: if we are to understand the mechanisms of integration, the point is evidently analytical. If the larger public never hears about the non-problematic and positive life stories of immigrants, the negative view will only solidify. We somehow need to make that 'normality' visible: that people come to Italy to work and live a perfectly normal life, and have children who are silently becoming part of our society.

### **Celebrating normality and belonging**

2G immigrants can enrich Italian society in many ways, and are already doing so. A majority of the 2G immigrants speak two or three languages fluently; this is a big advantage and a major step forwards in a country where the mastering of foreign languages has traditionally been poor. To a certain extent, one major step forwards in the debate over 2G immigrants in Italy would be to stop talking about it, and simply let social processes unfold. On the other hand, the question of immigration is already a tense discursive field, a field of 'problematization', and a highly politicised one at that. We do need to speak.

It is easy to identify and criticise right-wing, semi-racist voices against immigrants and their off-spring. However, political instrumentalisation can be seen at many levels. Left-wing liberals in particular like to see immigration as an expression of a more 'mature', cosmopolitanism, 'beyond' the nation-state. In most academic circles it would almost be criminal not to take a celebratory stance toward a new, cosmopolitan 'global' and 'multi-cultural society'. I think we have it wrong. What is happening is not a global spread of cosmopolitan values that are triumphantly outdating nationalistic models of identification. Or rather, such models *are indeed developing*, but they are restricted, with more or less precision, to a subset of cosmopolitan intellectuals, artists, businessmen and diplomats: people who have both economic and cultural capital to enjoy 'being in many places at the same time'. We are not the primary stuff that globalisation is made of, and we are not even the thread that can tie it together. Thus, the task of social scientists, increasingly relying on funds from policy-oriented institutions, has become not simply to study 'minorities', but to celebrate and identify with these, and see them as the sign of a new cosmopolitan culture. These normatively biased positions should not induce us to misjudge the increasing spread of cultural essentialism as simply 'traditionalist' or 'reactionary'. Cultural

fundamentalism is not confined to right-wing xenophobes: very often minority groups themselves speak culture and identity with a similar idiom (Grillo, 2010). When turned into a political weapon, essentialism is an evil to combat – but such politicised essentialism must not be conflated with the simple wish to preserve and develop a meaningful sense of belonging.

Most migrants don't want to be cosmopolitan creoles; most migrants and their children just want to have firm ground under their feet, a passport, and be a constructive part of a social and cultural setting where identities can unfold, hyphenated or not, ethnic or national, religious or secular, local and/or global. There is a need to de-politicise immigrants and their children, and to give culture and identity its own breathing space.

## Notes

1. 'Born in Italy Amir written in the sand take my name and you translate it into prince of Arabia a voice that shouts from Rome to Taba in this cold society I search for warmer air son of the love and the heart of two persons a mix of blood cultures races and religions I'm here as spokesperson I take up my mission against the despair that hits too many second generation persons I look at my son he is the third and if you try to barely touch him your head will go off if you don't understand that you found riches we precious stones in the midst of all this garbage I write with the hunger of he who does not give up I take your hate and transform it into this pen s.o.s. bad situation if they call me foreigner in the place where I live' [translation by author].

2. It is interesting that despite massive immigration from mainly Southern Italy into the city in the 1950s and 1960s there were no serious incidents of intolerance against southerners (*'terroni'*) compared to, for example, Turin or Milan.

3. Immigration in Italy only gathered pace in the late 1990s. For an overview, see for example Mingione (2009).

4. The lyrics open like this: [translation by author]

<i>'la gente mi ha confuso con un immigrato</i>	'people have confused me with an immigrant
<i>con la faccia da straniero nella mia nazione</i>	with the face of a foreigner in my nation
<i>se il futuro qui è la mia seconda generazione</i>	if the future here is my second generation
<i>non mi devo integrare</i>	I don't have to integrate
<i>io qua ci sono nato</i>	I was born here
<i>io non sono mio padre</i>	I am not my father
<i>non sono un immigrato</i>	I am not an immigrant
<i>non sono un terrorista</i>	I am not a terrorist
<i>non sono un rifugiato</i>	I am not a refugee
<i>mangio pasta e pizza</i>	I eat pasta and pizza
<i>io sono un italiano'</i>	I am an Italian'

5. Amir offers a condensed version of his position in a recent interview posted on Youtube. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQddLVQV7z8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQddLVQV7z8) [accessed 25 June 2010].

6. 'Se serve per tamponare una falla, piuttosto che perdere, si può tamponare' ma 'in Italia, a furia di usare gli stranieri, non ci sono più giovani campioni, non ci sono più attaccanti'; 'il momento attuale è transitorio e verranno fuori degli italiani bravi'.

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