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Final Dissertation

Development of biculturalism in childhood: A brief literature review

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cities have become increasingly multicultural due to the interplay of different factors and motivations. Cross-cultural contacts have reached unprecedented levels, mutually shaping both host and heritage cultures. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how children integrate multiple cultural inputs into a coherent sense of self, with a particular attention to the integration of two systems, a phenomenon known as biculturalism. Biculturalism is not just a commitment to the ethnic and the mainstream culture, but is rather a negotiation between the person and the socio-cultural context, requiring a thorough exploration and re-evaluation of personal and cultural aspects to fit in the environment. In the current thesis, I take a developmental approach while also acknowledging the contribution of acculturation theory rooted in social psychology, which will not be discussed here due to space constraints.

The first chapter examines the grand transformation occurring in societies to provide a comprehensive overview of the complexity of landscapes in which children develop and that shape their self-concept. The second chapter opens with an analysis of the most recent theoretical approaches on biculturalism, and then delves into an in depth examination of the developmental stages of bicultural identity formation. In the third and last chapter, a semi-structured interview with the mother of two bicultural children will be presented. The discussion that follows will offer novel insights into the multifaceted and dynamic process of children's bicultural identity development.

CHAPTER 1

THE GRAND TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETIES

1.1. An Overview of the Complex Landscape of Modern Societies

In recent years, cities have become increasingly multicultural due to individuals moving more frequently in response to a vast array of motivations, leading to the categorisation of migrants in ‘more’ or ‘less’ desirable. Migration is far from being a neutral process, as it is shaped by disparities in resources, wealth and political situations, with globalisation exacerbating these differences. Those who are more privileged relocate for professional or personal interests seeking new cultural experiences, opportunities or career advancements and moving back to their home country after having gained the desired skills. The appeal of having an international community of high skilled workers has made certain countries simplify their visa processes, thus increasing multiculturalism within cities (Choudhury, 2022).

While some individuals move out of personal preferences, like economic migrants and digital nomads, others are forced to move due to a lack of alternatives. For instance, conflicts, instability, violence and disasters have increased the number of people leaving their home country to search for safety and opportunities somewhere else (Choudhury, 2022). Despite the variability in experiences and ethnic backgrounds, displaced individuals, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers all fall under the term ‘immigrants’, which is often a synonym for ‘low-skilled workers’ and ethnic stereotyping. The type of support and treatment received by immigrants appears to be very different from the one provided to ‘premium migrants’, usually coming from a white and wealthy background and considered ‘high skilled’ workers.

In what Shachar (2020) has defined as the ‘great transformation of citizenship’, it becomes clear how country borders expand or contract to either accommodate or exclude individuals based on discriminating criteria such as their immigrant status,

perpetuating social and economic inequalities. As the labor force who is allowed to enter and stay in a country is often the one ensuring economic growth (high-skilled immigrants), it is argued that controls on migration are mainly sustaining a capitalistic narrative (Fan, 2020). In line with this reasoning, certain states have been restricting immigrants to certain geographical areas to prevent their large numbers to alter the current economic status quo (Fan, 2020).

In an already complex scenario, globalisation is thought to have ‘harmed’ more than supported human development, since it has amplified economic and social gaps between countries, becoming one the leading causes of migration (De Carvalho, 2023). In other words, former colonies have become increasingly dependent on dominant countries, amplifying economic inequalities and prompting individuals to migrate to more prosperous countries. Globalisation has paradoxically allowed goods and capitals to circulate freely instead of granting this opportunity to people, particularly those moving for survival reasons (De Carvalho, 2023). However, hegemonic countries are not immune to the complexity of mobility taxonomies, since traditional ‘ways of being’ have been rapidly outpaced by new values and standards brought by migrants (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022). European cities like Brussels, Amsterdam or Rotterdam are examples of a growing trend emerging at a international level, where migrants constitute the majority of the population and shape mainstream culture in innovative ways (Kuht, 2019).

The homogeneity in national identities has inevitably been challenged by new dynamics introduced by migrants, often leading to conflicts derived from the clash of cultural values. For instances, debates on whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear face-covering veils have been part of public discussions for a long time (Kuht, 2019). Many countries such as Russia or South Africa have responded to migration flows by adopting exclusionist approaches, treating immigrant as non-citizens and depriving them from political, social and economic rights. In these regions, it is frequent

to witness immigrants being victim of discrimination, violence and xenophobic attitudes (Fan, 2020). Even in the most inclusive countries, multiculturalism has often prompted local groups to assert their identities through nationalistic tendencies that have amplified the differences rather than the unity between cultures (Sisk, 2017).

In conclusion, cultural diversity is a mutually shaping phenomenon that affects both the host and the destination countries, potentially increasing the opportunities deriving from this heterogeneity, but also posing unique challenges that require a dynamic approach to a constantly transforming environment.

1.2. Children in Europe: between Citizenship and Non-Citizenship

Migration is often a choice of children’s parents or their relatives, even if there are also minors who move unaccompanied. The most recent data indicate that, as of January 1st, 2023, around 7.4. million children under the age of 18 are migrants (Eurostat, 2023), corresponding to 9,2% of the total child population living in the European Union (see Figure 1). Additionally, migrants make up 17,9% of the total number of non-national children.

It is worth noting that the highest percentage of non-national residents are children aged between 5 and 9 years, which amounts to over 30% of the child population, followed respectively by those who are aged less than 5 years (27,9%), those who are aged between 10 and 14 (27,4%) and those whose age falls between 15 and 17 years (14,6%) (Eurostat, 2023).

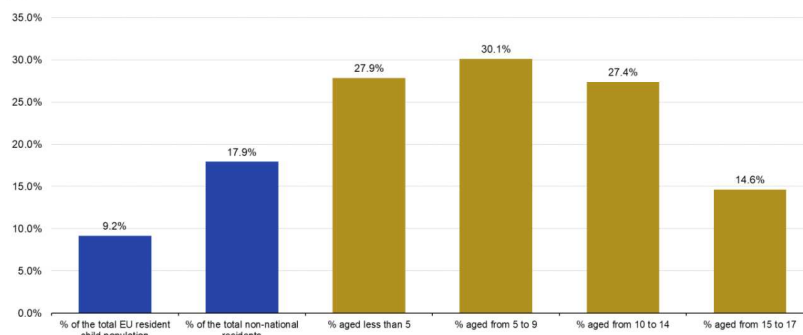


Fig.1 Non-national resident population aged less than 18 years by age group, EU, 1 January 2023
Source: Eurostat (2023)

Another relevant aspect is non-national children's countries of residence, which are - in order of importance - Germany (30.3 %), France (15.7 %), Italy (13.9 %) and Spain (13.4 %) (Eurostat, 2023). Moreover, during a period of nine years, the non-national child population has increased by around 52%, demonstrating the significance of the migration phenomenon in EU (Eurostat, 2023). In light of these considerations, it is crucial to become aware of the importance of children's migration to promote inclusive environments where diverse backgrounds are valued, and the wellbeing of children is pursued.

1.3. Cross-cultural Dynamics in Children's Identity Formation

Child development occurs within cultural systems that are now more complex and hybridised due to factors such as migration and globalisation. The traditional association between culture and geographical territories has been transcended in favour of a more dynamic and fluid approach, which recognises and encompasses the integration of multiple cultural inputs in identity formation. Children's worldviews and behaviours are increasingly shaped by cultures to which they do not have any ancestral ties, like in the case of ethnic affiliation (Goedhart, 2021).

The sources of children's intercultural contact have notably increased, as reflected in the diversity of cultural practices and values in which youth is engaged. Multiculturalism is particularly evident in Third Culture Kids (TCKs), who have lived for a significant amount of time in a country different from their parents' nationality due to parental occupation (e.g. diplomats) (de Waal & Born, 2021). Their identity is a blend of different cultures, where their sense of belonging is disconnected from a physical location due to the temporariness of their homes and the lack of control over their next

move (de Waal and Born, 2021). Enacting a fluid cultural identity becomes a fundamental protective factor for TCKs, as they potentially might experience a lack of stability. This is evident by them being often unable to define their place of origin or by not feeling to belong to a single country. In this sense, the presence of parents and the observation of certain routines, such as shared meals, are critical to provide those feelings of security and consistency that are sought after. On the positive side, TCKs demonstrate high competency in a variety of cultural environments as they have often attended international schools and have come in contact with a variety of cultures during their relocations (Goedhart, 2021).

Beyond TCKs, a growing trend is represented by bicultural children, in other words multiculturalism in its simplest form. Immigrant children (or those having immigrant parents) are required to manage and combine two cultural streams (biculturalism) from an early age. The ability to integrate norms and values coming from heritage and mainstream cultures has been found to foster high levels of resilience and adaptability, as children are more competent in navigating different social contexts (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022). At the beginning, cultural or multicultural inputs are received at home and stem from the observation and participation in parental practices; they are then consolidated at school, through the contact with peers and teachers coming from the same or different cultural background. In addition, the media (e.g. TV, smartphones etc.) and the widespread use of internet have exposed even individuals who have never left their home countries to alternative cultural scripts (Cheng et al., 2014). The advancement of technology also plays a role, as it has facilitated the contacts with relatives and friends back home, thus enduring immigrant children's ethnic affiliation. Therefore, children are immersed in an environment with a growing number of inter-ethnic contacts, which affect the context at different levels and influence the ideologies of the stakeholders to which they relate, shaping in turn their identities.

CHAPTER 2

BICULTURAL CHILDREN: GROWING UP BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

2.1 Biculturalism and Identity Development: Recent Theoretical Perspectives

The simultaneous exposure of individuals to the heritage and host culture is known as *biculturalism*. The term in its wider meaning encompasses not only cultural minorities such as refugees, immigrants or indigenous populations, who are inevitably torn between at least two cultures; but also those who have lived abroad, are in an inter-ethnic relationship or just travellers. The knowledge of different systems enable individuals to function successfully in different cultural environments by displaying higher adaptability and resilience, a skill known as *bicultural competence* (Hong et al., 2000).

A major theoretical framework for explaining biculturalism is Bicultural Identity Integration (BII; Trifiletti et al., 2022), which suggests that in order to investigate the mechanisms underlying bicultural adjustment and identity development it is important to focus on how individuals perceive their national and ethnic identities. Therefore, the intersection between ethnic and mainstream culture and the related concept of ‘frame shifting’ can occur either harmoniously or in a conflicting manner. Specifically, the perception of biculturalism in relation to the heritage and acquired culture involves two dimensions: (1) cultural blending as opposite to separation, and (2) cultural harmony as opposite to cultural conflict.

BII research has stressed the importance of both socio-cognitive and affective aspects in the formation of an integrated bicultural identity (Schwarz et al., 2019). The socio-cognitive appraisal occurs when the two systems are perceived as overlapping or separated (e.g., individuals claim ‘to feel part of two cultures or ‘to not blend Mexican and American cultures’). Whereas, the affective one emerges when identities are perceived as harmonious or discordant (e.g., individuals may ‘rarely feel conflicted about their bicultural identity’, while others might consider ‘Mexican and American

cultures incompatible’). Of importance, high levels of bicultural integration emerge only when the two identities are felt as blended and compatible. On the contrary, when the two cultural systems are perceived as conflicting and fragmented, integration is more difficult to achieve. This is also true for children, who have been found to report more integration, greater openness, and consequently higher wellbeing in the presence of high levels of blendedness to their cultural systems (Trifiletti et al., 2022).

An alternative approach to bicultural identity has demonstrated how two or more cultural streams can be maintained by processes known as hybridising and alternating (Meca al., 2019). In hybridisation, individuals merge and mix the cultural aspects they find more appealing to constitute a new cultural form (e.g., individuals say that ‘they are a combination of French and Nigerian roots’ or ‘a fusion of Russian and German backgrounds’). In alternation, identities are shifted in response to the context (e.g., individuals feeling ‘an Indian at home and a British at work’, or ‘being Italian with relatives and Australian at university’). According to Schwarz et al. (2019), individuals scoring high on BII are more likely to combine these identities to generate a new cultural form. In this sense, BII is thought to represent the foundation for initiating hybridisation. However, further research is needed to clarify how these identities develop and how they integrate in a coherent sense of self (Schwarz et al., 2019).

Despite the wide prevalence of bicultural individuals, developmental models of bicultural identity formation have received much less attention. In fact, upon literature review, few studies were found to address this issue, and when they did, they focused on adolescence and early adulthood, rather than childhood. While adolescence represents a critical period for identity development, scholars have recently demonstrated that the cognitive abilities essential to the development of ethnic racial identity (ERI) emerge much earlier, typically between middle and late childhood (6-12 years) (Trifiletti et al., 2022).

ERI refers to the label used by individuals to define themselves in relation to their ethnic and racial background. Apart from self-labelling, ERI encompasses the awareness, sense of affiliation, attitudes, behaviours and knowledge individuals display about their heritage culture, highlighting the multidimensionality of the construct (Williams et al., 2020). These aspects evolve throughout the life and manifest differently depending on a number of factors (e.g., stage of development, racial group membership, historical context, personal characteristics), thus complicating the way in which ERI is experienced (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Furthermore, identities are not only the result of group membership - they are also influenced by the way in which individuals come to think about themselves, a concept known as self-categorisation (Robertson & Grant, 2023). Indeed, individuals might sometimes enact identities and engage in behaviours that would usually not be relevant to them. This is witnessed especially in multicultural individuals, who might often have to adopt mainstream values to reposed appropriately to the environment despite not identifying with them.

The next two paragraphs summarise current knowledge concerning ERI development in children and adolescents, respectively.

2.2 Biculturalism Across the Lifespan: From Infancy to Middle Childhood

The developmental approach to identity formation is rooted in Erickson's (1968) psychosocial lifespan theory, where identity is considered one of the most important milestones in human development. Based on this theory, Phinney (1989) proposed that children develop their ethnic identity through different stages starting from early childhood to late adolescence. However, according to a more recent model (Williams et al., 2020), ERI starts developing in infancy as children are exposed to culturally relevant stimuli.

During the first year of life, children display a basic knowledge of ERI, a phenomenon known as ethnic-racial priming. This competence is not the result of racial

bias or inherent ethnocentrism; rather, it is connected with infants' ability to understand socialisation processes across different environments (Williams et al., 2020). In particular, between three and nine months, children engage in perceptual narrowing, where their systems become more attuned to capture the cultural stimuli deriving from the environment. For instance, by the age of nine months, children show preferences towards individuals belonging to the same ethnicity, allowing them to discriminate faces of their own cultural group from those of different backgrounds. This ability is believed to be important in the formation of attachment, as it allows children to distinguish caregivers from strangers (Williams et al., 2020).

As children progress into early and later into middle childhood, a more complex evaluation of ethnic experiences emerges (Williams et al., 2020). In the Piagetian pre-operational stage, children think in concrete terms and express themselves in symbolic ways through words and objects. In this phase, their understanding of ethnic-racial identity is based on observable traits as it emerges from the cultural descriptions they provide, often focused more on external (e.g. skin or hair colour) than abstract aspects. However, increasing evidence suggests that children may possess a greater understanding of cultural aspects than they can express. Indeed, while previous research indicates that children can categorise themselves in the correct ethnic-racial group at the age of 7 and understand ethnic constancy at the age of 8, it was found that bicultural children are able to label their ethnicity as early as 5 years, probably due to the more varied cultural experiences to which they were exposed (Williams et al., 2020).

During the early stages of development, parents cover a critical role as they convey children a sense of belonging to one or more cultural communities. Culturally relevant actions, such as the selection of the child's name and the participation in specific cultural rituals, affirm the child's membership in a certain cultural group (Meca et al., 2019). The child's sense of self, his/her social skills and worldview are the product of socialisation practices in which parents reinforce their cultural roots by

transmitting their cultural values, beliefs, behaviours and ethnic knowledge. In other words, children acquire an ascribed identity from their parents, which in turn reflects parents' own cultural background (Ochoa, 2023). This process becomes particularly important for those families who live in countries different from their own, where the cultural norms of host and receiving countries may differ or even conflict.

The environment characterising early and middle childhood is more complex than infancy because it encompasses more interactions that go beyond the parental ones. Apart from the heritage culture acquired at home, children start attending school and take part in other activities reflecting mainstream cultural scripts. These interactions shape children's behaviour as they learn to navigate between two cultural systems shaping their identity (Ochoa, 2023).

2.3 Adolescence: A Crucial Time for Identity Formation

The influence of parents is also evident in adolescence. Around 11-12 years, adolescents enter the formal operation stage where their thinking is more abstract, introspective and inclusive of other points of view (Robertson & Grant, 2023). The increased cognitive abilities allow for a full awareness of their ethnicity and its implications. For instance, children belonging to minority groups may be victims of discrimination or stereotyping, which might affect their commitment to the culture of origin. Differently from childhood, adolescents are more vulnerable to these experiences, which are further shaped by the importance of group dynamics (Erentaitė et al., 2018).

The need to belong and be accepted by the majority group can lead to re-evaluations of heritage values and to the engagement in behaviours that are opposed to parental ones (Quintana, cited in Goedhart, 2021). For instance, it is not rare to witness bicultural teenagers speaking in English with their Latino parents once they become aware of the better status connected to the mainstream language. However, adolescents who have developed a strong sense of identity are more likely to withstand the

mainstream influences, including the negative effect of discrimination, and maintain their self-esteem intact (Erentaitè et al., 2018). In this sense, parents have a crucial role in conveying a strong sense of ethnic identity and preparing children to deal with different cultural stimuli. For example, Latino parents ensure that the heritage roots are positively valued by transmitting values such as ‘pride’ (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Therefore, children develop their bicultural identity through the continuous interactions with the mainstream and heritage culture (Cho et al., 2024).

One of the most influential models of ethnic identity development in adolescence was proposed by Phinney (cited in Godhart, 2021). This model was conceptualised in relation to different ethnic minority groups in the US (e.g., Asian-American, African-American, Mexican-American). Drawing from Erikson’s (1968) theory, Phinney suggests that ethnic identity is the result of three phases ranging from unexploration to commitment (Cho et al., 2024). During pre-adolescence, ethnic identity is not explored and the cultural norms are accepted almost passively. In the case of bicultural children, this means that the dominant culture is accepted unconditionally and the mainstream norms, including the possible negative views about their cultural background, are not questioned.

As individuals reach adolescence, they start searching for their identity and understanding the meanings connected to it. Their experiences and behaviours are meaningful, because they become a representation of their heritage roots. The most positive outcome of this process is the achievement of a clear ethnic identity by late adolescence. Umaña-Taylor and colleagues (2014) have shown that this achievement is important to ensure adolescents’ psychological well-being. According to these authors, two main processes that contribute to identity formation and wellbeing are exploration and resolution. These processes are the basis for the development of bicultural competencies. Exploration consists of actively seeking information about one’s own ethnic racial background, whereas resolution refers to a sense of clarity concerning

one's cultural roots and their integration in one's self-concept. In particular, resolution increases adolescents' capacity for global bicultural competence due to its positive correlation with bicultural integration at both the affective (harmony vs conflict) and the cognitive-behavioural level (blendedness vs compartmentalization) (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Both exploration and resolution are considered essential for the achievement of a secure ethnic identity.

To conclude, biculturalism emerges from the socio-cultural context in which individuals are embedded, with parents playing a prominent role in childhood and adolescence. Parents engage in intentional efforts to make their children competent in two cultures and often represent the only source through which heritage culture can be promoted and preserved. This complex process will be illustrated in the next chapter, which describes and analyses a qualitative interview with a mother of two bicultural children.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY: BICULTURAL PARENTING

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of a parent of two bicultural children living in Italy. The aim was to investigate parental ethnotheories and family routines of a Colombian mother to examine her children's bicultural identity development using a semi-structured interview. Because one of the challenges that immigrant parents face is the balance between ethnic and mainstream parenting models to create an optimal environment for their children to develop, the case presented will delve into this issue to shed light on the dynamics involved in bicultural parenting.

3.2. Interview with a mother of bicultural children

Maria (fictional name) was asked to participate in the interview with the aim to contribute to this thesis and despite an initial reluctance, she accepted. The interview revolved around a low-income Latino mother's parenting practices and goals for her young children. The main questions of the interview were: 1) How do you identify yourself culturally? 2) How important is it for you that your children have a bicultural identity? 3) How do you help your children navigate and embrace both Colombian and Italian cultures? 4) Can you give examples of how you maintain this bicultural identity? 5) What are the main differences between Italian and Colombian culture, especially in terms of parenting? 6) What are your dreams for your children and their education?

Maria is a 48 years old woman who arrived in Italy almost thirty years ago from Bogotá, Colombia. She came to Italy because *'I was presented with the opportunity to do so, but any country would have been fine'*. She is a single parent living in a Council house with her two sons aged 10 and 12 years. Following the questions assessing her background information (e.g. name, age, living conditions etc.), she was asked about

her cultural identification: *'I am Colombian'* she stated. One thing emerging from the interview is the importance for her children to be respectful towards Italy and the Italian culture, as she has always wished for a full integration in the territory. In line with this reasoning, she has always spoken Italian at home as this was considered *'better for them'*. It came spontaneous to me questioning if her children were able to speak Spanish, and she confirmed their proficiency in both languages.

Moving to questions 3 and 4, Maria mentioned the strong bond they all had with the family back in Colombia, which was strengthened by the constant contact they were keeping through video calls and text messages, *'My children never miss to text their cousins for their birthdays'*. And she continued *'me and my children have a very good relationship with the family back in Colombia, but when conflicts arise, I feel sad and I always tell them to forgive each other'*. Maria has transmitted the value of the family to her children, who are considered as the most important thing for her as *'children are for life'*. In Colombia the *'familia'* is one the most important values, and she also admitted relying on her relatives to teach Spanish to her children.

The connection with the heritage culture was not limited to the contacts with the family of origin, but also encompassed a frequent involvement with the Colombian community in Udine. Her children got used to attend Colombian festivals and parties since an early age, and they have 'by now' become aware of what it entails. Attending a Colombian party means that *'one knows when it starts, but not when it ends'*. She laughed, and then recalled the time in which she and the children attended one of these events and ended up returning home three days later. A celebration that they never missed was the *'Fiesta de Liberación'*, where Colombian music and dance performances can be appreciated.

After a pause, she recalled the fact that the father of her children was not present physically or economically, and this has caused them a lot of financial constrains. However, she did not feel disheartened by it, but rather turned the situation into a way to

show Carlos and Juan (fictional names) how to deal with life challenges. Maria stated to have always dealt with difficult situations in an optimistic way, in the spirit of “*echarle ganas y no agüitarse*” (never give up or lose up). As many Colombians, she had faith in ‘something superior’ that guards on them and ensure nothing bad happens. She taught her children to have faith because the ‘*Universe has always a way to help*’. She added how this is a typical Colombian way to approach things, which is an important difference she noticed with the Italian culture.

Covering the question number 6, she claimed that ‘*Italians worry too much about the future*’ and do not allow for ‘things’ to unfold as they are meant to. She has never planned much, and also her children thought more about the present than the future (e.g., what they will do tomorrow). An example of how this reasoning applied to everyday life was the lack of planning when it came to cooking meals: despite recognising the importance attributed to have lunch and dinner altogether, she never thought about what to cook beforehand and did not organise accordingly, for example by doing shopping. Despite having lived in Italy for long time, she still could not understand when other mothers asked her ‘*what will you cook for lunch?*’. Therefore, the kids did not display any particular preferences or expectations when it came to food, because she raise them this way. When Maria was little, she could not be picky about food because her parents did not have the means, so she taught her children be content with what was available in the fridge. She recalls those occasions in which they were left with rice only, but no one complained.

Continuing with the interview, she claimed that she has always tried to find time to be with her kids, and has always invited them to be open about their emotions and feelings. Being the dialogue fully open between them, she was always aware of everything happening at school or with the kids’ peers. There was no TV in her kitchen or living room, as Maria wanted her kids to spend time together, talk and playing games without being absorbed by it. She often displayed her affection to her kids by kissing

and hugging them. Despite the young age, she seemed particularly proud of her children helping her with household chores and looking after the animals they owned.

Another core value transmitted to the kids coming from the Colombian heritage was '*respecto*'. Teaching to respect older people, starting from herself as a parent and extending it to grandparents and all the persons older than them, was something she had always put a lot of effort in. Maria was grateful for having been able to listen to the elderly, as they were particularly supportive when problems emerged. She usually tells her children that '*they have to listen to those older than them, because this is how you learn*'.

Despite having been part of the Italian community for a long time, there were things she has never been able to adjust to, such as the bed routine. They all went to bed very late and '*cannot do much about it, we are used like that*'. This often translated in a lack of punctuality in arriving at school. Moreover, she could not give up listening to Latino music at a high volume at home: '*The radio is on from the morning till evening, but only at home, never outside*', and she admitted to have a radio in the bathroom as well, even the neighbours had given up complaining. Children seemed to have integrated this habit into their routines, as they listened to their favourite songs in their bedrooms all day long.

Differently from Italian parents, when other children came to play at home she felt and treated them as if they were their own. When asked to elaborate further, she said that in Colombia children are all treated equally regardless of who they belong to; this translated, for example, into her giving advice to her children's friends. But equality also translated into other fields: '*In Colombia we are all mixed*', so everyone is accepted regardless of one's sexual orientation, ethnicity or background, '*we are as we were all brothers and sisters*', and she told the same to her children, who were less judgemental than the Italian counterparts, she claimed.

To conclude this interview, the last question was addressed. Maria believed that Italian parents are over ambitious, expecting children to be top achievers in everything they do - be it at school or in sports. She instead has always preferred her kids to be happy and serene regardless of everything else. Her approach was much more laid back, relaxed and flexible, and she felt that her children were somehow the same. She wished for them to be serene, enjoy life and be able to *'laugh as much as they can'*. When she was asked if education was not important to her, she said that *'of course education comes first'*. She claimed to feel sad when realising that an increasing number of young people leave high school earlier to find a job. She hoped that her kids would not do the same, and rather pursue university education one day. Her dream was for her kids to be happy and find a job where the priority was not earning *'a lot of money'*, but to find satisfaction in what they do. She concluded by saying *'my children believe to be Colombian at home and Italian outside'*, and she was happy with this narrative.

3.3 Analysis of the interview

The interview presented in the previous paragraph was analysed to explore the socialisation practices used by this Colombian mother to transmit bicultural values to her children. The analysis first focused on parenting attitudes and beliefs, and then on practices. The two main socialisation areas emerging from the discussion were bilingualism and the transmission of bicultural values (Robertson & Grant, 2023).

Attitudes and beliefs

The interview started by asking the participant about her background information: the self-labelling used by Maria (i.e. *'I am Colombian'*), together with the emphasis used in the claim, demonstrates the sense of pride she felt towards her Colombian roots. This constituted the foundation of her commitment to ensuring that her children learned about their heritage culture and took pride in being Colombian. The desire to transmit

heritage values might also be linked to a common concern among Latino parents that, if it was not for them, their children will never learn about their heritage culture, leading to a potential loss of identity.

It was also evident how important it was for Maria that her children became proficient also in the mainstream culture. This was seen as a way to integrate in the territory and show respect towards the host country. A crucial role was also played by the positive attitudes demonstrated by Maria towards her offsprings' bilingualism, which was reinforced by the fact that she was the one speaking Italian at home. The commitment towards the transmission of both cultures was in line with the literature suggesting that parents wish for their children to be competent in both systems (Ochoa, 2023).

One of the main values emerging from the interview was *'familismo'*, which encompasses the loyalty, closeness and harmony felt by individuals within and towards Latino families (Ayón et al., 2010). The frequent contacts between Maria, her children and the family living in Colombia were consistent with this value, strengthened by her desire for them to get along *'when conflicts arise, I always tell them to forgive one another'*. The Colombian family has a further role in this context, as it teaches Spanish to the kids and therefore promotes the connections that are so important for Latino individuals. Familismo has strong collectivist roots, which apparently are in contrast with the more individualistic aim to succeed often witnessed in Latino individuals (Ayón et al., 2010). However, in this particular case, success was reinterpreted as a commitment to education, because *'education comes before everything'*. This was highlighted by Maria disapproving 'those youth' who drop out of high school to find a job. Hence, the participant in this interview was both proud of her heritage roots and proactive in instilling Italian values to her children.

The attitude towards time management emerging from the interview was much more fluid compared to Italian culture. An example was that parties have a start, but not

a defined ending (e.g., Maria and her children returning back home three days later from a celebration). Strict schedules and punctuality were less important compared to social interactions and personal relationships. This was evident also in the fact that bedtime occurred late at night, as the family liked spending more time together rather than going to bed.

Another aspect emerging from this analysis was that Latino people tend to display high positive emotional expressions, which translates into them living the present moment rather than engaging in a lot of planning (Travers, 2021). This view was reflected in Maria's lack of planning what to cook, as well as in the idea that '*Italians worry too much about the future*'. The flexibility and adaptation manifested by Latino individuals is believed to be linked to historical and socio-economic factors, which have required them to be resilient (Sabine, 2017). The collectivistic values characterising Maria's background were also expressed in the idea that children are all equally important and deserving care, regardless of who their parents are. Children's wellbeing is in fact considered a shared responsibility among Colombian parents and the wider community, which again is part of the collective upbringing emphasised in this society. Interdependence and mutual support are deeply-rooted values that lead to consider all kids as part of an extended family. Consequently, children receive care from a multitude of adults besides their immediate parents (Sabine, 2017).

Practices

A number of practices emerging from the interview highlighted how values and ways of thinking are transmitted both directly and indirectly to children. The socialisation process began at home with the mother and was supported by the frequent contacts with relatives. Technology played a critical role in this sense, as it fostered close family bonds allowing for the transmission of cultural values and real-time communication, through which also the Spanish language was learned. The engagement with the local

Colombian community was an additional source that shaped children's identity. Participating in Colombian events and festivals is not only a way to be exposed to traditions, foods and and culture-specific ways of being, but also a way to learn about one's country history. For example, taking part in "El Día de la Independencia", here called 'Fiesta de Liberación' (a Spanish-Italian mix of the term) means gaining knowledge about the struggles that Colombians underwent for independence.

Maria's communication style was open, reflecting the prioritisation of close family bonds that was evident in her proactive approach to keep well-informed about children's social interactions, school activities and issues they might encounter. Problem solving reflects a collectivistic mindset in Latino families, since decisions need to ensure the wellbeing of the entire family unit. Shared meals become an important time to foster open communication and address any issues that might emerge during the day. Open communication is also used to teach 'respecto' (i.e., obedience and consideration for older people). Colombian parents tend to expect children to be more responsible than Italian ones, not only by respecting older people, but also by contributing to household chores. Despite their young age, Maria's children helped her in taking care of the animals and in cleaning the house.

Maria's parenting style could be considered authoritative, which is consistent with research on Latin parenting styles (Ayón et al., 2010). In this interview, this was expressed by her commitment to not allowing her children to spend time in front of the TV while they were eating (this is why she had not even bought a TV for the kitchen or the living room).

A fundamental aspect of Latin American culture is music, which is not only a background activity, but also a way to connect to the heritage culture both socially and emotionally. Listening to these songs 'all day long' promotes cultural pride and provides a sense of connection among family members, increasing their overall wellbeing (Travers, 2021).

Italian culture was associated with punctuality and generally to a more structured approach to daily life. This emerged from the need to follow specific schedules and routines, such as going to bed at a certain time and arrive at school on time. However, Maria showed some difficulties in adjusting to these requirements. A way to transmit Italian values was through Maria speaking Italian at home, thus confirming the strong connection between language and culture as emerged in previous studies (Cheng et al, 2020). The exposure to two cultural systems enables children to detect relevant cultural cues from the environment and appropriately shift between the two systems. The fact that they listened to Latin music at a high volume '*at home but not outside*' and the claim '*I am Colombian at home and Italian outside*' were relevant in the sense, as they provided evidence of the cultural switching.

In conclusion, this case study has provided novel insights into the parenting practices of a Colombian mother living in Italy, who was engaged in making sure her children were competent in both the heritage and the mainstream culture. The interplay of different factors starting from parenting practices, routines, and moving to the broader context, illustrates how bicultural identity development occurs dynamically.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to examine the complex dynamics involved in children's integration of their ethnic and national identities, a process known as biculturalism. Contemporary societies have become increasingly multicultural as a result of the interplay of different factors. The cultural changes emerging from interethnic contact have been shaping the context and the ideologies of both receiving countries and migrant individuals, requiring adaptation from both sides to a diverse and constantly transforming environment.

The extensive literature on acculturation models proposed in social psychology has not been counterbalanced by studies focusing on the stages of development of biculturalism, especially in the child population. While adolescence is widely recognised as a crucial period for identity formation, scholars have demonstrated that ERI emerges much earlier, with infants already demonstrating primordial knowledge of their ethnicity. During the early phases of development, parents play a crucial role as they engage in practices and behaviours aimed at making children competent in both cultures. As children leave infancy and move to early and middle childhood, the number and type of interactions in which they engage increase as they start attending schools and other activities, thus accumulating important experiences crucial for their identity formation. During adolescence, individuals start to make sense of these experiences and also understand the public regard linked to their ethnic identities.

For bicultural children, building a coherent sense of self is particularly challenging as they have to integrate two cultural stimuli in a single identity. Models like the ones proposed by Phinney (1989) and Umaña-Taylor (2014) have argued that processes occurring during adolescence, such as exploration and resolution/commitment are at the core of bicultural competence, and therefore are crucial to achieve a secure sense of self and adjustment. One of the most important concepts in discussing

biculturalism is BII, which refers to the degree to which bicultural individuals perceive their cultural identities, as compatible and integrated or as opposed and conflicting. The way in which these identities are interpreted and integrated becomes a fundamental aspect in the development of identity, as high levels of BII are connected to greater levels of resilience and adaptability. This then translates into an increased overall wellbeing and a better functioning in multicultural situations. However, there has been a paucity of studies on BII in children and youth. This is one of the main challenges of current research, but the recent adaptation of an existing adult questionnaire for younger populations offers a promising avenue for future studies on this relevant topic.

A valuable insight on how children integrate two identities is provided by the interview conducted to the mother of two Italo-Colombian kids. This case study demonstrated how the parental practices, routines and beliefs combined with the broader social interactions to which children are exposed, become fundamental for their bicultural identity formation. In this study, the mother plays a pivotal role in reconciling the Colombian collectivist principles with the more individualistic ones of the Italian culture. She transmits Latin values such as ethnic pride, *familismo* and *respeto* to their children, but at the same time she encourages them to speak Italian. As a result, children enact the Colombian identity at home, and the Italian one in school and other contexts, ultimately identifying themselves as Italo-Colombians. Despite cultural identity has been traditionally considered exclusively in terms of individuals ethnic culture, in recent years a more holistic approach has emerged, according to which individuals present many identities that change in relation to the interactions with different social groups (Knight et al., 2018). Therefore, it would be reductive considering an individual's identity solely on the basis of their ethnic or mainstream culture, as there are other identities - such as gender, religion, or SES - also shaping children overall cultural orientation (Knight et al., 2018).

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