

“Help Them Back Home”: Italian Fantasies of (Neoliberal) Inclusion from *Buona Scuola* to Salvini’s Government

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Abstract

*Amidst growing political turmoil and anti-immigration and anti-Blackness propaganda, this paper explores major shifts in the conceptualization of inclusive education in Italy, from its initial formulation with the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica*, to more recent neoliberal approaches. Drawing on the framework of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), this paper shows how universalistic human rights and Leftist values, underpinning the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* and Renzi’s Law n. 107 of 2015, colloquially known as *Buona Scuola*, are essentially colour-evasive (Annamma, Jackson, Morrison, 2016). The lack of critical considerations of the intersection of racism and ableism within Italian inclusive education discourse has led to the proliferation among school professionals of neoliberal fantasies of inclusion of migrants and refugees. Following the recent creation of a coalition government between the Five Star Movement and the far-right party Northern League, these fantasies have evolved into more populist, overtly racist, and discriminatory narratives. Ultimately, the paper advances an intersectional approach to inclusion in Italy, aimed to disrupt the reproduction of spaces of ableism, racism, and exclusion.*

Introduction

In January 2019, one of Italy's largest refugee centers (*Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo*, CARA) in Castel Nuovo di Porto, the northern suburban area of Rome, was subjected to eviction and was closed down, following the implementation of the new Decree Law on Immigration and Security (Decree Law no. 113/2018), colloquially known as the Salvini Law. In the same month, fifty people, including eight unaccompanied minors, were held aboard the Sea Watch 3 for several hours waiting for authorities to allow them to disembarkⁱ. This was followed by the death of a total of 170 migrants in the week of 21- 27 of January 2019, 117 of whom died when the Libyan coast guard refused to provide assistance to their sinking dinghyⁱⁱ. This sequence of events sparked outrage, especially from members of the Italian Democratic Partyⁱⁱⁱ, the Pope, and civil society. Despite increasing criticism of the new immigration and security law, a significant number of Italians continue to perform colour-evasive solidarity and anti-racism towards migrants and refugees (Migliarini, 2018; Obasuyi, 2019^{iv}), and to reiterate, especially using social media, the mantra of “helping them [the migrants] back home.”^v

In this paper, I situate public opinion and school professionals' discourses and actions within the historical and continuing impact of neoliberalism in contemporary life (Harvey, 2005), and its relationship to oppression at the intersection of disability and race (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2013). Neoliberalism, Harvey (2005) argues, is the doctrine that market exchange is itself a kind of ethics, capable of acting as a guide for all human actions. Its spread has depended upon a reconstitution of state powers such that privatization, finance, and market processes are emphasized. In light of such neoliberal fantasies, members and supporters of the Democratic Party affirmed, especially on social media^{vi}, a seemingly anti-hegemonic and anti-Salvini perspective championing the importance of not shutting down CARA, as it represents a “good example of successful inclusion” of migrants, adults and children alike.

This paper takes a critical stance towards both contemporary and mainstream Right and Left notions of inclusion of migrants and refugees. It explores how integration-style inclusion in Italy has shifted to a neoliberal approach from a Leftist solidarity, and a colour evasive perspective of disability and diversity, based on the need to ensure social and economic resources and public assistance to those in need of additional state support, as developed in the Framework Law n. 104/1971, also known as *Integrazione Scolastica*. Neoliberal inclusion envisions diverse bodies as risky, disposable, irredeemably illiterate, and as only to be employed in low-paid, blue

collar jobs, in spite of their expectations (Migliarini, 2017). This approach to inclusion has been reiterated by the Democratic Party before and after Italy's general elections, on March 4, 2018. To oppose post-truth discourses, anti-immigration, anti-Blackness, and the heteronormative agenda pursued by former interior minister Matteo Salvini, the Democratic Party continues to support forms of neoliberal subaltern inclusion. As Mezzadra (2008) explains, subaltern inclusion is performed through a colour line that defines migrants and refugees' phenotypic absorbability or non-absorbability within the colour of the nation. This colour line has historically produced a set of prismatic positions of greater/lesser proximity to the normative hegemonic conditions (Migliarini, 2018). By intentionally pursuing a subaltern inclusion against populism, the Democratic party continues to perceive migrants as disabled bodies, to be dislocated in the "post-colonial ghetto" (Erevelles, 2014, p. 89).

Drawing from the intersectional and interdisciplinary framework of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), this paper explores two major shifts in the conceptualization of inclusive education policies and practices: (1) from a Leftist solidarity approach, with both Marxist and Catholic undercurrents, of *Integrazione Scolastica* to Renzi's neoliberal policy reform *Buona Scuola* in 2015, and (2) from *Buona Scuola* to an extremist populist discourse of inclusion, whereby only 'genuine' refugees deserve to be absorbed within the nation state. In this paper, DisCrit will function as the theoretical grounding to show how neoliberal policies of subaltern inclusion infiltrate teachers' and educators' daily practices, reproducing systemic inequities and exclusionary spaces.

The paper starts by illustrating the affordances of DisCrit to the analysis of inclusive education policies in the Italian context. This is followed by the methodology that gave rise to the data used. Finally, the paper highlights the urgency of reconceptualizing inclusive education through a DisCrit intersectional approach to refute both the neoliberal and the populist discourse. Re-thinking inclusion in the Italian context in the light of DisCrit triggers a critical debate on how a universalistic, human rights approach to disability and diversity is essentially colour-evasive and may turn out to be counterproductive in the disruption of entrenched racialized inequalities.

Questioning Inclusive Education in Italy through DisCrit

As an interdisciplinary and intersectional framework, the grounding assumption that undergirds DisCrit is that racism and ableism are mutually constituted and collusive, always circulating across time and context (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2013). DisCrit challenges ableist and medical models of disability, exposing the limitations of the binaric thinking of healthy and

disabled, naming the social construction of disability, in order to illustrate the multiple dimensions of disability and its interconnections with race and other social constructed identities (e.g. gender, class, sexual orientation). DisCrit acknowledges how multiply-marginalized groups are most aware of a system of interlocking oppressions rooted in white supremacy, and of how these oppressions function and intertwine, as well as possible disruption (Annamma & Morrison, 2018, p. 72). Thus, DisCrit places multiply-marginalized subjects at the center of an analysis that seeks to dismantle racially separate outcomes.

Reading Italian inclusive education policies through DisCrit provides a unique opportunity to highlight how Italian solidarity and equality principles continue to be rooted in white privilege. DisCrit captures more accurately ways that the ideology of refusing to acknowledge race, racism, and ableism – as normalizing and interdependent processes that maintain white supremacy - functions in Italian society, and in the discourses of educators operating in schools and refugee centers. Said differently, DisCrit uncovers the colour-evasive racial ideology that has seeped into various Italian institutions, and most importantly education policy and practice.

There are seven tenets of DisCrit that show the possibilities of re-imagining inclusive policies and practices:

- DisCrit focuses on the systemic interdependent processes that render racism and ableism 'normal' within our society (Collins, 2011). These mutually constitutive processes are often rendered invisible to restrict notions of normalcy to those desired and to marginalize those perceived as 'different' in society and schools (Connor et al, 2016).
- DisCrit values multidimensional identities and finds single notions of identities, such as race *or* disability, troublesome. It acknowledges how experience with stigma and segregation often varies based on other identity markers intersecting with race and disability (i.e. gender, language, class) and how this negotiation of multiply-stigmatized identities adds complexities.
- DisCrit rejects the understanding of both race and disability as primarily biological facts and recognizes the social construction of both as society's response to 'differences' from the norm. Simultaneously, DisCrit acknowledges that these categories hold profound significance in people's lives, as is evident in the marginalization of students of colour or migrant students with disability labels, who are more likely to be segregated than their white peers with the same label (Fierros & Conroy, 2002).

- DisCrit privileges voices of multiply-marginalized students and communities, traditionally missing in research (Matsuda, 1987). Consequently, DisCrit recognizes those who have been pushed outside of the educational field through the discourse and practices of special segregated classrooms.
- DisCrit considers how whiteness and ability have been used historically and through the legal system to deny rights to those who have been constructed as raced and disabled (Valencia, 1997). Schools have historically functioned as spaces to sort and 'fix' multiply-marginalized children, curing them of their disability or problematic behavior.
- DisCrit recognizes whiteness and ability as 'property,' conferring rights on those who claim those statuses and placing at a disadvantage those who are unable to access them (Adams & Erevelles, 2016).
- DisCrit highlights the importance of resisting the existing state of education, which places the ideal citizen at the center and often segregates the unwanted into spaces less public (Erevelles, 2014).

The following section discusses the methodology used in the study considered here, and the themes that have emerged from the analysis.

Methodology

The data presented in this paper are part of a larger corpus of data collected through qualitative case study methodology (Bassey, 1999). The larger study looks at the intersections of 'race,' disability, and migratory status in relation to the educational and social experiences of forced migrant children. The research questions I attempt to answer in this paper are:

- How are disability, race, language, and migratory status historically articulated within Italian inclusive policies?
- How is DisCrit contributing to highlight the colour-evasiveness of existing models of Italian inclusion for migrants and refugees with disabilities?
- How are these narratives translated within educational professionals' discourses and practices?

Research Design

The research I present in this paper includes (1) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010) of the policies of *Integrazione Scolastica* and *Buona Scuola* and some recent newspapers article discussing the inclusion of refugees, following the eviction of refugees from

the CARA center in Rome in January 2019. It also draws on (2) data gathered through a qualitative, constructivist grounded theory conducted in nine refugee services in the city of Rome, in the period between 2014 and 2017. Data collection for this study involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 27 participants divided into two groups: the professional participants (17) in the area of education, health care, and social assistance, and the asylum-seeking and refugee children participants (10), mostly from sub-Saharan West African countries, who were either in the process of applying for asylum, had applied for it and were waiting for the application results, or had obtained the results at the territorial commission for asylum. The professionals were chosen because of their roles as managers, educators, teachers, social workers, psychologists, neuropsychiatrists, and cultural mediators, with a different level of previous work experience in the field of migration. We chose to use Fairclough's (2010) four step model of CDA because its main purpose is to analyze the opaque and transparent structural relationship of dominance, discrimination, power, and control, as manifested in language (ibid.).

Inclusive Education from *Integrazione Scolastica* to *Buona Scuola*

Integrazione Scolastica between Catholic and Leftist solidarity and universal human rights

Historically, one of the major challenges of inclusive education worldwide is the struggle against discrimination and macro-exclusions that are inherent in special education in segregated settings, and the various forms of micro-exclusion happening in both 'special' and mainstream settings (D'Alessio, 2011). Decisions about placement are often made on the basis of students' physical and intellectual impairments or cultural and social differences, and they deny some students their right to education with their peers. In 1977, Italy took a different path. Despite systemic constraints and lack of research and resources, the country in fact passed a piece of anti-discriminatory legislation known as *Integrazione Scolastica*. As a consequence of implementing this policy, education was made compulsory for all students, including those with disability, in regular classrooms with their non-disabled peers. Since then, the Italian government has removed its segregated institutions and special schools to the extent that the country has been internationally described as an inclusive education system (Ferri, 2008). Students have been encouraged to attend their neighborhood school regardless of 'disability' or any special needs. Education authorities have been required to provide financial support and specialist staff to guarantee personalized forms of teaching and learning to all students who need additional support.

Given these considerations, *Integrazione Scolastica* appears to create an ideal legislative, educational, pedagogical, and social context for the development of inclusive education. However, recent research shows that, despite the passing of such progressive policy, disabled children and migrant and refugee children classified as having Special Educational Needs are being discriminated against whilst attempting to avail themselves of the right to education in regular schools (Bocci, 2016; D'Alessio, 2011; Migliarini et al, 2018). Additionally, *Integrazione Scolastica* targeted mostly white Italian disabled children and children from the South of Italy (D'Alessio, 2011), while being largely silent about Black AfroItalian children. This section focuses on the analysis of the Catholic, Leftist, and universalistic perspectives underpinning *Integrazione Scolastica*, and how these aspects are colour-evasive and rooted in white supremacy.

The years when *Integrazione Scolastica* became compulsory were characterized by political upheavals, which saw opposing forces – the Christian democrats, the neo-fascist movements, and radical communist forces – fighting against the state. As such, *Integrazione scolastica* has been interpreted as a government policy effort to meet pressure groups' demands to guarantee universal rights (D'Alessio, 2011). This is evident by the fact that the policy of *Integrazione* at school was not originally intended for disabled students but for migrant students who were abandoning southern agricultural regions for northern industrial towns. In those years, the lobbying of disabled people's associations for mainstreaming was not a separate voice but part of a broader social movement, inspired by a Marxist but also Catholic ideology, which saw workers and university students campaigning together for justice and democratic rights for all minorities. The Marxist perspective that influenced the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* is evident in the government call for comprehensiveness to break the reproduction of inequalities of the selective Fascist education system. It also encouraged the rise of pressure-groups constituted of different organizations of disabled people, who played an active role in the passing of this anti-discriminatory legislation. Thus, the disability rights movements, represented by parents and associations, joined the movement for democracy and justice and fought for the passing of anti-discriminatory legislative measures. Conversely, the Catholic perspective influencing *Integrazione Scolastica* has attempted to establish its role through discursive practices of dependence, vulnerability, and assistance concerning disability and the management of disabled people in society (D'Alessio, 2011).

In the Italian context, Catholicism has affected the construction of the notion of disability, and consequently, the formulation and implementation of the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica*. The Church seems to have been central to the construction of disability as a 'personal tragedy,' where the disabled person is perceived as someone 'needy' and in need of assistance. As D'Alessio (2011) notes, this is particularly true when reading the Gospels, where Jesus Christ restores health to the poor and the deformed. The Church's statements on disability as a "ruin for the world" and on disabled people as "blessed creatures who will be compensated in heaven" (D'Alessio, 2011, p. 20) have a negative impact on the lives of disabled people, as they promulgate passivity and acceptance rather than political action, participation, and possibly rebellion. To put it simply, the Roman Catholic Church has always played a central role in Italy and its influence is still visible in the organization of the welfare state and in the reinforcing of discursive practices of dependence, vulnerability, and assistance, concerning disability and the management of disabled people in society.

When *Integrazione Scolastica* was implemented, a leftist conceptualization of the welfare state played a central role in the redistribution of rights and wealth in post-WW II Italy. Citizens were entitled to economic support on the basis of loss (for example, a limb during the war) or incapacity (for example, civil invalids). It was important that individuals were not 'guilty or responsible' for their loss or incapacity (D'Alessio, 2011). In order to identify and ascertain such a condition, the role of the medical professionals as arbiters of the redistribution of wealth became central. Thus, the welfare system became a tool for re-distributing wealth according to the severity of 'needs' and it represented the rationale for the allocation of resources within the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica*.

The development of a welfare society based on the collaboration among different bodies and state schools is still a crucial element of *Integrazione Scolastica*, as it contributes to the development of a social approach to disability and education that is based upon solidarity, community assistance, and networking among local bodies (see Law n. 328/2000, Parlamento Italiano, 2000). However, the solidarity and community approach to disability and diversity does not focus on race, or on the need to differentiate between impairment (individual) and disability (social), or on the active political role disabled people should play in the process of change, but rather on the need to ensure social and economic resources and public assistance to those people who needed additional state support.

Interestingly, more recently the ideas of solidarity and welfare have undergone significant change in terms of how children who are forced into a migrant status are dealt with. White privilege in welfare distribution for Black migrant and disabled children manifests itself in the intentional lack of coordination and availability of economic resources and the fact that certain educational, health, and social services are available to them only for a limited amount of time, so that they avoid being a burden on the Italian State.

An example of such White privilege in service distribution in Italy is offered by Participant N, a neuropsychiatrist in charge of Special Educational Needs and the disability certification of migrant children in a hospital in Rome, who is specifically set up to offer healthcare to migrants and refugees:

“[A] lot of resources have been taken away from schools, health and social services, so even if we have good theoretical models [referring to paediatric neuropsychiatry] in the end these models are not applied because we don't have the economic resources, and thus, the services don't have all the professional skills required, especially those for migrant children ... There is a lack of monitoring and ... absence of co-ordination, so I contextualize our service so that you understand that it is not our fault, but we operate in a difficult context for co-ordination”

(Participant N, Prof_Serv5)

Similarly, Participant X talks about “fragmented intervention” in the integration of unaccompanied and ‘vulnerable’ asylum-seeking and refugee children:

“There is no systemic approach to unaccompanied migrant and forced migrant children at local level. The local health services do not have long-term projects to deal with mental health problems of unaccompanied children, they do not have the training or the skills ... What we have is a series of fragmented interventions, and I mean if you are an unaccompanied refugee child you are already internally fragmented and this disorganized system at local level just makes your situation worse. ... I mean if you go to the local health service and you start talking about ethno-psychiatry they look at you and say, “What are you talking about?””

(Participant X, Prof_Serv2)

Participants N and X's accounts reveal how migrant and refugee children are strategically denied services or allocated to low-resourced ones with untrained professionals. From a DisCrit perspective, this implies shifting the attention away from institutional failings into positioning migrant and refugees as careless, troubled, illiterate, or incapable of learning, instead of offering the right kind of social and academic support. This leaves room for subjective clinical judgement of high incidence categories of disabilities (i.e. learning, emotional, and mild cognitive disabilities), which are constructed more often for migrant and refugee children based on desired norms (Hart et al, 2010).

Integrazione Scolastica appears to be an essentially un-problematic and perfectly designed top-down initiative that led to the development of inclusive education. It seems to be considered merely as a technical “debate about the quality of educational provision” and “divorced from the views of disabled [and diverse] people themselves” (Oliver, 1996, p. 82-83), as such a tradition leaves educational systems and mainstream schools unquestioned.

Integrazione Scolastica was used to support major interests of ruling groups and to maintain the status quo of the newly-born state against possible perils, as exemplified by the social upheavals of the 70s (D'Alessio, 2011). The interests of ruling groups, for example State and Church, were transferred and shared by different lobbies – teachers, psychologists, educationalists, parents, and disabled people - as the only possible alternative to segregated education (ibid.). Subsequent legislative measures, such as the 1992 Framework Law, or the 1994 Presidential Decree, known as the *Atto di Indirizzo*, take a step back from an ecological perception of the notion of disability, reaffirming the view of disability as a personal problem, the hierarchical position of medical professionals in the certification of ‘handicap’ (term reported by the '94 Presidential Decree) and in the implementation of *Integrazione Scolastica*.

Neoliberal Inclusion in Renzi's Buona Scuola

Until recently, Italy was one of the few countries in the world that did not use the classification of Special Educational Needs (SEN) to identify students at risk of school failure. In December 2012, the Italian Ministry of Public Education published a legislative measure known as the Ministerial Directive on the ‘Intervention tools for pupils with special educational needs and the territorial organization of inclusive education.’ Soon after this directive was issued, a new circular was passed known as the Circular n.8 (dated March 6, 2013), providing operational guidelines to the schools on how to implement SEN policies in everyday practice.

With the passing of these new educational policies, the country officially introduced the macro-category of SEN (*Bisogni Educativi Speciali/BES* in Italian) to refer to those students who 'diverge from the norm.' The new Italian macro-category of SEN includes three sub-categories of need: 1) Students with severe physical or intellectual impairments diagnosed by the local health units and according to the school integration policy (or Framework Law 104/1992); 2) Students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and dyscalculia, certified by a public or private clinical diagnosis according to Law 170/2010; 3) Students with cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic disadvantages, without any official medical diagnosis or documenting procedure, but who still require additional support.

Such a three-tiered categorization system, however, foresees different types of provision for learners: whilst the first sub-category of SEN students is entitled to additional provision and funding (i.e. supplementary aids and specialist teachers), the second and third categories are instead only entitled to receive personalized support, which may include compensatory or dispensatory measures put in place by class teachers. In other words, extra funding and specialized school staff are not provided to the schools for the second and third sub-categories of students. The consequence of the introduction of this new macro-category has been the increase in the number of students, especially those from migrant backgrounds, identified as 'SEN' (MIUR, 2014).

In 2015, the Italian government passed a new school reform known as the 'Good School' (*Buona scuola*) to improve the quality of the national education system and to make it more inclusive. A series of decrees were then enacted in 2017 to provide technical guidelines on how to implement policies. Decree n. 66, in particular, set the mandatory steps needed to promote the inclusion of students identified as having SEN and 'disability.' The Italian Ministry of Public Education argues that these SEN policies and the new Reform are the new 'Italian way for inclusion' as they increase the level of school responsiveness, as well as the accountability of classroom teachers towards 'learners at risk of academic failure.' In contrast, Disability Studies (DS) researchers and scholars across the country have taken a critical stance towards the new SEN policies and the new Reform. DS scholars believe that these latest policies reproduce a neoliberal and pathological view of inclusion, considering migrant and diverse bodies as only to be employed in low-paid, blue collar jobs, in spite of their expectations and life goals (Medeghini, 2013; D'Alessio 2014; Migliarini, 2018).

As a consequence of these neoliberal reforms in inclusive education, the manufacturing of migrant children's cultural and linguistic difference as a 'deficit' (see Tomlinson, 2017) infiltrates the discourse of Italian professionals working in refugee services:

"There was a girl subjected to forced migration in the first year of middle school who had socialization and behavioural issues and learning difficulties. In the beginning she was sent here by the school because of her learning difficulties ... so I met the teachers, the social worker, because her family is poor, they live in a squatted building, and after these meetings I met the family with the cultural mediator. During the first meeting with the family only the dad wanted to be present, but then thanks to the work of the cultural mediator we managed to engage her mum too, and we started working on family roles, and at school we encouraged the girl to play with groups of Italian children. In the end I confirmed the initial diagnosis of learning disability."

(Participant N, Prof_Serv5)

As a neuropsychiatrist, Participant N has been accorded the greatest status in placement deliberation. The *poor, migrant, patriarchal family, living in a squat* in central Rome is the last to be involved in the process, since it is explicitly perceived as less compliant, socially dangerous, and in need of fixing (Erevelles, 2000). Interestingly, Participant N focuses attention directly on the girl's family, perceived as less valuable and causing the girls' troubled behavior in school, without mentioning the specific issues the girl may have encountered in school nor the way teachers have engaged with her. Since it is not possible to force the girl into a segregated classroom, due to Italian inclusive policy and adherence to the Statement, Participant N disables the girl by assigning her a learning disability label based on a dubious judgement influenced by the teachers' implicit bias about the girl and her family, thereby enacting micro-exclusion. She positions the girl as 'dis-respectful' of the essential elements of Italian culture.

In the Decree n. 67, 2017, inclusion is defined as a process that is concerned *only* with students with disability, thus denying the achievements of *Integrazione Scolastica* as a process of change of the entire education system:

The new Decree policy measures must be applied only to those children (boys and girls) attending pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, and who possess a statement of disability according to Law 104/1992 in order to safeguard their right to education ... (Decree 67, Art. 2).

It also reads:

School inclusion can be implemented through the development and the shared usage of an individual educational plan (IEP), which is an integral part of the individual project of life according to the law 328/2000 (Art. 2, comma 2).

Such clauses clearly indicate that inclusive education is now seen as a process that is only concerned with students who are identified as having SEN and 'disability,' rather than with changing the education system to respond to the totality of the student population. Inclusion is also delegated to specialist staff and the compiling of an individual educational plan. There are no guidelines on how current 'regular' school practices could be improved, or what changes would be needed to modify current ways of delivering instruction and educating classroom teachers. In contrast, the focus of these policies remains on individual functioning and what is not working *within the child*, leaving the educational contexts unaltered.

Few Italian professionals seem to be aware of the disablement of migrant children. Those with [more years of] experience working with refugee children offer a critical view on the construction of learning disability by the majority of Italian teachers in public schools, and emphasize how the policy of *Integrazione Scolastica* fails asylum-seeking and refugee children, actively contributing to forms of micro-exclusions and pathologization in mainstream educational settings (Migliarini, et al, 2019).

From *Buona Scuola* to Populist Forms of 'Inclusion'

The lack of self-criticism of the Left on the limits of existing neoliberal inclusion models, or an indifference towards discussing Whiteness, problematic constructions of race, and implicit biases in the Italian context, fueled by a continuous economic crisis, has led to the election of a populist, far right government. Since fall 2018, the League (*Lega Nord*) that rules in coalition with the Five Stars Movement (M5) has begun dismantling neoliberal inclusion initiatives developed by the political Left, adopting neo-fascist responses to diversity with the slogan "*prima gli Italiani*" (i.e., Italians first). Through the deployment of an anti-immigrant and anti-Blackness stance, Northern League and M5 policies defend mainly the interests of able-bodied, cis-gender, white Italian men. Italian women are increasingly discouraged from having a career and instead Italian families are promised farming land upon the birth of a third child.^{vii} The nexus between land/nation state, security, and white supremacy reminds us all that Fascism is back, or perhaps it has never disappeared from Italians' consciousness.

By effectively abolishing humanitarian protections, and refusing or withdrawing international protections, the Decree Law no. 113/2018, colloquially known as Salvini's Law, will negatively affect unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors turning 18 in 2019 who sought humanitarian protection before the Decree was enacted. Save the Children has recently issued a report warning about the threats to the inclusive process for unaccompanied minors seeking humanitarian protection. Many of these children, close to adult age, may find their humanitarian protection request rejected, as it has already happened in some Italian regions. Thus, they could find themselves deprived of the legal protection and the rights they previously had as minors within the Italian context (Save the Children, 2018).

Currently, almost 8,000 asylum applications filed by migrant children arriving in Italy are pending. Most have been filed by unaccompanied children and adolescents, with no relatives or reference adults at their side. In 2017, they represented 65% of all asylum seekers under the age of 18 in Italy. Moreover, of the more than 11,300 unaccompanied migrant minors currently in Italy, almost 6 out of 10 (59.9%) will turn 18 in 2019, in many cases as early as January 1 (Save the Children, 2018). As a result of Salvini's Law, many of these young migrants may be left in conditions of extreme vulnerability, and their already precarious path of inclusion may be irretrievably lost. They might be forced to interrupt their education and training courses to be deported to their home countries. At the same time, younger migrants may be discouraged from following inclusive education strategies due to this fear for deportation (*ibid.*). The Salvini's Law focus on security and border patrol is jeopardizing the principles of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed and ratified by Italy in 1990, and particularly the child's best interests.

The new Decree Law on immigration and security has also had a significant impact on the wider society as a whole, with an increase in discrimination and racism against migrant children in schools and public spaces (Amnesty International, 2018). The current political battle is between neo-fascist and neoliberal perspectives and leaves very little space for a more grounded, research-informed, and critical reflection on inclusion. Undoubtedly, the Democratic Party has lost several important opportunities to address the problematic aspects of models of inclusion, and to pass the *IUS SOLI*, the law that would have given citizenship and voting rights to children born and raised in Italy from migrant parents. In such times of political crisis, Gramsci's (1921) words seem appropriate:

“Fascism presented itself as the anti-party, opened its doors to all candidates, gave way to an inordinate multitude to cover with a varnish of

vague and nebulous political ideals the wild overflowing of passions, odes, desires. Fascism has thus become a matter of custom, identified with the antisocial psychology of some strata of the Italian people”^{viii}.

Conclusion: Rethinking Inclusion through DisCrit

Adopting the intersectional framework of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), this paper has explored the changes in the ideology of inclusion in the Italian context, which shifted from a Marxist and Catholic approach of *Integrazione Scolastica* in the 1970s to the 1990s and early 2000s, to a neoliberal one, following the implementation of Renzi’s Law *Buona Scuola* in 2015. Such a neoliberal view is still held by the Italian Left party (*Partito Democratico*), in opposition to the right-wing party led by Interior Minister Salvini, who is pursuing an anti-immigration and anti-Blackness agenda, with negative consequences for the perception of diversity within Italian society. To find a way out of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic but still neoliberal perspectives, this paper proposes the urgency of reconceptualizing inclusion in the Italian context through the intersectional and interdisciplinary framework of DisCrit in Education.

In a country where solidarity is still expressed in a colour-evasive way (Annamma, Jackson, Morrison, 2016), reframing inclusion according to the tenets of DisCrit seems crucial. Applying the critical intersectional framework of DisCrit in Education in the Italian context provides insights into the ways that disability serves as an instrument of institutionalized systems of disadvantage for migrant students, largely because of definitional assumptions associated with the technical-rational understanding of disability (Migliarini, 2018). A commitment to an intersectional approach to inclusion in Italy, and indeed globally, would address much of the ableism, racism, and intersecting oppressions that are reiterated through current inclusive education policies and practices. Reflecting and modifying these policies through an intersectional perspective will improve the achievement, behaviour, and categorization of migrant students and all students. Without an explicit commitment to address the interconnection of racism and ableism, these intrinsically disabling practices and policies will persist. As this paper has attempted to show, a universalistic, human rights approach to disability and diversity is essentially colour-evasive and can be counterproductive in the disruption of entrenched racialized inequalities. Thus, an intersectional approach to inclusive education can guide educators to understand how multiple forms of discrimination push students out of schools, and lead parents to mistrust schools and education.

Notes

- ⁱ Mediterranean Rescue: https://mediterraneaescue.org/en/news-en/immediately-a-safe-harbour-for-sea-watch-3-mediterranea-ready-to-intervene/?fbclid=IwAR00D1NqbtPAUbQo_NM4v1D9um5OY0t2CFf9tmQ6f5a_4VYK7wN_msAFSdg
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46933724>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ A coalition of 'progressive' Leftist, indeed very neoliberal, parties.
- ^{iv} Available at: <https://thevision.com/attualita/razzismo-antirazzisti/> [Ita].
- ^v Available at: <http://www.retisolidali.it/hate-speech-e-societa-civile/> [Ita].
- ^{vi} <http://www.retisolidali.it/hate-speech-e-societa-civile/>.
- ^{vii} <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/10/30/terreni-gratis-per-chi-ha-il-terzo-figlio-se-e-un-modo-per-contrastare-la-denatalita-non-credo-funzionera/4731298/>.
- ^{viii} <http://www.centrogramsoci.it/riviste/nuovo/ordine%20nuovo%20p5.pdf>.

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