



Title: 'Intersections of Gender and Religion in School related Gender-based violence in Italy'

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Abstract

The paper focuses on gender equality and gender-based violence in schools and in society in Italy. In particular, it focuses on the intersections of gender with religion in perceptions of gender stereotypes. It reports a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 teachers and three focus group interviews with year 11 to year 14 students in three schools in Italy as part of a European project entitled: “*Developing Gender Equality Charter Marks in order to overcome gender stereotyping in education across Europe*” which included research in schools in England and Hungary as well as Italy. The paper discusses two fundamental issues: gender stereotypes and gender discrimination at school and Muslim girl discrimination in the present era, when people are especially fearful through terrorism and with a very high risk of creating negative stereotypes of Muslim people. As literature and these data research show, Muslim girls and women are particularly vulnerable.

Key words: school; teachers; gender; discrimination; religion, intersectionality.

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Introduction

In Italy, the problem of gender violence has dramatically increased in recent years; every three days a woman is killed by a man (often husband or ex-husband, boyfriend...) (Istat, 2017). The most alarming data refer to physical violence and killing. It is more difficult to discover and assess psychological violence, threats, insults and discrimination against women. The issue about education regarding the showing of respect, in particular towards women, is so important and urgent that, since 2015, policy makers have decided to introduce gender education in schools.

This paper presents the results of qualitative research conducted in three pilot schools in Italy. They are members of the European Project "*Developing Gender Equality Charter Marks in order to overcome gender stereotyping in education across Europe*". This paper reports data from thirty interviews with secondary school teachers and three focus groups of Italian students aged 11 to 13 and it is focused on gender and religious discrimination at school. In these three schools, there are many immigrant students, boys and girls, with some having been victims of discrimination for gender and religious reasons. The paper is focused on discrimination about gender and religious differences, in particular discrimination against Muslim girls. Data collected confirm that gender discrimination is more common among girls belonging to other religions, in particular Muslim girls. Evidence revealed by the focus groups of students underlines a greater discrimination towards girls who wear the veil; they tend to isolate themselves and to feel comfortable only when they are together with other Muslim girls.

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According to recent research conducted with young Muslim women in Italy, a variety of ways of practicing the Islamic religion in the West have emerged, so it is not possible to consider "Islamic women" as a single group because their religious identity is in constant movement and change; it is one of the many aspects through which identity constructions are defined (Salih, 2008; Acocella and Pepicelli, 2015, Roverselli 2017). Muslim women are not a homogeneous group and they differ according to their originating country, age, social class, educational, social and work background. Gender relationships and role and Islam cannot be considered as unchanging and fixed issues.

In 2018, in Italy, there were an estimated 2.6 million Muslims, corresponding to 4.3% of total population, which is lower than the European average (5%). Just over half (56%) of the Muslim population do not have Italian citizenship, with the following communities comprising the largest number: Moroccan (405,000), Albanian (201,000), Bengali (111,000) Pakistani (108,000), and Egyptian (102,000) (Ciocca, 2019). It is a stable though minority presence, concentrated in Northern Italy and in the large cities in the centre of the country. The two main Muslim communities in Italy for over thirty years (Moroccan and Albanian) are experiencing an increasingly strong Italianization process. However, there is still no official recognition by the Italian State as the second religion of the country, as in article 8 of the Italian Constitution.

The settlement of new citizens in Italy has been a complex process. Along with the various tensions and forms of exclusions that have arisen, this process has also brought to light a series of contradictions lying at the heart of Italian society regarding social representation and the different ways in which economic, legal, cultural and effective

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relations are produced (Ciocca, 2019). According to Allievi and Dassetto (1993), Italian Islam has various characteristics:

- a lack of identification of Islam in Italy with a single national or ethnolinguistic origin (as in France, Great Britain or Germany);
- the rapidity of the arrival and settlement and the increased public visibility of the Muslim immigrant community;
- the widespread condition of irregular status among Muslim immigrants;
- the diverse nature of the settlement of migrants depending on the region of residence and the type of employment;
- their lower exposure to the Italian system in the country of origin prior to migration;
- the paucity of associative representatives or spokespersons who are able to build mosques with a more relevant religious and social role in local society.

In Italy, the dramatic events on 11th September 2001, the intensification of the Middle East conflict, and the terrorist attacks that have taken place in recent years have acted as a catalyst for fear and prejudice already exists on the society, fuelling the xenophobic and racist moods that spread in society (Massari, 2006). In particular, Muslim people are perceived as “too different” from the Italian culture and the coexistence of Islamic law and Italian law appear to be very difficult (Massaro, 2006; Allievi 2009; Rivera, 2010). According to Sartori (2002), Muslims are considered to be bearers of diversity that have made it difficult to integrate in society.

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One of the most serious tendencies of the Italian population is to think of other cultures as homogenous, predefined and opposed to each other. These perceptions have produced significant implications also in terms of gender representations (Tarabusi, 2010); for example, migrant women have often been considered as bearers and reproducers of local traditions, depositaries of cultural models and values of the originating culture. This ethnocentric/androcentric vision has contributed to the diffusion of a stereotypical image of migrant women in the host societies, whereby they are seen as passive victims, in a position of subalternity and in opposition to Western women who are oriented towards emancipation and progress.

Discrimination and gender violence in Italy: the role of the school

According to most recent official data in Italy (Istat, 2017), 27% of women between the ages of 16 and 70 years have suffered physical and/or sexual violence, while an estimated 15% of women who have suffered violence in the last 15 months have not reported it to anyone. In 2017, 123 women were killed in Italy, with 80.5% being killed by a known person. In 44% of cases this was the current or the previous partner, in 28.5% by family members (including sons and parents) and in 8.1% by a person known to the woman (friends, colleagues). In 2017 (Istat, 2017), more than four thousand women reported sexual violence, more than thirteen thousand were victims of stalking and fourteen thousand filed a complaint for ill-treatment. This is an alarming phenomenon that also affects those in charge of education because episodes related to gender-based violence in Italy are spreading more and more through all social levels and in all age groups from adolescence to old age. In 2013 the Italian Parliament ratified the Istanbul Convention and approved the "Urgent provisions for the fight against gender-based

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violence" foreseen by the so-called anti-femicide decree (No. 93 of 14 August). In 2015, an extraordinary Action Plan against sexual and gender-based violence was adopted and since then all schools have to engage in activities to prevent gender discrimination and gender based violence.

The current inequalities between men and women are the product historically of the social construction of the female gender, which has been identified and stigmatized as inferior (Ulivieri, 2014). Even new generations are not immune to the stereotypes and gender disparities that affect their daily lives. Games, advertisements, colours and activities destined for children often reproduce gender stereotypes; they put male figures at the centre as protagonists of public, social and professional life while female figures remain predominantly devoted to the care of their children and at home, relegated to subordinate positions (Ulivieri, 1995; Priulla, 2013; Lopez, 2017).

Since the early years of a child's life there has been a "gender socialization" that constitute practices that act on the construction of a culture oriented to the reiteration of stereotypes and representations of the feminine and the masculine (Brambilla, 2016). The acquisition of stereotypes and roles takes place already within the family where the presence of sexual hierarchies, and the consequent characterization of the behaviour of the individual components, represents the main conditioning in the acquisition of attitudes considered typical of the female gender, such as the subdivision of housework (Lopez, 2017). Also, in school, this type of message is prevalent within textbooks (Biemmi, 2010; Guerrini, 2017), the communicative style of the teacher (Piussi, 1989; Leonelli, 2012), or even the relationship with teachers (Gamberi, Maio and Selmi, 2010) or the language used (Sapegno, 2010).

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Until a few years ago, in Italy there was no national legislation to guarantee the type of education and respect for gender equality in the school and to enable an adequate training of teachers (Eurydice, 2010). The most recent legislative measures implemented in Italy to ensure gender equality within schools have originated from the emergence of gender-based violence. After the ratification of the Istanbul Conference in 2013 and the enactment of the legislative decree n. 98/2013, in 2015 the school reform law n.107 was issued and within this (article 1, paragraph 16), the need to promote gender equality education, the prevention of gender violence and all forms of discrimination in schools of all levels was underlined. A few months later, the National Guidelines were issued: "Educating for respect: for gender equality, prevention of gender violence and all forms of discrimination"(2016). This document responds to the need to provide schools with useful indications to combine information with training, intervening for their educational function, in continuous synergy with families, through an action that is not limited to providing knowledge but acts on the experience and on the emotional and relational dimension.

In Italy, the population is currently divided into two parts. On the one hand there are the progressive secular forces, favouring gender education and ready to combat all forms of discrimination and racism, including the struggle to defend the rights of homosexual families (Gigli 2011, 2016). On the other hand, there is a conservative part, fearful of change and active in defending a traditional unique family model made up of the father, mother and children. These proponents are frightened "by the gender theory" because it ignores or pretends not to understand the intent of gender equality education by confusing it with an attempt by the school to educate the younger generation to the possibility of changing sex.

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The reactions of some parents' associations after the release of the 107/2015 law that established the need for forms of education to respect and gender equality in every school-, revealed within families a strong fear of homosexuality, above all in relation to males. This "phobia" towards homosexuality represents a serious problem for society. As research has revealed, (Burgio, 2007; 2012; Cambi, 2015; Dèttore, Antonelli and Ristori, 2014), in Italy female homosexuality appears "more tolerated" and less at risk of discrimination in comparison with males, possibly due to the legacy still existing of an old patriarchal culture that considered man the symbol of manhood, owner of the house and family. According to Burgio (2007), boys traditionally were educated, in Western society, not be emotional and to ensure feminine oppression, in particular from the time of industrialization. Furthermore, they are conditioned by a male stereotype that, as lori wrote:

“You must always be the best, the quickest, the most intelligent; you cannot make mistakes, you have to work and you cannot give yourself breaks; you cannot show weaknesses or your feelings; you don't need anyone; you cannot be like women, perplexed, uncertain, whining, ready to adapt yourself” (lori, 2001, p.60).

In Italy, there are still male and patriarchal forms of culture that, until a few years ago, have legitimized male superiority and which today manifest themselves in forms of gender violence and homophobic bullying even among the youngest. Also, it is only since 1975 that the equality of spouses in the marriage has been in force; until then the father's power over the children was paramount and there was no equality between spouses regarding children and assets (Law 151, May 19, 1975). In 1981, the “crime of honour” was

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abolished from the Penal Code. According to this, a man who discovered his wife or sister committing adultery, received a very reduced sentence in the case of the killing of or violence against the woman. Although today many cultural aspects have changed in gender relations, the current forms of violence and discrimination among adolescents reveal the strong influence of this old sexist heritage, to the detriment of the female gender.

Today there are different ways in which bullying takes place, for example, more and more often it is realized through the use of the web. The ever-increasing use of the Internet conditions social relationships, interpersonal relationships and the behaviour of everyone, especially younger people. The risk of cyberbullying is increasingly widespread and the data obtained from this research confirm it. Bullying has been on the increase in recent years; 35% of teenagers (boys and girls) from 11-19 years were victims of bullying and one case in three happened at school, in particular during break time or in the bathroom or outside when they go out after school. Just over half of victims are girls, and in these cases it is often the result of cyberbullying (Istat, 2015). These can be the publication by other boys and girls of sexual or humiliating photos on social media and written insults and derisions, in particular about physical aspects. In 10% of the total (boys and girls) the victim is not of Italian origin. Muslim girls who wear the veil are often insulted for this (Istat, 2019). From these data it emerges that female victims prefer to speak with parents first and then with teachers. The phenomenon is more widespread in the north of the country and among the most disadvantaged social classes.

If gender discrimination appears as a structural element and common to every social reality, at school, students are confronted by other factors of discrimination such as disability, ethnicity, religion, personal convictions and sexual orientation, which can also

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occur in combination giving rise to so-called "multiple discrimination" (Dèttore, Antonelli, Ristori, 2014). In this respect, one of the most widespread forms of discrimination in Italian schools is the ethnic-cultural one. Since the 1990s, Italian schools have been attended by students from many different cultures; currently there are estimated to be about 800,000 foreign students from 196 different countries (Fiorucci et al., 2017). In particular, the Tuscan region, where the research data were collected, has witnessed a steady increase in non-Italian students. Regarding secondary schools, Tuscany is the third largest region in Italy for the number of foreign students, representing 10% of the total student population.

The Ministry of Education (2016) showed a clear majority of male students, especially in secondary schools, and data has shown a loss of Muslim girls in school because they are required to take on the role of housewife in adolescence. For years, Italian schools have geared up to train teachers, educators and extracurricular staff to be able to accommodate and manage ethnic and cultural diversity (National Sources and Directions, 2014). Many projects are implemented today in schools to encourage the integration of different cultures and particular attention to the intercultural dimension is embodied within the initial training of teachers.

Despite this, isolation and marginalization still exist, alongside bullying towards non-Italian students, especially when the cultural difference is more visible because of skin colour, clothing and religious traditions. Data collected through this research shows a double discrimination, regarding ethnicity and gender in the case of Muslim girls who wear the veil. In current society, the appearance is enhanced and the female body is often the focus of attention in particular in advertising. This aspect represents an element of difference between Occidental and Muslim girls.

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The research context

This paper presents the results of qualitative research conducted in three pilot schools in Italy, which were involved in the project, data were collected through thirty interviews with secondary school teachers and three focus groups with students in year 11 to 14. The pupil sample was selected in collaboration with the three coordinating teachers for each school and was diverse in terms of gender, age, class, and ethnicity. The teachers were sampled for gender, age, class, school subject and experience.

The focus groups were aimed at discovering students' perceptions of gender differences and gender stereotypes in education and in the workplace. In addition, a series of more specific questions were addressed about school curricula, textbooks and the relationship with teachers, sports and leisure time activities, in order to find out whether students experienced gender discrimination. In particular, they discussed gender stereotyping, leadership at school, curriculum and teachers, the physical environment, attitudes and relationships, gender-based violence, community, gender inclusive education. The choice of the focus group was related to the characteristics of this data collection method. It allows the possibility of collecting a lot of data in a relatively short time. Additionally the interaction between group members provides access to the representation's way of social phenomena and how they perceive themselves in group interaction (Albanesi and Lorenzini, 2011). Finally, the research/action dimension, which is connected to the focus group, enables it to become a transformative tool about some concepts, to promote critical awareness and to activate empowerment processes.

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On the other hand, in working with teachers, a semi-structured interview was needed to find out their individual biographies, training and transformation processes and their perceptions about specific issues related to gender identity, gender stereotypes at school, teaching content, peer relationships, bullying and gender-based violence. The data came from three focus groups with twelve students each, carried out in the three pilot schools and 30 teacher interviews (10 teachers in each school), as well as two interviews which were conducted with school staff.

The three schools are located in three different provinces in Tuscany, an important region of central Italy, which is economically developed. These provinces are characterized by different social-economic-cultural characteristics. One school is located in Florence (383,000 inhabitants), just outside the historical centre but very close to it, with a predominance of medium-high socio-economic level of families. Emphasis is on the educational opportunities and reinforcement by the school which encourages a dialogue between school and family with good collaboration within the educational process. The school welcomes a fairly large percentage of immigrant pupils and a smaller proportion of Roma students. This offers more concrete and daily opportunities for intercultural education and citizenship education.

The second school is located in Tuscany in a small village of about 18,000 inhabitants, in the province of Pistoia where agriculture is still widespread and there are many textile and manufacturing industries. In recent decades, the territory has been subjected to a substantial immigration process, so much so that foreigners belonging to the school population are almost 12% of the totality. The majority of them come from Albania and Morocco. The third school is located in a town on the Tuscan coast, near the sea, with about 28,000 inhabitants. The socio-economic reality of this territory is mostly articulated

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in the tertiary sector and in agriculture, with a strong prevalence of seasonal employment in tourism, an absence of large industrial complexes and a presence of small craft enterprises. The percentage of foreign students is high, slightly above the average of Tuscany.

The research and the analysis is based on a feminist post-structuralist paradigm. It illuminates the significance of processes of recognition in the ongoing formation of the gendered and classed subject (Burke, 2012). One of the features of this paradigm is the intersectionality that allows us to read the various social phenomena from the perspective of plurality. People are not the sum of characteristics, just as the occurrence of facts is not a line of events but the living conditions and discrimination are determined by contextual and interconnected factors.

For this reason, Crenshaw (1989) theorized, on the juridical level, the multiplicity and simultaneity of systems of oppression but also the subjective experience perceived by individuals, for example the experience of violence suffered by black women differs from that experienced by whites. It is not a question of adding up discrimination, but rather of thinking that violence against black women is at the intersection of sexism and racism.

In reality, social hierarchies determine the interconnection between gender, class, state and inter-ethnic relations, the latter often declined in the form of discrimination, xenophobia or racism. These orders of relationships in turn are combined with other dynamics of categorization and hierarchical structuring of the society: based on generation, sexual orientation, nationality, access to rights ... Men and women cannot be considered homogeneous categories, in particular women, because they occupy different social positions and suffer discrimination and oppression in different degrees and forms.

The assumption underlying the intersectional approach is that the different forms of hierarchy and domain should not be considered as separate or additional, since in their

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dynamics as in the real effects they are interconnected and interactive (Poiret, 2005). The same people can be at the same time dominant and dominated, exploiting and exploited, discriminated and favourite. In social dynamics the relationships are very intricate: between male and female there is a complex, dialectic system of relations, mostly symmetrical and unequal that implies conflicts but also "reciprocal arrangements" (Sassatelli, 2006).

Above all, the patriarchal system would not be perpetuated without the complicity of the female gender. The same is true for ethnic minority groups: migration and consequent uprooting can undermine the sense of self and sometimes push people towards conformism (Rivera, 2010, p. 125). For these reasons, reading the social reality from the point of view of intersectionality is a key to understanding that allows for a wide, complete and realistic view of the relations between men and women and between women.

Gender discrimination at school

According to Article 1 of the ONU Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women "It is violence against women, every act of gender-based violence, that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats, the coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty". Thus the expression "gender violence" includes many forms of violence from psychological to physical and sexual, to the most extreme act of femicide. The term includes many aspects of violence and, even in school, among adolescents, episodes of abuse, physical and psychological violence, bullying and cyberbullying can occur. In this paper the attention is focused on psychological gender violence, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of girls, in particular of immigrants and Muslim girls.

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From the data it emerged that all teachers affirmed that until students are eleven to twelve years old, many conflicts occur between males and females and they tend to be separate during activities. Changes appear to occur around thirteen years old and they start to collaborate in and outside the school. The most common and widespread conflicts are verbal and cyberbullying forms, especially for women, but sometimes aggression also becomes physical. Males tend to upset girls using offensive and vulgar adjectives and appellations that allude to the body and sexuality. Gender discrimination is intertwined with ethnic-religious discrimination. Muslim immigrant girls suffer dual discrimination, gender-related discrimination and religion-related discrimination, especially when they wear the veil. The veil becomes a brand, an element of separation between us and them, where they are representative in a stereotypical way of Muslim girls with whom it could be more difficult to establish a relationship or friendship. In fact, often female companions tend not to include Muslim girls in their friendships.

In this research, from the testimonies of teachers and students it was evident, especially in the first years of secondary school, that there is a clear division between males and females; both prefer same-sex partners to work with at school and to spend free time with. Such preference sometimes ends up in not wishing to collaborate with a partner of the opposite sex or making jokes and teasing. The situation then changes, in the last year of secondary school when the collaboration between different sexes takes place, in order to spend free time together.

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Initially, during the interview, teachers seem almost in denial when listening to the expression "gender –based violence" and they declare that there had been no serious incidents of violence in the school. Immediately, though, they add that there had been forms of verbal violence and sometimes bullying, which they viewed less severe than physical violence. Teachers often reported situations with joking and denigration on the part of males towards females, which, sometimes, resulted in behaviour which was seen as brutal and too invasive for girls. Furthermore, the boundary between what is lawful and acceptable and what is not, is often unclear.

Some teachers noticed in boys and girls a search for homogeneity in the sense that they prefer someone who is very similar to themselves. They explained:

“This is a clear sign that education is lacking acceptance and respect for diversity. I have also seen bullying; the classic bully is one in every hundred boys, the others are bullies too but they are unaware, they think to enjoy with the victim and they do not perceive the suffering of the other” (Int. 27).

The teacher highlighted the problem of a lack of education related to dealing with emotions, education that should start in the family and then continue at school. According to this view, the school should leave more space to plan activities that educate the students to respect their own and others' emotions because most of the acts of bullying and violence derive from this “emotional illiteracy”. Teachers noticed an inappropriate approach from boys to girls, a decidedly sexual physical interaction that could be heavy, invasive and offensive for girls:

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“The males make the first attempts to approach often in a clumsy and harassing way and do not realize that it is heavy and offensive. They don’t have unawareness about the limits. Two episodes come to mind: recently some girls have accused two or three boys of harassment, in particular during break time, boys tried to touch the girls’ breasts and asked them to kiss but it is difficult to understand whether they are immature games or jokes or real harassment, or even a case of a girl who two years ago accused a boy of harassment and then she admitted to having invented everything to make him a victim and to attract the attention of a boy. (Int. 5).

Another similar opinion came from a Professor:

“Boys at this age have attitudes about girls that are not quite right; they approach them in a way that is too direct, especially from a physical point of view, touching the body or referring to physicality and this annoys girls. Sometimes immature boys try to approach the girls in a way that can cause a lot of upset” (Int. 3).

It appears evident that in the first approaches between males and females the physical approach prevails, and the attention for the body instead of an emotional relational approach. The excessive importance given to the body, especially the female one, is also very strong in the messages coming from the social world (mass and social media) that are easily internalized by the adolescents. The body, especially the female body, is often seen in advertising and it must be agile, slender, and attractive (Leonelli and Selmi, 2013).

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The female body, has recently been studied from a pedagogical and sociological point of view precisely because it assumes different connotations and consequently different educational implications; for example it is an object of possession and violence, as a place of clash between genres, or as a means to gain success, mainly aimed at a homogenisation, with its inevitable aesthetic and identity manipulations (Cagnolati, Pinto Minerva and Ulivieri, 2013). In general, the teachers note that the girls are more projected into adulthood, also from an aesthetic point of view and in the attention to the body:

“The girls are much more awake, at the same age they are ahead of their male friends, they think about putting on make-up, dressing in a certain way to appear more adults while the boys are still children” (Int. 26).

During the focus groups students talked about their relationships with the other sex:

“Last year we did a handball competition and we did it separately, male and female, because the Professor said that the teams were unbalanced but above all to avoid physical contact ... because the males are too aggressive” (Girl, focus group 1).

“Well it depends on people, we often prefer to be with female companions because we can talk about everything, things that maybe we will not talk to the males about it is not that we always close ourselves, there are moments that we are mixed. It depends on guys, some make fun, they're rude, they always



think about sex ... so we do not really like being with them” (Girl, focus group 1).

“At this age boys only care about one thing about girls - sex - so that's why we often prefer to stay only with girls” (Girl, focus group 3).

It seems clear that there is a fine dividing line between boys' comments on the physical appearance of girls which are appreciation, and those which are jokes and are offensive. It also depends upon how they individually perceived. While for some girls it is bothersome and inappropriate, other girls like it because they feel flattered and appreciated. What is evident is the excessive importance given by adolescents to the physical aspect that becomes both the triggering element of attraction towards the other, and a triggering element to discriminate against the other. Many studies agree that the relationship that contemporary adolescents have with their body is characterized by a powerful investment of its surface; care and attention are ostentatiously directed to what is visible of one's body (Barone, 2017). On the other hand, when discrimination is more explicitly expressed, teachers and students are fully aware of the problem of bullying, which on the basis of these testimonies manifests itself in various modalities, such as males towards females, females towards males but especially among groups of boys of the same sex.

In the focus group in the school in Florence, a boy said:

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“Another episode happened some days ago: a guy in our class put on a large group WhatsApp a particular photo of a comrade.....they added something on the photo... The parents went to the principal and the boy has been suspended” (Boy, Focus group 2).

Again, it is the theme of the body and sexuality that is the object of ridicule and denigration. Teachers sometimes give the impression of being unprepared and not being able to handle certain problems, precisely because until a few years ago there were no problems, such as that of cyberbullying.

“Bullying until some time ago was more common between boys, perhaps even today, but it is increasing that among girls; for example, a few days ago in the class three girls beat themselves. We teachers are not trained precisely because in our initial training there were no such problems. Now fortunately there are training initiatives for teachers but it is important that we have the support of external experts, like psychologists ... who can help us in these types of situations, because it is becoming increasingly difficult to work at school. For example, even the increase in non-Italian children, communication with foreign families, certain behaviours and traditions make living together more difficult because we do not have the tools to manage these complex situations” (Int 26).

Female bullying will cause even more confusion among teachers precisely because it breaks the stereotype that considers girls more polite, respectful, likely to listen and

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discuss and less aggressive. Moreover, teachers have to improve the ability to manage the ethnic differences considering many immigrant families in Italy.

The distress and difficulties derived from the management of multi-ethnic classes was often highlighted by the teachers' testimonies, especially when there were evident cultural differences:

“In the last years we have done and we are continuing to do a lot to integrate everyone, because foreigners who do not speak Italian are arriving continuously throughout the year and it is not easy to start from scratch when a class is already advanced. Teaching and learning Italian at 13 years from scratch is not easy but problems connected to cultural difference complicate the teaching and learning processes. I am thinking, for example, of Muslim families, where sometimes fathers have no respect for women teachers or even for the headmaster ...” (Int.11).

Some teachers appeared worried about Muslim mothers:

“We have some Muslim families in the school and they are increasing during the last years. I think it is very difficult to live in our culture for them, in particular for Muslim women, I noticed they have many difficulties to speak with teachers at school and to participate in scholastic life but they don't want to improve their Italian language and communicate with us. It appears that they are

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frightened, they prefer to stay alone and don't communicate with other parents"
(Int. 6).

In general, teachers notice that Muslim mothers are not active in the scholastic community, they prefer not to speak in a public context, but sometimes teachers are quite worried about their integration:

"I remember during a meeting with parents and teachers, a Muslim mother, stayed sitting down and never spoke, she appeared frightened if someone asked her something" (Int. 14)

"Sometimes I think it is very difficult to cohabit between different cultures such as Muslim and Italian. I don't know....we have different values, mentality, religion.. it is necessary that one of them changes their own ideas, for example, the role of women, I think the Muslim conception is not acceptable in our society" (Int. 27).

In particular, from this interview, the impossibility for this teacher to mediate between two different cultures if one of them does not change can be seen.

Ethnic-linguistic-religious differences often appear for teachers and, more generally in the whole society, they appear to be an obstacle to the peaceful coexistence of the two cultures, especially when the differences are strong and evident and affect the daily

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organization of life. In particular, as this research reveals, the Islamic religion with its behavioural principles, especially for women, appears to be an element that amplifies gender contrasts and discrimination.

Being Muslim teenagers

From data collected in this research, it emerged that gender discrimination is sometimes connected to religious discrimination, especially when the differences are clearly visible, such as wearing the veil. In this sense, being a Muslim woman has become an element of high risk exclusion/marginalization in the adolescent relationships.

Gender discrimination is intertwined with ethnic-religious discrimination: Muslim immigrant girls suffer dual discrimination, gender-related discrimination and religion-related discrimination, especially when they wear the veil. The veil becomes a brand, an element of separation between us and them, where they are representative in a stereotypical way of Muslim girls with whom it could be more difficult to establish a relationship or friendship. In fact, often female companions tend not to include Muslim girls in their friendships.

Islamic girls who wear the veil are immediately distinguished from the others just because through the veil they claim to be Muslims. As such, there is a risk that both teenagers and adults immediately have a stereotypical idea of the Muslim girls. The veil immediately captures the attention, transmits information and a certain way of life of the woman. Some

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students said they had been discriminated but not in the current school, or they had witnessed discrimination. During a focus group a boy stated:

“One day I was in the centre of Florence in a jewellery store, I overheard a saleswoman who was telling someone who probably went to ask for a job and she explained that in their shop, shop assistants do not wear the veil. I don’t know why, but this seems to me to be a form of gender discrimination” (Boy, focus group 1).

Then there was a discussion between students and they were a bit perplexed, insecure, as they could not understand the reasons for wearing the veil. In the end almost all of them were opposed to covering the whole face but they accepted the veil that shows the face. Being a foreign woman and a Muslim woman wearing the veil was perceived by them as even more discriminating:

“Thinking about gender stereotypes, it occurs to me that power and command belong to men and for women it is more difficult to command precisely because of this stereotype. If a woman is foreign it is even more difficult, first of all maybe she has some difficulties with the language, then if she wears a veil, prejudices could exist because people are afraid of terrorism ... so they prefer to hire a non-Islamic person” (Boy, focus group 2).



Western women who see a woman with a veil tend immediately think of a woman forced by some male member of the family. In fact some girls have declared that wearing the veil was an individual choice and it was not imposed by the family (Pepicelli, 2012; Salih, 2008). Among the girls who took part in the focus groups, some of them wore the veil and they said:

“Since I have become a woman I decided to put it on, my parents left me completely free, after me my sister decided to wear it too. One day in the centre of Florence, a young man asked me how a beautiful girl like me could put this rubbish on her head, I felt very offended. In this school I feel good, no one has ever made fun of me, while last year yes, I suffered for this, in the other school, students teased me and tried to tear my veil, I never told anyone otherwise my father would be very angry, but I changed school for this reason. I am Muslim and this is very important for me, I do Ramadan and when I fast I am well, I am satisfied, I feel that I have done something beautiful and important. But I am as a Muslim more open, not like my father ... for him girls can see boys only from twenty years and only Muslims ... I feel more Italianised every day and I do not know if the rules of Muslim life are right, I’m asking myself every day, I think in a little time I will be even more Italianised” (Girl, focus group 1).

These words represent the difficult transformation of the culture by second generation people (Guerrini, 2017).

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“In the school where I was before I was teased by an Asian boy because I wore the veil and he used to say to me "Bald! What do you have down there? Are you bald? "I like the veil and I want to keep it, I have several veils at home, different colours and different clothes, I choose what to wear in the morning depending on the season and what I wear” (Girl, focus group 1).

From the student’s voice the importance of freedom of choice to wear the veil emerges, and it goes beyond the religious meanings, since it also has a material and aesthetic dimension. The veil can be an expression of different aspects of women's identity. Historically there have existed various types of veil and how to wear it according to age, country and socio-economic status (Salih, 2008). The fabric, the length, the colour and the way of wearing it continue to diversify the veils across countries and generations. Moreover, at the same time and in harmony with any other item of clothing, the veil can express the social, economic or cultural identity of a woman (Salih, 2008). As the voices of pupils participating in the third focus group revealed, there is often confusion in recognizing the different types of veil. For example, seeing a veil, they called a burka, according to them a woman with a veil is the object of attention and can generate stereotypes, for example:

“A Muslim woman may have difficulty working as a shop assistant because customers don’t like her and they don’t go to buy in the store” (Boy, focus group 3).

And again a girl:

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“I know that when Italian women go to Islamic countries they have to cover themselves with a veil to respect their culture, so I wonder why they do not take it off when they come to our country? They should take it off” (Girl, focus group 3).

Students appeared quite confused about the use of the veil among Muslim women, and did not openly express themselves as to what they thought but they admitted that Italian people could be afraid or react in a stereotypical way towards them. Even from the expressions of the teachers, there was a kind of mistrust, combined with fear and lack of general knowledge of different cultures for which they admitted that at school the religious difference creates difficulties:

“We teachers try to educate students not to create barriers; we have many girls with veils, although there are many and deep differences between our culture and Muslim culture, I see that they are willingly coming to school, I realize that it is not easy to enter their cultures and have respect for them” (Int. 14).

Another teacher remembers an episode from years ago in another school, when the school had to report a parent:

“The difficulties for Muslim girls are much greater when compared to Muslim boys and to girls belonging to other ethnic groups and religions. I remember



some years ago when I was working in another school, there was the case of an Egyptian girl who was severely beaten by her father because she didn't want to wear the veil; one day we noticed some bruises. The headmaster reported the situation to the police, the girl was entrusted to a family home, the father sent his wife and the rest of the family back to Egypt. I think that the obligation of the veil is absurd and incomprehensible for us" (Int. 6).

One teacher wondered how coexistence between girls who are so different is possible:

"We see all cultures, we see girls to whom we have to say to be more covered, with shirts that are too low-cut or tops that leave their stomachs uncovered, miniskirts And together we have girls with veils ... I think that even for the relationships between them these differences affect them in a negative way, limiting their ability to go out and build relationships. Italian girls are interested in fashion and tend more and more to discover the body, whereas the Muslim girls are the opposite. Then there are differences in habits, for example Muslim girls practise Ramadan. I wonder how they can do all the activities and still feel good, at school, in sport, without eating or drinking all day. In my opinion this influences their participation in school and their social life, maybe they are tired, more nervous because they are hungry and thirsty" (Int. 21).

"I teach physical education and I have never had problems of coexistence between boys and girls, Muslim girls play all activities quietly, they love playing volleyball, of course they continue to wear the veil even in the gym, it may



seem strange, especially as it can be uncomfortable but there are never any problems regarding this aspect” (Int 6).

The question of the veil worn by immigrant girls of Muslim origin in European countries is quite complex; it signals a particular code of relationship and behaviour between the sexes, which can also be oriented religiously (Riviera, 2010). There is never a correspondence between the traditional meanings, which have historically settled in a certain custom, and the sense that gives it to those who have adopted it, for example it can confer an identity, polemic or claim value. Cypriel Avenel (2005) proposed a useful typology that identifies three ways of wearing the veil: the traditional veil, the veil of adolescents, the claimed veil. In the first case it is a way of dressing according to the custom of the country of origin, in the second it is one of the many signs of affirmation of identity, autonomy or rebellion, typical of adolescence, in the third it is a totally conscious choice, made by adults often educated and culturally integrated, which can have a religious, aesthetic or claiming value.

“The veil can express religiosity, modesty, pride, conformism, reinvention of tradition, or, on the contrary, unconventionality, desire for emancipation, challenge to the majority society ... These meanings vary and combine differently according to individual cases. It is an ethnocentric idea to believe that female emancipation and freedom must necessarily pass through the "transgressive" canons designed and imposed by global market agencies” (p.78).

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Furthermore, the dichotomous scheme which opposes tradition to modernity, and which associates the latter exclusively with ethical-aesthetic values and majority lifestyles in the West, prevents us from seeing that even the "Islamic" scarf has entered a niche in the industry of fashion and the globalized market, taking on commercial purposes, ephemeral aesthetic meanings, forms of communication in the name of frivolity (Rivera, 2010). The relationship with the families is an even more complex and problematic aspect because, being adults, they have well developed personalities and greater linguistic difficulties.

“Muslim women are afraid to speak, they are excluded from public life, something should be done to involve them, for example Italian courses but I'm not sure they would participate. We don't see Muslim mother coming to speak with professors at school, only fathers. Their culture does not allow them to enter the public field and as a result the daughters are educated, more reserved, and less involved in school life” (Int.20).

Finally, the problem of the drop out of Muslim girls' emerged:

“When in the third year students choose the secondary level course of study, I see that for some Muslim girls, more traditionalist, it is as if she already knew that soon she will leave her studies to dedicate herself to the family and to the house. This is displeasing because this is someone who has excellent skills, who has a lot of dedication and rigour in her studies but unfortunately still today some of them already have a predestined future of wife and mother since very young”(Int 24).

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This perception is confirmed by the official data of the Italian Ministry of Education according to which the female school dropout of Muslim girls is much higher than the males. This tendency is not recorded among girls belonging to other faiths where the dispersion rate remains fairly constant between the female and male genders (Miur, 2016). Seven Muslim girls in ten between the ages of 15 and 29 do not study or work. Also from this it emerges that the role of the school is increasingly difficult and delicate in terms of having to mediate between the respect for family habits and styles, education and the objectives of the scholastic education that also provide forms of self-realization and the discovery of one's own self.

Conclusion

From data collected in the three sample schools it appears that gender-based violence in preadolescence and adolescence manifests itself primarily through discrimination and, offences on a psychological level, forms of cyberbullying and sometimes even physical violence.

What lies behind these forms of discrimination and violence is an underestimation of the young or adult female figure and above all an excessive attention to the female body which becomes an element of attraction but also of denigration. For boys and girls, in general, there is a certain awareness and knowledge of the problems linked to gender discrimination. However, they appeared very sensitive and interested in these issues and some were particularly informed, a clear sign that in class they are starting to work through gender discrimination issues.

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What appears to be the case is that forms of bullying often take place when the female body is not perceived as “adequate” with commonly held beliefs about beauty. Muslim girls appear to be particularly at risk of discrimination because their physical appearance diverges from the majority, that is the fact of not showing their hair as coloured and styled like their Western companions but covered by the veil.

Muslim women in Italy are more discriminated against than men, with the veil being seen as a serious obstacle in access to work, especially for a position that requires contact with the public. As Dessì (2016) suggested, “To expose the Muslim foreign woman to forms of discrimination and racism, it is not religion in itself, it is not the status of woman in itself, nor that of foreigner and immigrant, but the fact of summarizing together, behaviour, clothing, lifestyle, role in the family and outside, all these conditions” (p. 73).

To prevent and eliminate forms of discrimination and violence, the first step is to recognize Islamophobia as a form of specific discrimination that affects Muslim women disproportionately with respect to Muslim men. Furthermore, the investigation of this phenomenon would bring out clear data to urge politicians and associations to act. Finally, greater solidarity on the part of feminist realities towards Muslim women would help to make it clear that gender and religious discrimination are closely related and have negative effects, once again, on the lives of women. The school has the difficult task of educating the younger generations to respect the differences in general, and in particular those of gender and religion, and to identify and eliminate forms of discrimination and violence early because the first forms of intolerance are born and developed in the school.

The intersectionality of gender, origin and religion made it possible to read data in a more complex and complete way. In data collection, particular attention was paid to the choice of the sample, both between teachers and students, so that all the various differences

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could be adequately represented: boys and girls, men and women, coming from different countries and belonging to different religions.

The interviews left space for teachers to reflect, elaborate and tell their own educational and professional experience giving value to individuality in the narrative. Students through focus groups told about experiences of discrimination on themselves or seen in society or on other companions. In particular, the intertwining of sexism and racism, as the data collected reveal, appears in discrimination against girls who wear veils. Muslim girls in Italy often wear the veil by free choice and not by imposition of the family, the veil indicates a relationship code between the sexes, which can also be religiously oriented. There is never an exact correspondence between the traditional meanings and the sense that the wearer attributes to it here and now: they can eventually also change the traditional meanings by giving that costume an identity, polemical, vindictive or rebellious value (Rivera, 2010). The challenge that both feminism and the reality of cultural pluralism impose is how to find new fields of translation and mediation that allow us to practice a common anti-sexist and anti-racist commitment beyond our own cultural and status peculiarities.

In educational research, adopting an intersectional model means using a paradigm that allows combining the singular, the particular, the universal, and thus founding the right of every woman and every man to define herself and himself, to build his own personal identity, to choose one's belonging.

Feminism and multiculturalism intersect, recognizing that immigrant women as women and as migrants add up a double lack of identity and cultural dispossession. Gender education combined with intercultural education can give strong and perspective suggestions for the enhancement of gender also in relation to ethnic and religious

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differences, helping to define the complex and multicultural plots of the contemporary world characterized by tensions, violence and refusals (Ulivieri, 2017, p.14).

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