Immigrant children school experience: how gender influences social capital formation and fruition?

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Abstract: The scientific debate on the integration processes of ethnic minorities over the years has become ever deeper and wider. A common acknowledgment has emerged from this debate of the role of education as a valid strategy to unfold such processes. The school experience of young migrants or the young of immigrant origin develops itself along trajectories differentiated from those of natives. The migratory event and the status of ethnic minority give shape to the educative destinies of youth emphasizing or arranging particularly with class effect. However, a third factor, related to gender, enters this relation determining more outstanding differences than those traditionally evidenced in the school population as a whole that sees female students get the better over male classmates. The analyses of educational history of the young migrants has often been "gender blind"; the purpose of this paper is to analyse international research to find the elements connected both to the ethnicity and to the gender differences that lead towards this differentiated frame, analysing the results of some research realised on Ecuadorian boys and girls studying in Genoese high schools.

Key-words: gender, school achievement, second generation, social capital, ethnic social capital

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An overview of integration processes

The rapid growth of migratory flows in recent decades has fed the debate relative to the integration processes of ethnic minorities in western countries. Although there is no agreement about what *integration* is to mean, in that it represents a concept that is difficult to determine and that is activated both at the individual and collective level, and coming into contact with events (suffice it to think of the deeds of 11th September), or state policies (the Bossi-Fini law for Italy), and continually mutates in time and space, the idea is transversally widespread according to which education is one of the most valid strategies for the insertion of immigrants in the arrival society (Alba, 1985; Aparicio, 2007; Thomson-Crul, 2007; Zhou-Bankston, 2001).

Research confirms that the complex modes of incorporation are highly influenced by levels of education, independently of age, even though it is among the young that education takes on particular relevance, given its importance in determining individual development and acquisition of competences that can be used in the labour market.

The success at school of the second generations of immigrants[2] may be an *acceptable* indicator of a fruitful process of assimilation, in that *"…*[for immigrant children or of immigrant origin] *going to school, acquiring knowledge and competences that can be capitalized for future insertion in the work market, is a crucial step toward successful assimilation"* (Zhou, 1997a). However, it is necessary to observe that there is no absolute correspondence between degree of integration of the second generations in the welcoming culture and school achievement, which rather indicates the level of adaptation of children to the school's requests. If for adults the litmus test of the success of the integration process is represented by the level of employment and by the average monthly income, for their children the degree of adaptation is *"…measured by the level of education reached, by the type of scholastic studies undertaken, by their aspirations and their academic performances"* (*ibidem*:75).

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[2] Here one will mean the category of second generation in its widest meaning including both the young of immigrant origin born in the context of reception but with at least one parent born abroad, and those born abroad independently of the age at which migration took place. For more information about the definition of second generation see: Ambrosini 2004, 2005; Oropesa-Landale, 1997; Ravecca, 2008; Rumbaut, 1997, 2004.

For the theoreticians of the liberal and assimilationist approach[3] (*straight-line assimilation*), education is a means to accelerate the process of incorporation understood as a deterministic mechanism in which the migrant has to *make him/herself similar* in everything and for everything to the members of the society of destination. An analysis of the conditioning to the fruition of the education systems is widely neglected and anyone who does not reach success at school is simply understood as destined to social marginality.

Starting from the '90s, observing the rapid changes that society is going through and that are revolutionising economic systems, and faced with a growing diversity between immigrants in terms of nationality of origin, ethnic group, cultural *background* and social class, new perspectives have pointed out how the straight-line assimilation no longer manages to explain the reality. Gans (1992), speaking about the *decline of the second generations*, and the school of Portes (Portes-Zhou, 1993; Portes-Fernandez Kelly et al., 2005; Rumbaut, 1997; Zhou 1997), with the theory of *segmented assimilation*, highlight how in this situation of complexity second generations risk following trajectories of downward assimilation. According to these authors the destiny of the new generations is closely correlated to the social setting in which the integration process is realised: depending on the segment of society in which the young integrate themselves the result changes and the success of the second generations in their educational path is fundamental just because it allows insertion at higher levels. However, the scholastic experience does not take place in a social void but in a multi-dimensional structured context on a network of relationships. The relations with others, according to the perspective of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam recently taken up and developed by many scholars, are understood here as a resource (and at the same time an obligation), as social capital, able to accompany the young on their educational and development path.

The factors of the familial socio-economic order are relevant in determining educative iniquities, but stopping at them would not allow one

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[3] The liberal and assimilationist approach presents itself as thinking of optimistic nature according to which immigrants insert themselves in the employment positions undesired by the local population placing themselves in the lowest positions of the social stratification and assimilating themselves over time in the reception context taking on the language, habits and customs to the detriment or abandoning of the cultural traits of their society of origin.

to correctly analyse the framework in that it is necessary to consider their embeddedness in the social reality.

In migratory contexts this consideration takes on even greater significance in that ethnicity and the status of ethnic minority may trigger a cumulative disadvantage with the class and with the endowments of social capital that were compromised following departure from the context of origin. On the other hand it is necessary to observe, as strongly emphasised by the theoreticians of segmented assimilation, that ethnicity, becoming concrete in ethnic social capital (Borjas, 1992, 1993; Dwyer-Modood et al., 2006; Fekjaer, 2007; Zhou, 1997, 2005), represents a specific resource, even more than that of generalised social capital, not lacking in ambivalence, in that it may facilitate the educative path of the young immigrants and more in general their process of assimilation, but even block them in social and occupational niches.

The relations existing between the different endowments of social capital (both generalised and specific), the familial socio-economic status and the condition of ethnic minority are of great usefulness to understand the motivations that explain the different forms that status attainment[4] may take on. However, the scholastic experience of the young is also influenced by other differential dimensions, such as those of gender, which interweave with social class, and among immigrants take on peculiar and sometimes accentuated characteristics compared with the majority group.

Gender and education in the migratory experience

Close examination of the relationship between the dimensions of gender and education has concentrated over time on the under-representation of women in certain areas of study, and more generally on female subordination with regard to men in different social contexts (Blumberg, 1984; Brown-Gilligan, 1992; Buchman, 2002), while with parity of other conditions female success is better than that of males: today in the most important western countries scholastic success is greater among females

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[4] It is not my intent to pick up these conceptions only briefly mentioned here and for which one is referred to the authoritative and in-depth research (cf. Aparicio, 2007; Bankston-Zhou, 2004; Portes–Fernandez Kelli et al., 2004; Portes-MacLeod, 1996, 1999; Thomson-Crul, 2007).

than among males (Colombo, 2003; Freudenthaler-Spinath et al., 2008; Greene-Debacker, 2004).

After centuries of marginality in educational and employment systems, with the advent of the liberal and democratic ideals that concerned Europe in the '60s of the last century, thanks to the public assertion of female emancipation, today gender, despite some exceptions (Colombo, 2003), can be defined as the element of social differentiation in gradual decline (Brint, 1999), so much so that in Italy the numbers of female diplomas and degrees are higher than those of males and the scores are also higher.

This trend is explained by a different way of living and understanding education between males and females which is expressed in:

• a greater centrality of the school in the life of girls (Besozzi, 1997; Colombo, 2003; Freudenthaler- Spinath et al., 2008);

• socialisation processes differentiated by gender, which envisage greater family control over women of whom one expects them to be *better* (Mickelson, 1998), *more virtuous* (Pessar-Mahler, 2006), *more conformist* (Willis, 1977) and *morally superior* to men (Zhou-Bankston, 2001);

• a generalised orientation of the young toward professions that are deemed collectively appropriate according to those that are the rules and the expectations of role socially determined (Feliciano-Rumbaut, 2005; Greene-Debacker, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999);

• the consideration that, with parity of other conditions, a high level of education for women constitutes a greater competitive advantage.

The scholastic experience of immigrant boys and girls or those of immigrant origin tends in general to mirror the models of gender differentiation exactly of the country of arrival, sometimes in contrast with those of origin; however, the many migratory stories intervene to intensify the phenomenon, in that the daughters of immigrated parents tend to reach better school results than boys (Dale-Shaheen et al., 2002; Dwyer-Modood et al., 2006; Rumbaut, 1997; Zhou-Bankston, 2001), to have lower drop-out rates (Brinbau-Cebolla Boado, 2007), to develop higher educational aspirations with a wider gap between girls and boys than what happens among the autochthonous population (Barajas-Pierce, 2001; Fuligni-Witkow, 2004).

The *gender gap* in the educational performance between immigrants turns out to be particularly surprising for those who come from societies where highly hierarchical, patriarchal family models prevail in which

women have fewer opportunities for mobility available compared to what happens in the contexts of destination; instead the young immigrant women or of immigrated origin in the span of just one generation often manage to counterbalance the penalising pattern of scholastic and employment integration that characterised their parents' lives in the country of origin (Feliciano-Rumbaut, 2005; Zhou-Bankston, 2001).

It is commonly recognised that women's emancipation in the educational and working field is to be attributed to the changing of the cultural models of reference, with organisation schemes of the social fabric rooted on the ideal of the parity of genders (Hubbard, 2005; Saunders-Davis et al., 2004). Education may be seen as an instrument of *empowerment* against tradition (Keaton, 1999), as a stratagem to postpone arranged marriages (Dwyer-Modood et al., 2006) and as an ambit of social liberation where girls can flee from a preordained future (Olsen, 1997).

Participation in the labour market is a further factor of transformation of the construction of the gender identity: indeed, the need to work implies a break with the tradition that relegates women to the home, typical of patriarchal societies, and the achievement of economic autonomy generates profound changes in the structure of family authority and a renegotiation of the gender relations that bring about radical transformations both in how women perceive themselves and in how they are perceived by men inside and outside the home (Lagomarsino, 2006; Pessar-Mahler, 2006; Sinke, 2006).

The employment opportunities, just as the time spent behind the desks of a school that optimises the parity of genders, therefore allow migrant women to establish identities built on a model that includes a greater independence from men compared to the country of origin; female work outside the home has also permitted the reduction of the disparities between genders in the management of family power (Kiribia, 1993). Furthermore, while following the migratory process men tend to live experiences of downward occupational mobility, for women compared to a situation of economic, cultural and social subordination compared to their husbands, the insertion in the workplace outside the home, even if in marginalised areas and in a dual labour market (Ambrosini, 1999; Pereňias, 2001), represents a chance for improvement of their own conditions which allows the triggering of upward mobility mechanisms (Guarnizo-Portes et al., 2003; Pessar-Mahler, 2006).

In the arrival context the expectations for female social assertion are much wider and the possibility of *breaking the chains* of a blocked mobility allows one to assess positively, and therefore increase the investment, in education understood as a means by which to realise the process of personal development.

Instead, other perspectives read the connection between better school performances of girls and the world of work in terms contrasting with those analysed up until now since the employment opportunities in the global economy are highly differentiated for girls and boys. For the former, beyond domestic chores and looking after people, the employment prospects without having reached a minimum educational level are practically absent, while the availability of jobs, even if not very skilled, represents for boys a source of income that allows them not to belittle their masculinity. An awareness of this differentiation in the demand for labour might protect girls from an early transition from the world of school to that of work (Marques-Valente Rosa et al., 2007).

School achievement between tradition and innovation

Female assertion cannot only be explained by the refusal of hegemonic patriarchal constraints but it is the fruit of a more complex model of action, in response to the socio-economic pressures that migrants encounter in the country of arrival, and due to the outcome of a *cultural remixing* given by a combination of tradition and innovation which encourages the building of unprecedented interpretation models.

In their research into the Vietnamese community in the USA Zhou and Bankston (2001) observe how paradoxically more than the contrast it is precisely the dialectical encounter between the regulatory patterns coming from the tradition of the country of origin and new conditions of context that allowed a change in the social positions of the immigrant women. The combination of tradition, which transits in a not painless way through intergenerational conflicts brought about by the desire of children for greater freedom in the new social context and the new structural conditions that one is heading for, makes up the premise with which female students can construct their own scholastic career.

The parents' hopes that their children will obtain a high school diploma does not configure as a reaction to the traditional gender roles, but it is rather a response to the *opportunities* and *needs* of education, valid as much for men as for women, in order to progress and compete in a highly competitive market.

School achievement for girls according to this perspective is not a reaction towards ancestral ties and is not born from a progressive process of uncritical acculturation, but from a constant reference to one's own ethnic identification and to family tradition. Vietnamese parents in the American context recognise the necessity of families to produce a double income, and, given their experience as workers segregated into inferior positions, they think that education is the only instrument of advance through which to reach employment levels that are economically and socially distinguished. For this supporting the scholastic efforts of their daughters does not subvert the traditional gender roles, but reinterprets them: daughters, studying and working, contribute to the family wealth according to what are the good family traditions and thereby adhering at the same time to the American life style (Zhou-Bankston, 2001).

It is the same concept of tradition that becomes situational in that it emerges from a crasis between old and new, from references that do not defer to a closely circumscribed context but to a transnational and multilocal circle. If it is true that first generation migrants (over)emphasize tradition in that in looking back to the past they manage to conserve their identity (Mørck, 2000), and that often their personality is played on a *habitus* no longer suitable to the social structure that surrounds them (Bourdieu, 2000), at a certain point in intergenerational transmission tradition is retranslated using a dictionary made up of new codes, symbols and meanings.

Through this passage which often takes place at different speeds for parents and children, creating tensions between the need for control and the desire for freedom, the gender relations are redesigned on a model of a cultural cross-fertilisation in response to the economic and social situations that the immigrants come across in the country of arrival. According to tradition, compared to their brothers girls are subject to more intense surveillance by their parents and the wider community, protected from risk factors with doubtful benefits, since the control allows one to minimise the dangers that the girls come into contact with situations of violence and

socio-environmental embarrassment that might lead to an assimilation towards the underprivileged strata who live in inner cities or the deteriorated suburbs on the outskirts; at the same time, besides supplying their daughters with great resources which can be seen through the expression of various and differentiated forms of both inter and intra family social capital, parents project positive expectations on their school career, reinterpreting tradition in different surroundings.

This dialectic process between old normative schemes and new socio-economic pressures[5] emerges in the thoughts of Vietnamese fathers, according to whom the importance of the education of their daughters is given not only by its economic value, but also by an awareness that in the USA "a wife and a mother model" cannot but be an educated woman; a good parent, according to the strict Vietnamese tradition, for the good of the daughter cannot do other than put pressure on her to study if one day she wants to find a suitable husband for herself; the parents' capacity to bring up an educated daughter in a context where the availability of educational opportunities for women is very wide compared to the country of origin may also be a status symbol that enhances the family's prestige (Zhou and Bankston, 2001)[6].

Following the perspective that links ethnicity, tradition and successful performance, Pessar and Mahler (2006) point out how families immigrated into the USA expect virtuous behaviour from their daughters diametrically opposed to the *libertine* one of American girls. For their sons this discipline is not envisaged. Once again, the greatest control exercised may be translated into supplementary support, an intergenerational proximity that translates into a more intense scholastic effort.

What is more girls have to guarantee the *good name* not only of the family, but that of the entire community, so supervision and the support supplied extend transversally from the close family nucleus to a wider and

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[5] Do not forget that the differences between various ethnic groups are profound, and an excess of generalisation would be harmful: the investment in training of Asian communities and families with regard to their daughters is very different from that of North-Africans and Moslems in general.

[6] Other research has reached similar considerations observing how constant reference to one's own ethnic community both by parents and daughters allows them to excel scholastically (Barajas-Pierce, 2001; Feliciano-Rumbaut, 2005; Fuligni-Witkow, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999).

therefore more effective relational network. So ethnicity may therefore be understood as a resource for girls, who on the basis of their own ethnical identification manage to have a greater social capital both from the family and from the community, aimed at scholastic *achievement* and attainment of those educational credentials that enable them to get ahead in the new society.

However, ethnic social capital may imply undesirable aspects (Portes-Landolt, 1996). Thomson and Crul (2007), studying the Dutch case, observe for instance how while for Surinamese the school achievement of their children is understood as a factor of family prestige and therefore incentivised, for Turks the presence of an emphasis on the wedding of girls at a very young age has disastrous repercussions on scholastic paths.

Gender is a key variable also in the structuring of linguistic development; girls tending to be more protected and controlled by the family and spending more time at home have, indeed, greater opportunities compared to their brothers of being exposed to their parents language as well as receiving input referred to family values, expected behaviour and social expectations projected on them (Feliciano-Rumbaut, 2005; Portes-Hao, 2002; Schmid, 2001). The gender effect on language learning is also confirmed by empirical research from which it emerges that girls have 6% more probability than boys of the same social class, family and ethnic background of being fluent in two languages (Portes-Rumbaut, 2001); these high competences are invested by girls not only to facilitate their own social progression, but more generally that of the whole family taking on the role of translators, cultural mediators and parent surrogate with regard to younger brothers and sisters (Valenzuela, 1999b), without considering that *temperate bilingualism* (Portes-Hao, 2001), or that form of bilingualism able not to transform itself into linguistic self-segregation is a further element that encourages individual well-being.

Ethnical self-identification

If under certain aspects the greater constraint that girls are subjected to may exacerbate intergenerational conflicts since in daughters it helps to grow the desire for independence from parental control, for others and

more relevant aspects the greater female familial proximity implies different ways of understanding gender self-identification.

For Rumbaut (1994), the same ethnical self-identification is the fruit of a process of gender and while men tend to define themselves in *unhyphenated* terms and therefore either as Americans or in the nationality of origin, women are more likely to choose a *hyphenated* identity, an *additional* binational identity (Italo-American, Cuban-American etc…). Furthermore men, due to the loss of status that they have suffered, tend to orientate interests and energy towards the country of origin closing themselves into an unproductive ethnocentrism, or alternatively they rebel identifying themselves with the opposition cultures of the autochthonous urban *underclass*, while women, in conditions of emancipation, tend to invest resources towards the new society without however turning their backs on tradition (Barajas-Pierce, 2001; Guarnizo-Portes et al., 2003; Mahler-Pessar, 2006).

For men, the process of identity building would therefore seem to develop along the principle of an ultimatum (*aut aut*), either absolute reference to their origins or uncritical adhesion to the values of the receiving society, while women favour an identity based on the idea of integration (*et et)*, giving a sense to one's history thanks to the conjugation between past and present, more easily embracing a model of *selective acculturation* structured on the assumption that the proximity with the culture of the receiving society does not necessarily imply the abandoning of the positive values of the culture of origin.

This trend is also reflected in the different means of development of migratory strategies which for women, faced with an increase in personal autonomy, independence and equality between genders, are by and large long term or permanent, while for men, who have seen their own social prestige diminish, they are short term and characterised by constant links with the country of origin, a place to be able to (re)exercise their gender *superiority* (Mahler-Pessar, 2006). The different orientation respectively toward the society of origin or that of destination, and the capacity or not of maintaining cultural references coming from both, also has repercussions on investment in education which will be minimum in the case of planning a return or on the on hand maximised if faced with the plan of permanent stabilisation.

Finally, family expectations are one of the most important predictors of *status attainment* (Blau-Duncan, 1967), and by and large this phenomenon is more incisive among ethnic minorities (Portes-McLeod, 1999). According to the hypothesis of *immigrant optimism,* the desire to redeem the conditions of subordination of the first generations leads to an extra investment by parents in the scholastic prospects and therefore on the working future of their children (Boyd, 2002; Boyd-Grieco, 1998), and above all on their daughters who manage in this way to develop positive ambitions on which to hinge themselves in order to progress socially. The greater expectations with regard to daughters emerge from the more intense proximity and familial intimacy in the domestic sphere which allows one to transmit the parents' *wishes* more easily and with greater emphasis (Feliciano-Rumbaut, 2005). The intensity of the expectations is also translated into a greater sense of obligation of daughters to pay back their parents' sacrifices: a debt which can only be repaid with scholastic achievement (Fuligni-Witkow, 2004).

Masculinity and femininity in class

Several ethnographic studies have shown how in the United States daily life in the school classrooms of young immigrants has been moulded by gender dimensions. Gibson (1987), for instance, pointed out that immigrant students of Indian origin show off their masculinity challenging the school rules, on the contrary schoolgirls express their femininity, positive behaviour and attitudes toward the school; furthermore, while males perceive a split between the activities proposed by the school and future professional insertion, females recognise that a good education can help them to find a good job. Even Willis (1997[1976]) in his well-known essay *The meaning of school counterculture class*, observes that among the minorities male chauvinism emerges as a form of rebellion to the limitations of opportunities for social mobility, while women show off feminism as a strategy of adhesion to socially shared values. Cammarota (2004), studying the process of adaptation of young *Latinos,* points out how males within educational systems, given the strained relations with the teachers who tend to *criminalise* them and to label them as problematical, adopt anti-school behaviour as an act of rebellion. On the other hand girls

see the scholastic commitment as a strategy of resistance to contradict the expectations of race and gender that society projects on them. In Europe one has reached   not dissimilar conclusions observing for instance how the school experience of Pakistani and West Indian boys in Great Britain (Dwyer-Modood et al., 2006), of Turks in Norway (Prieur, 2002), or Ecuadorians in Italy (Queirolo Palmas-Torre, 2005), presents itself as more problematic compared to that of their sisters.

Male students belonging to minorities have greater behaviour problems (Sànchez-Còlon et al., 2005) and tend to over emphasise their masculinity behaving as *fearless*, as *toughs* who challenge authority to be respected by their classmates thereby intensifying the *macho* model. As a result the teachers activate negative mechanisms of perception triggering dangerous self-fulfilling prophecies (Feliciano-Rumbaut, 2005); then the fact that the teachers are prevalently female intensifies the phenomenon since women are less likely to tolerate expressions exacerbated by masculinity (Qin Hilard, 2003). What is more, teachers are more tolerant and manage to handle relations with girls in a more positive way (Gregory, 1997). Girls, through a mechanism of social building founded on prejudices often rooted in common sense, are by and large more accepted and perceive and interiorise forms of racism with less intensity compared to what happens for boys, also for this reason more prone to forms of rebellion (Qin Hilard, 2003; Rumbaut, 1994).

Empirical analysis

This study is based on the data gathered during the school year 2006/07 through the administration of a questionnaire under the scope of a wider research project aimed at investigating the decisive factors of school achievement for schoolchildren of Ecuadorian origin attending the high schools in the   Province of Genoa[7] (Tab. 1). The representativity was guaranteed by defining a sample that responded to the characteristics of the population distributed according to the variables of gender, typology of education (state and non state school) and courses attended. The sample

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[7] Ravecca A., "Between inclusion and emargination"? Paths to school achievement for immigrant youths in Italian high schools, University of Genoa, PhD in Political, Social and Psychological Sciences specialising in Migration and Intercultural Processes, 20th Cycle

thus set up was set alongside a control group made up of schoolchildren of Italian nationality.

Table. 1 – The composition of the sample[8]

Pupils of Ecuadorian nationality	a.v. universe	%	a.v. sample	%
Males	518	55.2	150	55.2
Female	420	44.8	122	44.8
State schools	912	97.2	264	97.2
Non state schools	26	2.8	8	2.8
Vocational education	559	59.6	162	59.6
Technical education	263	28.0	78	28.7
High schools	116	12,4	32	11.8
Total	938	100	272	100

Intersecting gender, assumed as an independent variable, and the other variables found, we were able to highlight certain aspects of great interest.

- *The perception of success is higher in females.* Females declare they have very good or good success in 4.1% and 27.3% of the cases, against the values expressed by males which stop at 1.4% and 17.4%. The distribution between those who declare than they manage well and quite well is substantially balanced, while 9.7% of males, against 4.1% of their female classmates, declare negative results. Even the declared level of scholastic effort is higher among the females, 11.8% and 28.6% of the schoolgirls work very hard and hard, while the value expressed by boys is respectively of 8.5% and 14.8%. The females dedicate more hours to studying than males: 25.7% and 42.1% of girls spend two or three hours or more than three hours studying a day, only 8.6% and 27.1% of their male classmates dedicate an equal number of hours to studying. The girls who in their reports did not receive any insufficient marks are 17.1%, the boys only 10.7%, and reciprocally three

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[8] The sample of foreign pupils, with nature of statistical representativity, was put together through the determination of a level of confidence equal to 95% and to an interval of confidence equal to five percentage points (N=938, n=272)

insufficient marks were had by 33.6% of the boys and 22.2% of the girls.

- *Females deem they have better language skills.* Not only do females have a medium-high general knowledge of Italian, and in any case considerably higher than that of males, but they have higher competence even in their mother tongue: girls know Spanish very well in 44.7% of the cases, the males only in 23.4%. The writing skills in Spanish are high only for 28.1% of the total of Ecuadorian youths, as if showing that the mother tongue is the language used at home and in the co-ethnic circle, but it is the Spanish of daily life, not the language studied at school, so, in that it is limited to speaking, it is poorly mastered in the formal linguistic aspects. Even in this respect one observes in any case differences between the genders with constant surpassing by the schoolgirls: the gap observed in the general competences of language skills is indeed even wider observing in detail the competences of reading and writing both Spanish and in Italian. Spanish is then the language mostly spoken at home by males while in the school environment one does not record particular differences between the genders. Males and females are equally divided between those who attend or have attended integrative courses to improve their competences in Italian and those who did not take any qualification.
- In terms of *projections on the future* males seem to perceive a greater separation between expectations and reality, and they have little faith in the possibility of reaching a high qualification: 48.7% of females deem reaching a degree or the high school diploma possible, a value that stops at 27.6% among males.

To verify the validity of the main hypotheses on the factors that bring about the school achievement of young immigrants and how this develops along declinations of gender, besides the dimensions connected with the production of community and ethnic social capital, four areas specifically correlated with the production of social resources were investigated: the family sphere, the scholastic sphere, religious beliefs and the linguistic sphere.

With a procedure of normalisation of the indicators twelve standardised indices were constructed: school achievement level index (marks obtained in the propedeutic subjects, number of insufficient marks, regularity in the

scholastic path etc…); *familial socio-economic status* (level of family education, family employment level etc…); *familial proximity*: (family condition, presence in the area of a network of relatives etc…); *intergenerational proximity (*relations with neighbourhood, etc…); *familial intimacy* (time parents and children spend together, quality of relations between parents and children etc…); *religiosity* (profession of faith, participation at religious functions and activities etc…); *scholastic and employment prospects* (assessment of the feasibility of realistically pursuing one's own educational and employment objectives etc…); *scholastic sphere* (quality of the relations with teachers and classmates, etc…); *ethnic social capital* (participation in the activities organised by the community of origin, maintenance of transnational ties etc…); *linguistic proficiency in Italian and in the native language*; *linguistic proficiency in Italian of the parents*; *scholastic reinforcement* (attendance on integrative courses to improve linguistic proficiency in the language of destination, presence of facilitators and cultural mediators etc…); *discrimination* (episodes of discrimination suffered, perception of discrimination)[9].

The analysis of the distribution of the averages of the school achievement level index of males and females (Tab. 2) allows one to highlight how the performances of the former are clearly inferior, confirming the general trend found by research. The distance between the scholastic performances of Ecuadorian boys and girls in the Genoese context is however more limited compared to both that found in other migratory situations and to the Italian classmates who make up the control group.

Parental supervision and community control are forces present also for Ecuadorian girls, and this easily explains their greater school achievement, compared with other groups of immigrants in other contexts; however, the Latino networks in the Genoese context stood out as being particularly dysfunctional in the production of social capital, in particular in its form that opens towards the outside, in that it is excessively homogeneous and poorly united (Ambrosini-Queirolo Palmas, 2005)

Women have different access to social resources in that they occupy a position of disadvantage in the hierarchical structure of the community and are incorporated into deprivileged networks. To this one adds the influence of Ecuadorian socio-cultural models which, despite contacts and

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[9] For more details of the methodology of construction of the indices see Ravecca (2009).

hybridations with a context of reception more sensitive to egalitarian relations of gender, are characterised by a widespread hegemonic masculinity which indeed relegates women to a subordinate position in the social hierarchy (Cerbino, 2005).

Girls, faced with a future already largely traced out of the power relations between genders, would therefore be led to investing in a lesser measure in education compared to their own potential; furthermore, their mistrust in educational credentials might be increased by the consideration of the employment of women of the first generation of migrants in inferior and segregating occupational niches (Lagomarsino, 2006). The different opportunities of work for males and females intervene further in structuring this dynamic: while in other countries the male employability is by far and large favoured (Marques-Valente Rosa et al., 2007), in the local labour market the request for female labour is higher, but downgraded; in the sample for instance 57.3% of females and only 48.1% of males did a paid job during the year, but the better employment prospects for girls may lead to a devaluation of the value assigned to education and to an early abandoning of the school creating a situation conflicting with that, more common, in which it is the boys who are not protected from an early transition to the world of work.

Tab. 2 – School achievement level index: distribution of mean and standard deviation by gender

Gender	Ecuadorians		Italians	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Males	-0.15	0.96	-0.09	1.01
Females	0.08	1.03	0.22	0.97
Total	-0.05	1	0.05	1

Observing the difference of the distribution of the index of familial socio-economic status between the genders it emerges how males (mean value -.0949), are more favoured than females (mean value -.1900); this datum confirms how the socio-economic elements are inadequate to explain alone the educational outcomes in that a greater socio-economic well-being should correspond to a better scholastic outcome, and not the other way round. The scarce significance emerging from the data of the

relationship between the school achievement level index and that of socio-economic status in both subgroups (Tab. 3 and 4) reconfirms how other factors, and in a particular way the migratory experience, interfering with the   socio-economic elements, contribute to tracing an all but linear framework .

The index of familial proximity does not appear significantly correlated with that of school achievement either for males or females (Tab. 3 and 4). The physical presence of parents inside the nucleus, of brothers and other relatives in itself, despite being a relevant aspect, does not represent a condition that determines school achievement, while other elements connected with the quality of the familial relations weigh more on the destinies of the young. The quality of the relations with parents and all the other factors included in the composition of the index of familial intimacy instead come into close relation in the educational career of children, especially females, for whom one records a highly significant relationship between this element and the indicators of school achievement and socio-economic status (Pearson's coefficient respectively equal to .296 and .272)[10]. For males the most significant relationship is among the indices of intergenerational and familial proximity and that of familial intimacy (Pearson's coefficient respectively equal to .335 and .226): for Ecuadorian girls the closer relations of proximity are most important for the success of the educational paths, while males feel the influence of the quality and quantity of mid-wide range relations more.

The endowments of ethnic social capital do not have a significant relationship with the school achievement level index either for Ecuadorian boys or girls. This datum, in strong contradiction with the results that emerged from other investigations and differently from the initial research hypotheses, is widely ascribable to the presence in the Genoese situation of a dense migratory network that is poorly united, decisive in starting up and perpetuating flows, but limitedly functional in supplying real support to its components. The Ecuadorian networks have not been able to encourage an improvement in professional conditions and social mobility of their members, but have rather perpetuated the development of mechanisms of employment segregation on an ethnic basis, generating a risk of occupational entanglement. The young faced with this situation perceive a

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[10] In the tables one considers significant a relationship with a value of 0.05, very significant a value of 0.01

separation between the educational level and the real possibilities of work placement and tend to depreciate the role of the school in determining one's collocation in the social hierarchy. The correlations between the indices confirm how this tendency is particularly significant for women, even more blocked than males, due to the conditions of structural weakness seen before, within a network that traps rather than supports.

Discrimination suffered or perceived represents an ambivalent element in the integration processes of young migrant: if, indeed, on the one hand it may be seen as an element that inhibits educational success since it projects a backdrop of blocked social progression on the second generation youth, on the other it is a spur for individual progression, because it activates alternative resources deriving from one's own ethnic group made more cohering and united by the sharing of sense of emargination and segregation. The network, within this perspective, offers itself as an environment inside which to produce and exploit ethnic social capital, an alternative form of social capital which in guaranteeing support and prescriptive control presents itself as a compensatory resource able to accompany the young along their paths of growth. This vision of subsidiarity is confirmed by the missing inverse relationship between school achievement and discrimination, a link partly balanced by the compensatory intervention of ethnic social capital, which in the Ecuadorian migratory experience however has not been expressed with sufficient force to invert the disastrous scholastic paths in a decisive way. For females the elements of weakness of the network emerge as particularly significant, while for males one finds a significant correlation of the discrimination index exclusively with the familial intimacy index (Pearson's coefficient -.170), for girls the significance of the relationship is also present with the intergenerational proximity index (Pearson's coefficient -.196): in a dysfunctional community, weak and scarcely supportive, especially with regard to women, in which the intergenerational and interethnic relations are slack, the opportunities to balance the implicit effects of discrimination are fewer.

Mastery of both Italian and the native language comes under the logic of the inter and intragenerational communicativeness: those who have better linguistic proficiency have better opportunities to extend their own relational network and to benefit from the support produced and transmitted by this. The data confirm this trend in which linguistic proficiency in

Italian, personal and of the parents, interweave with proficiency in the mother tongue and with the familial variables, suggesting the hypothesis that the capacity for communication, wherever and however expressed and generated, makes up a positive factor that is decisive for school achievement (Tab. 3 and 4). Linguistic proficiency in Italian of the parents, for instance, and this is valid for both subgroups, is an element positively correlated with many of the factors that influence educational paths: parents who speak Italian well go to meetings with teachers, they speak to and get to know the parents of their children's' classmates, they read newspapers and take information about what is the best school etc…, in short they are able to open themselves up more to the exterior, thereby generating positive connections useful to exploit generalised social capital. Good personal linguistic proficiency in Italian comes into play instead exclusively for the girls who manage to extend their own relations beyond the immediate co-ethnic circle, and to maintain and intensify the intergenerational communicative channels.

The relationship between school achievement and the activation by schools of didactic/pedagogical interventions directed at accompanying the path of education of young immigrants does not appear in immediate terms: the relation between the indices that measure the two dimensions for both subgroups is, indeed weak (Tab. 3 and 4). However, it is the males who have benefited most from didactic support (males: 0.3592, females: 0.2614): the females, who on average have better results, had less need for the support of figures of mediation or extracurricular teaching, given that the interventions are destined to those who have poorer achievement, and therefore more often to males.

The existence of a positive scholastic climate acts in a decisive way for males but less for females (Pearson's coefficient .173 and .046); the former seem more influenced by positive socio-environmental conditions, the latter, for whom one records a significant correlation between the indices of scholastic sphere and intergenerational proximity (Pearson's coefficient .255), manage instead to mediate this influence by activating more articulated social bridges across which to obtain useful resources for enhancement of individual productivity.

The perception of positive scholastic and employment prospects is for Ecuadorian schoolgirls significantly correlated with the school achievement level index (Pearson's coefficient: .418). Even though faced with a situation

of occupational immobility and the presence of a scarcely supportive ethnic network and with a lower intensity compared to other migratory situations, even for Ecuadorian schoolgirls, and this happens more than for males, a positive vision congruent with their own representations has acted as a stimulus to invest in education. What is more for women one records a significant correlation between the scholastic and employment prospects index and the other dimensions connected with the production and exploitation of social capital and exactly with the aspects referable to the relations of familial proximity and intimacy.

Finally, one points out how for women sociality on a religious basis and more generally religiosity, encourage the structuring of community and familial bonds, the development of social capital and therefore a more effective intergenerational transmission of human capital compared to that which emerges between men, for whom however these elements remain important.

Conclusions

Overall, therefore, immigrant girls have at their disposal greater resources of social capital which are expressed, according to Coleman's classic perspectives (1988) in the form of high supervision by parents (*familial closure*) and the co-ethnic community (*intergenerational closure*), in the maintenance of the ethnic identity traits alongside those acquired in the support of the peer group and teachers, forces that conjointly contribute to encouraging school achievement. Instead for boys the links of the ethnic network are slacker and so parent and community support, control and supervision are weaker in protecting them from the dangers of a *downward assimilation*. Also for boys the veering toward the cultural references of origin as happens for girls, who thanks to better relations of familial proximity and intimacy manage to maintain a solid identification in tradition even if declined to innovation, would mean being able to count on ethnicity as an instrument of protection in the contemporary arena of urban injustice. However, the empirical analysis allowed us to understand how the connections between different levels of fruition by Ecuadorian boys and girls of the resources potentially deriving from the ethnic relations and school achievement follows paths that are not obvious, and is rather

determined by a mixture of factors, such as nationality, the characteristics of the community of origin and the migratory seniority, just to mention the most important, which mixing up among themselves lead toward deterministic scholastic destinies much more flexible than one would think. In the studied case in fact the conditions of structural weakness that characterise the Ecuadorian community, as seen a community dense but scarcely supportive, partially nullify the potential effects of the strength ties commonly deemed as a nostrum. The assumption of the international research on the topic are thus not disconfirmed but rather partially criticized since the greater resources of social capital commonly held by girls in same situations can became something biding rather than a always promoting resource.

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