School activism. The meanings of political participation of young migrants in Italian Schools

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Introduction

While entering into a secondary school in a deprived area of Modena, an affluent city yet on the verge of a still unforeseen economic crisis, I was overwhelmed by excitement and fears. It was my first experience as a professional researcher, the task being to interview young migrants, promoting narratives about their social networks in and out of the school. Previous experiences suggested me that adolescents might be reluctant in narrating personal experiences; however, human interaction often surprises expectations: I cannot remember a single interview being anything else than an intelligent and provocative discussion on education, politics and peer groups. The researcher and the students, we were sharing and co-constructing personal narratives through multicultural dialogue, while learning that social research is an opportunity to have our voices heard.

This chapter presents the results of that research with young migrants, and four others. All researches took place in Italy between 2006 and 2014, over an unfinished economic crisis, the rise and fall of xenophobic political parties and a continuing debate around migration and inclusion in different social contexts.

The researches and methods

Data consists of young migrants' narratives, promoted and collected in 62 focus group and 118 individual interviews. The participants in the researches were 17 to 20 years old at the moment of data collection and resident in Italy for more than one year. An exception is represented by the researcher, an Italian citizen in his late twenties and thirties during the time frame of the interview.

The first research project was part of a social intervention, *Intendiamoci* (2006), aimed to promote young people (migrant and Italian) perspectives on their social networks and experiences in multicultural classrooms, using photographs taken by them as the starting point of personal narratives. Although the research was not specifically focused on political participation, the narratives produced revealed, the importance of political activism for young migrants attending vocational programmes in the City of Modena. *Intendiamoci* consisted of 8 focus groups and 21 individual interviews that took place in the classrooms.

The second research project was an evaluation of another social intervention, *COMICS* (Children Of Migrants Inclusion Creative Systems), funded by the European Commission within INTI04 Call For Projects (Farini and Iervese, 2008). *COMICS* aimed to promote participants' social and political participation, using visual art as a medium for young migrants' expression. The evaluative research was aimed to measure the impact of the project through the promotion and analysis of young migrants' narratives. The sample consisted of 12 focus group and 24 individual interviews at the youth centers where *COMICS* activities were undertaken.

Similarly to COMICS, the third research was interested in young migrants' narratives, to explore their semantic of political participation. The research project, entitled *Ri-Generazioni* (*Re-Generations*, 2008-2011) was supported by the Scandicci Town Council (Tuscany), and consisted of 18 focus groups and 48 individual interviews, taking place in youth centers managed by the Scandicci local authority.

As for *Intendiamoci*, the fourth research was not primarily interested in political participation; rather, it aimed to explore self-narratives of young people who, at the moment of the interviews, were not employed, in education or in training. However, data produced in the research,*'A socio-cultural analysis of risk, trust and affectivity in young people groups'* (*risk/trust,* 2012-2014), showed that political engagement was an important aspect of young

migrants' narratives. The data was produced through 24 focus groups and 25 individual interviews, again taking place in youth centers in the Region Emilia-Romagna.

Two different non-probabilistic sampling methods were used in the researches. The first one was *purposive sampling*, which was used for the two evaluations of social interventions. Both evaluative studies were therefore limited only to young people who were involved in the projects. The second sampling methods was *convenience sampling*, used in two studies targeted to young people within delimitated areas. For those researches, subjects meeting the selection criteria (employment status and age for one research, age only for the other) were approached in collaboration with local social services, and their inclusion depended on their willingness to be interviewed.

Notwithstanding different aims, the four research projects share similar methodology, consisting of the promotion of young people's narratives to support a phenomenological description of their semantics of social participation. Narrative analysis is an extension of the interpretive approaches within the social sciences. Narratives lend themselves to a qualitative enquiry in order to capture the rich data within stories. Narrative analysis takes the story itself as the object of study; thus the focus is on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives through examining the story they produce (Riessman, 1993). This approach to study is not new to qualitative sociology. Sociology has had a history of ethnographic study including the analysis of personal accounts. However, with ethnography it is the events described and not the stories created that are the object of investigation: language is viewed as a medium that reflects singular meanings.

Under the narrative movement and criticisms of positivism, the question of textual objectivity has been challenged by social constructionism (Gergen, 1997), encouraging many to approach narratives as social constructions, that are social in the sense they are exchanged between people. As such, life stories are a linguistic unit involved in social interactions and are therefore cultural products, in their content and form (Linde, 1993). Language is therefore seen as deeply constitutive of reality, not merely a device for establishing meaning. Stories do not reflect the world out there, but are constructed, rhetorical, and interpretive (Riessman, 1993), lending themselves to a phenomenological analysis.

Linde's concept of life stories as cultural products and Riessman interactive rhetoric inform the methodology of all four researches, allowing to approach interviews as a (multi)cultural product of a dialogue co-constructed and continuously re-interpreted by the researcher and the participants.

The narrative approach to the analysis of interviews applied in the four investigations hereby presented is posited to have the ability to capture social representations 'in the making'. Narrative analysis is well suited to study subjectivity and identity largely because of the importance given to imagination and the human involvement in constructing a story, allowing an analysis of how culturally contingent and historically contingent the terms, beliefs and issues narrators address are (Rosenwald, and Ochberg, 1992; Gill, 2001).

Participant narratives across all four research projects were promoted dialogical forms of communication, acknowledging that participants in social research actively construct meanings and social practices, influencing the cultural and social situations in which they are involved (James et al., 1998; Baraldi and Iervese, 2012). Inspired by Mercer and Littleton (2007) research on dialogic teaching, dialogic research is defined here as that in which all participants make substantial and significant contributions and through which thinking or themes are promoted to move forward, and through which researcher and participants mutually encourage each other to participate actively. Dialogic research requires facilitation of interaction, in which the researcher is an organiser of participation, and mutual learning (see Holdsworth, 2005). Facilitative dialogic research is a specific form of social research based on methodologies of facilitation.

The practice of facilitation emphasises the production of different perspectives, in displaying and managing predefined assumptions, doubts, divergent interpretations, different stories and experiences, unpredicted emotions. Facilitation enhances and manages different

perspectives. In interactions generated by social research, facilitation makes it possible to coordinate and manage active participation and relationships and promote mutual learning-outcome through post-activity feedback and reflection.

2. Results and Discussion.

Narratives produced by young migrant converge in suggesting the criticism of the idea of cultural identity as an "essential" identity, something given and fixed (Hofstede, 1980; Ting Toomey, 1999). The researches presented in this contribution support a different theoretical claim, underpinned by social constructivism, advancing the idea that cultural identity is negotiated in public discourse and interaction (Baraldi, 2009; Holliday, 2011; Piller, 2011; Zhu Hua, 2014). Data collected in the four social research projects invite us to consider political participation as a crucial context of the construction of cultural identity through social practices.

In this chapter, an English rendition of the original narratives in the Italian language will be provided, aiming to reproduce participants' linguistic choices and style. Excerpts from the intercultural dialogue co-constructed by the researcher and the participants will be used to support the discussion of data. In line with its methodological premises, this chapter approaches personal narratives as constructed through multicultural dialogue, that is, a social *process* rather than an *object*. For this reason, the discussion that will follow should not be understood as an attempt to distill some cultural characteristics of young migrants as a social group; rather, the aim of the chapter is to discuss how personal narratives contribute to the negotiation and co-construction of multicultural identities.

2.1 Marginalisation in the education system

Participants' narratives emphasise the importance of agency in the construction of the meaning of their social experiences. Agency is observed when individual actions are not considered as determined by another subject (James, 2009; James and James, 2008, Baraldi, 2015), although the concept of agency implies that individuals '… interact with the social conditions in which they find themselves' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005: 380), acknowledging limitations imposed by social constraints (Bjerke, 2011; James, 2009; James and James, 2008; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Valentine, 2011; Wyness, 2013).

Agency and its social conditions are visible in social interactions (Bae, 2012; Baraldi, 2014; Bjerke, 2011; Harre and van Langhenove, 1999), where agency can be observed in the availability of choices of action and the agent's possibility to exercise a personal judgement and to choose according to it (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Markstrom and Hallden, 2009; Moss, 2009).

In the data sets considered, participants' narratives present a situation of limited agency in the education system. This is not surprising, as a tradition of sociological research on education points out that education is interested in standardised role performances, rather than agency (Parsons and Bales, 1955; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Vanderstraeten, 2004; Farini, 2011; Walsh, 2011; Luhmann, 2012). The following excerpt is taken from the *Intendiamoci* research; a student from migrant background is sharing a narrative that represents a form of categorisation.

Modena, *Intendiamoci,* December 2006:
School is the most difficult thing, because if you have problems, then you see that they really expect you to have problems; before you start because you come from a different place. A bad assignment and you are in need of support, but this is not the same for Italian students. They are told to study more, not that they need support, in a way that it is up to them, not up to support they receive, which is somehow more respectful

Irrespectively of their individuality, migrant students are categorised as members of a problematic group; such membership informs their position in the education system and the interpretation of their contributions. The language used to convey the narrative, and in particular the distinction respect/lack of respect indicates that the student perceives the ethnic-based categorisation as a negation of his agency.

Tilly's idea that inequality becomes embedded in any organizational structure (Tilly, 1998) may help in further analyzing this interesting aspect of participants' narratives. Tilly (1998) elaborates an inventory of causal mechanisms through which categorical inequality is generated and sustained. Tilly (ibid) argues that certain kinds of social structural relations are solutions to problems generated within social systems, for instance the problem of trust. Educational interaction creates, through selective events, categorical forms of inequality. Durable, categorical distinctions make easier to know who to trust and who to exclude, and categorical inequalities become stable features of organization, enhancing the stability of educational relationships. In education, inequality among individual performances and goal attainment is a structural feature of social relationships and an expected output of the system. Tilly (1998: 15) distills the core explanation of categorical inequality to three positions:

(1) Organizationally installed categorical inequality reduces risks. Categorical inequalities sustain in the risky choice to accord or not trust. This is a claim about the effects of categorical inequality on the stability of organizational relationships: the former stabilizes the latter;

(2) Organizations whose survival depends on stability therefore tend to adopt categorical inequality. This is a selection argument: the functional trait, categorical inequality, is adopted because it is functional,

(3) Because organizations adopting categorical inequality deliver greater returns to their dominant members and because a portion of those returns goes to organizational maintenance, such organizations tend to crowd out other types of organizations.

For educational organizations the limitation of risk offered by institutional distrust frees resources for the attainment of curricular goals via the exclusion of categories of students. In educational situations, categorical distinctions stabilize social relationships, but also positions of marginalization (with regard to migrant students, see Devine,2013). Institutional trust and institutional distrust may be understood as consequences of the operations through which educational organization reproduce themselves. The two following excerpts illustrate Tilly (1998) theory: categorical inequalities contributes to the stabilization of marginalization.

Piacenza, *Risk/Trust,* June 2013
I feel that teachers genuinely want migrants to succeed, but they are anxious because they have this idea that migrants have problems and it is enough to be a bit slower that they run around asking for help and you are not seen as the same as others anymore. But maybe you just need time. This makes it hard you may learn Italian but you do not feel like part of the school as the others. Also because when it is said that you need support no one can see what you can do already: you become a preoccupation

Scandicci, *Ri-Generazioni,* May 2009
I used to study at the Liceo (selective school comparable to Grammar School in England), this is what my parents fancied, I suppose. They had that idea that Liceo is for future medial doctors. However, after a single month teachers told me 'fine if you stay with us to listen, but maybe it is better to look for a different school'. This was because it was decided that I was not going to pass. They said that I was showing issues but I think that really the issue was because I am a migrant and they are quick to see you as a failure after just one bad month, because this is what they expect you to do, to fail because you are like that. I was determined to achieve, leaving was no choice of mine

The narratives promoted in the researches presented here introduce another form of marginalization that does not concern the educational careers of migrant students but their access to contexts of personal affective relationships, which is an important aspect of the school experience. The following expert taken from the COMICS research can support a discussion of this form of marginalization.

Modena, *COMICS*, January 2008 (focus group)
Josie: *I am doing quite well at school, well I am getting better, but still I feel isolated and unhappy*
Researcher: Do people exclude you?
Josie: *No one really does, the system does. They push you back as they think that you are not quite there with guys of your age because of the language, basically*
Researcher: *Push you back?*
Josie: *Back to a classroom with children that are younger, even three years younger. They are CHILDREN. Of course they do not fancy you and you think they are a bit, boring, so to speak. You feel quite alone for the many hours you spend at school*
Rita: *You may develop language while doing easy stuff with children, but you are left behind with friendship. I feel embarrassed with friends outside, I have only children's antics to share, after a while it is not funny*

Research suggest that classrooms are contexts of peer-relationships based on affectivity and personal choices, that can be therefore observed as expression of agency (Patrick et al, 2007; Farini, 2008; Baraldi and Iervese, 2014). Participants' narratives clearly present a semantics of the classroom as a context of peer-socialisation and expression of agency. However, they experience unfavourable conditions for developing interpersonal relationships at school, due to educational strategies aimed to support academic achievement, but detrimental for their inclusion in the peer-groups.
Removed from their age group at school (*being pushed back*, in the vocabulary of Italian school practices) young migrants experience reduced opportunities for agency: personal affective relationships are simply not viable with much younger classmates. The pedagogical strategy deployed to allow young migrants to familiarise with the education system and to develop linguistic competence at a slower pace, supports a process of marginalization from what participants see as the 'proper peer groups'; such marginalisation can be understood as a latent function of the manifest functions (support of development) of education. As suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, (1987), enlightened practices can deny the dignity of self-determination, objectivising certain subjects.

2.2 From marginalisation to the invention of new forms of inclusion: school activism

Participants' narratives concerning inclusion in the political system develop around their distrust in the concrete possibility of agency, connected to their citizenship status. It is possible to utilise the concept of agency presented in paragraph 1 as a conceptual tool to understand the position of young migrants. Whilst young migrants can make political autonomous choices, such choices are not visible in the political system, due to a limited access to political rights. This prevents their preferences to make a difference. Using Bateson's vocabulary (1972), the informative value of young migrants' internal difference (their political preference) for the political system is nullified by exclusion from political rights. This short excerpt from the COMICS research illustrates the divergence between personal engagement and lack of agency due to the citizenship status.

Modena, *COMICS*, February 2008
Politics is like football for me, I pick my team, I watch, I get angry if a team I hate wins, but I will be never good enough to play, because I am not good enough, I am no citizen

Taylor's (1989) historical account of the conceptualisations of human value may support a discussion on the above excerpt, which represent a common form of representation in participant's narratives. According to Taylor (ibid.), in hierarchical societies human value was ranked against the proximity to the owner of the land. Examining the transition from feudal societies to societies based on trade in Western and Southern Europe, Taylor (ibid) observes a semantic evolution, whereas human value is a function of dignity, which is taken to be both the possession of, and what it is owed to, each and every individual, regardless of the conditions of their birth.

However, human value as a structural form does not disappear in trade societies; in order to differentiate grades of human value, the universal and inclusive principle of dignity is coupled with the selective and exclusive principle of 'level of development', which is measured according to separateness from others, self-governance and independence from the claims, wishes and command of others. While Taylor (ibid.) suggests that the function of the combination of development and dignity is to detect a shared quality among aristocracy and bourgeoisie, that would otherwise be separated by degrees of honour, such coupling has been the catalyst for semantics of categorical distinction: development is associated with general historical movement (savages against civilised), personal development (child against adult), gender (female against male), ethnicity (black people against white people, white people of the south against white people of the north).

The coupling between dignity and development is still accepted in the public discourse only regarding generational order (although being the object of criticism, particularly from the area of childhood studies (Wyness, 2014; Leonard, 2016). However, its underpinning structure, that is, the coupling between the inclusive principle of dignity and an exclusive principle still generates social semantics. An example of this consists in the coupling between dignity and assumed limited school readiness in migrant students (Herrlitz and Maier, 2005; Grant and Portera, 2011), or in the coupling between agency and citizenship status within legal and political systems. The following expert is taken from the *Ri-Generazioni* research, part of a narrative shared by a migrant young man.

Scandicci, *Ri-Generazioni*, May 2010
I think that if rights are also about what you can potentially do, maybe you won't but you are not prevented, I mean offering you possibilities, I do not have rights. Or I have less than Italians in Italy. I cannot vote or I can dream of changing the town but I cannot really as I will never be a candidate. Unless I change myself and become Italian in the passport, but this would be like changing to have rights that others have for what they are

A discussion of the narratives represented by the above excerpt may develop from the ideas that whilst dignity generates inclusive and universal human rights, citizenship generates exclusive and conditional personal rights (Mattheis, 2012). The multicultural dialogue co-constructed by the researcher and the participants indicates that young migrants position themselves at the centre of the paradoxical coupling between dignity and citizenship. The two excerpts shown below, from 2006 and 2013, suggest the persistence of marginalisation and inequality in young migrants narratives concerning their political participation

Modena, *Intendiamoci*, December 2006, focus group
Nicu: *At the end of the day I am not really anyone while I feel quite secure about who I am and what I like.*
Researcher: *What do you mean?*
Nicu: *I am not Romanian, well I am but I do not live like one, I live like an Italian, but I am not.*
Amadou: *I am really into politics, I just do not understand the guys who do not care, which is stupid because it is like one who does not care about his body and illness, illness and politics that affect your life. I spend lots of time watching all the debates and shows with*

politicians and when I go to the Internet Café it is not only a movie but also political news, and international. But while I think it is serious stuff, then I also realise that it is not, because I cannot do much with all of my information, I cannot vote or being a candidate. So it is like a game really if you cannot be of it, and I am not sure if am not wasting my time as the guys who play with NES or Playstation
Paulo: *I made up my mind a lot of time ago about politics but I cannot choose in practice, I have no choice but I would know what to choose*

Cesena, *Risk/trust,* June 2013
My idea is that one thing is the passport, another thing is who you are. Because of the passport I am still a guest, a kind of visitor, but I do not feel like one. What are my interests when being heard and to do things here, so I think I am not the data in the passport but the person in the photograph, who wants to be part but cannot as others can. It is a struggle.

These narratives suggest that young migrants do not experience the negation of their human rights, but the exclusion from 'personal rights', therefore the exclusion from some social domains. The conditional access to personal rights is exemplified by the exclusion from political rights. While the semantics of rights is based on the dogmatic of human dignity (Teubner, 1988, 2010), human dignity that does not presuppose human essence; on the contrary, it is the individuality of persons that is constructed in the social sphere by help of rights. This statement may help to conceptualise the connection advanced by young migrants' narratives, between categorical inequalities (exclusion from political rights) and marginalisation in situations of limited agency.

However, this is only a possible outcome of categorical inequalities. Another possible outcome is that the excluded groups construct forms of oppositional solidarities. This is suggested by the excerpt below, from the COMICS research.

Modena, *COMICS,* March 2008
I was feeling isolated and really sad for a while, and angry because I was feeling I was not listened to at school and not be quite like the others outside. It has been quite bad recently; because of the elections I really wanted to be heard but I knew I am no citizen of Italy. Then I see the French guys get out in the street, for the right to a decent job. They are not really touched because they are still students, but they want to make a difference for the people in the here and now. And I realised that you do not need to vote to do it. When it was the students' strike I just joint the guys of the strike because here is not different from France. I do not feel out of place when we have meeting. I want to join a Union because it is what you want for the future that matters not where you come from

The excerpt introduces a social process emerging from many narratives that can be discussed by making use of the concept of *unintended consequence.* Merton (1957) analyses types and determinants of unanticipated consequences of purposive action. For Merton (ibid.) the functions of a social practice are its "observable objective consequences". Manifest functions are those outcomes that are intended and recognized by the agents concerned; latent functions are those outcomes that are neither intended nor recognized. Although the distinction between manifest and latent functions has been the object of critical review (Campbell, 1982, Portes, 2000; Farini, 2012), the concept of unintended consequences can help understanding participants' narratives.

Categorical forms of inequality set in motion a pattern of contradictory effects. Participants' narratives suggest that the exclusion from political rights generates political participation and the access to contexts where fluid identities are constructed and negotiated in multicultural dialogue. *School activism* describes the process of re-inclusion in the political system, based on trust commitments and the development of multicultural personal relationships.

Section 2.1 discussed how participants' narratives indicate that the construction of categorical inequalities in education activates a vicious circle between institutionalised

distrust and marginalisation (Luhmann 1988). The effects of marginalisation extend to trust in peer-relationships due to strategies to support young migrants' academic achievement. In particular, removing young migrants from their age group at school and placing them in a younger cohort prevents the construction of person-centred relationships and trust based on affectivity. For Luhmann (ibid.), while trust enlarges the range of possible actions in a social system, distrust restricts this range, in that it requires additional premises for social relationships, which protect interactants from a disappointment that is considered highly probable. When distrust is established, building trust appears very difficult because the interaction is permeated by trust in distrust.

Although presenting conditions of distrusts and marginalisation, participants' narratives also introduce a counter-process of trust-building, based on school activism. In particular, the intercultural narratives collected during the four researches relate school activism to Kelman (2005) model of trust building. Kelman (ibid.) analyses conditions of radical distrust and building trust in workshops involving Israeli and Palestinian representatives trying to reach peaceful agreements. Kelman (ibid.) argues that in these workshops trust was built through successive approximations of increasing degrees of commitment, starting from the building of a feeble temporary trust (*working trust*) not committing participants to anything beyond the solution of specific problems. Two excerpts help illustrating this process, taken from the COMICS research and Ri-generazioni.

Modena, *COMICS*, November 2008
There is a lot to do, because you know we are not many, and you do want as many students as possible attending the debate but also that they understand the meaning of it, not only the free time to smoke and drink. I got friends almost without speaking, just doing things which made sense to all. And another thing is that I understand and master the meaning of my actions and I feel this is reckoned as they trust me as I trust them. I have showed skills and trustworthiness.

Scandicci, *Ri-Generazioni*, May 2010
What I am excited about all those strikes and protest in the street to save the school against privatisation is that I am not 'someone in deficit' anymore. I am not the struggling one to be helped, but I can help with my thoughts and practical actions. Actually, I was not friend with any of the guys in the political group. I was working with them before befriending them. You walk in the streets with people you do not know well, but also you know them well in the sense that they share what you want for the future. Of course, then you become friend with some, actually a good friend and there is something more than befriending someone at the disco. Fun is part of the friendship but really it is what you want from the future that make you feel closer politically and in a personal sense.

In Kelman (ibid.) model, working trust and interpersonal relationships can merge, but only at a later stage of the interaction. Interpersonal closeness is not the basis of (working) trusting commitment. however, interpersonal closeness may follow working trust.

The two excerpts represent a diffused aspect of the narratives collected over almost ten years: forms of school activism are the context for the development of working trust through political participation and involvement in activities with peers. Working trust creates the presupposition for trust based on affectivity. Data suggest that working trust supports the visibility of political choices, and the development of personal relationships.

Conclusion

Rather than a small-scale reproduction of political rights they are excluded from, young migrants' involvement in political activities in schools is the context for the development of working trust, built on mutual interests and orientated to specific limited objectives. The final series of excerpts illustrates this point:

Piacenza, *risk/trust*, June 2013, focus group
Michail: *I met my girlfriend while preparing the solidarity march for Greek students. But this is not because I joined the group looking for girls, it just happened*
Giga: *This is something that you (the researcher) make me thing about. Why the same people see you as a failure at school and give you responsibilities in the (political) group? My idea is that here you are known for what you do. You are what you really do, not what you are supposed to be.*
Toni: *We all know that the problem at school is that they look for easy solution. If I come from Albania and don't do well, this is because I need to adapt quicker. Maybe there are other reasons, the same as Italians who struggle more than me. But you are another struggling Albanian.*
Giga: *I think it was the same for his girlfriend who is Italian and because they work together for the political group, she saw he is not an unfortunate.*

Working trust may be the foundation of personal relationships, adding a new dimension to the semantics of political participation of young people. This new dimension consists in (re)-inclusion based on dialogue, a genuinely social process beyond the centrality of individual agency emphasised by previous research (Percy-Smith, 2010; Tholander, 2011).

Modena, *Intendiamoci,* December 2006
I think that soon everyone who lives in the country will be able to vote for a candidate, which makes sense as we all live and share issues and hopes with Italians. But this is not really the point, I understand now. I used to hate Citizenship Education, because it is about rights I do not have. But I understand now, and the guys and the workshops and the professor from the University coming and taking about anarchism helped…he thing is not having rights, citizenship is about doing it, doing the citizen. This is what I am, a 'maker', we all are.

Modena, *risk/trust*, June 2013
I cannot be happier than when I am not a Moroccan anymore. It is like being born again, and I think it is the same for the Italian guys there and here. Not you are because you come from but you are something different each time, you are the cause you are fighting for.

Young migrants experience marginalisation in the education system and in the political system. 'School activism' describes a situation where movements and campaigning are contexts of active political participation of young migrants. School activism is an example and the context of the development of trusting relationships with peers, where fluid hybrid identities are negotiated and co-constructed around the person trough multicultural dialogue.
Young migrants' narratives present a link between educational practices and a concept of cultural identity as an "essential" identity, given and fixed (Hofstede, 1980; Ting Toomey, 1999). The same narratives show that cultural essentialism can generate important problems of intercultural communication, in particular problems of ineffective educational treatment of cultural identity. These problems can become particularly relevant during adolescence, an age in which the construction of identity may be seen as challenging (Fail et al. 2004).
However, young migrants' narratives do not only concern processes of marginalisation. They also present school activism as the dialogical construction of cultural identities, through the negotiation of cultural difference in interaction (Holliday, 2011; Piller, 2011; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Zhu Hua, 2014). Migrant, and non-migrant, young people are 'makers', makers of cultural hybridization through multicultural dialogue.

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