NEW ANTHROPOLOGIES OF EUROPE

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GLOBAL ROME

Changing Faces of the Eternal City

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Indiana University Press

Bloomington & Indianapolis

This book is a publication of

Indiana University Press
Office of Scholarly Publishing
Herman B Wells Library 350
1320 East 10th Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47405 USA

iupress.indiana.edu

Telephone 800-842-6796
Fax 812-855-7931

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Global rome : changing faces of the eternal city / edited by Isabella Clough Marinaro and Bjørn Thomassen.
pages cm. — (New anthropologies of Europe)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-253-01288-3 (cloth) — ISBN 978-0-253-01295-1 (paperback) — ISBN 978-0-253-01301-9 (ebook) 1. Rome (Italy)—Social conditions—21st century. 2. Urbanization—Italy—Rome. 3. Urban policy—Italy—Rome. 4. Community development—Italy—Rome. I. Marinaro, Isabella Clough. II. Thomassen, Bjørn.
HN488.R6G56 2014
306.09456'32—dc23
2013044271

1 2 3 4 5 19 18 17 16 15 14

For Francesca, Paolo, Maria, Stella, and Chiara—our Roman families. And for Terry Kirk, who loved the city as passionately as we do.

6 Foreign Pupils, Bad Citizens

The Public Construction of Difference in a Roman School

Piero Vereni
(translated by Jennifer Radice)

A PRECISE QUANTIFICATION OF the presence of foreigners seems to be one of the main worries of Italian political institutions. "How many are they?" is a common question even in public schools. The Ministry of Education considers it extremely important to set apart Italian pupils from those "of non-Italian citizenship" independently of their actual linguistic competence and their level of socioeconomic integration (Miur-Ismu 2011a, 2011b). This quantitative attitude certainly derives from the "blood" principle of Italian citizenship, according to which one is Italian or foreign based on the nationality of one's parents, notwithstanding one's place of birth (i.e., the *ius sanguinis* principle). Yet the deeper reason for this fixation on numbers also relates to a more widespread social anxiety toward otherness felt by ordinary Italians, caused by a very rapid demographic change still underway. After a century of emigration, Italy became a receiving country during the 1970s (Colombo 2004) without being socially and politically ready for this unexpected turn. The number of incoming migrants has only accelerated since the turn of the millennium. Facing an unanticipated growing foreign presence, Italian institutions set in motion a numbering strategy which is readily understandable, since the objective annotation of sheer numbers constitutes a "minority" as a politically controllable entity and reinforces the status of the "majority" that is in charge of counting (Appadurai 2006).

This defensive attitude has been mirrored by Italian legislation, which has tied immigration with securitization by positing an almost necessarily positive correlation between the *numbers* of foreigners and the idea of social *danger*. Local incidents and contextual situations have been reconfigured (Herzfeld 1997, 2003)

to the institutional and national level through their numerical dimension. Starting from the assumption that foreigners are indeed a social problem, quantification has been presented not only as a possible analytical tool, but sometimes as the real solution: *Count* them, and you will be able to *limit* them.

But how does this occur in practice? In the case presented here, it will be shown that the negative social connotation associated with a primary school on the outskirts of Rome was first "ethnicized" in numerical terms and then transformed into a question of national identity, via the efforts of various interested parties and institutions: the "local moms," worried about their children's schooling; the school's various management teams; the regional directors of education; the local councilor for public education; a member of the Italian parliament; and, finally, the minister for public education. The thread connecting these individuals was formed first by the borough itself (with which all of them had a personal connection, except for the minister) and second by a series of personal links of acquaintanceship and friendship that constituted a channel of communication. Once this channel between the local and institutional level was established, it was very difficult for alternative versions to reach any public space; they were relegated to the margins and regarded as utopian or indeed mendacious portrayals.

An Ill-Starred School

The number of pupils without Italian citizenship in Italian schools has increased steadily in the last decade and recently reached the level of 7.9 percent of the total number of pupils (Miur-Ismu 2011a, 5), although clearly these statistics synthesize completely different situations: Some schools have almost no foreign pupils while others have a very visible multiethnic presence. In the Torpignattara district, in Rome's eastern periphery, the Carlo Pisacane school is famous for the fact that more than 80 percent of pupils are technically foreigners, as they do not have an Italian passport, even though the great majority were born in Italy or arrived there before they were of school age and thus speak Italian just as well as children of the same age who are native speakers. In short, we are talking about a school attended for the most part by bilingual children whose parents are immigrants, and where the number of Italian pupils is much lower than the national average and than the presence of Italians in the district. The Carlo Pisacane school currently has 140 pupils, of whom 115 are foreigners and only 25 Italians, divided among nine classes, two in each year except for year 2, which is unique for reasons that we shall see shortly.

How can it be that *no* other primary school in the district has ever had more than 30 percent of pupils per class with a foreign passport, while at the Carlo Pisacane school, the same figure in the last decade has never fallen below 80 percent? To answer this question, we need to start with an observation that few people have made in facing up to the "peculiarity" of the Pisacane school, namely the words of Maria Grazia Cascio, a teacher at the school:

> I personally think that what should arouse our concern at Pisacane school is not the presence of foreign children: that is absolutely predictable, they live round here, all of them are our neighbors so naturally they come to this school. What should arouse our concern, but does not . . . , is the fact that the Italian families have gone away; indeed the Italians are saying, send our children to that school? We'd rather take them to another school by car in the morning.[1]

The reasons for the lack of Italian pupils are complex: some may be linked to Italy's legal system, others derive more from the local context. Before we set the Pisacane story in the social context of the district, let us take a brief look at the legal framework for teaching the second generation of immigrants.

Immigrant pupils in Europe have an overall lower school performance than do native pupils. Immigrant pupils drop out or have to repeat a year more frequently and, in secondary school, are concentrated in lower-level institutions (Ricucci 2008). This distance between newcomers and natives lessens in the second generation—pupils born of foreign parents who received their entire "secondary socialization" (primary school attendance and formation of a group of peers) in the receiving country—who score in between the two previous groups in their educational achievement (Di Bartolomeo 2011).

This also holds true for Italy, with the addition of some special features relating to the Italian legal system. Although the rights of foreign minors are formally safeguarded by Italian legislation (which requires compulsory schooling for all minors notwithstanding their residency status, the possibility to enroll at any time of the year, and the right of pupils not to be in a class with an excessively high number of children), these principles often do not lay down clear instructions for their implementation (Liddicoat and Díaz 2008). As a consequence, schools know quite well *what* they are supposed to offer in terms of rights for their pupils, yet they do not know *how* to fulfill those legal expectations (Ricucci 2008, 453) and "teachers, especially head teachers, are increasingly worried about the practical applicability of the legislative provisions" (Gilardoni 2011, 452). In this context of uncertainty concerning the application of regulations in practice, the minor case of the Pisacane school has risen from the working-class suburbs of Rome to the national level.

Up until the 1950s, most inhabitants of Torpignattara were laborers, clerical workers, and shopkeepers. Rapid urbanization in the postwar period led to a worsening of social conditions in the whole of Rome, with consequences that were most evident in the suburbs. From the 1960s onward, an image of local crime, linked to prostitution and an increase in drug-dealing, began to be associated with Torpignattara; the general perception was that most criminal activity took place around Via della Marranella (see also Broccolini, chapter 5), where the Pisacane school is situated.

Before 1969, Pisacane, built in 1928, was the only school in the district, but the very rapid growth in the number of children enrolled (these were the years of

the Italian baby boom as well as rapid urbanization) led to the construction of a second primary school, the Grazia Deledda, on the south side of the Via Casilina. This is one of the radial roads that cross the city and the neighborhood developed along it.

The Pisacane school, simply by virtue of its geographical location, began to have a more and more negative image among residents as the "school for the local crooks." For reasons of social distinction, anyone who could manage to, sent their children to Grazia Deledda, thus triggering a downward spiral in which Pisacane gradually became known as the school for "those Marranella types."

From the 1980s, the population of the neighborhood began to fall, owing to the demographic crisis that affected many areas across Rome. The low demand for housing and the Marranella district's bad reputation kept property prices very low, whereas they began to rise in other parts of the district, such as Pigneto (Pompeo 2011). Immigrants arriving from the late 1980s onward found that the Marranella area was just what they wanted. Prices were low and young foreign workers found that the trains going along Via Casilina were a good (if spartan) way of getting to the historic city center, where they often worked in bars and restaurants (Pompeo 2011). Following the five successive amnesties enacted under Italian law between 1990 and 2009,[2] many of them obtained a residence permit that allowed family members to join them. Over the years, the Torpignattara district witnessed an increase in the number of foreigners, in particular Bangladeshis, Egyptians, and, a few years later, Chinese. Even though many groups of single male immigrants continued to live in the decrepit apartments of Marranella (Priori 2011), the number of reunited families grew rapidly. They began to use the municipal services available in the district, including the schools; and Pisacane was there, very large and effectively underused as regards numbers of pupils, given that many parents (as we have seen) preferred to send their children to Grazia Deledda and to leave Pisacane for "those Marranella types."

In the second half of the 1990s, when the immigrant presence in the district was becoming evident, a further factor contributed to the ongoing exodus of Italians to other schools. The headmistress at that time is remembered as someone who was reluctant to engage in dialogue and was often in conflict with the teaching staff. Thus a vicious circle was created in which the school, already burdened in the 1970s and 1980s by ill repute for those who attended it, saw its reputation worsen in the 1990s with regard to the education that it offered, given the excessive turnover of the teachers who went elsewhere as soon as they could.

It was only at this point (when the number of Italian pupils was falling in any case) that the presence of the foreign parents became substantial. Most of them had settled in the Marranella district, yet they were inevitably uninformed about the bad reputation of the local school, given their restricted social contact with Italians in the neighborhood. They turned to Pisacane as the "natural" school when the time came to enroll their children in infant and then primary school.

Pisacane's notoriety was interpreted by many Italian families as the consequence of the incipient "ethnic diversity," provoking Italians to distance themselves further. Having started as a school for (Italian) problem families, Pisacane ended up by being "the immigrants' school" without losing its negative image—indeed seeing it reinforced.

But while the number of Italian children was steadily falling, the immigrants in the district continued to send their children to Pisacane, and it was this unbalanced ratio between Italians and foreigners that at the end of 2007 prompted a group of parents to form a committee that was self-styled—without any irony—as Moms for Integration. The entrenched inadequacy of Pisacane was interpreted by the committee as a direct consequence of the presence of immigrants. At the political level, this was argued as having been caused by the excessively left-wing policies of the school's management and some of the teachers. After years in which the gossiping and negative judgments had been expressed in chitchat between individuals, Pisacane was now being attacked publicly.

This politicized interpretation soon aroused institutional interest. The first person to make himself publicly heard was Fabio Rampelli, a member of Parliament belonging to the PDL (Il Popolo della Libertà, Italy's main center-right party). He had a long history of right-wing political activism in Rome and was a leading light from the 1980s in the Fronte della Gioventù (the youth section of the then "Movimento Sociale Italiano") in Colle Oppio. There Rampelli had come to know the Marsilio family, two boys and a girl, who lived a few steps from Marranella. The four of them formed a friendship that was to lead Laura Marsilio to be elected several times from 1993 onward as a local councilor in the sixth borough (the Torpignattara *municipio*), a position that enabled her to get to know the district and its residents very well (meanwhile her brother Marco would be elected to the first *municipio*, in the center). After being elected regional councilor in Lazio, Rampelli entered Parliament with Marco Marsilio in 2006, and he was elected again in 2008, this time forming part of the majority coalition, thanks to the Italian right's victory under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi, who appointed the young lawyer Mariastella Gelmini (PDL) as minister for Public Education. But Fabio Rampelli's new parliamentary role by no means led him to forget his old companions and their many political battles. When after many years, the left lost control of Rome in the municipal elections of May 2008, the new mayor Gianni Alemanno (who had a political background similar to that of Rampelli) invited Laura Marsilio to join his team and made her the city councilor for education and schools.

The very strong political ties between Member of Parliament Rampelli and the Marsilio family, on the one hand, and between Laura Marsilio and the sixth

municipio (where the Pisacane school is located), on the other, thus constituted the individual connections that caused the Pisacane question to "take on new life" and to become a national cause célèbre: The local "problem" turned into a matter to be dealt with through appropriate legislation of the Italian state facing the issue of integrating foreigners into its social fabric. Let us examine the main stages of this process and its ramifications.

From Neighborhood School to Political Drama

The matter flared up before Christmas 2007, when some of the mothers opposed the preparation of a cardboard Nativity scene conceived as a "global village," an initiative that required the children's parents to make a contribution in accordance with their own cultural traditions so as to celebrate an occasion that would exclude nobody, certainly not the non-Christians. On 22 December, Rampelli issued a press release in which he expressed regret at not having been allowed to visit the school in person to check how many people the term "some of the mothers" referred to. He then added, somewhat contradictorily:

> During my inspection I established that at least 76 percent of the school roll consists of foreign pupils of the Muslim faith, that in one class there are 18 foreign children and only one Italian, that many Italian families have been forced to leave after suffering discrimination against our identity and against the Catholic faith, to the point where there have been instances of linguistic regression. . . . The parents are in despair because their children are frightened by the completely veiled women who bring the Bangladeshi children to school (Rampelli 2007).

But the attack on Pisacane started for real only about a year later, when Laura Marsilio was city councilor for education and Fabio Rampelli was in Parliament as a majority member of the Culture Committee, together with the Minister for Education Gelmini, who belonged to the same party (PDL). While awaiting the enrollments for the 2009/2010 school year, the parents of thirteen Italian children in the final year of the infant school at Pisacane unanimously decided for the first time, with a clear "political" intention, not to enroll their children in the primary school in the same complex, and the thirteen children were instead enrolled in other schools. Their motives were that there were too many foreign children at Pisacane; the consequence was that the prophecy fulfilled itself, and in 2009/2010 the school, instead of having two entry classes—each of which would have had about ten foreign and six or seven Italian pupils—had just one with eighteen pupils, all of them foreign.

By now, the problem had been brought into focus: there were not too few Italian children at Pisacane but too many foreign ones. Thus instead of finding a way of making the school more attractive to Italian parents, tempting them to enroll their children at Pisacane, and thus increasing the number of pupils with

an Italian passport, the opposite solution was proposed: put a cap of 30 percent on the number of foreign children in each individual class.

This objective was pursued at the same time by Rampelli—who declared on 5 February 2009 that "it is necessary to establish a reference point, a maximum percentage of foreign children in each class" (Rampelli 2009a)—and by the councilor Marsilio, who on the same day summoned the representatives of the sixth borough, Department XI (the regional education office for Lazio), and the primary schools of the sixth *municipio* with the intention of jointly signing a "network agreement" that would put a definite and quantified limit on the presence of foreign children in school classes. But the agreement, thanks to the joint efforts of school principals and local left-wing politicians, once signed, actually steered toward the opposite solution, with a recommendation that Italian parents in particular should be incentivized to enroll their children in neighborhood schools, given that (as noted by Giammarco Palmieri, chairman of the sixth *municipio*):

> The municipality has received a request to fulfill the requirement for a more balanced composition of Italian and non Italian pupils in our schools. Precisely because of the great importance of the contents of the agreement *the Sixth* Municipio, *supported by the great majority of head teachers of scholastic institutions, has rejected the insertion into the agreement of an upper limit on the presence of non-Italian children* . . . (Abitare a Roma 2009, emphasis added)

Some weeks later on 17 March, Rampelli harshly criticized the network agreement: "The maximum quota was not approved, owing to its boycotting in the sixth *municipio* and by certain head teachers." According to his reading of the facts, the ever-smaller number of Italian children enrolled in the primary school was attributable not to previous causes or the provocatively anti-immigrant attitude of the Moms for Integration committee, but to the management of the school: "It is the failure of a presumed utopian and stupid model arbitrarily imposed on citizens by a presumptuous and ideologized school board. . . . There are two possible explanations if only 21 children are enrolled at Pisacane with only 2 Italian children: incompetence or malice" (Rampelli 2009e).

But by now it was clear that a local solution was no longer possible. The Pisacane issue would have to be resolved by bringing in the most weighty institutional hierarchies, and the task of galvanizing the minister became more urgent. During that same month of March, the news that some mothers had asked permission to move their "Italian" children from Pisacane to other schools had "forced Minister Gelmini to announce a cap on the number of foreign children in schools, fixed at 30 percent" (*Roma Today* 2009).

Indeed, the next move was the involvement of the government with a decision taken in the Committee for Culture, Science, and Education on 1 April 2009. Rampelli was the first signatory of this resolution, which obliged the government to introduce "a maximum quota of 30 percent for foreign pupils" as soon as

possible. One sentence in the resolution makes its final aim very clear, where it declares that the government undertakes, inter alia,

> not to introduce in the first years any differential treatment between recently-immigrated foreign children and second-generation foreign children, so as to allow the latter to perfect their cultural and social integration, this having up until now been insufficient owing to the lack of adequate measures of support.

However obscure this may sound (what does "in the first years" mean and what is understood by "treatment"?), the general sense of this obligation is clear: foreign children (*whatever* their practical level of integration and linguistic competence) must be treated on an equal basis and thus the cap on their presence in class is due simply to the fact of their being foreign. Thus a child of immigrants born in Rome, who speaks Italian as his or her first language with a strong Roman accent and is happy to speak Roman dialect with classmates, must be treated and included like a foreign child who arrives in Italy at the age of 8 or 9 years, knows no Italian, and has been educated in a different educational, linguistic, and cultural system. Or rather, the resolution insists that this equal treatment will serve to encourage cultural integration of the second generation, which is presupposed (we do not know on what empirical data) to be "less capable of achievement owing to the lack of adequate support." Scientific reports do indeed confirm that the educational achievement of second-generation immigrants falls between that of native Italians and those who have arrived when already of school age (Di Bartolomeo 2011). Those reports also indicate that foreign children who have done all their secondary socialization in the host country have specific needs that differentiate them from both native Italians and immigrants who arrive in Italy after having had some sort of formal education in their country of origin (Ricucci 2008). It may be difficult to think of second-generation immigrants as the same as Italians in all respects, but it seems just as misguided to think that they are at the same level as other foreign citizens. One should make further distinctions, given that vast categories such as "second generations" or "young immigrants" bring together people who differ enormously in terms of their desires; expectations; life projects; religious, political, and cultural affiliations (Thomassen 2010; Bello 2011). The types of identity are particularly stratified in second-generation immigrants, and to reduce them to a general cultural adhesion to the civic principles of the state where they have grown up does not allow us to grasp how much the institutional, participative, and affective dimensions interact in unforeseeable ways in bringing about integration (Colombo et al. 2011). And yet, Rampelli, when asked for an adequate interpretation of the governmental obligation advocated by him, confirmed that:

> Integration is a cultural fact, not only a linguistic one, and therefore cannot be proven by the fact that a child was born in Italy. . . . We need gradually to reach the stage of considering the new generation of immigrants to be integrated from the cultural, not merely the linguistic, point of view and therefore we should not regard birthplace as a conclusive factor (Rampelli 2011).

By making such a rigid distinction between linguistic integration (that is, competence at native level) and cultural integration, Rampelli seems to dismiss any possibility of identifying a specific group of second-generation students, not "completely" Italian nor even superior to the new arrivals. Or rather, the lumping together of all foreigners on the basis of their passports, without any regard for their linguistic competence, reveals a political ideology that is scarcely aimed at facilitating integration. It is not surprising to find that this legalistic position was confirmed by the Ministry of Education which, in a research project commissioned by the Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicità foundation (Miur-Ismu 2011a), classified the "pupils with non-Italian citizenship" in schools by calculating their attendance record and scholastic achievement without making any distinction between the performance of the second generation and that of the new arrivals, as is normally done in research projects of this kind (Ricucci 2008; Di Bartolomeo 2011).

Pressure on the minister continued not only at institutional level, but also from below; on 7 September 2009, Flora Arcangeli, the spokeswoman for the Moms for Integration committee expressed her disappointment to the press: "Minister Gelmini promised to put a cap on the number of foreign children in school classes, but nothing whatever has come of it" (*Il Tempo* 2009). On that occasion, Ms. Arcangeli also made an embarrassing statement that gave away the depth of her prejudice against the foreign pupils and their families:

> Given the prevalence of Influenza A, we have a further concern: until last year, no health certificates were requested from foreign children who came back to school after travelling to their country of birth. We hope that attention will now be paid to this at least (*Il Tempo* 2009).

The next day, 8 September, Rampelli made another reference to the Pisacane school and to the "Utopian fantasies" of the school's management and asked the minister to impose a cap of 30 percent: "I hope at this juncture that Minister Gelmini will issue as soon as possible a ministerial circular on the introduction of a 30 percent cap on foreign children" (Rampelli 2009c). This request was reasserted a few days later on September 14: "The first day of term at Carlo Pisacane school in Rome has served to sanction the objective of our proposals on the introduction of a cap of 30 percent on foreign children" (Rampelli 2009d).

Once again, the only solution put forward foresaw a cut in the number of foreign children, not a move to increase enrollments of Italian children. All this pressure yielded results and finally on 8 January 2010, Minister Gelmini issued Ministerial Circular No. 2, "Indications and recommendations for the integra-

tion of non-Italian pupils." As was to be expected, the new text bore no formal trace of its entirely fortuitous genesis, but City Councilor Laura Marsilio frankly admitted that she had played a central part in its making: "Look, I know it by heart because it was I who wrote virtually all of the circular, side by side with the minister" (Marsilio 2011).

Once the objective of imposing an obligatory cap on foreign children had been achieved, one of Councilor Laura Marsilio's last public acts was the inauguration of the 2010/2011 school year. On 10 September, she arrived at the Pisacane school and publicly reasserted her conviction that "the children of immigrants born in Italy are not Italians" and therefore it was right for them to be regarded as foreigners (Corriere Roma 2010). Even though the declaration aroused much controversy, it was in complete accordance with the government's commitment of 1 April 2009 not to make any distinction between "foreigners," who were all considered to be equally "inadequate." Rampelli made another public statement on 17 September, starting once again with the Pisacane but ending up by speaking of citizenship and *ius soli*, defining the latter as "a true presumption of superiority and thus a racist attitude. To oblige someone who was born in Italy to disown the roots of his own family and to foist on him a definition of 'Italian' was a clear example of racism" (Rampelli 2009b).

With this statement, the reconfiguring of the Pisacane affair was complete: a school abandoned by dozens of people from the lower middle class in Rome's periphery and attended lately by immigrants' children becomes a symbol of how to belong to the Italian nation, or to a nation in general. According to the picture that emerges from this affair, one does not "belong" because one shares *learnt* values, principles, and cultural attitudes; one must belong where these values, principles, and attitudes are *inherited*, transmitted by the blood line. A primary school has become the basis for formulating a very general principle of belonging for ethnic reasons, as opposed to any civic citizenship. Constrained between *obliging* someone to belong and *forbidding* someone to belong, this principle neglects one of the basic dimensions of Western liberal identity: the possibility of *choosing* where one wants to belong.

Another Pisacane?

The old stereotype of the district that portrayed the "Marranella school" as a source of potential peril for respectable people has acquired a new lease of life from the presence of foreign pupils: the other (now the ethnic other) is lying in ambush and wants to replace us, to take our place. In consequence, the ministerial circular of 8 January 2010, although it did not sanction the breaking-up of the classes at Pisacane—given that most of the foreign children speak Italian as their mother tongue—certainly legitimizes (from the cultural perspective) some practices that are now established in the institutional "filter" that prevents the

enrollment of foreign children in certain schools. Even if the circular did not apply in the case of Pisacane, it certainly helped to give legitimacy to the negative views concerning the school.

Once entrenched at the institutional level, the prejudice against Pisacane can spread elsewhere, reinforced and legitimized in its public expression through petty day-to-day bureaucracy. This, more than any circular, directive, or formal act creates Pisacane's segregation and the fact that it is a "case." For example, a mother tells the story of a significant episode in another local school in the same neighborhood. A little girl born in Italy, the daughter of an Italian mother and an Arabic-speaking father and thus with a recognizably foreign surname, was informally refused admission to that school on the grounds that there were no longer any places; she had to resort to Pisacane. On the same day, an Italian girl who lived in the same building and had an Italian first name and surname was accepted in the very same school.

But there are many anecdotes along these lines. An Italian mother had offered to help a foreign mother who had just arrived in Rome and wanted to enroll her daughter in the infant school. The Italian mother thought that Pisacane would be a good choice:

> First I went to speak to the teachers, because my request was outside the normal time of year. The teachers told me: We have no problem with this, but you must go to the borough's office. So I went to the office and the woman there said to me: "But why do you want to enroll your friend's daughter at Pisacane school? Don't you know that it's the school for foreigners? Why not enroll her in another infant school?" She took it for granted that I, an Italian, did not have a Lebanese friend and obviously thought that the child to be enrolled was Italian.[3] A further incident told to me by the people involved further underlines how stereotypes are produced. Someone who works in the education office spoke to a teacher at Pisacane, emphasizing the fact that "well-off parents and intelligent migrants who paid their taxes sent their children to the Deledda school, whereas no Italians went to Pisacane because the immigrants enrolled there came from disorderly families who were in trouble with the law."[4] It will be noted that the old conception of the school for "the riffraff" is superimposed with almost exact precision on the newer one of the school "for foreigners."

The "Pisacane affair" has evolved from this discrimination expressed by small gestures, words that are barely weighted, and shared "common sense." It is on the basis of common sense that the wind of political debate has been able to blow strongly, legitimizing an interpretation of the school to the point of making it predominant. The general sense that emerges from all this is clear: For many of the residents in the district, especially those who need to demonstrate their respectability in contrast to the disreputable Torpignattara district, there

are dangerous types prowling around Pisacane who could endanger collective well-being and who, it is feared, will displace the present inhabitants. Foreigners are perceived as an *alternative to us*, a close-knit group that confronts us with an "either-or" situation.

And yet, seen from the perspective of the teachers and the small number of Italian parents who still send their children to Pisacane, that school could offer an opportunity of enrichment for all. These people instead regard the Italian-foreign couple as a "both-and" situation. That is to say, they see in the multiethnic groupings in Pisacane a wealth of opportunity, the chance to expand the horizon of our concept of humanity, the other as an *alternative for us*.[5] In this binary opposition, the school may be seen as either a *ghetto* or an *oasis* (Benadusi 2009). The teachers in particular seem to be aware that teaching at Pisacane is an opportunity for growth also for them. The original text voted for in the "network agreement" of 5 February 2009 went in that direction of addressing Italians so that they would recognize the value of multiculturalism—only then to be symbolically defeated by Ministerial Circular No. 2.

Thus the teachers' vision of Pisacane school as a space for dialogue, mutual enrichment, and collective civic growth for Italians and foreigners, a vision that is put into practice daily, remains suppressed and invisible. This vision finds no space of its own to evolve; it remains confined to the local context of those who share it because there are still no official channels to encourage it and give it publicity. And yet, it is a concept that could have its own appeal not only for Rome but for the whole of Italy, a country that has not yet found a way to come to terms at the symbolic level with its recent role as a country of immigration, after having been a country of emigrants for over a century.

In the light of these final considerations, I would like to end this chapter with an amusing episode. I will tell it without further comment, as it seems to me to summarize perfectly the cultural space that could be opened up in a school of this kind, a space that the Italian children of the neighborhood unfortunately do not yet have the opportunity to experience to the full.

In the fourth year class of a primary school, the teacher proposes an exercise of reciprocal description. One at a time, the children come to the teacher's desk and their classmates try to recite their main features. The purpose of the exercise, as intended by the teacher, is for them to discuss openly the difference between one classmate and another, inviting them to think about it and to express their doubts.

It is the turn of S., a very Roman son of Filipino parents.

"What is S. like?" asks the teacher.

"He has very sleek black hair."

"He has olive skin."

"He is thin and has very white teeth."

G. (an Italian girl) adds: "He has almond eyes!"

The teacher takes advantage of the fact that G. has identified an "ethnic" feature to try to speak about the relationship between physical and cultural diversity and to explain it: "Why does S. have almond eyes? See if you can tell me, G.!"

Her answer seems odd to those Italian adults who have grown up in a uniform cultural environment, but it expresses poetically a new way of seeing that could be created only in a context such as that of Pisacane school:

"Because he's always laughing!"

Notes

1. These statements by the mothers and teaching staff at Pisacane school were made in various informal conversations and collected in the course of two discussions recorded on 4 April and 24 May 2011 in places near the school.

2. The Martelli Law in 1990, the Dini Government's Decree Law in 1995, the Turco-Napolitano Law in 1998, the Bossi-Fini Law in 2002, and the "amnesty for carelakers" in 2009 gave a complete amnesty to over 1,600,000 immigrants without official residence permits (IDOS 2012).

3. Given the sensitive nature of this episode, I was asked to maintain the anonymity of the persons concerned.

4. Again, in reporting these judgments I am maintaining the anonymity of my interlocutors.

5. I have stolen this juxtaposition of *alternative to us* and *alternative for us* from Clifford Geertz (1986).

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