UNIVERSITA' DELLA CALABRIA

Dipartimento di Culture, Educazione e Società

Dottorato di Ricerca in

Politica, Cultura e Sviluppo

&

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION OF SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND

Department of Cultural Studies

Con il contributo di (Ente finanziatore)

Programma Operativo Regionale Calabria FSE/FESR 2014 – 2020 (CCI 2014IT16M2OP006)"

CICLO XXXIV

Arab-Islamic education systems in the experience of migrants and refugees in Europe

Settore Scientifico Disciplinare L-OR-10 and SPS/08

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To Alberto Ventura,

Academic professor

Whose extraordinary breadth of knowledge has enchanted generations of students,

And Master

Of rare humanity.

Riassunto

La presente ricerca indaga l'impatto delle politiche di costruzione dell'identità nei sistemi educativi dei paesi arabi mediterranei sulle esperienze degli alunni di lingua araba emigrati in Europa, analizzando il loro contesto educativo di origine da un punto di vista storico e culturale e il loro intero percorso educativo, prendendo in considerazione anche le esperienze di genitori e insegnanti. Le domande di ricerca nascono dalle riflessioni dell'educazione interculturale, nella cui letteratura emerge spesso la necessità di approfondire gli universi culturali degli alunni con background migratorio (da Ouellet 1991 a Fiorucci 2011), ma le risposte a questi appelli sono rare. Come viene sottolineato nella letteratura afferente all'educazione postcoloniale, l'educazione interculturale spesso sostiene la convivenza tra culture senza considerare le reali relazioni economiche e di potere tra i paesi di partenza e quelli di accoglienza. Inoltre, si attribuisce grande importanza teorica alla storia in quanto disciplina che concorre alla formazione dell'identità degli studenti e alla loro attitudine verso gli altri popoli, ma difficilmente poi si considera la storia dei paesi di origine degli alunni immigrati, in particolare la storia coloniale, come un elemento determinante nella costruzione dell'identità e dell'appartenenza nei processi educativi.

L'analisi dei sistemi educativi di partenza viene effettuata a partire dalla categorizzazione di Mernissi (1992) dei sistemi educativi arabi in dinamici o statici, a seconda che insegnino a rispettare o ad attraversare i confini, e seguendo l'analisi multifattoriale di Nussbaum (2011) dei sistemi educativi per la quala le discipline umanistiche hanno un ruolo chiave nella trasmissione dell'identità. I valori tradizionali vengono affrontati attraverso la teorizzazione di Habermas; l'impatto del colonialismo e del nazionalismo sull'identità e l'istruzione è analizzato sulla base delle riflessioni di Anderson (1991). Il rapporto tra educazione ed economia è affrontato attraverso i concetti sviluppati da Bordieau & Passeron (1990), secondo cui le società delegano all'educazione il compito di riprodurre valori e relazioni sociali specifici necessari alla riproduzione delle élite.

La metodologia utilizzata è l'analisi multifattoriale (Nussbaum, 2011), di cui la ricostruzione storica e le interviste qualitative sono parti fondamentali. Il focus è su quegli aspetti dei diversi sistemi educativi che mirano alla formazione dell'identità degli alunni, facendo riferimento ai fattori identificati da Nussbaum come centrali (economia, politica, ruolo e contenuti delle discipline umanistiche, ruolo delle lingue e culture straniere, religione, trattamento delle minoranze interne e dei migranti, politiche educative di genere), nonché sul ruolo che i sistemi educativi svolgono nella riproduzione sociale e nella costruzione della nazione. I risultati della ricostruzione storica sono verificati attraverso la ricerca sul campo in cui le esperienze di alunni, genitori e insegnanti di lingua araba sono raccolte attraverso interviste semistrutturate con approccio narrativo e analizzate con l'aiuto del software MaxQdata a partire da codici derivati dai

principali fattori dell'analisi multifattoriale e modificati deduttivamente a partire dai contenuti delle interviste. Il campione delle interviste è categorizzato in base a paese di partenza e di arrivo, sesso ed età, stato di istruzione, sintesi dei percorsi educativi e peculiarità, come ad esempio l'appartenenza etnica o essere nati in un paese diverso dalla madrepatria (vedi tab.6). La maggioranza degli intervistati proviene da Siria e Marocco, gli altri da Algeria, Tunisia, Egitto, Libia, Giordania e Palestina. Molti siriani hanno attraversato il Libano, la Libia o la Turchia prima di arrivare in Italia, Germania e Svezia, altri si sono trasferiti direttamente in Europa. Anche alcuni marocchini si sono trasferiti in Libia prima di migrare in Italia ma la maggior vi sono arrivati direttamente, come Tunisini ed Egiziani. In Marocco, l'unico appartenente ad una minoranza ad essere stato intervistato è un educatore proveniente dall'Africa subsahariana; invece per quanto riguarda la Siria, sono stati intervistati cristiani armeni e arabi, curdi, circassi e palestinesi e arabi. Infine, ci sono 2 casi particolari di alunni nati in Italia e che vi hanno iniziato la scuola prima di tornare nei paesi di origine dei genitori.

Lo sviluppo storico dei sistemi educativi nazionali e l'analisi multifattoriale, sintetizzate nella tab.5, mostrano un andamento simile in tutte le aree considerate e le significative eccezioni. Lo sviluppo storico dell'istruzione può essere suddiviso in 5 periodi: età classica arabo-musulmana, il periodo ottomano, coloniale, dell'indipendenza e della globalizzazione. L'analisi ha permesso di identificare Marocco e Siria come casi studio poiché in essi si realizzano tutti i passaggi fondamentali dello sviluppo dell'educazione nell'area considerata, non configurandosi quindi come eccezioni come il Libano o la penisola Araba, ma si giunge a due declinazione diverse della identità arabo-islamica.

L'educazione tradizionale trasmetteva l'identità religiosa e l'appartenenza a imperi multietnici, offrendo a tutti la stessa educazione e identificazione con la civiltà islamica senza soffocare le identità particolari e a prescindere dalla posizione sociale. In epoca contemporanea, in competizione con l'istruzione tradizionale, i missionari cristiani e l'alta istruzione tecnica moderna ottomana, alcune potenze locali istituirono sistemi educativi indipendenti, come la Tunisia e l'Egitto, costruendo il modello dei sistemi educativi sovraconfessionali nazionali odierni. Questo processo è stato interrotto dalle potenze coloniali, che hanno creato sistemi educativi per formare servitori specializzati con valori europei, contribuendo alla creazione di élite nazionaliste. Al tempo dell'indipendenza, gli stati costruirono sistemi educativi per trasmettere l'habitus delle élite nazionaliste arabe. L'arabizzazione ha caratterizzato tutti i paesi arabi, con forti narrazioni nazionaliste. Si svilupparono quindi due diversi approcci alla modernizzazione dell'istruzione: quello laico e socialista sviluppatosi in Egitto durante il governo di Nasser, modello per gli altri paesi arabi al tempo dell'indipendenza, e uno religioso e capitalista con sede nella penisola arabica, divenuto il nuovo modello educativo al tempo della globalizzazione. I due modelli sono ancora in

competizione nel determinare l'identità degli alunni oggi. La spinta all'arabizzazione si è attenuata nella maggior parte dei paesi, portando al riconoscimento dei diritti delle minoranze linguistiche.
Marocco e Siria hanno seguito un percorso leggermente diverso da questa tendenza genele. Il Marocco, a cavallo del millennio, ha optato per un'educazione ancorata alla religione e all'identità tradizionale ma non aggressiva nei confronti degli altri. L'educazione marocchina trasmette l'identità musulmana e nazionale come sovrapposte e supera le differenze etniche con la fedeltà al re. Le disparità economiche sono però estreme, con un sistema di istruzione pubblico debole che ha scarsi risultati educativi e uno privato molto sviluppato che riproduce l'élite. Nonostante ciò, i valori trasmessi dall'istruzione pubblica e privata sono gli stessi e gli intervistati mostrano di apprezzarli e condividerli. Dalla parte opposta c'è il sistema educativo siriano, che, al contrario, ha ottimi risultati a livello di apprendimento ma il cui regime politico influenza negativamente la libertà di pensiero, opinione e discussione in classe e propaga attraverso le discipline umanistiche un'identità araba aggressiva verso le minoranze e il resto del mondo. A partire dal 2011, la guerra civile ha portato alla frammentazione del sistema educativo nazionale con la creazione di diversi sistemi, ciascuno con l'obiettivo di costruire la propria comunità immaginata e trasmettere determinate narrazioni e valori alle generazioni future. All'istruzione governativa si sono contrapposte quelle del Daesh, dei ribelli arabi e dell'organizzazione autonoma curda, espressioni delle diverse narrazioni e habitus che coesistono nello stesso paese.
In Europa, i principali scontri culturali si riscontrano nell'ambito della religione, delle discipline scolastiche di storia e geografia e nella vita sociale. Per quanto riguarda la religione, come afferma Habermas, lo scontro non è tra fedi diverse, in quanto gli intervistati sono abituati a frequentare la scuola con alunni e insegnanti cristiani spesso già nei paesi di origine. Lo scontro avviene invece con l'ateismo dell'ambiente in generale o di alcuni docenti di filosofia o scienze, che non danno la stessa dignità intellettuale alle posizioni religiose e atee. Nelle discipline umanistiche non ci sono scontri su contenuti legati ai paesi di partenza poiché sono trattati molto poco. Il conflitto è sul colonialismo, nei loro paesi considerato l'evento storico più importante della contemporaneità, soprattutto in Siria, dove è la pietra angolare dell'intera identità siriana. La questione palestinese resta un punto di riferimento identitario essenziale. I siriani e gli egiziani sono coloro i quali manifestano maggiore disagio e che raccontano differenze profonde negli insegnamenti scolastici in merito a questa questione. L'ultimo punto riguarda gli scontri culturali concernenti l'importanza dell'autonomia dei bambini nel processo di istruzione, lo stile genitoriale, l'amicizia e la vita sociale che emergono in Svezia e Germania ma che non vengono mai segnalati in Italia, sottolineando una differenza non tra l'educazione e la cultura araba ed europea, o tra cristiana e musulmana, ma tra quella mediterranea e quella nordica.

Summary

This research examines the influence of identity construction policies in the educational systems of Mediterranean Arab countries on the experiences of Arabic-speaking pupils who have migrated to Europe. It analyzes their educational background within a historical and cultural framework, as well as their entire educational journey, while also considering the perspectives of parents and teachers. The research questions stem from the reflections in the field of intercultural education, which often highlight the importance of delving into the cultural backgrounds of pupils with a migration history (from Ouellet 1991 to Fiorucci 2011). However, there is a scarcity of studies that provide answers to these inquiries. The literature on postcolonial education underscores that intercultural education often promotes cultural coexistence without adequately considering the economic and power dynamics between the countries of origin and the host countries. Additionally, there is significant theoretical significance attributed to history as a discipline that shapes pupils' identity and their perspectives towards different cultures. However, the history of immigrant students' countries of origin, particularly their colonial history, is seldom regarded as a decisive factor in the formation of identity and a sense of belonging within educational processes. The examination of the educational systems of origin is conducted using Mernissi's (1992) categorization of Arab educational systems into dynamic or static, based on their emphasis on teaching respect or encouraging crossing borders. Nussbaum's (2011) multifactorial analysis of educational systems, which highlights the vital role of the humanities in identity transmission, is employed. The exploration of traditional values draws upon Habermas' theoretical framework, while the influence of colonialism and nationalism on identity and education is analyzed through Anderson's (1991) reflections. The relationship between education and economics is addressed using the concepts developed by Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), which suggest that societies entrust education with the task of reproducing specific values and social relations necessary for the reproduction of elites. The research methodology employed encompasses multifactorial analysis (Nussbaum, 2011), with a particular emphasis on historical reconstruction and qualitative interviews as integral components. The study focuses on exploring the aspects within various educational systems that contribute to the formation of pupils' identities, specifically referencing the factors identified by Nussbaum as central: economics, politics, the role and content of the humanities, the role of foreign languages and cultures, religion, the treatment of internal minorities and migrants, and gender education policies. Additionally, the study examines the role of education systems in social reproduction and nation-building.

The findings from the historical reconstruction are corroborated through field research, involving the collection of experiences from Arabic-speaking pupils, students, parents, and teachers through

semi-structured interviews conducted with a narrative approach. The collected data is then analyzed using the MaxQdata software, utilizing codes derived from the main factors of multifactorial analysis. These codes are deductively modified based on the content derived from the interviews. The interview sample is categorized based on several criteria, including the country of departure and arrival, gender, age, educational status, synthesis of educational journeys, and specific characteristics such as ethnicity or being born in a country different from their parents' home country (refer to table 6). The majority of the interviewees originate from Syria and Morocco, while others come from Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, and Palestine. Many Syrian individuals traveled through Lebanon, Libya, or Turkey before reaching countries like Italy, Germany, and Sweden, while some migrated directly to Europe. Similarly, some Moroccans also passed through Libya before migrating to Italy, while others arrived directly in Italy. Tunisians and Egyptians predominantly migrated directly to their destination countries. In Morocco, only one interviewee, an educator from sub-Saharan Africa, belonged to a minority group. Regarding educational experiences in Syria, interviews were conducted with individuals from various backgrounds, including Armenian Christians, Kurds, Circassians, Palestinians, and Christian Arabs. Lastly, there are two unique cases of pupils who were born in Italy and initially started school there before returning to their parents' countries of origin.

The historical evolution of national education systems reveals a common trend across the studied regions, with Morocco and Syria serving as significant case studies. These countries encompass all essential stages of educational development, distinguishing them from exceptions like Lebanon or the Arabian Peninsula. Traditional education in the past played a crucial role in fostering religious identity and a sense of belonging within multi-ethnic empires, emphasizing Islamic civilization while accommodating diverse identities. However, it faced competition from Christian missionaries and the modern Ottoman technical high education system. Colonial powers introduced educational systems aimed at producing individuals with European values, interrupting the process of educational development. During independence, newly formed states constructed educational systems to transmit Arab nationalist elites' values, with Arabization becoming prominent across all Arab countries. Two distinct approaches to education modernization emerged: a secular and socialist model in Egypt and a religious and capitalist model in the Arabian Peninsula. These models continue to compete in shaping pupils' identities. However, the push for Arabization has diminished in many countries, leading to the recognition of linguistic minority rights and a more inclusive approach to education. Morocco's education system, rooted in religion and traditional identity, aims to convey both Muslim and national identity, promoting loyalty to the king and bridging ethnic differences. Syria's education system has historically achieved excellent learning outcomes but is influenced by a regime that limits freedom of thought and

promotes an aggressive Arab identity. Since the civil war, different entities have created their own educational systems, representing various narratives and coexisting within the country.

In Europe, cultural clashes among Arabic-speaking pupils primarily revolve around religion, history, geography, and social life. However, as Habermas notes, the clash is not typically between different faiths, as the interviewees are accustomed to attending school alongside Christian pupils and teachers, which was already the case in their countries of origin. Instead, the clash arises in relation to the atheism prevalent in the general environment or certain philosophy and science teachers who do not accord equal intellectual dignity to religious and atheist perspectives. In terms of the humanities subjects, there is generally no clash regarding the content related to the students' countries of origin because these topics receive limited attention. The conflict arises when discussing colonialism, which is regarded as the most significant historical event in their home countries, particularly in Syria, where it forms the cornerstone of Syrian identity. The Palestinian issue also remains a critical point of reference for identity. Syrians and Egyptians express the most discomfort and describe profound differences in how this topic is taught in schools. Lastly, cultural clashes emerge regarding the importance of children's autonomy in the educational process, parenting styles, friendships, and social life. These clashes are more prevalent in Sweden and Germany but are not commonly reported in Italy. This highlights a distinction, not between Arab and European education or between Christian and Muslim cultures, but between Mediterranean and Nordic cultures.

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1 Introduction

"I started comparing my five years of high school [in Italy] with my time in Egypt. Gradually, I started to understand the value of things, of people; I realised that... I found it difficult to grasp the fact that the professors... What, they put in your head, their legacy, is what makes you then, what makes you become... You, what shapes your mind, your thoughts, etc…Then I realised I had discomfort with my thoughts just because... In short... How do you say? Changed, in short. I had ideas that then changed for a while. I started to question my current mindset […] I understood that politics decide what children are taught in school […] Once I started to consider this concept in depth I understood it was what I had always intrinsically thought and believed. Subsequently, I started to think <<What happened in that period? Was it right, or wrong? Bad or good? This thing here is accepted, this thing here is not>>" (Int.30).

This research originated from the need to provide tools for teachers and other school staff to understand the educational and cultural universe where Arabic-speaking[1] pupils with a migratory background[2] come from, in order to interact with them into European schools. The aim is to analyze their educational context of origin in depth from a historical and cultural point of view and interview pupils, parents and teachers in Europe on their entire educational experience. This research deals with newly arrived Arabic-speaking pupils, but the same procedure of analysis of the background culture could apply to every pupil's background culture. The choice of Arabic-speaking people depends on the current developments: in the last decade, due to the so-called *Arab Spring*[3] (Lynch 2012), Europe has received numerous requests for political asylum from Arab countries. Most of them are welcomed in Germany, many in Sweden and fewer in Italy and other European countries (UNHCR 2021). Their inclusion in host countries' schools was sometimes challenging, and the teaching staff had to deal with new problems and unfamiliar realities (Catarci

[1] The categorisation is based on language and not ethnicity, although sometimes it is summarised by talking about Arabs. However, the "*Arabic-speaking*" category also includes other ethnic groups and other languages' speakers, such as the Amazigh in Morocco or the Kurds in Syria, because attending an Arabic-speaking education system has made them de facto Arabic speakers as well. The category clashes with a reality of linguistic pluralism in which there are actually many spoken Arabic languages, but only one official Arabic language, the *fuṣḥā*, which is the classical Arabic of the Quran on which the sense of belonging to the Arab community is based. On the relationship between language and identity in the Arab context, see *The Routledge Handbook of Arabic and Identity* (2021).

[2] The category of pupils with a migratory background (Catarci 2015) includes both newly arrived pupils (whether following working parents or refugees or unaccompanied minors) and pupils born in the country where they attend school, without blaming their identity on being foreigners, migrants or refugees, that is their legal status, but giving importance to their cultural identity.

[3] The journalistic term used here refers to the uprisings and revolutions occurred in the Arab world since December 2010, when in Tunisia Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire following mistreatment by the police. From Tunisia, protests spread to Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, Iraq, Bahrain, Jordan and Djibouti, while there were smaller uprisings in Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Sudan, Somalia, Morocco and Kuwait. In 2011, they led to regime change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. In Syria, instead, the regime harshly repressed the protests and the conflict turned into a civil war with many different actors, among which there was the Islamic State, which conquered significant parts of territory, and the Syrian Democratic Forces.

2015; Cummins 2015; Crul et al. 2019; Mazzei 2018, 2021b and Mazzei et al. 2020). The main research question is:

- How are Arab-Islamic education/al systems constituted regarding identity and belonging building, and how do Arab migrants in Europe reflect them entering new school contexts?

The subsequent questions are:

- What are the historical foundations of Arab-Islamic Education systems? What kind of identity has Arab education transmitted in the past and transmits today? How do Arabic-speaking pupils, parents and teachers perceive traditional religious education and contemporary mass national education systems?
- What transformations occurred between the 19th and the 21st century that led to the gradual affirmation of independent national school systems at the expense of traditional Islamic education? How do educational policies relate to the different political ideologies and religious interpretations hegemonic in the various countries? What historical and political events do the interviewees consider the most influential in determining educational identity-building policies?
- How did the contemporary educational focus on scientific subjects for economic development (Nussbaum 2011) spread in the Arab world? Which ideologies and religious currents fit this global trend, and which countries represent the main exception? How the interviewees experienced this focalisation on scientific subjects and technology?
- How do religion and humanities in current education systems transmit identity? What are the differences between the construction of identity enacted through humanities and religion in education in Syria and Morocco? How do the interviewees perceive this identity construction? What topics do they consider the most important for it, and what feelings do they have on the values transmitted by religion and humanities?
- In European education, which disciplines and topics do pupils and families feel personally involved in, in terms of identity and belonging? In which cases do they experience this involvement positively as a means of developing their identity in the host society? In which cases is it negatively experienced as an attack or offence to one's identity and belonging? How do differences in the reproduction of identities through education in their countries of origin influence how they relate to these sensitive topics in Europe?

The historical and cultural reconstruction of the educational systems' development allows an in-depth analysis that would be superficial if it only focused on the present. Analysing only the present, it is possible to argue that globalisation creates similar infrastructures in all the world regions, such as models of educational systems that cross the borders of states and cultures and impose themselves everywhere. In reality, different civilisations respond to the modernising pressures assuming them as challenges to transform their societies based on resources internal to

their specific cultural traditions that shape the pedagogical ethos and school curricula despite the standardisation brought by globalisation (Habermas 2018, pp. 27-30). To understand the experience of pupils with a migratory background in European countries, it is helpful to take into consideration their entire careers (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p.90), contextualising them inside the history of the transformations of their home countries' education systems. In this way, it is possible to interpret today's individual experiences through the history of education and bring out historical and traditional elements that influence them even today. Thus, it is possible to interpret what newly migrated parents, pupils and teachers think about European education in the light of this knowledge, understanding the cultural and traditional background behind their narratives.

The theoretical foundation of this research is intercultural[4], post-colonial and decolonial education[5], and the fundamental idea was born from the work of Fiorucci (2011). The other authors quoted are only a small, albeit significant, part of those who have dealt with intercultural and post-colonial education in Italy and worldwide. The topic is widely debated, and this introduction aims not to provide an exhaustive review of its literature but to give some examples of works written by authors whose vision comes closest to the ideas proposed in this research.

Fiorucci's (2011) operational proposal aims to develop intercultural competence in teachers, defined as behavioural traits, values and specific knowledge. He articulates intercultural teachers training around the following eight points: reception; teaching of Italian as a foreign language; enhancement of the language and culture of origin; common intercultural activities; integration indicators[6]; second generations; intercultural reinterpretation of knowledge and disciplines; critical analysis of textbooks. In the first point, dedicated to reception, Fiorucci affirms that it is necessary to have information on the education systems from which the pupils come and their previous schooling. It is helpful to know newly migrated children as pupils and understand what knowledge and skills they have already developed to anchor new knowledge to old and create educational continuity capable of improving results and increasing self-esteem. It is the starting point and the primary objective of the present research. Teachers' appreciation and enhancement of the language and culture of origin are useful in dealing with the new educational pathway and with cultural

[4] Dewey 1916; Capitini 1967; Ouellet 1991; Freire 1993; Susi 1999; Gobbo 2000; Favaro 2002, 2009; Pinto Minerva 2007; Fiorucci 2011; Santerini 2017.

[5] Sultana 2008; Burgio 2015; Zoletto 2016 e 2017; Mayo 2019. On postcolonial studies in general, the principal reference points are the text from which this field of studies originates (Said 1978) and the most recent Italian critical reconstruction (Mellino 2021). Regarding the history of colonial and postcolonial education, one can refer, among others, to Kalisman (2023) for the Middle East, to Swartz (2019) for English colonies, to Jacob and Gardelle (2020) for French colonies and to Matasci et al. (2020) for an approach to the history of education in Africa similar to that used in this work.

[6] The integration indicators are (Favaro 2009): scholastic results, competence in the Italian language, quality of relationships in class, quality and quantity of extracurricular relations, relationship with mother tongue and with one's origins (see also Cummins 2015), self-esteem situation.

differences and conflicts that could arise in it because it reinforces pupils with a migratory background's general communication skills, contributing to increasing their self-esteem, and creates a sense of educational continuity (Fiorucci 2011, p.84). The seventh and eighth points (an intercultural reinterpretation of knowledge and disciplines; critical analysis of textbooks) affect general teaching organisation by founding a curricula revision from an intercultural perspective. Such a revision is essential in the humanities, especially in history that has a particular social, political and pedagogical relevance (Fiorucci 2011). The relevance of the humanities curricula revision in host countries is the same that drives studying them in the countries of origin education systems. Humanities, in home and host countries, act with different narratives on constructing pupils' identity and belonging. The second aim of this work is to understand how these various constructions clash or meet in pupils with migratory backgrounds.

Dewey is the father of American pragmatism and Freire of South American liberation pedagogy. They did not define their pedagogy as intercultural, but, from different perspectives, their theories are considered the basis of today's intercultural education.[7] Dewey's pedagogy has had a direct and declared influence on the construction of contemporary education systems in Turkey and Egypt. However, Turkey did not realise Dewey's recommendations on minorities' cultural rights (Caligiuri 2007), while Egypt did (Zani 2005, pp. 201-206). Evidence of it is the cultural rights denied to Kurds and Armenians in the Turkish education system and the full recognition of Copts' rights in the Egyptian one. Ouellet (1991) articulated his operative proposal for the teachers' intercultural training in four components: a critical analysis of the theoretical problems, the exploration of a foreign cultural universe, intervention projects and specific competencies. This research falls under the second point, which for Ouellet is essential because it allows knowing the persons who are the subjects of intercultural interactions and enhances the aspects of their culture that converge towards the universal values of coexistence. In this regard, the author suggests deepening the traditional religious universe and its contemporary transformations, the family, the children's education, the educational system, the tensions between traditions and modernity, the relations between cultural and religious groups and the state policies in that field, the economic problems and their impact on migrations. All these factors are taken into consideration in the present research.

Particular attention is paid to humanities, both in home and host countries' education systems, following the lesson of Nussbaum (2011). Within humanities, a particular space is reserved for analysing history teaching. For Dewey (1916), history teaching is fundamental in global citizen

[7] For what concern Freire see Ardito 2007; Mazzei 2012; Catarci 2016; Mazzei 2018a, Mayo 2019. For Dewey see Spadafora 2010, Nussbaum 2011, pp. 79-102.

education, and he suggests teaching it from primary school onwards, from an international perspective, not only in its military and political aspects but also, above all, in its economic and social aspects. For Capitini (1967), history teaching is the one with the highest social and political meaning, as it contributes to determining people's attitude towards other people; for example, rhetorical and nationalistic teaching fosters in pupils a feeling of revenge towards peoples with whom there have been conflicts in the past. Many non-Western scholars in general and Arab in particular agree with the social importance of history teaching, such as the pedagogue and history teaching expert Hassani-Idrissi, who describes history textbook not simply as a medium for transmitting knowledge but as a privileged means for the educator who wishes to transmit assimilation models. Beyond the facts, dates and historical figures, history textbooks carry on an ideological discourse. They contain appeals to pupils, suggesting what to like and adopt as well as what to hate and reject. In this way, history textbooks contribute to pupils' identity construction, transmitting identification models and setting their ideals (Hassani-Idrissi 2015, p.53).

By studying these approaches, the need to analyse the educational and cultural universe from which Arabic-speaking pupils, parents and teachers came, developed. In intercultural education literature, the need to deepen migrated pupils' cultural universe often comes up (from Ouellet 1991 to Fiorucci 2011), but responses to this widespread appeal are rare. In addition, as post-colonial education points out, intercultural education often advocates coexistence between cultures without considering the economic and power relations between countries of departure and host countries and, therefore, without carrying out an in-depth analysis of the contexts of origin. A gap that this research aims to bridge starts from the consideration that intercultural education gives great theoretical importance to history but hardly considers the history of immigrant pupils' home countries, especially colonial history, as a determining element in the construction of identity and belonging in the educational processes in home and host countries. As Jacob and Gardelle (2020) state:

> *"The concept of coloniality highlights the intersections between constructions of modernity and forms of domination. While it is present in International Relations and Political Science more widely, it does not seem to have applied critically to school settings, from curriculum content to teacher training"* (Jacob and Gardelle 2020, p.8).

These reflections on the weaknesses of intercultural education in deepening the cultural universe from which Arabic-speaking pupils come push to research into the fields of Arab-Islamic studies, especially religious and historical, cultural studies and comparative education. The interdisciplinary nature of this research has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it does not allow analysing in too much detail all the existing literature on each topic in each of the

disciplinary fields taken into consideration. On the other hand, taking into consideration *"the importance of covering the topic of schools and national identities from interdisciplinary perspectives"* (Jacob & Gardelle 2020, p.10) helps to bring specialist knowledge on the Arab-Islamic world within the coordinates of pedagogical, cultural and intercultural studies.

This thesis is structured in 2 sections and 12 chapters, of which this introduction is the first. The second chapter contains the background analysis of the host education systems - Italian, German and Swedish - by discussing the number of Arabic-speaking migrants and pupils who arrived in Europe in the last decade and the school inclusion of Arabic-speaking pupils within the general framework of school inclusion policies and practices for pupils with a migratory background.

The third chapter sets the major theoretical issues, describing the different disciplinary approaches involved and the authors and literature to which it refers, identifying what is engaging inside the education systems of origin of Arabic-speaking pupils and from which sources relevant information can be obtained relevant information. The first reference is to Nussbaum's conceptualisation (2011) of human and social sciences as the transmitter par excellence of the values that society wants to reproduce and of how it is possible to address and compare diverse societies by looking at the role that humanities play in their education systems. Then there is a focus on the relationship and intersection between Comparative Education and Arab-Islamic Studies and, subsequently, on Habermas's post-metaphysic approach to religion and democracy, applied to Islamic tradition and contemporary issues. In the fourth paragraph, the reproduction of values through education is linked to the theory of Bourdieu and Passeron. Indeed, knowledge about the education systems' history and ideology allows us to know the school culture of a population, the set of knowledge, beliefs, values, behaviour, etc., transmitted as official culture, or in other words, its *habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, pp.31-32). Finally, there is the definition of the concept of identity and belonging used in this research.

The following two sections address the building of identity and belonging in Arabic-speaking pupils through two different methodologies, which contribute to identifying its key factors, acting one as a confirmation of the other.

The first section is devoted to Arab-Islamic education's historical and cultural reconstruction. 4th chapter is devoted to methodology and explains how Nussbaum's multifactorial analysis of education systems (Nussbaum 2011) and the historical reconstruction, which is a fundamental part of it, are used in the present work and why Morocco and Syria are chosen as case studies. In chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, the multifactorial analysis of the different education systems throughout history is carried out based on literature. It focuses on those factors Nussbaum (2011) identified as central: economy, politics, humanities, foreign language and culture, treatment of internal minorities and migrants, and gender educational policies, and on the role that education systems

play in social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990) and the building of a nation (Anderson 2016). The 5th chapter deals with traditional education, highlighting some traditional Arab-Islamic values at its base, and using Habermas' concept of neutralising translation to bring concepts from their religious meaning to a secular sense (Habermas 2015; 2016; 2018). Traditional education is addressed by looking at the Sufi tradition, focusing on Ibn 'Arabi, and then through the reconstruction of education systems history up to the present day focusing on identity, belonging, otherness and tolerance. The cultural meaning of identity is addressed through the perspective of Arab-Islamic studies, especially theological and historical. The 6th chapter deals with the indigenous attempts to build modern educational institutions and with education under colonialism considered the last stage before the emergence of national, independent and mass education systems. The 7th chapter discusses current education by describing the foundations of national mass education systems built in the independence period with strong Arabist and anti-colonialist ideologies on which humanities curricula are built and on which the treatment of minorities and foreigners in the education system depends. Then it addresses two fundamental historical-pedagogical junctures that are the weakening of anti-colonial feelings and the re-emergence of religious claims, in parallel with economic liberalisation and the onset of globalisation (1970-2000) and the digital revolution (2000-21), analysing their effects on identity building, humanities and minorities and migrants' treatments. The 8th and 9th chapters focus on the case studies analysed inside the general picture described in the previous chapters.

The themes highlighted in this analysis are investigated again through interviews in the fieldwork, the results of which are reported in the second section. In the fieldwork, people trained in Arab and European educational systems are interviewed to see how social and ideological reproduction has acted on them and how they have perceived it. They are the most significant witnesses of identity and belonging building and negotiation processes because they have experienced both the educational system of the country of origin and that of the host country and the differences between them and can narrate them as individual experiences. The 10th chapter explains field research design and methodology. Arabic-speaking pupils, parents and teachers' experiences are gathered through semi-structured interviews with a narrative approach. It gives freedom of expression to the interviewees, taking inspiration from the analysis of educational biographies of migrants and refugees in Europe such as Breckner & Massari (2019), Atkinson (2002), Bichi (2002) and Erben (1998). This chapter explains how interviews' guidelines and sampling were built, how data were collected within the PARENTable project and finally describes the method of analysis. The last chapter presents the qualitative research's results, exploring how educational identity building emerges in Arabic-speaking pupils, parents and teachers' educational experiences between the Arab countries from which they arrive and the European countries where they live. The chapters

reflect the most crucial topics of the multifactorial analysis and themes that emerged deductively as central from the interviews. Subchapters 11.1-11.4 deal most with experiences in the home countries and concern the structures and models of education systems, religion, and humanities. The chapter 11.5 deals with educational experience in Europe, comparing Italy, Germany and Sweden and those from 11.6 to 11.8 compare both experiences in the home and host countries, dealing with minority issues and the statements in which the interviewees directly talk about their identities.

Conclusions are drawn at the end, indicating possible future lines of research.

2 Background situation in European host countries

> *"And an abyss separates the Calabrian peasant, whose troubled state of mind we read about in Ernesto De Martino, when he sees his bell tower in Marcellinara disappearing over the horizon, from the Islamic student in contemporary Frankfurt - a city divided between Lutheran and Catholic churches, subversive Salafists and modernised Turks - who rolls out her prayer carpet in her college room every day"* (Ceppa in Habermas 2018, pp. 11-2).[8]

The two examples in this quote, a peasant of a marginal Italian region and a female Islamic student in a central German city seem tailor-made for this research carried out between Italy and Germany on the educational experience of people coming from Arab countries. What does migration mean, what does distance from our cultural and religious reference points represent, and how do educators deal with these experiences? There is considerable debate about migration in Europe from African or Asian countries, but who are these migrants, and how do their identities relate to European education? Are migrants' home countries homogenous places? Are European countries a homogeneous place to arrive at, with the same traditions? How much education tries and succeeds in questioning the cultural dimension of school inclusion, composed of collective traditions, national and local histories and singular educational paths?

This chapter firstly provides a quantitative overview of the phenomenon, identifying Arabic-speaking pupils in the available official data in which people are categorised by nation or continent and not by ethnic or linguistic belonging. The choice of Arabic-speaking people and Syrian and Moroccan pupils, in particular, depends on several reasons, one of which is numerical. From the analysis of the MIUR (Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research) data on the background of pupils with different cultural backgrounds in Italy between 2016 and 2022 (Mazzei 2016, 2018, 2020; MIUR 2015- 2021) it emerges that, among pupils with non-European backgrounds, the most numerous are the Arabic-speakers. The data analysis of pupils with a non-European cultural background in Europe aims to circumscribe the Arabic-speaking community and understand if there is the same reality as in Italy. In official statistics, pupils with migratory backgrounds are categorised by nation, something reductive regarding broader belonging, such as the Arab or the Muslim one; or they are categorised by continent, encompassing again entire cultural communities (G. Hofstede et al. 2014), such as the Arabic-speaking or the Muslim one (Mazzei 2020). This discrepancy risks fostering unrealistic representations about migrants and thus preventing effective intervention planning.

After this brief but critical quantitative description, the chapter hosts a brief description of the research ground, which is the educational situations of Arabic-speaking pupils mainly in Italy and,

[8] All translations of Habermas (2018) are mine.

secondly, in Germany and Sweden, followed by a comparison from a European perspective. The three selected European countries could represent three different ways to act on the idea of European inclusive education (Catarci 2015). Furthermore, Italy is the principal landing place by the sea for many migrants who then try to reach Germany, the country that has been the main host for the Arab migration wave of this decade (United Nations 2020), and Sweden, which many migrants consider as the ideal host country (Interviews). The brief description of school inclusion policies in Italy, Germany and Sweden aims to explain how these countries deal with pupils' cultural diversity and which educational policies help most to build robust identities that be not in conflict with each other, despite being composed of different cultures.

In 2018, 2.4 million immigrants arrived in European Union from non-European countries. Germany had the highest number of immigrants, followed by Spain, France and Italy. On 1st January 2019, the most significant number of residents with a migrant background was in Germany (10.1 million), followed by Italy (5.3 million), France (4.9 million), and Spain (4.8 million). As in previous years, Moroccans were the largest group of new EU citizens in 2018.

To identify the number of Arabic-speaking pupils in Europe, reference is made to data on school-age children who migrated from Arab countries to Europe in 2018 rather than on pupils enrolled in national education systems. This choice is based on two reasons: the presence of aggregate data provided by a single European source (Eurostat 2020) and the importance of considering the number of those entitled to education and not those who benefit from it. In this way, comparing, for example, the Eurostat data for Italy with those provided by MIUR, it is possible to see that they correspond and, therefore, that the Arabic-speaking minors living in Italy, according to European statistics, all attend school in Italy.

In the 0-15 age group, Arabic-speakers account for about 10% of newcomers, a higher percentage than Asians (about 9%) and Africans (about 4%) (Tab.1). This can be stated despite the missing data on some countries such as France, as they are known to be countries of the arrival of migratory flows from Arab countries. The other interesting data is about Arab, African and Asian children residing in Europe in 2019, focusing on the 0-15 age group (Eurostat 2020) related to compulsory education (Tab.2). Here, too, the data are incomplete (Greece, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta and Poland are missing). The most significant communities of Arabic-speaking minors in Europe are Syrians in Germany (236,764), Sweden (36,756) and the Netherlands (25,852); Moroccans in Spain (199,520) and Italy (104,097); Iraqis in Germany (66,399); Egyptians in Italy (36,872); Tunisians in Italy (22,001). The only group of minors from the United Arab Emirates is in Germany. The European population between 0 -15 years old is approximately 47,592,582 people, of which 2,649,855 are non-EU citizens (Eurostat 2020). Among non-EU citizens, Africans are 7.4%, Asians 19% and Arabs 34.3%. As regards the missing European countries, it is possible to

refer to the data on the resident migrant population in 2019, not divided by age (United Nations 2020), to get an idea of the Arab communities there. In France, Arabs account for a large proportion of the total number of people with a migratory background, with Algerians predominating; in the other countries, Syrians are among the most prominent communities along with Egyptians, confirming the trend shown by tab.1 and 2. Arab communities and Arabic-speaking pupils represent a significant portion of new-comers and long-term communities in Europe, even if their cultural specificity is not often taken into account, as they are counted inside more large categorisations such as African, or Asiatic or Muslim since this affected the debate on social, cultural and scholastic inclusion.

2.1 Italy

"I: What did you think the first time you saw this village?

A: I got on the wrong plane (laughs).

The first thing I said to my mother was <<but is this Italy? Yes, for sure? >>" (Int. 20). [9]

In the last twenty years, Italy has transformed itself from an emigration country into a country also of immigration. In addition to the so-called economic migrants (mostly Romanians, Albanians, Moroccan and Chinese), there are also refugees and asylum seekers who turned Italy into a host country, like other European countries. This has profoundly changed the Italian school, which until the last century did not have students with a diverse cultural background, if not for the so-called historical minorities, such as Roma, Arbëreshë and others. However, these latter are not exactly strangers as they have been in Italy since before the national unification and are, therefore, Italian (Mazzei 2012).

Italy is certainly not the country with the highest number of refugees in Europe, despite the image given by the Italian media about the phenomenon of landing by sea concerning primarily African people. It creates significant logistical difficulties but does not affect the number of migrants in the country since many are not granted refugee status and have to leave shortly after their arrival[10]. Indeed, non-Arab sub-Saharan Africans, who are the majority of those who landed by the sea, is a tiny part of migrants in Italy and a small minority of pupils with a migratory background in the school system. Starting from the data analysis concerning pupils with a migratory background (MIUR 2015-2021), it is possible to see that there are more than 200 nationalities of origin for the 857,729 pupils with migrant backgrounds: data divided by continents show that the majority are European (46.28%), followed by African (25.72%), Asian (20.07%), American (7.89%) and

[9] Young Syrian girl hosted in a small village in the Calabrian countryside.

[10] All official data on landings, asylum applications and their outcomes are available on the Italian Ministry of Interior website http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica

Oceanic (0.03%) (MIUR 2020)[11]. Europeans could be redefined as East Europeans as they come mainly from Romania, Albania, Ukraine etc. This group could be compared with other groups with similar internal cultural coherence, such as the Arabs. This latter group comprises pupils from, or whose parents come from, the 22 countries of the Arab League located in both Africa (18.3%) and Asia (0.4%). This is necessary because "Asia" and "Africa" categorisations are too general, given the critical cultural differences between the various peoples of the two continents, which include numerous populations differing in language, culture, religion and tradition. Asians are Chinese (6.4%), Indian (9.2%), and South East Asian (which in themselves are rather broad and general categorisations). Proceeding with this different subdivision (which subtracts Arabs from the African and Asian macro-groups), one will notice that the most numerous pupils with migratory backgrounds after the (east) Europeans are the Arabs and not generally the "Africans" (Tab.3).

In terms of religious affiliation, the Muslim community is even more significant, including African, Asian and European countries (Albania above all). Adding up the percentages of countries where Islam is the state religion or the majority religion, one can note that more than a third of pupils with a migrant background belong to the Muslim community. This conclusion is approximate compared to the previous one since there can be, and are, non-Muslims, albeit a minority, among those from these countries.

Among the Arabs, Moroccan pupils are the most significant and longest-standing national community; the second largest is Egyptians, who have been among the top ten most represented citizenships in recent years (MIUR 2015-2020); the third, equally stable, is the Tunisian community. This is followed by Algerians and Syrians (a few thousand), while the other nationalities are in the hundreds (Table 4). Moroccan pupils are, therefore, the most numerous, and they have the highest percentage of those born in Italy, i.e. those belonging to the so-called second generation. This does not mean that they have better results at school. Although the Moroccan community has been living in Italy for a long time, there are significant problems in communication between schools and families. According to data on migrant minors in Italy (MLPS 2015-2019), the main characteristic of Egyptian and Tunisian minors in Italy is that they are mostly MSNA (unaccompanied minors) adolescents, especially between 16 - 18 years old. Therefore, they do not have their families in Italy and are at an age where they often prefer work to school. Nevertheless, they have to fulfil their compulsory schooling in Italy, but they cannot be included in regular high school classes because they do not know the language. Often they enrol in CPIA, i.e. adult education centres. The same problem with language also exists for younger

[11] At the time of writing this chapter, the 2020 report is the last available. Comparing it with those published in 2021 and 2022, the data are about the same with a stable percentage also in the previous five years, showing a stable trend.

pupils, but Italian law provides that they have to enrol in regular classes for up to 16 years old with their peers or, at most, the next lower or upper class (Miur 2014). Syrian pupils relate to the latter case and are very few, with significant educational gaps due to the interruption of studies because of the war (Mazzei 2018).

As for categorisation, it is worth noting that until 2017 the name of the documents produced by the Italian Ministry of Instruction, University and Research (MIUR) is *"Gli alunni stranieri nel Sistema scolastico Italiano"* [12] and from 2018 "*Gli alunni con cittadinanza non Italiana"*[13]. The improvement should be the elimination of the word *foreign* to categorise them, but falling back on a categorisation based on a lack: "*with NON-Italian citizenship*", far from our category of *"pupils with migratory background"*, which refers to an additional cultural background of pupils, a resource rather than a lack. This is not subtlety and is not only an Italian limit (on the topic see Cummins 2015).

2.2 Germany

Germany has a long history of immigration, especially labour migration from other European countries, like Italy. Today, Syrians are the largest Arabic-speaking group and the second as migrants who come from a Muslim country (only the long-standing Turkish community is more significant), but it is a recent migration[14]. Educators and other actors within the school system mostly lack information about children's family situation and their personal and educational histories. Besides, it is difficult to reach out to parents who do not speak the local language and do not trust school authorities. Children and young refugees are educated in learning groups specially created for teaching German (in Baden-Württemberg they are called Preparatory classes, in Berlin *Willkommensklassen*) for a year or more, depending on when they learn German at a level considered acceptable by teachers to enter regular classes with their peers. Newly arrived pupils are therefore not included immediately in regular classes with their German peers, which limits their ability to learn the language to communicate with them. Moreover, they do not study the curricular subjects, increasing their educational delay. It is a challenge for teachers, who often do not receive the necessary support and do not have the specific training to help them and ensure that they have good quality teaching. While younger children manage to enter the German school at some point (but accumulating further delay), teenagers very often attend only those separate classes until they reach the age of majority, without ever going to school with their German peers

[12] Foreign pupils in Italian education system

[13] Pupils with non-Italian citizenship

[14] https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/_node.html

and often without even learning the language well. As a result, they enter the labour market as unskilled labourers (Mazzei et al. 2020).

The differentiation of secondary schools into *Hauptschule, Realschule* and *Gymnasium* represents an additional problem because of its selectivity. This early-stage selection disadvantages children with a mother tongue other than German. In most federal states, except Berlin and Brandenburg, the basic primary school ends after four years (six years in Berlin and Brandenburg). Teachers direct these children to the *Hauptschule*, the less prestigious school type, fixing their educational career often before they have had the chance to adjust to the linguistic level of their fellow pupils (Mühe 2012, p.36). With its early selection, the German school system is strongly stratified and it is very difficult for refugee children aged 10-14 to pursue an academic track, preparing them for higher education. Most of these refugee children are placed in *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*. Only a tiny proportion of German pupils go to *Hauptschule*, while in the case of refugee children, for many teachers and policymakers, this seems to be the highest aim. In reality, second language difficulties often impede refugee children from finding an apprenticeship and families often have difficulty familiarising themselves with the complexities of the German vocational sector (Crul et al. 2019, p.20).

2.3 Sweden

Migration to Sweden is a relatively new phenomenon: it increased considerably during the Second World War with refugees from other Nordic and Baltic countries. After the war, the immigration increase was mainly work immigration and most work migrants came from Europe. Between 1970 and 1990, migration changed its characteristics: the majority of migrants were political refugees from Latin America and Asia, and the number of political migrants from Turkey, Iran, Lebanon and Syria was also significant. Today, Sweden's immigration rate is relatively high (Catarci 2015, pp.231-2) and the number of migrants has been stable for many years. However, between 2013 and 2015, a change can be noticed, with 162.877 new migrants, among them 71.000 children (35.369 unaccompanied), many of them from Arabic-speaking countries (mainly Syria and Iraq)[15]. According to current National Agency for Education statistics, 1 out of 5 pupils has a foreign background, with Iraqis being the most numerous. The National Agency for Education includes in the category '*students with a foreign background*' either those born abroad or those born in Sweden to parents with a foreign background (Catarci 2015, p.233).

When newly-arrived pupils arrive at school age, they are enrolled in international classes for two or three weeks and a maximum of three months, for the shortest possible time, to help them to learn the language before entering regular classes but also to prevent segregation (Crul et al. 2019,

[15] https://www.enable-tamkin.com/background

p.9). When they move to regular classes, they can benefit from additional courses in Swedish as a second language. Swedish schools offer it as a regular subject for all pupils who need it, from primary school to the end of upper-secondary school, facilitating the integration of pupils with a migration background into regular classes (Rydin et al. 2012). In addition, the ministry assigns mother-tongue teachers to support pupils who attended international classes: schools are obliged to allocate this additional support. These teachers start giving support once pupils move to a regular class. This could be individual support or support in a small group or even in regular classes (Niemeyer 2014).

Pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish also have the right to study their language in compulsory and upper secondary schools: it is voluntary for them, but municipalities have to organise such education by law (Catarci 2015, p.240). This measure was born in the 1990s to meet the needs of ethnic minorities like Finnish, Yiddish, Meankieli, Romani and Sami; then, the government extended it to all pupils with a foreign background. In the academic year 2016/17, approximately 275,000 students in primary schools were eligible to attend mother tongue classes (one to two hours per week), which equated to 27% of all registered students (Bunar 2017). According to statistics from the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2007b), during the academic year 2005/06, among pupils entitled to mother tongue education, Somali-speaking pupils showed the highest participation (72.8%), followed by Albanian (67.6%), Arabic (66.5%), Persian (64%), Turkish (58.7) and Kurdish (55.9) (Catarci 2015, p.240). All these nationalities are linked to the Muslim world, and in many of their countries, there are fundamentalist political currents, and people are often subject to racism and discrimination. These courses allow many migrants and refugees, teachers and pupils, to teach and learn their language and culture of origin and to see their value recognised, with important effects on self-esteem, on learning, and on the reduction of social marginalisation and political radicalisation risk.

2.4 Comparison

Each European state designs and implements school inclusion of pupils with a migratory background following European guidelines, but in different ways: according to the general structure of its education system, its general welfare policies and the treatment of ethnic and cultural minorities. The history of the different countries, especially their colonial past, the specific migration flows, and the history of the right to asylum also influence school inclusion policies (Catarci 2015). According to Catarci, it is possible to categorise European countries by their migratory flows history:

- The *old immigration countries* (the United Kingdom, France and Germany),
- The *new immigration countries* (Italy, Spain and Greece)

- *Northern European countries* (the Netherlands and Sweden) (Catarci 2015, p. xiii).

European education systems can also be categorised by their support model for immigrant children. Catarci proposes two different categorisations.

The first distinguishes between:

- An integrated model in which immigrant children are allocated to classes with children of the same age in mainstream education (like in Italy)
- A separate model in which immigrant children are grouped separately from other children in order to respond to their particular needs (like in Germany) (Catarci 2015, p.22).

The second categorisation distinguishes between the comprehensive support model (like in Sweden); non-systematic support model (like in Italy); compensatory support model (like in Austria); integration model (like in Ireland) and the centralised entry support model (like in France) (Catarci 2015, p.25). Germany would generally be attributable to the compensatory support model, with due differentiations within the country between Länder and between individual educational institutions.

Therefore, according to these categorisations, Germany, Italy, and Sweden are representative of different European models of school inclusion of pupils with migratory backgrounds:

- Germany is an old immigration country with a separate compensatory support model.
- Italy is a new immigration country with an integrated and non-systematic support model.
- Sweden is a Northern European country with an integrated and comprehensive support model.

Germany and Sweden are the countries that host more Syrian refugees, and Italy is one of the countries with the biggest Moroccan community; the Swedish model seems to be the most effective in school inclusion. Most of the research on school inclusion focuses on a single country and is in the relative national language with few comparative works and data on school results. One exception is the work of Crul et al. (2019) which compares the school inclusion of Syrian refugee children in Turkey, Lebanon, Greece, Germany and Sweden, categorising these countries by degree of inclusiveness precisely in the order in which they are listed here. The issues considered are: migrant pupils' entrance to compulsory education; the so-called *welcoming*, *submersion* or *introduction classes*; second language instruction; tracking and education after compulsory schooling - among these, the present work takes into consideration mainly the first three. Shortly, the main characteristics highlighted in Crul's research are the parallel school system in the refugee camps in Turkey, the parallel afternoon classes in Lebanon and Greece, the parallel classes in Germany and the full inclusion in regular school classes in Sweden. According to this categorisation, Italy also has a high level of inclusion due to the immediate and full inclusion in regular school classes. Problems and malfunctions exist even in the Swedish system, and the one

described is a reference model that does not always coincide with reality. Nevertheless, it is the fairest and most functional model.

Everywhere, the main problem of scholastic inclusion is of linguistic nature and regards overall the difference between the language of instruction and pupils' mother tongue (L1). The first measure that deals with this problem is teaching the national language as a second language (L2). There is not a common European strategy on how to teach the language of instruction to pupils with a migratory background, but every country has its rules and strategies, which often change from region to region in the same state and from school to school, according to school and regional autonomy. In Sweden, Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) is offered in both elementary and upper-secondary schools up to 18 (Rydin et al. 2012, p. 196). Swedish as a second language is an independent subject with different teaching materials and is taught by specially trained teachers included in the national educational system (Nilsson and Bunar 2016, p. 409). It is essential for adolescent refugee children to attend regular classes with their peers and, simultaneously, have extra support in Swedish as a second language without having to be included in adult education programs such as in Italy or separate schools as in Germany. These differences are significant for peer socialisation and for pupils' self-image development.

In Germany, there is second language support in primary school, up to the age of 10-12, depending on the Land. However, it is nowhere stated that German as L2 should be taught in school, and it is added to regular language instruction. As a result, its quality and number of hours differ from school to school and teacher to teacher. There is no second language instruction in secondary education. Teacher training in second language instruction is insufficient, and methods and techniques are often lacking. In some schools, there is a specific German as a Second Language (GSL) teacher available, while in other schools, teachers have additional but very poor training (usually consisting of one day only). In daily practice, additional second language instruction is provided either by regular teachers with little training or by GSL teachers from adult education centres. However, new second language education programmes are, expanding: in 2014, second language teacher training was compulsory for teachers in one Land, and in 2016 in six Länder (Crul et al. 2019, pp. 9-10)

In Italy, this linguistic support is absent in the national curricula, despite universities providing specialized courses in Italian as a second language. In the best situations, in national schools, it is optional, experimental and additional to regular language instruction. As a result, the quality and number of hours of second language instruction differ from school to school and teacher to teacher. Some voluntary organisations offer free courses in Italian as a second language but are completely outside a homogeneous national institutional framework.

The second measure is the institution of a supportive mother-tongue teacher that offers excellent service to the school community and allows graduated migrants and refugees to enter the labour market according to their qualifications. A common aspect in the management of school inclusion in Italy and Germany is that both neglect - apart from sporadic attempts - the role of mother-tongue tutors/mediators, while they could be an essential bridge for children's integration in new learning contexts (Mazzei et al. 2020). Indeed, a mother-tongue teacher supports pupils in studying and in psychological challenges such as identities, belongings and expectations. A mother-tongue teacher knows the pupils' background context well and knows the education system they are accustomed to, their culture and their problems better than any other teacher. These teachers can guide the path to inclusion by offering a living example of how to combine, in a non-destructive way for their identity, the different affiliations and values related to the culture of the country of origin and the host country, offering an example of how such pupils can realise their job expectations through education.

Research on this topic is more common in Sweden, where this kind of teacher works, than in countries where it does not, like Italy and Germany, where teaching work is traditionally reserved for the natives. The restriction concerns German language skills in Germany since it is necessary to have the CEFR C1 level to teach in schools. Associations and institutions are promoting courses to train teachers with migrant backgrounds. The NGO *Back on Track* proposes a training course for the second year in this field. The project *"BAB - Ready for Work in Education"* is a further training course for Arabic-speaking refugee educators that strengthen the participants' voluntary work as mentors in the education sector and thus encourages them to resume their professional experience in the labour market. The course offers an introduction to educational goals, teaching methods and curricula in Germany, as well as a familiarisation with the local job profiles in the field of education and training. As the target group has its own refugee experience and knowledge of the socio-cultural background of refugee pupils, the target group brings with them the competencies needed in the German education system. The participants should also be able to deal with pupils with migratory backgrounds' special needs; therefore, dealing with trauma and multilingualism is part of the programme, together with modules on children's rights and child protection and non-violent communication. The 7-month course takes place full-time and includes a four-week internship in a Berlin school[16]. In Italy, teaching has long been reserved for natives. In the last decade, implementing European directives, teaching has also been allowed for foreign teachers through the recognition of professional qualifications acquired abroad. The numerous

[16] https://backontrackev.org/wp-content/uploads/flyer-bab.pdf ; Microsoft Word - 2021000134_Back on Track.docx (efg-berlin.eu)

public discussions on the subject have mostly concerned the right of foreigners to teach, due also to the saturation of the job sector, while discussions and measures to enhance their role in schools, as well as training courses to train them as mediators, appear to be absent.

The third measure regards *mother tongue teaching*, existing regularly only in Sweden, and that could be an example of how to achieve equity through valuing diversity. In Italy, there is something similar, but not systemic, because asylum seekers centres or cultural associations often offer this type of mother tongue support voluntarily and experimentally. The national school system does not plan mother tongue teaching and, therefore, the subject remains mostly undiscussed in research, although for years associations carried out numerous quality experiments during extracurricular hours. In Italy, there is not a vast scientific literature on the subject because interventions are sporadic, limited in time, not linked to each other and hardly put into a system within a single study to assess benefits and limitations. In Germany, language learning in schools and school inclusion are planned at a federal level, so the federal states have reacted differently to the needs of newly migrated pupils: ten out of sixteen federal states, including Berlin, have funded and organised L1 courses. In some federal states, such as Baden-Württemberg, the teaching of the language of origin is organised by the consulates based on the *return approach*. In most cases, these courses are held as voluntary supplementary education. However, there are model projects in primary schools in Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt, which offer, for example, bilingual writing and reading lessons in Turkish. As immigration from Arabic-speaking countries has increased, the debate now focuses on integrating Arabic into schools. However, Arabic is still marginal as a supplementary language. Mosques offer courses in Arabic for children, which is often a criterion for exclusion, especially for lay or non-Muslim parents. Volunteer projects, such as the NGO Back-on Track, offer additional Arabic lessons for Arabic-speaking refugee children and provide an alternative to confessional education (Mazzei et al. 2020).

The different European educational practices and policies concerning pupils with a migrant background reflect two contrasting theoretical approaches. The first argued that using the native language in the family context has a negative effect on immigrant children, reducing motivation and success in learning the host country's language. It endorses policies that would immerse immigrant-background children in the host country's language from the age of 3, reducing exposure to L1 and its associated adverse effects. According to this approach, inadequate proficiency in the school language and academic underachievement are partially due to insufficient opportunity to learn the school language, because of speaking a minority language at home. By contrast, the OECD and the Council of Europe advocate affirmative school policies towards pupils' mother tongue because valuing the mother tongue of immigrant pupils is essential for the development of a positive and appreciative approach to diversity and identity. It means considering

students' language capacities as part of their personal, social and cultural identity and welcoming it as a tool for learning and understanding. Several recent comprehensive research reviews on bilingual education for underachieving minority language pupils suggest that bilingual education represents a superior option to immersion in the host country's language. This second is currently ideologically unacceptable in most European countries, reflecting the assimilationist rhetoric and exclusionary reality of social policies in these countries (Cummins 2015).

The last point of this chapter concerns school systems' attitudes towards religion. In 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Islam is part of Germany, just like Christianity and Judaism, and she accepted diversity, particularly Muslims, as a legitimate part of the imagined German nation (Cummins 2015, p.7). The German constitution states that the state should actively support religious expression but has to refrain from unequal treatment between the different religious denominations. Religious education is a fundamental legal right, and religious communities, responsible for its contents, can demand its teaching as a regular subject in public schools. Implementing Islamic religious education remains challenging because the state never has officially recognised any Muslim religious community. Berlin is an exception: here, religious education is not a regular school subject, as in most other federal states, but only taught as an additional voluntary subject and organised by the religious communities themselves. For many years, The Berlin Islamic Federation *(Islamische Föderation Berlin - IFB)* fought for its acknowledgement as a religious community, which would have allowed it to give religious instruction in Berlin, and finally, the court granted them this possibility. In most other federal states, Islam has only been taught in schools as part of the additional tuition in the mother tongue regarding Turkish immigrants' children, which was not explicitly religious education and only for one ethnicity. The introduction of regular Islamic religious education in line with the constitution is in development in various federal states, and state institutions decide its content in cooperation with religious communities' representatives. The non-recognition of the existing Muslim organisations as religious communities is the major problem, and federal states look at different options of cooperation in order to introduce regular Islamic religious education in public schools (Mühe 2012, pp.38-40). Catholic education in public schools in Italy was compulsory until 1984 when it became optional with the Concordat between the Republic of Italy and the Vatican. It states that the Italian Republic, recognising the value of religious culture and taking into account that the principles of Catholicism are part of the Italian people's historical heritage, shall continue to ensure Catholic religion teaching in State schools of every level and grade. In compliance with the freedom of conscience and the educational responsibility of parents, everyone is guaranteed the right to choose if they avail themselves of this teaching. At the time of enrolment, pupils or their parents will exercise this right at the request of the school authority, and they cannot be

discriminated against for their choice[17]. Pupils that do not attend catholic education classes, can study individually or do alternative activities organised by schools. In 2013, Ministry reiterated the obligation for schools to organise alternative activities for pupils who request them[18]. In most cases, there is no alternative activity and pupils either study individually or came back home with their parents. It is worth noting that about 90% of the pupils attend catholic religious classes, and the possibility of using religious instruction from another religious denomination is not currently under discussion. This would be theoretically possible, but there are no agreements between the state and religious groups to allow it. Italy is one of the few European countries that offer only Catholic religious education, while many Nordic countries opt for a plural teaching of religions. In 2000, Sweden abolished its 16th-century concordat with the Lutheran churches, opting for compulsory teaching on the religious phenomenon and values based on an objective and supra-confessional approach[19].

[17] https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/archivio/documents/rc_seg-st_19850603_santa-sede-italia_it.html

[18] https://www.dirittoscolastico.it/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/cm61_12.pdf

[19] https://web.archive.org/web/20070928125209/http://www.elledici.org/scuola/rel-a-scuola/irc-europa/dwl/Insegnamento%20religioso%20nelle%20scuole%20pubbliche%20europee.pdf

3 Theoretical frameworks

This chapter sets the research theoretical issues starting from Nussbaum's conceptualisation (2011) of human and social sciences as the transmitter par excellence of the values that society wants to reproduce and as central factors in the analysis of education systems. A focus follows on the relationship and intersection between Comparative Education and Arab-Islamic Studies and, subsequently, on Habermas's post-metaphysic approach to religion and democracy applied to Islamic tradition and contemporary issues. In the fourth paragraph, the reproduction of values through education is linked to the theory of Bourdieu and Passeron. In the last paragraph, the concept of identity and belonging used in this research is defined based on Anderson's works (2016) on what concerns national belonging in colonial countries, supported by Remotti's (2011) and Cummins' (2015)' theories regarding identity obsession in European countries and the Yampolsky et al. (2016) theory of the configuration of identity in people with multiple belonging.

3.1 Nussbaum's conceptualisation of human and social sciences

Nussbaum's broad philosophical reflection is not the subject of this research, nevertheless, it is useful to explore its pedagogical aspects and what she said about Islam (Nussbaum 1998, 2011, 2012; Rossi 2012, 2013, 2013a, 2013b, 2017, 2018; Alessandrini 2014; D' Addelfio 2016). Her research intersects with the post-colonial studies, particularly with those of Amartya Sen. From the rhetoric of the good coloniser who brought science, progress and religion to peoples "backwards" in the social development scale, they move on to the consideration of a polycentric universe. In this universe, there is a more or less peaceful coexistence of different paths to development, ideologies, philosophies and religions, all equally respectable and deserving of equal dignity and protection (Rossi 2018, p. IV). Sociological studies describe her position is in as universalistic cosmopolitanism: national boundaries are purely arbitrary and accidental data, so it is entirely irrational to attribute moral significance to them (Pendenza 2020, pp. 444-5). In Italy, there is extensive pedagogical literature referring to Nussbaum and even more extensive referring to her work. However, no studies on the education systems of Arab countries consider her approach and methodology of investigation focused on the role of the humanities (Nussbaum 2011).

In her work "*Not for Profit*" (2011), she analyses the role of the humanities in Western and Indian education systems, the core values they educate at and the cultural and religious traditions they inspire, and the weight given to them in the general organisation of education. Her work is essential for reasoning about how history, literature and philosophy are and should be taught. She argues that it is essential for the humanistic culture to regain a prominent role in the younger generation's education because only humanistic culture can develop critical thinking and open-mindedness, showing how, in history, the interaction between different cultures has been essential for sciences

and arts development. Her reflection is consistent with the pedagogical references mentioned in the introduction about history teaching. Indeed, she states that this discipline's rhetorical and nationalistic teaching leads to oppression and closure towards diversity. On the other hand, teaching based on social history contributes to building responsible citizens, sensitivity to justice and openness to the global society. It also counteracts the tendency to exclude minorities by teaching authentic facts about them, fighting stereotypes, and developing the ability to decentralise one's point of view; finally, it shows how the interaction between cultures has been essential for the development of science and the arts.

The essential issue of the research work behind her book is that humanistic education has been the victim of government policies in recent years, which have reduced the funds allocated to it and focused instead on technical, profit-oriented knowledge, reducing the quality of humanistic teaching. The author finds this in most Western countries, mainly Anglo-Saxon, and Asian countries such as India. The author wishes to emphasise- and it is helpful to be aware of this - that the conflict is not between humanistic and scientific disciplines (as it is often convenient to think) but between a profit-oriented education and an education oriented towards the construction of an inclusive, responsible and supportive global citizenship. She advocated that this second type of education requires adopting a Socratic teaching method, which places reasoning at the heart of the process. Referring to her work helps to contextualise the analysis of Arab Islamic education systems within a worldwide trend towards a profit-oriented education in which the scientific disciplines necessary for technological development have greater weight. This trend is evident in the wealthiest Arab countries, such as the Gulf States.

Nussbaum identifies the foundations of the active pedagogical method in the Western tradition in that educational approach that goes from Socrates to Rousseau to Dewey, emphasising that, even in other cultures, there are elements of pedagogical culture that go in this direction. Her reflection focuses on Indian authors, such as Gandhi and Tagore, and leads to a search for similar elements in other pedagogical traditions to enhance them and use them to seek intercultural convergence on shared values. The author mainly compares the condition of humanistic culture in the American and Indian education systems. Many insights are from European countries (among which Holland seems to be the country where philosophy is most studied and appreciated) and some Asian countries. At the same time, she admits that she does not know the situation in the Arab-Islamic countries. However, she hopes someone else will use her theoretical framework and comparative method to analyse the role occupied by humanistic culture in other educational systems, closing his book with a recommendation:

"Whoever wants to advocate humanistic culture to a particular society must know that society and its traditions, and must choose the subjects that are most likely to prevail according to the national values of that society" (Nussbaum 2011, p.166)[20].

In analysing the educational systems of the Arab-Islamic world, therefore, I pay particular attention to the role given to the humanities, to the authors who have proposed a method similar to the Socratic one, bearing in mind that the Arabic language is the classical subject par excellence, as the study of Latin and Greek is for the West.

The idea is that knowledge of Arab-Islamic educational systems and the pedagogical theories connected to them could contribute to newly migrated pupils' school inclusion. For this purpose, it is particularly useful to find within Arab pedagogy those elements tending towards peaceful world coexistence, tolerance and convergence towards common values, necessary for today's schools to form aware and responsible world citizens and to re-propose them in our schools so that newly migrated pupils could see valorised their culture of origin, an essential step for coexistence. This work identifies Sufism as the Arab-Islamic tradition[21] tending towards peaceful world coexistence and supposes that in the countries where it has cultural and spiritual power and influence the educational systems attempt to build what is defined as "world citizen". While the greater the exclusion of Sufism from the theological, cultural and political scenario, the greater the tendency of the educational systems towards building a close nationalist or Islamist identity.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to clarify what Nussbaum means by "*world citizen*". Firstly, a citizen with the ability to judge oneself and one's traditions critically in order to live what Socrates called an examined life. Secondly and consequently, citizens who want to become world citizens have to perceive themselves not only as members of a group or a nation but, above all, as human beings linked to other human beings by common interests. The third requirement of citizenship is defined as *narrative imagination*, the ability to imagine oneself in the shoes of another person in order to better understand his or her personal history, experiences, emotions and desires. Studies of religions and philosophies play an important role in the realisation of this project: awareness of cultural differences is essential to foster mutual respect, which is a prerequisite for productive dialogue. In fact, the leading causes of rejection of those who are different are ignorance and the belief that one's habits are valid by nature. According to Nussbaum, each of us could devote ourselves to the study of our own region and history, but humanity's well-being could be achieved through the knowledge of other peoples' and minorities' cultures. This

[20] All translations of Nussbaum (2011) are mine.

[21] It is necessary to made clear that Sufism is not an exclusively Arab tradition. On the contrary, it is widespread and shared throughout the Muslim world, regardless of ethnic barriers and brings with it important contributions from Iran, Turkey, India, Africa and beyond.

does not only mean recognising the dignity of pupils with a diverse cultural background and of those belonging to minorities but also that those pupils need to learn to treat their neighbours with respect and understanding for the recognition not only of differences but also of rights, ambitions and shared problems (Nussbaum 1998).

3.2 Education in Arab-Islamic Studies

The first source analysed on Arab-Islamic education is that of Zani (2005), which is the most complete historical reconstruction of the affirmation of the national school system in the Arab world in Italian literature. It begins with the Quran's (Qur'ān) revelation and finishes with the independent education systems after colonization. The historical reconstruction of the first section is built on it. Despite its great value, it fails to analyse the influence of two forms of Islam considered essential in this research project: Sufism and Wahhabism (on the different schools of thought inside Islam, see Ventura 2003). Sufism is a current that is often little considered by media and research but is representative of an open and tolerant vision of Islam (see Ventura 2016, 2017, 2019), with important relationships with politics in the contemporary world and educational policies and practices (Stepanyants 2003, in particular, the papers of Smirnov, pp. 27-45). Another source of information and reflections on Sufism's role in building a tolerant contemporary society is the Ibn 'Arabi Society website. These studies mainly concern the theoretical and conceptual apparatus of Sufism, its structure of values and ideals, with a mainly philosophical rather than anthropological and sociological approach to the historical realities of the various brotherhoods. It is necessary to take into account even the controversial side of a religious phenomenon that is as widespread as it is multifaceted and, for this purpose, it could be useful the work of A. Hammoudi (1997) *Master and Disciple. The cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism.* It gives a critical view of the relationship between mysticism and authoritarianism in education and politics, focusing on Morocco. He affirms:

> *"This book analyses the transfer of mystic guidance in initiation to the realm of power relations and political institutions. I do not intend it as a campaign against Sufism in any of its forms. Hence, I wish to […] express my admiration for Sufism as a personal passion for God and as a revolution in many women's and men's lives that kept hegemonic conformism (of religion and reason) in check"* (p. xxi).

Sufism contributed to the instauration and consolidation of traditional education. This tradition influences today's education in different ways in the diverse countries considered, overall, in the relationship between teachers and pupils, even if this influence is not often recognised. This tradition has a direct and political influence in Morocco since Sufi brotherhoods participate in power with a particular role in education, as will be better explained in the following section.

Returning to the discussion about literature on education systems, the foundation stone of the comparison between Islamic and Western educational systems, but focused on universities in Medieval Time, is Makdisi (1981). The content of his book is not very interesting for this research, but his approach, method and fundamental lesson are. It is the first work in which someone shows that universities were not born in the West and then exported to the whole world. On the contrary, it affirms that important higher education institutions that still exist today, like *al-Azhar* in Egypt, *al-Qarawiyyīn* in Fez and *al-Zitouna* in Tunisia, were born in the same period or even before the first European universities. In these Muslim institutions, students did not study only Islamic subjects, even though they were the basis of the training, but also sciences, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, chemistry, physic, philosophy, poetry, history, and rhetoric. The author compares the Western and Muslim worlds without colonial prejudices, i.e., without the prejudice that culture was born and developed in the West and then exported. Interestingly, the comparison method considers two different cultural traditions equally valid and rich without trying to show the superiority of one over the other. Consequently, the fundamental lesson is that in Arab-Islamic countries, there are ancient and valuable cultural, educational and pedagogical traditions and that the task of today's researcher is to understand what has remained of these traditions in modern national educational systems built on the European colonial model rather than on these traditions. According to literature, Egypt has had an important historical, cultural and pedagogical role in the Arab-Islamic world from the foundation of Al-Azhar to the end of the 20th century (Zani 2005; De Poli 2007; Campanini 2005, 2008, 2017) and the history of its educational institutions clearly shows the dynamics of contemporary Arab education systems' construction. Due to this reason, it is a reference point to explain the two case studies. Currently, the most interesting studies on Egyptian education are those of Chiara Diana (2009, 2009a, 2010, 2012, 2014). As to the role of the religious educational institution, such as Al-Azhar, and concerning Sufism, it is possible to refer to Leccese (2017), Brown (2011), Gradoli (2013), Hassan (in Mohamed, E., Gerber, H. R., Aboulkacem, S., & Momani, B., 2016), to the work of Zeghal in Abi-Mershed (2010) and finally to my article (Mazzei 2018b). Homerin (1986), in particular, explains why and how al-Azhar contributed, during the Sadat era, to eradicate Sufism from contemporary pedagogy. Egypt due to its central pedagogical role to religious (Al-Azhar) and political (the Arabism of Nasser) factors, but, as explained in the 6th chapter, lost this role during the Sadat era. The Arab world has therefore moved in search of other models. Tunisia has a good system, but it is based on a European model. Morocco is an interesting case due to its peaceful tradition without ethnic or religious struggle based on the relationship between monarchy, Sufism and politics (Leccese 2017). Fatema Mernissi's studies (1996, 2000, and 2002) are a starting point for the analysis of the Moroccan education system, identified as the Arab country with the educational policy most sensitive to the

role of humanities in the education of citizens. For the education system of this country, in addition to the previously mentioned Zani, the studies of Ennaji (2005), Gandolfi (2011), Chirra (2012), Chic (2013), and Roverselli (2014) are interesting. On the other hand, it is possible to find the nationalist traits of the Egyptian system in the Syrian one. For the contextualisation of Moroccan and Syrian education systems inside the Arab world, it is essential to refer to collective and important works. One of these is the book edited by Kirdar S. (2017), in which there are studies on Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. In this book, a historical analysis of the development of modern national education systems is conducted, confirming the historical reconstruction in which colonialism and post-colonialism have a major role. The most interesting thing about this work is the analysis of current education systems. Each country's education system is analysed by a local scholar, with wealth and precision of data on students' composition, gender issues, levels of schooling, early school leaving, types of high schools chosen, post-school employment levels, ethnic and language issues, as well as subjects' content and the role of Islam. Its further merit is that it is a recent work, published after the upheavals of the so-called Arab springs, and therefore capable of describing the changes (or the disappointment at the lack of change) that these have brought about in education.

On this topic, it is also possible to refer to the work *Education and the Arab Spring. Resistance, Reform, and Democracy* (Mohamed, Gerber and Aboulkacem 2016). Other important works in this field, but published before 2011, are Abi-Mershed (2010), Hefner and Zaman (2007), and Griffin (2006). Important authors dealing with education in Arab countries are Mazawi and Sultana. Mazawi wrote, among the others, an article published inside the mentioned *Trajectories of education in the Arab World* (*Naming the imaginary: "building an Arab knowledge society" and the contested terrain of educational reforms for development,* pp. 201-225) and a paper on Saudi Arabia inside the mentioned work edited by Griffin. Mazawi and Sultana are members of the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, an important source of information on Arab education concerning (south) Europe from a post-colonial perspective. Among their latest issues, one is about the widespread phenomenon of private tuition across the Mediterranean region (Bray, Mazawi and Sultana 2012), which let the economic issue enter the analysis of educational systems. Among Sultana's numerous publications, it is important here to mention the article *"Looking back before moving forward: building on 15 years of comparative educational research in the Mediterranean"* (2008) which allows us to learn critically about the history of this field of study and to clarify the category of post-colonial education study. Compared to the pedagogical literature, rich in intra-European comparisons, and, on the other side, to the specific literature on Arab education, their work is a valuable base for comparing the two shores of the Mediterranean

Sea that is between two similar but rarely compared political-cultural entities and their education policies, the European Union and the Arab League (Sultana 2008).

Another important journal on the topic - though focused on religion more than on a geographical space - is *The Journal of Education in Muslim Societies (JEMS)*, a biannual, peer-reviewed journal published in partnership with the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Indiana University Press; it is interesting but not specialised in Arab and Mediterranean countries. About educational issues from a comparative perspective at an international level, there is the *Global Comparative Education: Journal of the WCCES* in which Maherzi published the article *"Culture et enseignement dans la civilisation Arabo-Musulmane*" [Culture and teaching inside Arab-Islamic civilization] (2019). According to the perspective of the present work, it states,

> *"If we start from the analysis of ancient Arabs' culture and education, this does not exempt us from emphasizing the capital importance of these borrowings. They are not only essential to civilization's survival but, if they were recognized and introduced into the curricula of the world's educational systems, could greatly contribute to the fight against xenophobia and others' rejection. Valuing the other and his cultural identity, listening to him and recognizing him as a bearer of wealth and not as a simple intruder to be avoided at best and eliminated at worst would promote understanding and peace in societies and among the world's populations"* (p.68)[22].

The author claims that to promote peace in societies it is crucial to recognise the values of culture and education of other civilizations and introduce them into Western education. On the topics of this thesis, French literature plays a significant role, overall concerning the countries colonized by the French and in which people still speak French, like the Maghreb. Despite the vast amount of sociological, anthropological, political and other disciplinary studies in French literature on the Arab world, the educational issue is also marginal and little debated.

> *"The contemporary history of education in the Middle East constitutes, moreover, a marginal field of this region's history: few works are explicitly devoted to this question, and there is no synthesis on this subject until today, neither for the Ottoman period's end nor for the 20th century"*[23] (Verdeil 2017, p.9).

This work provides a summary of the Middle East educational history and a framework of the various perspectives used in writing this history by various authors in diverse times. It also provides a critical analysis of the literature on the subject, distinguished between English and French literature, with a preference for the English one, more attentive to local characters and intellectuals. Nevertheless, French literature has interesting studies, especially regarding specific

[22] All translations of Maherzi (2019) are mine.

[23] All translations of Verdeil (2017) are mine.

educational issues in French-speaking countries, such as Pellegrini (2019, 2020) on Morocco. Verdeil (2017) also discusses religious education and secularization (pp. 26-30) linked to national education, in a way useful to point out the connections between traditional education of the classical time and religious education inside existing national education systems. Additionally, from this quote, a clear idea emerges about existing literature and what miss in it:

> *"This very political approach to the history of education leaves many pedagogical and social aspects in the shade. Certainly, it is admitted that education in its modernized version is at the heart of the transformations of society (modification of the place of women, birth of an urban middle class, a new way of standing, dressing, new calendar, access to books and printed matter, etc.). However, the actors of this transformation have not given rise to much work, and despite approaches that are as close as possible to the life of the institutions, knowledge of the contents and methods of teaching, as well as the economic implications of the development of the educational systems, remain incomplete"* (Verdeil, p. 33).

Education studies rarely consider the main stakeholders in education, while they focus more on official policies. In this sense, the fieldwork planned in this research project involves interviewing students and teachers involved in education, and the focus on the humanities and economic conditions assumes its value.

3.3 A post-metaphysic approach to religion and democracy: Habermas and the Islamic tradition[24]

In dealing with the subject of Islamic religion concerning education, it is necessary to set this topic within the broader debate on the role of religion in today's world. The starting point is the Marrakesh Declaration (2016), promulgated by the King of Morocco and other important personalities from the Muslim world. It affirms that from a tolerant and future-oriented Muslim perspective, one should not reject everything from the West in order to safeguard traditions but should separate what is good from what is evil. The document points out Habermas' political and philosophical proposal as a welcomed Western production as it aims to promote respectful dialogue between cultures and religions and not the implementation of a Hegelian synthesis in which one side dominates the other. Accepting Muslims' invitation to use the conceptual tools offered by the German philosopher, the present work supports his theory about the role of religion in contemporary societies and their public spheres and about how to build communication aimed at understanding between different faiths and between believers and atheists to build a cohesive and inclusive society. The method he proposes is the neutralising translation, i.e., the transposition

[24] I have already written on this topic in Mazzei (2021).

of religious values onto a secular signification system so that they can be rationally discussed and enhanced within society (Habermas 2016), a cooperative process capable of safeguarding the force of articulation and the resources of meaning enshrined in the religious discourse (Ceppa in Habermas 2018). Within the author's truly impressive bibliography, the interest here is in those works that deal directly with religions, thus his most recent production, which began in 2001 with an interview on Islamic terrorism (Borradori 2015). After the exploding problem of religious extremism and the consequent fierce international debate, Habermas proposes one thesis aimed at striking against the sclerotic secularism of contemporary liberalism. The exclusion of religion from the public sphere, as has been done in Europe and especially in France, deprives society of essential resources in the foundation of meaning (Ceppa in Habermas 2018, p.7). The Habermas' work of 2015 treats the enhancement of the sacred complex, with his myths and rituals. In *Revival of religions and secularism* (2018), Habermas affirms that institutional secularism of multicultural democracies represents today the condition for the revival of religion and that the secular reason is the constitutional basis of confrontation and deepening of religious authenticity. The meaning of secularism changes as much as the way of believing.

It is not among the aims of this chapter to provide a summary of the vast literature on this author and his concepts nor to discuss it in detail. It is undoubtedly essential to refer to the monographic issue of *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale* (Corchia et al. 2020), the most recent and complete Italian collective reflection on the topic, entirely dedicated to him. Two papers are particularly interesting in this publication: the one by Ceppa and the one by Affuso. The second one critically discusses the use of the *Public Sphere* concept in a context different from the one in which it was born: a bourgeois, Western and male context. It is worth saying that works that use the concept of the public sphere in the Arab context already exist, like that of Sebastiani (2014) on the 2011 Revolution in Tunisia and that of Wien (2010) talking about education in Iraq. However, on the other hand, an important part of the Muslim intellectual world recognises the legitimacy of this author.

The French school system is not a subject of this research but a little discussion about it is useful concerning post-colonial relationships and religion. Nevertheless, the comparison between France and Algeria presented by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) (see for example p.182 and p.211 note 2) has a strong influence on this thesis work as a paradigmatic example of the colonial and postcolonial relationship between Arabs and European education systems and societies. In the French school system, the strong atheism and the absence of religion in the school system create more difficulties for pupils used to educational systems where religion has a lot of importance. The declared neutrality towards ethical and political creeds clashes with the reality of the contribution that the educational system makes to the established order in reproducing its values,

which are not the same for Muslims, or, in general, pupils with a diverse cultural background (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p. 206). For other and more recent points of view that confirm this perspective, it is possible to refer to Cummins' analysis focused on the French education system related to the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre (2015). In Cummins' analysis, the French education system tries to build what Yampolsky (2016) defined as an exclusive identity based on French national belonging as much as jihadist groups try to build an exclusive identity based on Muslim belonging. The questions that Cummins posed starting from French education are interesting for the present work:

> *"- The extent to which educational systems in western countries may have indirectly contributed to the alienation and radicalization of youth from socially marginalized groups*
> *- The extent to which alternative educational orientations that prioritize the ways in which identities are negotiated within schools might increase the identification of marginalized youth with the broader society"* (Cummins 2015, p. 3).

3.4 The Habitus transmitted by the education systems.

This paragraph discusses the decision to analyse education focusing on educational *systems* and values and social relations' reproduction. Talking about education as a *system of reproduction* immediately refers to the famous text written by Bourdieu and Passeron (first original edition 1970) on the French educational system. The two authors strongly criticised this system as reproducing the existing social order rather than creating opportunities for emancipation and change. However, the French case is only one historically and geographically situated example of a school concept conceived as an institution for the reproduction of legitimate culture in every time, place and political community (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, pp. 10-11). Therefore, this thesis aims to show whether and how Arab education systems tend to reproduce existing society or produce changes in it, based on the following considerations.

The unveiling of the ideological function of an educational system carried out by the authors leaves no room for any hope of reform that could eliminate the violence inherent in inculcating a particular knowledge selected as the official one to reproduce a specific social order. This idea caused a great stir; taken up by many and criticised by equally many, it remains an example of a critical analysis of the function of education in contemporary society, capable of providing general axioms (first book), even though it refers strictly to one historically and geographically confined reality, namely France at the time (second book). Whether or not history may have overtaken their analysis, whether reforms that have taken place over fifty years in French schools have changed the reality they describe is not the subject of this work. What remains is the widely held awareness

that every educational system performs, for the society of which it is part, a specific irreplaceable task, namely that of reproducing specific cultural values and social relationships.

It is not a mechanical and predictable reproduction in which no changes can take place, or which does not produce "undesirable effects" such as people who deviate from the received training. However, certainly, every educational system tends to reproduce a given society, regardless of whether it succeeds in doing it or not (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, pp.33-4).

Therefore, the text is a point of reference about the reproduction of social relations, especially economic and cultural values that underpin these relations. In the present work, the first question is what social order the diverse Arab-Islamic educational systems aim to reproduce, assuming that there are opposing drives:

> *"The monopoly on the dominant cultural legitimacy is always the object of competition between institutions or agents. Follows from this that the imposition of a cultural orthodoxy corresponds to a particular form of the structure of the field of competition […] between the values and ideologies of different fractions of the dominant classes"* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p.22).

The university system is not the main subject of the present work. It is the focus of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) second book, especially regarding the selection mechanisms based on the relationship between linguistic skills and social class of origin. This selectiveness exists not only in universities but also in schools. The present work addresses it by looking at the same relationship in multifactorial analysis and at the interviews relating to schooling in Arab countries and Europe. In many Arab countries, university education takes place in French (or English), especially in the scientific disciplines, making the relationship between the group of origin, education received, and university selection by linguistic competence, particularly significant. In this situation, studying European languages from a very early age is an essential precondition for university success, as was the study of Greek and Latin in Europe in the last century. Other faculties, especially humanities, are in Arabic, meaning the classic Arabic language, named *fuṣḥā*, different from any spoken Arabic in any Arab country. This means that the chances of success in scientific faculties are much higher for those who have attended private schools, where there is a particular emphasis on foreign languages and in the humanities for those who also have a traditional religious education, i.e., those belonging to two privileged social classes.

When these pupils cross the Mediterranean to arrive in a European country, they enter a new educational system that aims to reproduce a social system. This issue is not analysed in detail for what concerns European educational systems, but they declare to aim at building the European citizen and thus to reproduce the social structure and values of Europe. Although European education systems explicitly aim at intercultural education, this does not mean that they do not aim

at building specific identity and belonging, as it is almost unthinkable to have a pedagogy that does not aim at this. The authors said:

> *"It is one thing to teach 'cultural relativism', that is the arbitrary character of all culture, to individuals who have already been educated according to the principles of the cultural arbitrary of a group or class; it would be quite another to claim to be giving a relativistic education, i.e. actually to produce a cultivated man who was the native of all cultures. The problems posed by situations of early bilingualism or biculturalism give only a faint idea of the insurmountable contradictions faced by a PA (Pedagogical Action) c1aiming to take as its practical didactic principle the theoretical affirmation of the arbitrariness of linguistic or cultural codes"* (p.12).

Despite the declaration of multiculturalism, each education system tries to reproduce an identity and a society. Therefore, for school inclusion in Europe, it is necessary to measure the distances between the education systems of departure and arrival in terms of the habitus they build:

> *"Given that the primary habitus inculcated by primary PW [Pedagogical work] is the basis for the subsequent formation of any other habitus, the degree of specific productivity of any phase of secondary PW is measured in this respect, by the degree to which the system of the means required for carrying out the PW (the mode of inculcation) objectively takes account of the distance between the habitus it aims to inculcate and the habitus produced by previous PW"* (p.45).

The results that the host countries' schools could achieve with newly migrated pupils previously trained in other education systems depend on their previous achievements. The two different habitus meet in each pupil, mixing or clashing, determining his relationship with the legitimate culture of his home and host country.

3.5 Identity obsession and imagined communities

Talking about the construction of identity and belonging in a pedagogical context, to refer to sociological and psychological studies on the subject is helpful. Going into detail about these vast fields is not the aim of this work. Instead, its objective is to describe what kind of identity the various Arab education systems in history aimed to build and what habitus they reproduce today, with the awareness of the numerous and contrasting perspectives with which the topic is treated, based on sociological, psychological, pedagogical and cultural knowledge. This section mentions the studies on the subject that have contributed to the construction of the perspective used in this research. They are treated at the end of the theoretical chapter also because they entered the research project at an advanced stage. The educators and philosophers mentioned until now are indeed at its basis and contributed to the definition of the research questions; instead, the authors

and the topics discussed here have entered the research afterwards because of the need to clarify unresolved questions and give a more solid structure to the whole research.

Firstly, it is necessary to outline a definition of identity. The reference is generally to those study perspectives that understand identity as a momentary personal construction resulting from a personal synthesis of many factors: family-related, educational, social, cultural, religious, economic, historical and geographical and others. This perspective distances itself from all those that regard identity as a monolith inherited at birth and unchangeable over time according to individual life experiences. It also distances itself from those views that consider complex identities weak by definition, believing that people could build solid and complex identities through conscious free choices, even if they are not fixed and pre-constituted.

Identity is something that has become omnipresent in contemporary society's discourses, something that different powers try to build and use for their aims; studying identity will therefore mean deconstructing the identity constructions voluntarily enacted by the political powers through education systems, deconstructing all the narrations built from this identity obsession.

> *"If the construction of identity becomes an absorbing total, all-comprehensive task, a task which unilaterally occupies our entire culture (if we are talking about a collective subject) and our energies (if we are talking about individual subjects), the effect would be deleterious. Why? Because to enter into an identity exclusively logic means entering into a very strong conflict with others, and means giving rise to those situations which in "Against Identity" I described in terms of the destruction of the other"* (Remotti 2011)[25].

Cummins also highlights how this identity obsession has the form of national identity in European countries (Cummins 2015, pp.7-9). Referring generally to the negotiation of identity in European education systems, he writes:

> *"Immigrant-background students are not encouraged to take pride in their linguistic and cultural knowledge and accomplishments. Schools reinforce the devaluation of identity experienced by immigrant-background communities in the society […] societal power relations and identity negotiation intersect in determining patterns of academic achievement among marginalized group students. The ways in which teachers negotiate identities with students can exert a significant impact on the extent to which students will engage academically or withdraw from academic effort […] Coercive relations of power refer to the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group or country. For example, dominant group institutions (e.g. schools) have frequently required that subordinated groups deny their cultural identity and give up their languages as a necessary condition for success in the 'mainstream' society"* (Cummins 2015, p.14).

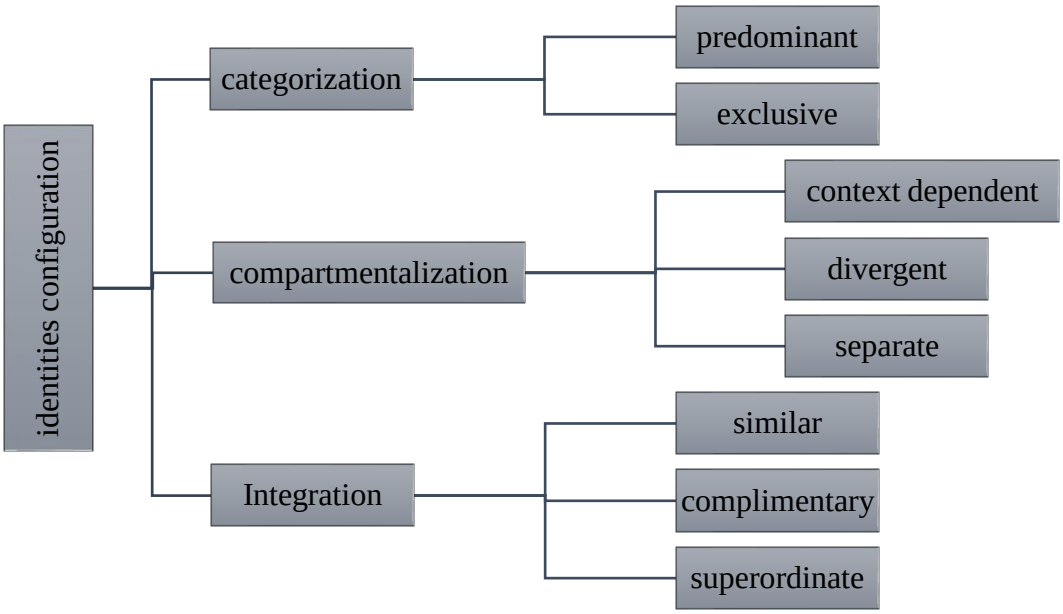
[25] All translations of Remotti (2011) are mine.

Despite European declarations on inclusion and respect for cultural differences, pupils with a migrant background often have to make a voluntary choice between the different cultures they belong to, in other words, to establish a hierarchy in which European culture must have a predominant position. The present research hypothesis is that this hierarchy of belongings already begins in the home countries between dominant ethnic identities (Arabs) and particular ones (Kurds, Amazigh), and national and religious identities on the other hand (to name only the most common, but there could also be other minority identities). Farouk Mardam-Bey and Elias Sanbar adopted a metaphor to describe Arabs identity: they represented it as composed of concentric circles that do not exclude one another, from the littlest to the biggest, from birthplace to the nation, through familiar, communitarian, local, regional, religious, linguistic and other belonging. These identity configurations could permit the coexistence of different cultural nationalism or belonging feeling, where one could recognise himself simultaneously. Arab and Muslim communities (in Arabic *Umma*) differ from the nation because they are not spatially limited and do not detain sovereignty (Mermier 2012, p.6). With the entry into European schools and the inculcation of belonging to one European nation, to Europe in general and to Western culture in even more general terms, the question of identity and belonging becomes even more complicated.

From the point of view of recent psychological studies, the work of Yampolsky et al. (2016) can help us to visualise how people organize identities inside themselves, identifying the identities configuration better related to well-being and trying to build an education capable of encouraging this type of conscious configuration. Yampolsky defines multicultural identity as follows):

> *"Multicultural individuals can be defined as anyone who is a member of, or has a lineage from, more than one cultural group"* (Benet-Martinez & Hong 2014, in Yampolsky et al. 2016, p.166).

This is the identities configuration scheme elaborated by the authors (Yampolsky et al. 2016, p.177):



As the authors point out:

> *"Categorization involves identifying with one cultural group over others by seeing one identity as predominant, and by excluding other identities from the self. Identifying with one culture can be seen as a cognitively simpler way to go about defining oneself"* (Yampolsky 2016, p.168).

In the *predominant* option, people create the hierarchy mentioned above, for example, a pupil belonging to the second generation who declares, *"I am first Italian and then Arab or Muslim"* (Int.08). In the *exclusive* option, people do not create a hierarchy and delete other identities from themselves.

> *"Compartmentalization is characterized by having multiple cultural identities that are kept in their own isolated compartments within the self"* (Yampolsky 2016, p.168).

In the *separate* option, "*the identities are kept separate from each other";* the divergent option is more problematic because "*the differences between one's identities are seen as opposing, and […] contradictory";* instead, the *context-dependent* option can also be a functional strategy to deal with a multicultural situation: *"one identifies with one cultural group at a time, depending on the context".* The third configuration, Integration, is characterised by the following:

> *"Cohesively connecting and reconciling one's multiple cultural identities within oneself […] In integration, individuals can identify with their different cultures simultaneously rather than identifying in a context-bound manner. In this way, people adapt to the demands of their contexts, but they still identify with their many cultures at the same time"* (Yampolsky 2016, p.168).

It is possible to distinguish between *similar*, *complementary* (*involves seeing a common ground between one's identities*) and *superordinate identity* (an *inclusive identity that encompasses different cultural identities*).

> *"A superordinate identity, such as human, as a means for reconciling and uniting them […] superordinate identity of being human groups all her cultural identities together and helps her create bridges between these unique Identities"* (Yampolsky 2016, p.168).

In this work, they search for a correlation between the types of identity configuration and well-being. Here the definition of the concept of well-being is not of interest, but some study results could be helpful. The *superordinate integration option* seems to be identifiable as the psychological reference regarding the aim of intercultural education since it relates better to personal growth. In simplest terms, it has to aim at building a sense of belonging to humanity, the so-called earthly identity, in which every belonging can find its own space in harmony with the others (Morin 2001).

This type of psychological study uses multiple-choice surveys and psychometric methods that are not used in the present work; instead, the concept of identities is similar. In Bartolo (2020), it is possible to find an interesting concept of multiple social identities considered as a resource that positively influences social activism. They investigate three social identities: national, religious and ethical, the same used in this work. The work of Costabile (2020) links psychological well-being with activism and describes it as a significant factor that reduces the risk of radicalisation. The great difference in the method of investigation between the present research and the aforementioned psychological studies reinforces theoretically the common points, namely the attention to how different identities and belonging intersect within the same individual, determining his social behaviour and the results of his education.

It is now necessary to address the issue of identity from the point of view of its historical construction linked to political events and the social environment. Several times the terms identity and belonging are linked to the adjectives "ethnic", "religious", and "national", as these are the three elements considered here. Ethnicity could be considered objective (on which there would certainly be much to discuss, but this is not one of the objectives of this research), and religious affiliation or identity is immediately understandable from the faith professed and practised by a person. Instead, nationality appears much more complex from a theoretical point of view. The ambiguity of the concepts of national identity and belonging has been the subject of significant scientific and political debates in the last 40 years. These concepts are at the basis of nationalist political movements, which have been very important in the last two centuries but reveal a theoretical weakness incomparable to the ideological structure of other political thoughts

(socialism, liberalism, etc.). The difference in terms of theoretical construction leads to consider them incomparable, so much so that one could consider nationalism an "adjective" of structured political ideologies (nationalist socialism, nationalist liberalism), giving rise in reality to concepts as ambiguous as the concept of national identity itself. The national community as a community of belonging is the weakest of belongings since it is not based on a blood tie (ethnicity, family), religious choice or the sharing of daily life (village community, membership of sects, subcultures etc.). Moreover, one characteristic of traditional religious communities, such as both the *Umma* and the World Church, is that they build on a common sacred language, namely Arabic and Latin, that is more a system of signs understandable by believers all over the world that a language that is spoken in someplace. On the contrary, a national community is based mainly on the accident of being born in a given territory, defined through arbitrary borders established for political reasons, with countless compatriots often speaking other languages and believers of other faith. Of these compatriots, one knows nothing and never meets them in life; with them, the common belonging relationship is dramatically imaginary (Anderson 2016, or. 1991).

Analysing the issue of national belonging, particularly in the context of Arab countries, would require a separate study; here, the interest is in understanding how national education systems inculcate and decline this concept. The imagined community is not false but built through imagination, creating original myths and national traditions and thus through a historical reconstruction of the past that seeks to give legitimacy to the nation itself. These processes work in public discourses, political actions, mass media and literature, and overall education systems aiming at building the new national community imagined by the nationalist Arab elite during colonialism. An imagination nurtured by colonial education, as Anderson (2016) shows in his chapter on the last wave of nationalism, namely the nationalism in the colonised world, a nationalism that differs from that of America and Europe, also for the role of education in its development. After independence, in the newborn Arab independent Nations, and for the first time in Arab pedagogical history, one of the main aims of education was to build the national identity of the young generations. One crucial difference with Europe is of a linguistic kind. In Europe, nationalism means Latin's decline in favour of local vernacular languages, becoming the national languages; instead, in Arab countries, the enhancement of the Arabic language among young people against the diffusion of European languages was one of the main features of nationalist education. The emergence of local languages has been blocked so far. This will lead us to analyse language education policies as a key factor in the analysis.

The following chapters describe how this process works in Arab countries. However, aiming to understand it better in its general meaning, here it could be helpful to refer at least to one historical study on this process in the European context, to look at others after looking at ourselves. Inside

the vast literature on the nation, nationalism and national identity in the European context, it is possible to find a short article written by Beonio Brocchieri (2001) on the weakness of Italian identity, nationality and citizenship. It is interesting because it defines Italy and German, the two European countries of the empirical research, as exceptions inside the European development of Modern Nations. In countries like Britain and France, the monarchy played a fundamental role in the creation of a feeling of identification of people with the State because people identify with the King and the King with the State. Following this approach, it was through the monarchy's symbolic power and sacred values that these national communities imagined themselves, permitting the centralisation of the power in the hand of the state and its legitimisation in front of the people. Conversely, in Italy, the presence of a disseminated power between city-state, lordships, duchies etc., without a symbolic and material centre of power does not permit the identification of the population with a single national power. In addition, the presence of a unique figure of symbolic and religious power, such as the pope, desecrates the other political power in the peninsula. Therefore, the monarchical institution has played a decisive role in the "*constitutive political myth*" of the nation through the sacredness of the figure of the king (Brocchieri 2001, p.152)[26].

This concept could be used to understand better the difference in identity building between Morocco, with the oldest monarchy in the Arab countries claiming direct descent from Muhammad and ruling a country independent for centuries, and Syria, where an independent king ruled only for two years, and he was not born in Syrian lands. Despite the shortness of this Syrian experience, nationalistic movements have referred to it for decades when they tried to imagine a national community in a country that has never been an independent political entity in history, inhabited by different ethnicities and religions and whose borders British and French arbitrarily set in colonial times. In Syria, such as in Italy, the force of family relationships and local and particular belonging was more potent than national identification. On this weakness in Syria born one of the most muscular Arab nationalistic movements that try to impose the national community that they imagined to people through dictatorship and national education, relying on those familial, sectarian and client ties that represent the true belonging of the people, beyond the rhetorical proclamations on nationality, religion and Arab ethnicity.

[26] All translations of Brocchieri (2001) are mine.

SECTION 1 - HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION

4 Methodology

Why start with a historical reconstruction when the material object of the research is pupils who currently move between Arab and European educational systems? Why be concerned primarily with traditional Islamic education if today's Arab-Islamic pupils study in educational systems built on European models?

> *"This historiography, which takes the study of the national education system as its analysis centre, enables to highlight variable chronologies according to the countries and areas considered but underlines the extent to which education is an important object of political management and national construction, particularly in a context of new nations and inter-regional competition's emergence"* (Verdeil 2017, p.23).

The historical and cultural reconstruction of educational systems development allows us to see what part of the past has remained in the present and with what meanings, what has been tried to be removed and why and what motivations have driven the construction of things as they are today. In short, it gives depth to an analysis that would be superficial if it only focused on the present. The analysis of the present from a systemic and functionalist perspective shows globalised infrastructures that envelop all regions of the world, such as models of educational systems that cross the borders of states and cultures and impose themselves everywhere. Looking deeper, it is possible to see different civilisations responding to the modernising pressures of the West by assuming them as challenges to transform their societies. They do that based on resources internal to their specific cultural traditions. The same "tradition/modernity" tension that has shaped Western modernity is also at work within other civilisations, and the identity traditions shape the pedagogical ethos and school curricula (Habermas 2018, pp. 27-30). As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) said in the first chapter of their second book, it is not possible to understand the situation of pupils in a single moment of their school careers linked to their social belonging without taking into account their entire career, from the beginning up to the present moment. The empirical research is conducted with pupils attending European education; however, to understand how they experience it, it is worth knowing their entire education path in terms of its social and cultural characteristics:

> *"Just as we have had to go beyond a purely synchronic grasp of the relations which are established at a given level of education between the social or academic characteristics of the different groups and their degrees of success, in order to construct the diachronic model of careers and biographies, so too, in order to escape the illusion inherent in a strictly functionalist analysis, we must reinsert the state of*

the system grasped by our survey into the history of its transformations" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.90).

As the authors suggest, the analysis of the existing education systems and the experiences lived inside them need a contextualisation inside the history of the transformations of these education systems to interpret today's individual experience through the history of education and bring out historical and traditional elements that influence the educational experience even today.
Corchia, in his work (2009), rearranges Habermas' reflections about identity, socialization, belonging and other psychological issues and affirms that, from a methodological point of view, the primary source of access to people's experiences is their own reconstructions of their individual and collective life histories. The researchers do not have to attribute meaning ex-novo to what they observe but make explicit the meaning given by people, understandable only through an interpretative process (Corchia 2009, pp. 51-57). In this research, in-depth knowledge of pupils' educational universe of reference is the base of the interpretative processes and attribution of meaning to understand the symbolic references and collective imagery underlying their perception. One example concerns the relationship between teacher and pupil, regarding which the traditional model of the relationship between master and disciple at the basis of Islamic education greatly affected the imagery of the interviewees. Thus, it is possible to interpret what recent immigrant parents think about teacher-pupil relations in European schools in light of this knowledge, understanding the cultural and traditional background behind their narratives. The alternative is to merely dwell on the surface and assume that these parents are not accustomed to modern and advanced European educational models without questioning the meaning and origin of their reflections. This second choice relates to a methodology of comparison based on supposed objective efficiency criteria of Western origin and colonial spirit, against which a lesson can be learned from Bourdieu and Passeron (1990):

"Because the indicators of the 'rationality' of an educational system are less amenable to comparative interpretation the more completely they express the historical and social specificity of educational institutions and practises, this procedure destroys the very object of comparison by divesting the elements compared of all they owe to their membership in systems of relations. […]It is necessary to reinstate these relations within the systems of relations on which they depend, in order to avoid comparing the incomparable or, more subtly, failing to compare the really comparable" (pp. 180-1).

These criteria of rationality, which already produce comparative analyses of educational systems worldwide (UNESCO, Pisa surveys, etc.), are little considered in the present work. On the contrary, it focuses on those historical, traditional, cultural and social aspects that constitute the

system of relationships that situate the identity construction acted by the educational systems and characterise individual experiences.

This first section is based on previous work (Mazzei 2016, 2017, 2018a), in which, however, fundamental references for the reading presented in this work (such as Habermas, Bourdieu and Passeron, Verdeil, Maherzi, Kirdar and others) are absent and in which the historical reconstruction focuses mainly on Egypt. This historical analysis of Arab educational systems nurtured the emergence of a broader research idea, which is carried out in the present work. It is from this historical background that the research questions addressed in this research were born. Ethnic, religious, national and other identities and affiliations are described as processes under construction in history and not as facts or primordial characteristics of a particular group. The historical analysis shows us the complexity of the process that has led to the construction, often politically exploited, of the identities that these people bring with them, often in a problematic way, in their migratory journey. The reconstruction of the Arab educational history is carried out from the theoretical perspective described in the previous chapter, without aspiring to judge it in comparison with Western pedagogy, but rather to know what Arab pedagogical elements in history tend towards the concepts of universal citizenship and tolerance. In other words, this historical part aims to identify which Arab pedagogical currents tend to build in pupils a habitus able to relate to differences and live together with other cultures, and which tend to build closed pupils' identities. The hypothesis is that pupils who attended schools in which the second type of pedagogy is used experience the path of inclusion in Europe with more difficulty. To categorize the diverse education systems, the categorization of the Moroccan sociologist Mernissi (2002) is applied: she divided Arab education systems into dynamics or statics, depending on if they aim to educate people to respect borders or to cross them. Her categorisation breaks with the Western view that sees European education as dynamic and Arab education as static, showing that the two approaches coexist in both traditions. Following this model, the multifactorial analysis, of which historical reconstruction is a fundamental part, focuses on those aspects of education systems that aim at the formation of pupils' identity, such as the background ideology of educational policies regarding identity building and how to relate with differences and human and social sciences' role inside education systems and their curricula contents.

All the analyses are based on the existing literature, analysed through the model of multifactorial analysis of education systems. It focuses on those factors Nussbaum (2011) identified as central: economy, politics, humanities' role and contents, the role of foreign language and culture, treatment of internal minorities and migrants and gender educational policies; the role that education systems play in social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and nation building (Anderson 2016).

A comparative overview of all Arab Mediterranean countries is accompanied by a focus on Morocco and Syria, firstly because Moroccan and Syrian communities are the most significant Arabic-speaking communities in Europe: the Moroccan one is a historical community built through decades of economic migration; the Syrian one is recent, due to the war in that country. Another reason to choose these two countries as case studies is their history and education systems. Due to their specific history, they represent two extremes in the Arab world, overall for the different ways in which they built their national education system after colonialism, interpreting and implementing the concept of Arab and Muslim education and identity in a very different way. The hypothesis is that Morocco, which identifies itself with the monarchy that has ruled it for centuries, conveys in its state schools an idea of belonging more openly, linking it overall to the monarchy and a tolerant interpretation of Islam. Instead, in Syria, republican and socialist sentiments have led to the emergence of an Arab nationalism aiming at inculcating Arab identity in a school built by and for the Ba'th regime. Egypt's already well-defined pedagogical history is a point of reference for the analysis of Moroccan and Syrian education for its pedagogical role during history. The analytical table (Table 5) summarises the development of the education systems in the 22 countries of the Arab League. It gives a general idea and makes the general homogeneity of the process immediately visible in the countries considered and, simultaneously, the primary exceptions.

The primary focus is on understanding what belongings diverse education systems in the history of Arab-Islamic education aim to transmit: ethnic (Arabism), religious (Islam), national (nationalism) or human (world citizen), and the effects of globalisation on these processes of identity and belonging building. In order to understand this, Nussbaum's multifactorial analysis (2011) is used, taking into account the diverse factors she identified that reflect the complexity of the relationship between education and history, culture, tradition and society. As the author points out, education development is influenced by and influences society. Therefore, it has to be analysed with the factors on which it is based: cultural tradition, religion and the pedagogical approaches throughout history, as well as economic and political issues. Other central factors of the analysis are literature, history and philosophy teachings, foreign languages and cultures, treatment of internal minorities and migrant pupils inside the education system, and gender educational policies. This complexity is addressed again in the field research, starting from the heterogeneity of the school stakeholder: teachers, parents and pupils, whose voices are essential for understanding the meaning and the result in everyday life of each educational apparatus.

In regards to the relationship between religious tradition and national education, Habermas' method of neutralising translation is applied to understand which concepts of the Muslim tradition schools transmit and which contribute to building and spreading a tolerant attitude within the

Muslim community and between the Muslim community and society. The intention is to show how some concepts of tradition, opposed to Islamic extremism, are helpfully implemented to fight such extremism without the risk of falling back into Islamophobia, which only nourishes the Islamist phenomenon. In particular, the reference is to the Sufi tradition and the mystic Ibn ‘Arabi in opposition to Ibn Taymiyya (the primary source of the current Wahhabism), who were the two prominent voices in medieval times and whose disagreements still permeate the theological and political debate in Muslim societies today (Ventura in Stepanyants 2003; Leccese 2017).

Starting from the definition of *“the legitimate culture transmitted by schools”* as a momentary product of specific political and social relations and not as a natural and always equal unit (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), the historical reconstruction and the multifactorial analysis show the combined pressures to reproduce the traditional religious order, the Arab nationalist order or the Western capitalist society. This situation reflects three systems of power and social relations: traditional religious power (*‘ulamā, sheikh*), nationalist political power and (colonialist/Western) capitalistic economic power. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p.9) said, the historical reconstruction will move “*between the quasi-perfect reproduction of culture in a traditional society*” and the “*reinterpretative reproduction*” of the *“humanist culture”* through *“the academic culture of the nineteenth-century bourgeois lychees”* exported by colonialism to Arab countries. It also shows how the education of independent Arab countries continues to struggle with the contradiction “*between the aim of recovering the cultural heritage bequeathed by the dominant classes or nations and the aim of rehabilitating the survivals of the dominated culture*” (p.24).

The section is divided into 4 chapters. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deepen the three fundamental historical periods of the development of Arab education: traditional education (4th chapter); the emergence of modern independent education systems (5th) and independent education (6th chapter). The 6th chapter carried out a multifactorial analysis of Arab independent national education systems and is divided into three subchapters to analyse the issue in time and space. The first deals with the two different hegemonic pedagogical thinking and models of education system developed after independence, one symbolised by Nasser’s educational policy in Egypt and the other with globalization, science and religion at its core, symbolised by the end of the Nasserian Era and by a new educational paradigm with Wahhabism at its heart. The second subchapter deals with gender issues and the third with minority language issues thus summarising 4 fundamental elements of the analysis (political ideology, religion, gender, and minorities). All the historical reconstruction and multifactorial analysis fully contextualise the 7th chapter dedicated to the two case studies of Morocco and Syria, the geographical extremes of the Arab Mediterranean and the theoretical and practical extremes of non-Wahhabi pedagogy in the Arab world.

5 Traditional Education

This chapter contains the historical and cultural analysis of the Arab national education systems' background, i.e., the part of the multifactorial analysis that addresses tradition and the history of education. It describes traditional education and its values, using Habermas' concept of neutralising translation (Habermas 2015, 2016, 2018, Mazzei 2021). Traditional education is addressed by looking at the masters of the Sufi tradition (*Shaykh*), focusing on Ibn 'Arabi, and then through the reconstruction of the education systems' history up to the present day, focusing on identity, belonging, otherness and tolerance.

Islamic traditional education had already built a system considered an education system corresponding to the current European definition of the education system:

> *"Durkheim is justified in regarding the medieval university as the first true ES [Educative System] in the West, since the advent of juridically sanctioned validation of the results of inculcation (the diploma), Durkheim's decisive criterion, here joins the continuity of inculcation and the homogeneity of the mode of inculcation. It is equally possible, from a Weberian standpoint, to consider that the determining features of the educational institution are present with the appearance of a corps of permanent specialists whose training, recruitment and careers are governed by a specialized organization and who find in the institution the means of successfully asserting their claim to a monopoly of legitimate inculcation of legitimate culture"* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.56).

In this definition, created for medieval European universities, it is stated that the determining features for defining a form of education as a system are the existence of a juridical validation of education results, together with its continuity and homogeneity, with the presence of specialised teachers, all features already existing in traditional Islamic education. Islamic traditional education not only had its structured educational system, according to Maherzi, but it was also the first one:

> *"We know that the Lyceum is Greek. However, when it comes to education on a large scale, the real founders and organisers were undoubtedly the Arabs themselves. They created institutions and organized education, set up codes for teachers and students, set up an administration to support pedagogy, granted scholarships to students, and developed scientific exchange and research throughout the vast world of Islam. Moreover, the professional body was internationalized. Only competence was taken into account in the recruitment of its research teachers"* (Maherzi 2019, pp. 76-77).

As it is possible to deduce, the Muslim identity was the cornerstone of this education system built by the Arab Empires since the professional body was internationalized, and the same was for the attending pupils. The primary source of Islamic education is, of course, the Quran. It does not explicitly define education but offers orientations of meaning; what is normative is the *revealed horizon* to which every education that wants to declare itself Muslim must conform. Islamic

education aims to form the Muslim man according to the idea of humanity in the Quran. Islam considers men as "vicars" or "lieutenants" (*khalīfa*) of God, and they owe total obedience to his inscrutable omnipotence. Quran highlights principles of God's natural plan, norms that preserve the natural balance, indicating a precise lifestyle to which young people must be educated, canalising instincts through discipline. Regarding the accusation of being a warmongering religion and concerning the attitude taught to school children towards other people, it is worth saying that Quran does not condemn war instinct. However, it affirms that it is necessary to submit to God, fight for what one believes in, and treat one's enemies with respect and humanity. The Quran defines values, knowledge and behaviours that help relate to God and community, and, from the believer's point of view, it contains everything Muslims need to mature in themselves. Education must teach submission to God and respect for His rights, hence the five pillars of Islam: the profession of faith (*shahādah*); daily prayers (*ṣalāt*); alms-giving (*zakāt*); fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*) and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). It must also teach the duties of the community: justice, order, peace, and the defence and dissemination of Islam (the *jihād*). Submission to natural morality leads to the development of virtues to which every good Muslim must be educated: the sense of moderation and correct balance. The sense of moderation means temperance or discipline that prevents man from exceeding the limits set by God, so Islamic morality does not require the renunciation of life's goods but the enjoyment of them within the limits of legality. The idea of the correct balance is reminiscent of the ethical virtue of the *Golden Mean* described by Aristotle, whose thinking is at the basis of Western philosophical thought but which also strongly influenced Islamic thought. Parables and narratives that offer moral teaching also have educational value. Education must help man to develop virtues and behaviours pleasing to God, such as justice, patience, benevolence, piety, generosity and modesty while correcting the human tendency towards pride, envy, ostentation, laziness and indolence. In the Quran, there are indications on how to be a good father, treating sons and daughters with love and gentleness, giving them a good cultural and moral education, and accustoming them to apply the teachings of Islam (see, for example, *Sūra* 13 of Luqmān). Towards other Muslims, one must be sympathetic; towards infidels, honesty and fairness are prescribed if they have not waged war against Muslims. In Islamic education, it is essential to internalise what the Prophet said and did (the *ḥadīth*), to imitate him even in the most visible acts, thus ensuring that one leads a righteous life. The principles contained here guide education from birth, dealing with vices and virtues, relations between men and women, calling for consistency, and specifying the need for the young person to have a guide who carries out constant educational action. In the Quran, it is written:

"You have had in the Messenger of God a good model" (Quran, 33:21).[27]

Therefore, Muhammad represents the perfect man to imitate, the model to follow that parents and teachers point out to their children and pupils. In pedagogy, the value of example is fundamental and often much more functional than theories. In the Quran and the Ḥadīth, there is very little on Muḥammad's human reality; therefore, it is necessary to look to the numerous biographies written posthumously for information. Politically, Muḥammad places religion above tribal ties, inaugurating a universal religious ideal that transcends ethnic barriers. Following Muḥammad's example, a good Muslim must not discriminate against people for racial criteria but must affirm the equality of all people in front of God.

The most famous and influential in the educational field was certainly Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), rector of the *Niẓāmiyya* in Baghdad, one of the most important *madrasa* of the time (the explanation of the term can be found later in this chapter in the paragraph on structure and models of the traditional education system). He was a significant theologian who laid down the principles of Sunni orthodoxy and took an interest in mysticism and Sufism. The work that deals directly with education is the *Letter to a Disciple,* which well expresses the conceptions of his time. The purpose of education is the formation of virtuous men subjected to Islam; it concerns theoretical and practical knowledge, morality and religion. Education is a responsibility of parents first and then of a teacher, who helps the disciple in his search for truth and who is a spiritual guide. Young people must be accustomed to modesty, privation and asceticism. Women can receive religious education at home. Sufism influences his conception of the master-disciple relationship, as it must be mutual and constant. A child must first attend the primary Quran School (the *Kuttāb*), where the master must teach Quran, reading and writing, grammar, arithmetic and poetry; music, singing and dancing must be used with moderation; painting and drawing are forbidden.

5.1 Religion, sciences and humanities (or the traditional classification of sciences)

Science in Islam is not opposed to religion; on the contrary, religion is the primary science, and all the others contribute to understanding God and creation (Zani, 2005). The Quran itself prescribes the search for knowledge and gives great importance to wisdom for a good Muslim; among the sayings and deeds of the Prophet, a famous *ḥadīth* stands out:

"Seek knowledge even if it was in China" (at-Ṭabarāni).

The science of Ḥadīth, called *tajrih*, analyses and compares the diverse testimonies concerning their context to establish the authenticity of the Prophet's sayings and deeds. The influence of this scientific method was essential to the development of other sciences, especially history, because

[27] All translations of Quran (2010) are mine.

of its ethic of research that requires systematic mention of sources without deforming them before criticizing them with reason. The *ʿilm al-ḥadīth* goes back to the source to establish the truth; in this way, a body of work considered reliable was established thanks to objectivity and scientific rigour (Maherzi 2019, p.75).

In the beginning, the humanistic concept of *ʿAdab* was more related to Arab than Muslim religious affiliation. In the Umayyad period (661-750), a man who possessed the *ʿAdab* was the one who excelled in the knowledge of the ancient poets, the glorious history of the Arabs and Arab culture as a whole. However, at the beginning of the Abbasid period (750-1258), contacts with foreign cultures transformed it into a universal culture, which progressively included elements of Indian, Iranian and Hellenistic literature. From the Iranian world, it acquired the epic and narrative tradition; from India, fables; from Greece, philosophy, especially ethical and economic (Gibb 1986, *ʿAdab*). One of the first Muslim intellectuals to deal with education was al-Fārābī (870-950), who, influenced by Aristotle, retains that education's purpose is to acquire intellectual and moral virtues that lead to happiness. From a social point of view, education contributes to the constitution of a harmonious community and the emergence of political leaders capable of striving for the collective good. In reality, he never speaks of education, but depending on the case, he speaks of *ʿAdab* (education, culture, literature and social norms, corresponding to the Greek *Paideia* and the Latin *Humanitas*), *Ta'alīm* (education as instruction, corresponding to the Greek *Episteme* and the Latin *Eruditio.* It is used today to talk about school education), *Tā'dīb* (education as discipline).

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) contributed enormously to the classification of sciences by distinguishing between praiseworthy and reprehensible sciences, the latter including all disciplines considered unhelpful or harmful to life on earth and the health of the soul in the afterlife. Higher studies in the *madrasa* were organised according to this classification of sciences. The compulsory sciences are the religious ones, while the non-religious ones can be recommended, like medicine, permitted, like history and poetry, or reprehensible, like magic. In this classification, the "foreign sciences", like the Greek philosophy, lost their importance while that of the Arab-Islamic sciences increased (Gibb 1986, *ʿIlm*). While al-Ghazali places the exact sciences (at the time: religious, legal, medical and scientific sciences in general) at the top of the classification, *'Adab* acquires an intellectual meaning increasingly differentiated from the traditional one. It implied the sum of knowledge that makes a man courteous and urban, a culture of a profane kind based on poetry, oratory art, historical and tribal traditions, rhetoric, grammar and metrics. The concept of *ʿAdab* soon lost the broad humanistic meaning it had had during the golden age of the caliphate, restricting itself to the sphere of fine literature: poetry, prose and anecdotes, characterised by verbal virtuosity, formality and purism. Thus, it became the academy's literature and remained so throughout the Arab decadence period up to modernity (Gibb 1986, *ʿAdab*).

Therefore, it is possible to identify an indigenous dialectic between religious sciences, natural sciences and humanities, which was already developing in the Middle Ages independently and even in advance of the West. At the same time, in Europe, religion and natural sciences were in opposition to each other, and it was not until modernity that natural sciences acquired their primacy in the hierarchy of sciences, but at the expense of, and not in alliance with, religion, as was the case in the classical Muslim world.

5.2 System and structure of the traditional education system

The Encyclopaedia of Islam (Gibb 1986, *Madrasa*) reports that the first informal teaching institutions in the Islamic world were probably schools for children, organised according to the teaching model existing in the pre-Islamic period. In Medina, the teachers were often Jews, but the ability to write was much more widespread in Mecca. After the battle of Badr, some Mecca prisoners were released to teach writing in the city of Medina. Mu'āwiya, the Prophet's amanuensis, took great interest in the education of young people, who learned with him writing and reading, arithmetic, swimming, a small quantity of the Quran, and the necessary religious observance. The main subject of instruction was *ʻAdab*, which is why schools for children were called *majlis al-ʻAdab* and teachers were called *mu'addib*. A teacher was often held in low esteem, especially when he or she had previously been a slave[28], but there are also examples of distinguished scholars teaching in schools, such as Ḍahhāk b. Muzāḥim, an exegete, traditionalist, and grammarian who had a school in Kufa attended by 3,000 children. Schools spread during the Umayyad period with the name of *kuttāb* (Gibb 1986), while private tutors also provided education at home. Kuttāb, plural *katātīb*, derives from *katib*, meaning scribe, writer; it designates the primary school. European writers have often translated the term as *Quranic School*, and this is the term used in literature and used here. However, this meaning is not implied in the Arabic name, which instead would literally indicate a school of writing. Although the term has been universally applied to Muslim primary schools, it was widespread even before Islam and referred to Jewish schools in Arabic-speaking countries. Instead, Copts in Egypt preferred the term *Maktab* to indicate their traditional schools, unlike the Islamic *Kuttāb* (Gibb 1986, *Maktab*). In the Maghreb, *kuttāb* was and is called *msid*, a Moroccan term derived from the classical *masjid* (De Poli 2007).

There is no precise information on when the first Muslim primary school was established. However, it certainly spread in the Umayyad period in the aftermath of the armed conquests, so the primary school system was already stabilised in the early Abbasid period and led to almost complete literacy in the empire (Maherzi 2019, p.77).

[28] The Arabs were almost illiterate at the advent of Islam. Initially, slaves from developed cultures, emancipated by Muslims, and converted into teachers provided this education (Maherzi 2019, pp. 77-78).

Schools' structure and teaching methods were modelled on the Byzantine primary school, but the content was strictly Arab-Islamic. The school was an essential means of socialising different ethnic groups into the Islamic faith and way of life, providing a standard basic education for all who attended. From that time until the penetration of the Western education model in contemporary times, the kuttāb was the only public education vehicle for young Muslims. Even in recent times, it has continued to compete tenaciously with other educational institutions. Basic education was imbued with a religious spirit, and its stated aim was to produce true believers, so the school was closely linked to the mosque, ideally but often also physically when a room in the religious building was used as a classroom. However, it could be in any available place, a room in a house, a tent in the desert, or even outdoors. If the building was purpose-built, as it was during the Ottoman Empire, it consisted of an unadorned room under a large dome in which pupils sat cross-legged on mats arranged in a semicircle around the teacher. These buildings were built by philanthropists or by pupils' parents, who also paid the teacher with money or food. In the Middle Ages, wealthier families sometimes built private schools for their children. The state rarely intervened in the education sector before the 19th century, so every aspect of education, from buildings to teachers' payments to curricula, was determined solely by the agreement between parents and teachers. There were cases of teachers who voluntarily taught without payment; in other cases, they were grossly underpaid; some sent pupils to ask for alms for them while others pupils paid with goods and services of various kinds. Most pupils were male; there were rare cases of separate institutions for girls and even rarer cases of mixed classes; they were exclusively Muslim. Attendance was voluntary, and there was no precise age limit; pupils usually enrolled for around four years, and training lasted between two and five years. There was rarely any division into groups according to age; pupils stayed together, and each one progressed at their rhythm. Classes lasted from sunrise to sunset every day of the year except holidays, namely Fridays and the period of Ramaḍān. Teachers were called *mudarris* or *mu'allim*, or *mu'addib*, the latter sometimes referring to the highest rank, the most educated teacher or private tutor. There was often a system of rewards and punishments: lazy and undisciplined pupils received beatings with the *falaka*, a whip, while to the meritorious, able to master most of the Quran by heart, teachers offered prizes such as sweets or riding a camel. In the beginning, books were rare, so the teacher dictated, and the pupils wrote on a small tablet, from which they read again and on which the teacher corrected and commented. Much importance was given to memorisation, so much so that the traditional learning method can be described as fundamentally mnemonic. It had many drawbacks, as it required studying a complex text such as the Quran in a language that was difficult to understand. Literary Arabic was little known even among Arab children and dramatically alien to non-Arab Muslims, yet this was the language of teaching even though it was clear that children

could not understand it. Teachers rarely used local idioms to explain difficult text passages; mainly, the eastern Muslim populations resorted to Turkish, Persian or Urdu, whereas this was not the case in the Maghreb with the local languages.

Throughout the Muslim world, education aimed at building good Muslims, so in every school pupils studied the Quran more or less in the same way. Teachers always began with the opening *Sūra*, the *Fātiḥa*, and then proceeded with the other Sūra from the shortest, the 114th, called *al-Nās*, to the longest, the 2nd, called *al-Bakara*; afterwards, the recitation was carried out in the correct order; during the day, prayer and rituals were regularly followed. This training constituted the essential basis for those who wished to continue their studies (Gibb 1986, *kuttāb*).

The spread of this first Islamic primary school in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods provided basic education for pupils who would continue their studies but was also the most common form of religious transmission for the lower classes living in the countryside, constituting a right for all children and a decisive factor for homologation between the different Muslim peoples. School's most important task was to transmit the content of the Prophet's message, which, even if not fully understood by children at the time of learning, would be a constant reference point for them in their later years. It was also essential to transmit the precision of forms necessary for the correct interpretation of God's Word and the principle of the teacher's authority as the transmitter of a truth superior to him. Typically, Islamic content was transmitted by methods aimed at internalising the message and mastering spirit and body. The key category for learning the Quran was repetition, as it was essential to know the text by heart, reciting it with a rhythmic voice and involving the body in the rhythm without going so far as to sing or dance. At the end of the learning process, there was a ritual exit from the school, symbolising the importance of the passage (Zani 2005). Ibn Saḥnūnat Tanūhī, a ninth-century Tunisian, stated that, in terms of contents, there was a distinction between what is compulsory and what is optional to teach. Compulsory teaching included the internal vocalisation of the words of the Quran, spelling, calligraphy, good reading with the science of pauses, and good manners; permitted, but not compulsory, is the teaching of poetry, ancient philosophy and history. In this distinction, it is possible to hear resonate the classification of disciplines theoretically established by Al-Ghazali. As for the reciprocal duties between master and pupils, the former must provide advice and protection and the latter respect, obedience and interest. Corporal punishment is permitted but limited to three beatings if the error concerns the Quran's recitation and 10 in other cases. The teaching method is based on dictation, reading aloud, and memorisation, with no room for personal opinions (Lecomte 1953, pp. 77-105). Given these characteristics common to all kuttāb, there were qualitative and substantial differences between different countries and cities in the vast Muslim world. Leaving out India, Iran, Turkey and the rest of Asia and Africa that are not treated in this research, in the eastern Arab countries, like

Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Iraq, as well as in Muslim Spain, pupils usually studied Arabic grammar and poetry better than elsewhere (Gibb 1986, *kuttāb*). In Algeria and Morocco, on the other hand, very little was taught besides the Quran; in Tunisia, even *ḥadīth* was included. The Tunisian Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) spoke at length about the low level of education in the Maghreb in the 14th century, and according to him, it was limited to mnemonic learning without deep understanding, also because of the little knowledge the local population had of the Arabic language (Khaldun 1997, p.942). Ibn Khaldūn, the last Medieval Arab thinker and the first Arab modern sociologist, lived at a time when the Arab Golden Age was long over and criticised the decadence of his time, proposing new and modern analysis tools and educational ideas. He was born in Tunis, lived in Fez in Morocco, Damascus in Syria, and Cairo in Egypt, where he taught at the University of Al-Azhar following the Maliki School. His superb work is the *Book of Examples - Kitāb al-'ibar*, a universal history whose premise, called *Muqaddima*, explains the inspiring principles of his historiographical method. It comprises six chapters, the last of which (*Pour Une bonne Pédagogie*) is devoted to sciences, teaching, disciplines and methods (Zani 2005). At the base of his pedagogical conception, there is the concept of *Malaka*, which means acquired attitude, experience and rooted quality, which could be intended as *Habitus* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). In order to form it in young pupils, a teacher must be competent and use methodological rigour. The sociologist argues against corporal punishment and excessive paternalism, which were very common in educational institutions at the time. As mentioned before, Ibn Khaldun criticised the state of education in the Maghreb of his time, in which Tunisia was a positive exception. In the rest of the Maghreb, primary education did not include the teaching of traditions, jurisprudence, poetry and philosophy, but only of the Quran, often carried out in a mnemonic way by pupils who did not know Arabic. Even in higher education, he criticised the results of the mnemonic method because students know numerous notions but were incapable of arguing and teaching and did not know the scientific method (Zani 2004, Khaldun 1997).

Higher education institutions are called *madrasa* and correspond to universities (Makdisi 1981) and are, therefore, not the specific subject of this research. Nevertheless, a brief description of it is necessary to understand the general educational system and the relationship between education, religion and political power. As a higher learning place, the *madrasa* has a different history from primary Quranic schools. It is the final product of the three stages of development of higher education. The first stage is that in which teaching takes place in the mosque or *masjid*. The second is that of the *masjid-khān*, in which the khan was the accommodation where off-site students may reside, thus the element that began characterising the institution as a real college. The third stage is the *madrasa* proper, in which the educational and accommodation functions are combined in a single institution based on a foundation (*waqf*). In the beginning, teaching in the smaller mosques

concerned only the explanation and commentary of the Quran and the *Sunna*, with a few mentions of the law. On the other hand, the large mosques inaugurated courses in legal and theological studies, linguistics and grammar, archaic poetry and rhetoric. Then they built accommodations with large libraries (*masjid-khān*), thus establishing the first colleges or institutes of higher learning in the Muslim world. They contained books on different sciences: mathematics, logic, philosophy, geometry, astronomy, music, medicine, and chemistry, called *al-'ulum al-Kadima* (ancient sciences). An important example is a library inside the *Bayt al-hikma* (house of science), founded by al-Ma'mun in Baghdad. Many original texts are present, and many translations, especially from Greek, were made at this academy (Gibb 1986, *Madrasa*).

> *"Ils créèrent des centres de recherche don't le plus important est celui de « Beyt al-hikma (ou Maison de la sagesse) dans la même ville où les traductions vers la langue arabe se multiplièrent. Les commentaires des écrits divers furent de même. Des auteurs de l'antiquité tels Aristote, Platon, Plotin et autres penseurs, furent à l'honneur en philosophie et influencèrent les savants musulmans même dans leur interpretation de leur religion. A l'époque abbasside, les Mu'tazilites, fondèrent une doctrine basée sur le rationalisme importé de la Grèce. Le khalife al-Ma'moun dont le règne dura de 813 à 833, la déclara officielle dans tout l'empire"* (Maherzi 2019, p.74).

These institutions spread to the eastern territories of the caliphate around the 10th century. The masters in them had a permanent role, which was then inherited by their son or disciple. Those who attended the master's lectures sat in a circle on the ground around him, and often, alongside the regular students, there were transient hearers, mostly merchants. This characteristic of the mosque as an open place disappeared in the *madrasa* that developed later. A teacher was the *shaykh*, a professor or independent expert, a religious leader, a spiritual guide and a model to follow, who became like a father to his disciples. There were no official syllabuses, but each professor had his own; remuneration also varied because, according to the ḥadīth, he could receive money but not demand it, so in practice, parents offered a regular salary or an allowance, as the case may be. Each lesson began with the recitation of the Quran, and both comprehension and memory were of fundamental importance, not only for the sacred texts but also for the professor's explanations. The most important texts were read aloud, commented on by teachers and then discussed in real debates (Zani 2005, pp.113-118). Egypt is one of the first places where Islamic culture and educational institutions spread. Under the Fatimid dynasty (959-1171), despite its Shiite affiliation, teaching continued, always within the framework of Sunni law schools. In 972, the construction of the important al-Azhar mosque was completed. It soon became the most important cultural and teaching centre in the Islamic world and still retains its functions and centrality. Another important example is the house of knowledge, *dār al-'ilm*, founded in Cairo by the Fatimid ruler al-Hakim in 1005, where, alongside the traditional Islamic disciplines according

to the Sunni view, there were works on all branches of learning. They represented a continuity with the pre-Islamic culture and Hellenistic tradition in Egypt before Islam. The *madrasa* plays a vital role in Egypt even during the reign of the Ayyubid (1169-1250). Salah al-Din was famous for the large *madrasa* he built in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. While the *dār al-'ilm* developed in the Fatimid countries as centres of the Shi'a propaganda, the *madrasa* proper developed in the eastern countries as a similar but Sunni institution (Gibbs 1986, *Madrasa*). The term means a place of study, deriving from the Arabic verb *darasa* (to study). Since the 11th century, it was intended as a college for higher studies, including student accommodation, in which the main subject was law. The Islamic, philosophical and literary sciences were auxiliary. Through the *waqf* (donation) system, wealthy private Muslims founded *Madrasa*. The founder was free to decide on teaching staff and pupils, appoint professors, and decide who will succeed him. The student, called *ṭālib*, could freely choose his teacher and was granted accommodation, food and some small scholarships. He had a personalised and patriarchal relationship with the teacher, but great importance was given to the debate known as *munāẓara*, which consisted of the use of dialectics to support opposing theses on the same subject (Zani 2005):

> *"Des techniques et des codes spéciaux furent mis au point pour les « munadharate » (ou controverses) entre les savants et pour le « jadal » (ou dialectique) que les savants ont héritées des Grecs"* (Maherzi 2019, p.76).

The *madrasa*, structured in this way, was born in Iran and spread over two centuries to all the eastern regions of the caliphate; with time and territorial diffusion, two different models soon emerged. In the Eastern model, philosophical, dialectical and even scientific studies found broad application, especially in medicine, and Persian was widely used alongside Arabic. This model influenced the *madrasa* of three great successive empires: the Ottomans in the Middle East and North Africa, the Safavids in Iran and the Mongols in India. The Arab model, on the other hand, focused more on religious sciences, while all other disciplines were licit but less essential and taught only by a few masters. When the Seljuks conquered Baghdad in the mid-11th century, *madrasa* had their most widespread period. One of the most important was founded by the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk, from whom it took the name *Niẓāmiyya*; it was a public and open institution in which all three schools of law coexisted and was provided with an extensive library. The penultimate Abbasid caliph al-Mustanṣir also built an important *madrasa* in the 13th century, the *Mustanṣiriyya*, which housed all four Sunni law schools and scientific studies such as mathematics, geometry, medicine and pharmacy, showing great intellectual openness. It was partially destroyed by the Mongols when they conquered Baghdad (1258) and then definitively by the Turks (Zani 2005, pp. 118-125). In the Maghreb, some of these institutes, such as the

University of Qarawiyyīn in Morocco, established for the first time in the 9th century in Fez, are still active today (De Poli 2007). In Tunisia, the most important educational institution was for centuries the great Zitouna Mosque, founded in 734 AD by Ibn Al-Ḥabḥāb and considered the oldest Islamic university. Under the Hafsidi dynasty (1237-1573) it experienced its period of maximum splendour, and it was during this period that also the scholar mentioned above, Ibn Khaldūn, carried out his studies there, considering it second only to Al-Azhar; with the fall of the dynasty, the Zitouna also experienced a period of decline (Official site of Zitouna University). The first *madrasa* proper was that of al-Saffarin (also called al-Haifa'iyyin), built by the Marinid Abū Yūsuf Ya'jub b.'Abd al-Ḥaqq in Fes, Morocco, in 1285. His successors built others in Fes, Tilimsan and other cities. Many *madrasa* were built in Tunisia by the Hafsids (941-1539), the oldest being that of al-Ma'rad in 1252. Between the fall of the Baghdad Caliphate and the height of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, one of the most important and enduring kingdoms was that of the Mamluks in Egypt (1260-1517). Under them, educational institutions continued to fulfil their function (Gibbs 1986, *Madrasa*).

5.3 Sufi education and the relationship with otherness inside Islam

There were also educational institutions encapsulated within the Sufi communities that were not *Kuttāb* or *Madrasa*. Sufi education works inside communities of believers gathered in a *zāwiya* built around a mosque. Between the 12th and 13th centuries, the emergence of brotherhoods (in Arabic *ṭuruq*, sing. *ṭarīqa*, "way", a path of spiritual improvement, a proper school of Sufi thought), led to the regularisation of Sufi teaching methods. Within the confraternities, the relationship between the master (*shaykh*) and his disciples, and among the disciples themselves, was codified through rules of behaviour (*adab*) that reflected the Sufi school of thought. The independent role of the *zawiya* allowed it to maintain its original function until today. The Islamization of the conquered populations in the Maghreb took place mainly through the confraternities and their system of teaching, fostering the integration of local religious practices into an Islamic framework. In the Middle Ages, there were two opposing trends in the relationship of authority between Sufism and politics: on the one hand, the persecution of individual Sufi personalities, and on the other hand, state patronage of certain brotherhoods. This ambivalent policy has lasted until today (Leccese 2017, pp.138-9).

In pre-colonial Morocco, education was almost exclusively provided in the zawāyā of the Marabout brotherhoods, characterised by popular Sufism (De Poli 2007). In one Egyptian zāwiya, in the 16th century, lived ‘Abd Al-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī, author of the book "*al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*", translated by Vacca with the title *“Vite di sheikh musulmani”*[29] (1961). This book shows evidence

[29] *Lives of Muslim Sheikhs*. All translations are mine.

of important mystics and devotees' lives, of sheikh masters of life, from the first century of Islam to the 16th century. The mystics, called *wali,* were intercessors of the community towards God, saints not canonised by a hierarchy but chosen by the people to whom they were indissolubly linked. The people they referred to are, in some cases, the entire Muslim people; in other cases, a local or proto-national belonging, like in Egypt. The master-disciple relationship was significant and marked by complete devotion and imitation. A few examples from the just cited work may help to understand it better:

> *"If he sleeps, the disciple will sleep; if he stands in prayer, the novice will also pray; if he orders others to do pious practices, being lazy himself, or preaches against vanities and falls into them, the disciples will laugh at him and will not listen to him"* (Vacca 1961, p.45).

Here it is highlighted the value of the example inside this community, in which the master was a model that the disciples had to imitate.

> *"The disciple should never speak without asking permission from his sheikh, if he is present; when he is absent, ask him from the heart"* (p.47).

Here, instead, the focus is on discipline and obedience: the disciples had to introduce the masters' authority within themselves.

> *"None of them was irritated by the punishments inflicted by the sheikh: Isolation, expulsion, beatings, fasting and similar; on the contrary, they considered the chastisements a grace from the sheikh or from the one who had accused them, such was the good faith with which they sought perfection"* (p.50).

The master's authority is unquestionable, and gratitude to the one who dispenses knowledge must be shown even in the face of punishments and reprimands. Maxims belonging to different sheikhs are also given, and some of them can help to understand the idea of education in Sufism, for example:

> *"Oh you, who know the Quran by heart, but use it as a commodity from which to make profit in this world: Seek money by human means and the future life by supernatural means"* (pp. 123-131).

Here, it is possible to see a clear distinction between spiritual and material enrichment.

> *"Whoever wishes to know with certainty how much science he possesses, let him trace back all the things he remembers to their authors, and then consider how much science remains: the residue is his own, and it is rather small, insufficient to give him the name of a scholar"* (pp.123-131).

Herein lies a lesson in humility and method of study, leading to trace information back to its source. However, the most interesting aspects of Sufism for this research are not to be found in the educational practice just discussed but in the more theoretical speculation and its practical

consequences on education over time. Indeed, inside diverse Islamic interpretations, it is possible to identify discourses on the relationship between religious and ethnic belonging. Let us start by reading some Quranic verses:

> *"Men, We have created you from a male and a female and have created several peoples and tribes among you so that you may know each other. However, the noblest of you is the one who fears God the most. God is wise and knowledgeable about everything"* (Quran, v. 49:13).

In this verse, the existence of diverse people and tribes appears as a precise God's will, aiming at stimulating man's curiosity in the knowledge of others and not a competition between people based on a supposed superiority of a race, group or tribe. Indeed, the only measure for judging men is their respect for God.

> *"And to you, We have revealed the book in all truth in confirmation of the scriptures revealed before and for their protection. So judge between them according to what God has revealed, and do not follow their desires in preference to the truth that has come to you. To each of you, We have appointed a rite and a way, but if God had willed, He would have made you one community, and if He has not done so, it is to test you in what He has given you. Therefore, compete in good things, and all of you will return to God, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ"* (Quran, v. 5:48).

The *rite* and *way* assigned to each one refer to the different religious laws and practices followed by human communities, differences that hide the essential unity of the divine message. *The test* to which people are subjected through these diversities could precisely understand the common ground beyond their multiple expressions (Ventura 2010, p. 494, v.48).

Unlike rigidly structured currents such as Wahhabism, Sufism is not a monolithic school of thought but a mystical approach to religion that embraces many different characters, thoughts, traditions and brotherhoods. A common point is a centrality given to the inner religious experience of the believer, in a direct relationship with God, over the external aspects of religion, linked to law and social conventions (Ventura 2003, 2005, 2016, 2017). A famous verse justifies the idea of an inner Quran to be read not academically but spiritually:

> *"We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it is evident to them that this Quran is truth"* (Quran, v. 41:53).

The word of God can pass from the exterior universe of the sensitive horizons to the inner depths of man. To do this, the Sufi mystics read the Quran as directed to themselves, as an intimate conversation. Sufi interpretation aims at the continuous search for the hidden meaning and attempts to remove the veils of ordinary language, dissolve the symbols and perceive the invisible (Ventura 2010, XL). This current of Islam flourished in the time of the great Islamic empires like

the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), one of the biggest empires of history that stretched from Sicily to Iran, in which people of different ethnicities, religions and cultures cooperate peacefully to the cultural and economic development. Given the temporal, geographical and philosophical extent of Sufism, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) is chosen as a point of reference within it, mainly because of the severe opposition that his thought found among the more rigid and extremist currents like that founded by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) (Leccese 2017, p. 140).

From the Quranic verses presented above, it is possible to derive an idea of identity and tolerance related to Sufism. According to Ibn ‘Arabi, in God there is no otherness but only identity; therefore, God accepts inside himself as identical to all the separate individualities of the world. Any part of the world is the whole world, and all things in the world are particular manifestations of God; from this view derives an inability to hostility towards adversaries seen as identical to themselves in God even if experienced as otherness in the world. Divine unity preserves all diversity, as opposed to Western tolerance from which derives an assimilationist integration that marginalises irreconcilable aspects of differentiation to focus the relationship on shared values and principles, thus operating a selection that Sufi unity does not operate (Smirnov 2003, pp. 40-43).

The Salafists polemic began early in the history of Sufism and is often associated with the anti-Sufi arguments of Ibn Taymiyya in his critique of Ibn ‘Arabi. In 1258, Mongols conquered and destroyed Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Arab people find themselves caught between the Mongol invasions from the east and the Christian crusades from the west. As the empire disintegrated, tolerant and universal ideas lost force, and intolerant and particularistic ones gained strength, with a racial view of Islam as the religion of the Arabs. These views attributed the empire’s collapse to the moral degeneration caused by the estrangement from the Arab Islam of its origins. They advocated a return to *pure* Islam with the elimination of foreign elements. Ibn Taymiyya was the prominent voice of this period and the first reference for this type of interpretation in the Contemporary age, such as Wahhabism (Ventura 2015).

It is possible to argue that the cross-cultural challenge is not posed to Islam by the needs of contemporary society. However, it is intrinsic to Islam from its origins, and ideas about how to manage diversity can be found within it. Extremist interpretations of Islam can be read as a response to external aggressions and not as the basic message of Islam. Over many centuries, Sufi Islamic Tradition has developed interesting concepts of diversity and tolerance, whose neutralizing translation (Habermas 2015, 2016, 2018) could be useful in the contemporary debate on religion and coexistence. The Iraqi Sufi ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d.1428), a disciple of Ibn Arabi, sees non-believers as an indispensable component within God's plans (Cornel 2004); Habermas sees believers as an indispensable component within the process of development and the current working mechanism of the secular state (Habermas 2016). The tension between faith and

secularism could only be resolved by intellectual positions of this kind that not simply 'tolerate' them as wrong, not only recognise the dignity in the other field, but that recognise their ontological necessity within a much broader project (Mazzei 2021).

5.4 Syria and Morocco between Arab and Ottoman Empires.

Modernity, whose beginning many scholars identified with the discovery of America in 1492, saw the decline of the Arab-Muslim kingdoms and the progressive increase in power of the West and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire took its name from its founder Osman (1259-1326), and, starting from what is now Turkey, expanded its territorial borders enormously in the space of two centuries. After the Balkans and Greece, Mohammed II conquered Constantinople in 1453 and gave it the name it still has today: Istanbul; the city became the new centre of Muslim civilisation and the Ottomans the Abbasids' successors in the role of leader of the Muslim world. It was with Selim I (1512-1520) in 1517 that the Ottomans conquered Cairo, defeating the Mamluks, and with his son Suleiman I (1520-1566), known as the 'Magnificent', the empire reached its greatest expansion and splendour. The empire encompassed the whole of North Africa, excluding Morocco, the Balkans as far as Hungary and the east as far as Iran, which they did not manage to conquer. Suleiman reorganised the tax system and justice and supported the development of the arts and sciences. After him, however, the empire entered a long period of decline, marked by resounding defeats by the West at Lepanto in 1571 and Vienna in 1683. Over the next two centuries, the empire tried to resist the pressure of Western powers on the one hand and the attempts of the elites of the various peripheral territories to gain independence on the other. These elites had a great deal of freedom in the management of the territory, while the empire reserved for itself only the direct management of the army and finances; thus, the educational structures (*Kuttāb*, *madrasa*, and *zawiya*) continued, for the most part, undisturbed to exist as they had before the Ottoman conquest (Zani 2005, 176-178). After this brief historical summary, it is possible to focus on traditional education in the modern/Ottoman era, especially on the relationship between central power and local elites that is evident in the field of education, set in the more general field of religious and legal relationship. In this dialectic, there is the basis of the contemporary drive to build an independent Arab education, all within the Muslim world, concerning a still completely traditional education.

Focusing on the first case study, Syria, the first question is what the term Syria meant before creating the current nation-state and its borders. This term is attested in Roman times, when it designated an eastern province of the empire extending from the Mediterranean to Mesopotamia, from the Taurus Mountains to the Arab Peninsula; including territories now part of Jordan, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey. Arab-Muslims conquered it in the 7th century, when it was

a Byzantine province, and renamed it *Bilad al-Sham* (lands that are to the left, according to the vision of geographers who placed Mecca at the centre of the world). Syrian lands, with Damascus at its centre, did not correspond to present-day Syria. In Islamic times, they were always part of successive empires: the first Umayyad caliphate made Damascus its capital; then they were part of the Abbasid, Seljuk, Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk empires. These territories had a special importance and holiness in Islam, since Jerusalem - the third holy city after Mecca and Medina, both in the Arabian Peninsula - is located there. From 1516 to 1918, the Ottoman Empire dominated these lands, some of them only formally, others directly, some for a limited period and others for the entire one. The *Bilad al-Sham* were a mosaic of confessional and ethnic communities administratively divided into four provinces related to Damascus, Aleppo, Tripoli and Sidone-Acri. The inhabitants felt a sense of belonging to their specific community and the region as a whole, developing a stratified identity. In these identities, the Arabic common language, the city around which they inhabited, and the religious community to which they belonged played a fundamental role, interrelated with belonging to the empire (Trombetta 2004, pp. 13-14; 2013, pp. 53-6). In the Ottoman Syria:

> *"While the Ottomans imposed an unprecedented level of centralisation on some aspects of the religious and legal system as it operated in Damascus, the central authorities also made accommodations for local sentiments and attachments. The structure of employment among the teachers of Damascus illustrates the coexistence of the force of centralisation, on the one hand, with those of localism, on the other"* (Tamari 2009, p.49).

Teachers who made a career within the Ottoman Empire acquired its culture and enjoyed the same privileges as the Ottomans, going on to teach throughout the Empire. Thus, some teachers acted:

> *"As Bulwarks of imperial rule while others remained stalwart defenders of local traditions and sensibilities. Finally, there were those who taught in minor mosques, madrasas, and within Sufi circles, positions which did not require an appointment made in Istanbul"* (Tamari 2009, p.50).

What is very interesting are the diverse educational positions, which represented different religious interpretations and power affiliations (imperial, national and linked with Arab regionalism), thus a balancing of power and belonging between empire and local élite. The first was *"Al-Sulaymaniyya, the seat of the highest figure in the local establishment and the symbol of the empire's maintenance of law and order, leaded by Hanafi lines"*. The second is under *"Qubbat al-Nasr and was reserved for the city's most prominent hadith scholar with a significant nod to Shafi'I localism"*, the third is reserved for Sufism above the tomb of the *"Greatest Master"* (Ibn 'Arabi), far from the centre of the town (Tamari 2009, p.56). Abd Al-Ghani al-Nābulusī (1641-1731) was the Sufi scholar and Damascus's most famous intellect and celebrated citizen during

this period. Nevertheless, his disagreement with imperial authorities was why they refused to appoint him chief *Hanafi mufti* (the first of the three positions). He was at the centre of a cultural war by reformists against Sufism and launched into an ethnocentric diatribe against Turkish corruptions of Arab Islam. This diatribe will have a significant role in the later struggles for Arab independence. His devotion carried on his intellectual and spiritual legacy, and he remains influential today (Tamari 2009, pp.54-55). This helps to remember:

> *"L'importance non négligeable de la lutte des savants contre l'introduction progressive dans les programmes de l'idéologie du pouvoir en place. L'indépendance des savants et des enseignants était considérée comme sacrée"* (Maherzi 2019, p.80).

This struggle for independence started with the Ottoman Empire and continued under colonialism, as the following chapters will show.

It is essential to remember Morocco's particular history inside Arab history. Morocco is a Berber (Amazigh) country conquered in 682 by Muslim Arabs. The inappropriate name *Berber* came from the Latin term *Barbaro* used for people who did not speak Latin and Greek. Roman, Arabic, and finally, French used it to name this population, connoted by a derogatory meaning. The Imazighen people were the inhabitants of *Maghreb* (meaning the *west* in the Arabic language) or *Tamazgha* (in their language), a region that includes parts of the present-day states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and part of Western Sahara (Mauritania, Mali, Niger). Their language was a wide variety of Amazigh languages (such as the *Tarifit*, *Tamazight*, *Tashelhit* and others), the first language attested in Morocco, dating from over 3,000 years ago (Gandolfi 2011, p. 56). They lived there since before Christ and became Christian, then with the Muslim conquest (VII century), most of them converted to Islam. Due to the long resistance they opposed, the Omayyad caliphate made them an autonomous province, and their capital was Qairouan, a Tunisian city (Zani 2005, p. 220). Morocco soon detached itself from the rest of the Arab world as early as the time of the Abbasids Caliphate (750-1258): the Idrisid dynasty conquered it in 788, and since then Morocco has been governed by independent dynasties, some of which were Imazighen (Laroui 1982). The Arabization, intended as the adoption of the Arabic language, is a long, never finished process: The Arabic language entered these territories, overlapping and merging with the Imazighen languages that people still speak today in some communities. They lived in tribes and, with the Arab conquest, retreated mainly to the mountains. Every village had a leader and a council of elders who had several tasks, including transmitting values and education. As well as linguistically, cultural mixing had also taken place from a religious point of view, combining Islam with ancient local beliefs: magic, animism, worship of good spirits, and fertility rituals.

Sufi brotherhoods spread over the country, especially through the *ribāṭ*, born as fortresses and transformed at the end of the military conquests into monasteries, where ascetics and Sufi mystics found refuge and created their *zawiya*. Over time, they became cultural centres and religious schools for local populations[30]. Sufi brotherhoods played a fundamental role in Maghreb religiosity, acting as mediators between popular religiosity and official Islam, organizing rural populations and managing rites and collective ceremonies. Sufi became popular leaders preferred by the people over official religious and political leaders (Zani 2005, pp. 221-5).

Morocco was never a part of the Ottoman Empire, being disputed, since the end of the 15th century and for almost the whole of the 16th century, between the Portuguese and independent Moroccan dynasties. The current one, the Alawide dynasty, has governed the country since 1660. The different educational institutions, therefore, functioned based only on agreements between teachers and parents, and there was only one supervisor, the king, who could close a school if he found violations of religious rules (Partouche 2014). The culture was homogeneous, following the Maliki School and allowing Sufi teaching. Therefore, there was no balance of power between different political and religious entities since the king was also the prince of the believers. There is also no evidence of ethnic tensions regarding education, as the Imazighen had their own zawiya and schools. The authoritarianism of the Moroccan monarchy overlapped with master-disciple authoritarianism in a unicum that held the country cohesive for centuries (Hammoudi 1997). As Ennaji states:

> *"For almost a millennium, Morocco adopted an Islamic type of education that still has a great impact on a variety of educational, religious, and political institutions […] The Qarawiyyīn University in Fès, for instance, was built in the eighth century, and its influence exceeds the realm of the modern educational system. Before the French colonisation, an Islamic traditional system of education was prevalent. Quranic and religious schools, namely medersas and zawiyas (mausoleums), offered an Islamic traditional style of education. They taught mainly the Arabic language and the holy Quran for centuries; the University of Qarawiyyīn at Fès helped students in this system to pursue and deepen their knowledge of Arabic and Islamic studies. Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence were taught, and religious counsels and public notaries were trained in these institutions"* (Ennaji 2005, p. 202).

It is possible to say that before colonialism, Morocco had a Muslim traditional independent national education system, independent from the Arabs and Ottoman Empires, and national because it referred to the King and to a "national" institute, the *Qarawiyyīn* University, that was the top of that system.

[30] Today they are places of pilgrimage, often with a Quranic school and a centre for Islamic studies attached.

6 The emergence of modern independent national education systems

This chapter deals with the indigenous attempts to build modern educational institutions, mainly in the 19th century, before European colonialism, and with education under colonialism considered the last stage before the emergence of national, independent and mass education systems, which developed in the post-colonial period. All the analysis focuses on Nussbaum's (2011) factors and on the role that education systems play in social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and the building of a nation (Anderson 2016).

Even though this chapter refers to a brief period compared to the previous one, it plays a fundamental role in the analysis. These attempts show clearly that European colonial education did not enter an immobile context and therefore was not the modernising agent of a context that did not intend to change. The modernising thrusts of education were already at work in the 1800s in Arab countries and Europe, when ideas of modern and national education for all were spreading trans-regionally. Enlightenment ideas of progress and nineteenth-century romantic ideas about the homeland nurtured the desire to build nation-states with modern, national education systems in Arab territories still formally subject to the Ottoman Empire, as well as in Italian territories subject to foreign powers. Enlightenment values entered intellectual and bureaucratic circles, nurturing Ottoman reformism first and then Arab reformism (Leccese 2017, p.146). On the contrary, colonial powers and colonial education systems played the role of agents against modernisation, blocking the processes already underway in these countries for about a century and diverting them.

At the time of these first indigenous attempts, all Arab countries were dealing with an increasingly weak Ottoman central power, except Morocco and its independent dynasty, which had been trying to mediate with the Portuguese, Spanish and French for centuries. Modernity coincides for most Arab people with the submission to the Ottoman Empire, a period that many Arab considered characterised by the decadence of the Arab spirit and culture. With the decline of the Muslim empires, Islamic education also declined gradually in quality. Over the centuries (XV, XVI, XVII), kuttāb remained numerous but of poor quality, while madrasas declined considerably in number and mainly Islamic law faculties located in the most important urban centres survived (De Poli 2007).

Ideologically this time finished in the XVIII century when the first reforming current of modern Islam was born in Saudi Arabia through the work of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), based on the previous theorisation of Ibn Taymiyya. He preached a return to the religion of the origins and the need to master science in open controversy with the sultanate and the doctors of the law, accused of being the culprits of Islamic decadence. Wahhabism became a state doctrine in Saudi Arabia (1750 with Muḥammad Ibn Saʿūd) and spread first to Egypt and then throughout the

Islamic world, influencing reformism in other countries in various ways. Wahhabism proposed a general condemnation of Sufism, whereas, before the spread of Wahhabi theories, anti-Sufi criticism had only concerned peculiar practices or doctrines adopted by individual fraternities or their exponents (Zani 2005, pp. 179-181; Ventura 2003; Stepanyants 2003; Leccese 2017, p.140). Nevertheless, Arab countries remained controlled by Ottoman Empire; therefore, the present analysis has to start from the Ottoman reforms in education, seeking to provide a reasoned chronology of significant reforms and events in education in Arab countries.

6.1 The modernisation of education in the Ottoman Empire

The first effective state interventions in education were modern; before that, there was an exclusive relationship between school and family. These first interventions aimed to form technicians for the development of the empire and an intellectual élite for its modernisation with schools built on the European model (Leccese 2017, pp. 146-7).

People moved between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea to study and teach each other. The first important example of this occurred in 1729, when a French nobleman, the Count of Bonneval, arrived in Turkey, converted, took the name Ahmed and entered the service of the Ottomans, in charge of reforming the bomber corps. He established a military engineering school in 1734 and the first naval engineering school in 1773. The importation of military instructors from the West to train Turkish officers generated a series of consequences: new relationships with infidels as teachers, from which it followed that Muslim students had to respect them as mentors and guides. The students also had to learn new barbarian languages, something they had not felt the need for until now. Once they had learned French, or another language, to follow engineering lessons, or read artillery manuals, a new, infinite possibility of reading opened up, with more explosive and revolutionary consequences (Scigliano 2017, p. 63).

The first sultan provision on Quranic primary schools was that of 1781 by Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid I, who instituted compulsory Arabic language teaching. This innovation was introduced in a few schools and became more accepted later with other reforms in the 19th century (Gibb 1986, *Tanẓīmāt*). In 1798, when Napoleon landed in Egypt, al-Azhar was still the most prestigious cultural centre, with as many as 3,000 students; the only other important traditional cultural centre left standing in North Africa was the Qarawiyyīn in Fez and the Zitouna in Tunis (De Poli 2007).

Concerning terminology, *Maktab* became, in the Turkish declination *mekteb*, the term used in the Ottoman Empire to designate schools in general. Moreover, in Arabic, it is preferred to kuttāb to designate the modern educational institutions that spread from the 19th century onwards in the official definitions of school, even if the two terms continue to be used in common parlance as synonyms (Gibb 1986, *Maktab*).

As for the North African provinces, the Ottoman Empire had already lost Algeria, conquered by the French in 1830, when the modernization and nationalization of education began. This is why this paragraph does not treat Algeria. An important historical turning point occurred when Egypt's governor, Mohammed Ali Pasha, defeated Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II's troops in 1839 and gained Egypt's independence from the empire even if it remained formally in it. The sultan later died, leaving the throne to his 16-year-old son Abd al-Majid, who was guided to enact reforms by Foreign Minister Mustafa Reshid Pasha, a convinced pro-Westerner who hoped to gain European support. Thus the first *Tanẓīmāt*, reforms inspired by the Western political model, were issued, aimed at making the empire more modern and efficient and with the declared intention of abolishing the distinctions between Muslim and non-Muslim pupils and students.

The reform period in the Ottoman Empire refers to the middle fifty years of the 19th century (1830-80 in an approximate way, as there are different chronologies). All these reforms had a dual character; on the one hand, they invoked Allah and the Prophet and asserted the need to return to tradition, to the authentic interpretation of the Quran and respect for sacred law. At the same time, they proposed new institutions and a complete renewal of customs. In any case, they were top-down reforms aiming at strengthening the empire, which was by now highly decadent compared to the neighbouring Austrian and Russian empires; in fact, the reforms concerned first and foremost military modernisation, but not only. An attempt was made to include representatives of non-Muslim minorities in the government to increase their loyalty and to bring under state control matters traditionally in private hands, the most obvious example being education (Zani 2005, pp. 176-178). Both European and Arab historiography often belittle or fail to recognise the reformist spirit of the Ottoman Empire of this period, engaged in attributing the drive for modernisation either to the West or to Arab nationalism. In contrast, the historical truth is that the empire gave a solid impetus for modernisation (Verdeil 2017). Many Quranic schools were secularised, and in the years to come, the Quranic Schools followed a slow decline, flanked and then replaced by Western-style educational institutions. An educational commission was created in 1845, which planned three levels of state public schools: primary (*ibtidā'i mekteb* and later *ilk mekteb*, in some of which the Turkish language was introduced), intermediate (*rushdiyye*), and higher (university). In 1847, a Ministry of Public Education was established to supervise schools. In 1850, the Education Commission stated that schools should have no distinctions based on religious affiliation (Gibb 1986, *Tanẓīmāt*). In Egypt, for example, kuttāb began to welcome Coptic pupils, marking the first major exception to their being for Muslims' exclusive use and setting an important precedent for the national interfaith school (Gibb 1986, *Kuttāb*). In 1869, a new education law that provided for five levels of education was drafted: two primary levels (*sibyān* and *rushdiyye*), two secondary levels (*I'dādiyye* and *sulṭāniyye*) and a higher level divided between

higher technical schools and universities. Primary schools proliferated in number, while few secondary schools were opened. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ghalata Saray French Lycée remained the only high school for a long time. A university was opened in Istanbul (*dar ül-fünūn*), closed after only a year due to protests at al-Afghani's lectures.

The empire definitively lost its dominance of North Africa with the French occupation of Tunisia and the British occupation of Egypt in the 1880s, the histories of which broke away from the Turkish one even though they had already acquired certain independence by this century (Gibb 1986, *Tanẓīmāt*).

6.2 Indigenous Arab attempts at modern educational systems

Arabs call the historical period in which the Turks had the supremacy of the Muslim world "decadence", and "rebirth" (*nahḍa*) the attempts at political and cultural reforms aimed at recovering the best of the Arab-Islamic tradition and, at the same time, assimilating the scientific and technological progress of the West. Specifically, it is possible to distinguish between the following:

- Arab countries subject to Ottoman Empire that obtained political independence and tried to build modern independent national education systems (the primary example is Egypt, but also Tunisia)
- Arab countries ruled by independent dynasties, in which there was an independent proto-national education of traditional type (like Morocco, Libya, and Saudi Arabia)
- Algeria, which was colonised before it could start the education nationalisation and modernisation process.

Egypt is the country that most developed an independent modern national education system before colonialism. Napoleon's expedition in 1798 marked the beginning of the Renaissance: the country found itself bewildered and defenceless, discovering at the same time its weakness and the European culture of the time. It was still under the formal control of the Ottoman Empire, but the three years of French occupation left a strong mark on it (Zani 2005, pp. 179-181). 1798 was a fundamental turning point for Egypt and the relationship between the European and Islamic worlds (Leccese 2017, p. 146). When the French left, the Ottoman Sultan entrusted the government to Muhammad Ali, who remained in power from 1805 to 1849 and made his office hereditary, making Egypt a country de facto independent from the Ottoman Empire both in internal politics and in foreign policy with the Europeans, to whom he opened the country. He was an authoritarian reformer: he supported the establishment of the first printing houses and newspapers, instituted a new school system with Western-style technical instruction, encouraged the emergence of a national middle class and promoted the development of the Egyptian economy (Zani 2005, pp. 199). He organised and financed periods of study in Europe for young Egyptian students to

understand and learn and then return to Egypt with new knowledge and skills. One famous learning trip was that of 1815 in Italy to learn typographic art; on the other hand, when students came back from Europe, they had to translate in Arabic the books they had known and, from these translations, new books were printed. This was part of the general state strategy of translation aimed at acquiring Western scientific knowledge and, simultaneously, revitalising the Arabic language and its classical authors. From 1832, the State had begun to print its textbooks (Mermier 2012, pp. 29-30). The Quranic School retained its functions, but Egypt was the first country to try to adapt it to modern needs and integrate it into the state system. In 1835 an inspector for these schools, called *Mufattish al-makātīb,* was appointed for the first time (Gibb 1986, *Kuttāb*). Among the oldest and most famous female institutions is the school for *hakimāt* (female doctors), founded in 1832 by the French doctor Clot Bey, who had settled in Egypt. Over three decades Abyssinian and Sudanese female slaves and orphans studied to become health officers in this school that declined in the 1860s. Women's presence in missions, as pastors' wives or members of women's congregations, encouraged the growth of women's institutions (Verdeil 2017, p.31).

From the mere choice of vocabulary, *Maktab*, instead of *kuttāb*, the governor's desire to share the modernising and secularising educational policies of the Ottoman Empire emerges. Muḥammad Alī's work was continued by his successors, among which the most important is Ismā'īl Pāshā, who ruled from 1863 to 1879. In 1867, he obtained from the Sultan the title of *khedivé,* which emphasized Egyptian independence from Istanbul (Gibb 1986, *Tanẓīmāt*). In the same year, the khedivé instructed the Ministry of Education members to inspect the Quranic primary schools. He tried to unify state education and distinguish between different school levels, including women in the public education programme. The results fell short of expectations due to poorly trained teachers working with antiquated methods and low salaries, and state education continued to be for only a few people (Gibb 1986, *Kuttāb*). During his Khedivate, the general meaning of "school" for the term *Maktab* seems to have become so prevalent that the national school founded between 1868 and 1879 in Cairo was called precisely *makātīb ahliyya* (Gibb 1986, *Maktab*). A large part of the population continued to attend Quranic schools not controlled by the state, where arithmetic was introduced only in 1876. Thus there were two parallel education systems: on the one hand, the *katātīb* and, on the other, state schools (*makātīb*), which coexisted with foreign schools often funded by the state and reserved for the local elite. This period ended with the British occupation in 1882, which came in response to the nationalist revolt that had deposed Ismail's successor, the khedivé Tawfīq, for his pro-Western policies. England put the khedivé back on the throne and acted as his guarantor but took control of the country (Zani 2005).

In this period, some intellectuals developed educational reflections that will have repercussions on the country's school system, influencing the Arab and Muslim pedagogical debate at large up to

the present day. Rifā'a al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801-1874) was one of the first exponents of liberal reformism who saw the West as a model, especially for the institutional structure to be given to the country; his thought was close to that of the Young Ottomans (later Young Turks). Fascinated by the Enlightenment philosophy, interested in reflections on the nature of power and opposed to despotism, he dealt with various themes that he interpreted in a pedagogical sense: love of one's country, economic progress, civic education, women's emancipation, and the abandonment of superstitions and the urgency of scientific translations. In 1826, he accompanied a group of students to Paris to study its administration and stayed there for five years; he wrote a book on this experience, *The Gold of Paris*, in which he exalts the beauty of French culture and through which it penetrated Egypt, prompting the opening of schools for translators. He exalted the value of a constitution and a parliamentary regime that ensures freedom and justice, developing the idea that national belonging surpasses and unites religious affiliations, so education must aim to form the good Egyptian citizen before the good Muslim. Education must transmit traditional values by anchoring them in modern times and be accessible to all as a fundamental element of homeland rebirth and development of society. In the last years of his life, he proposed a project for the reform of education to Ismā'īl Pāshā, in which he argues that primary education, including that provided in Quranic schools, must be under state supervision and must provide the knowledge necessary for work. Secondary education should be highly developed and open to the meritorious, and higher education should be reserved for those with the necessary financial means.

The vision of Islamic reformism was quite different. Al-Afghānī (1838-1897) was an Iranian and Shiite thinker who was very influential throughout the Arab world. Unlike the liberals, he intended to develop society on the principles of Islam and considered French cultural influences to be a negative consequence of colonialism. Inspired by Wahhabi ideas, he proposed reformism that started from the Quranic sources and reinterpreted them without betraying them in the light of modernity. He argued that it was necessary to master Western science and technology to resist colonial oppression, and all his thinking aimed at defending and re-evaluating Islam. He did not develop an educational project as his Egyptian disciple 'Abduh (1849-1905), an imam, philosopher and sociologist, leader of Egyptian reformism with a nationalist perspective, attentive to religious and pedagogical aspects and their relations, did. In his reflections, he re-evaluated Islam as a rational religion, showing how the original message of the Quran is favourable to science and progress and placing his proposal for cultural renewal in this perspective. Consequently, he proposed to modify teaching methods by organising education on three levels: primary, aimed at teaching religion and good behaviour to the masses; a higher level, aimed at developing reasoning in those who will have to perform public functions; advanced education, for those who will have to perform the role of professor or spiritual guide. Riḍā (1865-1935) was born in Syria but lived

mainly in Egypt alongside 'Abduh and is considered the founder of the Salafiyya. In 1898, he founded the magazine *al-Manār, the lighthouse,* which was to become a cultural reference point for the Muslim Brotherhood. He advocated Arab nationalism and was the most conservative of the reformists (Zani 2005). He also gave the polemic against Sufism a new lease of life in the twentieth century, editing Ibn Taymiyya's works and influencing later Salafi ideologues such as Hasan al-Banna (d.1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (Cornel 2004). Their influence on the Egyptian educational system is the role that religion always maintained within every modernising proposal and reforming project. The cultural hegemony they created acted as a barrier to radical Turkish secularism that would not find fertile ground in Egypt.

The Coptic Christian community and its reaction to European Catholic and Protestant missions are also interesting. At the same time as Muslim reformism, and driven by the same concerns and desires for national independence, it is possible to find internal reformism within the Coptic Church, which began with Cirillo IV's patriarchate (1853-61). Cyril's reform aimed to provide the community with training schools at the same quality level as Protestant or Catholic schools. He pushed for a reform of education from primary to higher levels, including schools for women's education, on the model of what the missionary orders were doing. This renewal effort is all the more significant as it is the fruit of the Church's initiative since it does not enjoy the support of either political power or any foreign power. This reform operation generates a strong sense of belonging to a distinct community based on ancient religious and cultural traditions. A further element in the construction of this identity is the rediscovery of the Pharaonic past, and the creation of a communitarian history understood as a factor of unification and group pride. To defend themselves against the threats of community disintegration, a danger justified by the conversions to Catholicism and Protestantism that were taking place, the ecclesiastical hierarchies supported a movement to research and strengthen the Coptic identity, making the believers aware of the millenary value of their national history. In its twofold direction, religious and civil, Coptic reformism does not seem to have as its primary objective the safeguarding of the faith, but rather the protection of the historical heritage of the Egyptian nation, with its thousand-year history. Even the Islamic modernist movement considers Egyptian identity crosswise the religious identities. The correspondence of some basic principles, such as the need for a social reorganisation and the preservation of national identity and history, led to a common feeling manifested in the mutual acquaintance between Coptic reformists and Muslims, with whom they held frequent debates. Among them, the figure of Muhammad 'Abduh emerges (Pizzo 2002, pp. 40-43). The space enjoyed by the Copts in the Egyptian educational system, unlike other Arab educational systems concerning other minorities, did not derive from the acquisition of Western democratic education principles but from an earlier and indigenous cause: the Copts themselves built the Egyptian

national educational system. They could do this thanks to the space given to them by Muhammed ‘Ali in the new state construction and the sharing of a national cultural project, more plural than secular, in the sense that religions always continue to play an important role.

In Tunisia, the Husainidi dynasty reigned from 1705 as Bey (governors) of the Ottoman Empire, with a certain level of political freedom and independence. The monarch began to embrace Western and especially French culture, trying to modernise the country by founding modern schools and higher education institutes; therefore, he made the first attempt at internal reform (Laroui 1982). The general decline of the Muslim powers was perceived as a loss of military power, so the first remedies adopted, here as in Turkey and Egypt, were to acquire the tools, techniques and discoveries of the military art. The Bardo military school’s opening must be seen in this context. In 1837, Aḥmed Bey commissioned the Italian Luigi Calligaris to establish the country's first secular school to train Tunisia's top military hierarchies and elite. Calligaris, who also knew Arabic, began writing and translating not only works on engineering and military techniques but also politics. The king also intended to be inspired by Western politics and institutions while maintaining the Arab-Islamic identity. Khayr ad-Dīn at-Tūnisī was one of the fathers of Tunisian reformism, characterised by the desire to know and discover Europe in an equal relationship of reciprocal exchange and by the acknowledgement of a technological and scientific, but also political and social, gap between the Muslim and Western worlds. It was also characterised by the awareness that the foundations on which this European progress was based were not alien or contrary to the spirit of Islamic law and that instruments and institutions could therefore be imported, metabolised and adapted (Scigliano 2017, pp. 66-7). In 1845, Christian Bourgade founded the first female school (Mermier 2012, p.26). With a secular and modernist nature, nineteenth-century Tunisian reformism spread thanks to the Zitouna scholars, who tried to reform themselves to regain their former glory. The first reform of the Zitouna was in 1842, accomplished by Ahmed Bey, thus before the French colonisation, as was the attempt in 1876 to include modern sciences in the curriculum, which was stopped by the conservative Sheikhs (Mazzei 2017). This internal reformism, the process of building the new state, and the elaboration of the first modern institutions (such as the first constitution of 1861) were all processes that the French protectorate brutally interrupted (Scigliano 2017).

Libya and Morocco are special cases. In Libya, the Turkish dynasty of Qaramānlī dominated it from 1711 to 1835, in a semi-independent way, upon the formal power of the Ottoman Empire. In this country, a proto-nationalist spirit was formed due to religious power, namely the Al-Sanūsī Brotherhood (Senussia). It pursued an austere and popular Maliki Sufism that found acceptance among the local Bedouin tribes. In 1856, Al-Sanūsī chose the oasis of Jaghbūb as his new *zawiya*. It was built around a mosque and a school with brothers and students’ houses, which numbered

more than 300: the oasis became the seat of a madrasa second in Africa only to that of al-Azhar. Al-Sanūsī was an erudite writer with a library of about 8,000 volumes, including Islamic law mysticism, philosophy, history, Quranic exegesis, poetry, astronomy and astrology. Al-Sanūsī personally educated the future leaders of the Brotherhood before appointing them as sheikhs at the head of the monasteries with the power to ordain members and accept adherents; the hierarchy depended on the level of education, which was one of the main objectives. Given the trust that the Bedouin populations placed in Senussia, the Ottoman Empire accepted it as the population's representative and ruler of the territory that guaranteed it the collection of taxes and peace, thus recognising its political role. This role became more pronounced when the brotherhood first opposed the French advance in the desert and then the Italian colonisation.

In Morocco, Sufi brotherhoods also created a proto-national education system. Education was almost exclusively provided in the *zawāyā*, characterised by popular Sufism (De Poli 2007). The zawāyā were communities of believers who lived together around a mosque under the guidance of a shaykh, a devout and mystical Muslim who organised communal life and taught his followers both religion and reading, writing and arithmetic (ash-Sha'rānī 1961). The Quranic schools, *kuttāb*, or *msid*, a Moroccan term derived from the classical masjid, offered primary education; the religious colleges, madrasa, provided higher education in Islamic law and doctrine. At the apex of the educational system were the Qarawiyyīn of Fez and the king (De Poli 2007). The king's power and his cultural approach can also be seen in printing history. A private citizen brought the first printer into the country in 1864 but had to donate it to King Mohammed IV, who founded the first official Moroccan print house in Fez: over the next six years, it printed six books (Mermier 2012, p. 26). However, the international education system also developed alongside the traditional Moroccan education system. Even before the French protectorate establishment, the Moroccan educational system was not limited to the kingdom's institutions alone, but other institutions of different origins coexisted. In 1862, the first school of the Universal Israelite Alliance was opened in Tetouan, and others soon followed in the main towns and the countryside. France, too, did not wait for the Treaty of Fez (1912) to start the first Franco-Arab schools in cities and consulates. In fact, in 1907-08, there were already 42 foreign schools with 5270 pupils (Partouche 2014).

In the Mashreq, Arab nationalism and Western missionary schools challenged the power of the Ottoman Empire. The central Ottoman power divided the *Bilad Al-Sham* into administrative provinces: Aleppo (which includes today -Turkish lands), Damascus (which includes today - Jordanian and Lebanese lands), Tripoli, Sidone and Jerusalem (entire Palestine, directly ruled by the Ottomans). These territories were formed by locally integrated independent regions, which often did not correspond with Ottomans provinces. Some were religious communities, such as the

druse-Maronite Mount Lebanon, the Shiite Jabal ‘Amin, or the Alawite Jabal Nusayri. Istanbul always opposed the emergence of confessional political entities (Trombetta 2013, pp. 55-6).

In Syrian lands, there was relative cultural and religious independence from Istanbul, especially in Damascus, derived from a long pre-Ottoman history as a centre of Islamic learning. It was the seat of the first Muslim dynasty and exerted a pull for Muslim scholars from the entire Islamic world. In contemporary times, it is possible to note strong local, regional and ethnic loci of identity, but the Ottoman system had incorporated them within the balancing of power between the three most important religious educational figures (Tamari 2009, pp. 46-7). In the XVIII-XIX century, Arab nationalism had not gained real autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in the educational field because they had to cope with secular Western education together, even before colonisation. The institutions supported by the French government, such as Catholic missionary schools, Alliance missionary schools and the Universal Israelite Alliance or the French Lay Mission, were the vehicles par excellence for the French cultural influence before colonialism (Verdeil 2017, pp. 17-24). Printing was an instrument with which the Ottoman Empire failed in its modernisation aim, and it was the instrument with which Western powers and Christian communities overtook it in the educational field. The first Arab printing house was born in 1706 in Aleppo thanks to the Christian Antioch’s Patriarch, but from 1485 to 1726, there was the Ottoman prohibition of printing Arab works. The concern was religious: some *ulemā* were worried that the mechanic reproduction could alter the Divine Message, so all the XVIII century Islamic religious books could not be printed (see Anderson 2016 on the printing press’s role in building national community in Europe and for a comparison about the prohibition to print in Catholic lands). Christians indeed printed their religious books in the Arabic language, leading to a considerable development of education and alphabetisation in Christian communities. The lack of education in Syria and Lebanon can be explained by the hostile approach of the Ottoman Empire, represented by the lack of books on which people could learn (Mermier 2012).

In this mid-nineteenth-century reformist period of the Ottoman Empire, the geographical, cultural and political identity of the region was redefined, and the phenomenon of sectarianism (in Arabic *ṭā‘ifiyyah)* in the Syrian-Lebanese region was born. Contrary to essentialist analyses that consider it a peculiar trait of Middle Eastern societies, sectarianism seems to be born and developed in the modern world. The origins of this phenomenon lie at the intersection of the modernisation process carried out by the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism in the XIX century. In this particular historical period, the political and social forms of the old regime collapsed, and a new culture that chose religious affiliation as its political characteristic took shape. Sectarianism became a feature of the modern political system in which religious identity was secularised and assumed a political role (Zecca 2018, pp. 47-48). At the end of the nineteenth century, rural classes in missionary

Christian networks did not differ radically from those run by local Muslims: the content remained religious, and Arabic, more than the French language, was the language of instruction (Verdeil 2017, p. 27).

On the other hand, the growing European political and cultural influence brought the circulation of the term *Suriya* referring to the Ottoman *Bilad al-Sham*'s region, overall by reformist academic foundations, printing houses and scientific organisations. The Egyptian invasion of 1831 accelerated Syrian independence from the Ottomans; in fact, the country officially adopted the term *Suriya* for the first time during this brief experience of a separate government (1831-40). The local elites began to develop an awareness of the distinction between these lands and the Ottoman Empire. After 1860 with its religious contrasts, the Arab proto-nationalists, often Christians, used explicitly the term *Suriya* to evoke the birth of a modern and secular nation and to overcome sectarianism with a Syrian Arab national vision. The Ottoman Empire also adopted the Latin denomination for the Damascus Province, named it *Vilayet Suriya*, a name that seems less identified at a religious level, in an attempt to appear as an agent of modernisation in the region. The attempt was to move towards the future by favouring the rediscovery of a pre-Ottoman past, and therefore of a pre-Ottoman identity, which is effectively non-existent for the current rulers, who arrived in the region 'recently'. This choice favoured European influence in the region and the alteration of the traditional social order. Nationalists began to talk of Great Syria (*Suriya al Kubra*) and natural Syria (*Suriya al-tabi'iyya*), including Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. Despite these visions, Syrian nationalists claimed autonomy inside the Ottoman Empire without rebelling against it until the new Turkish nationalist movement of the Young Turks began to pursue a policy of Turkification (1908-14). The radicalisation of the Istanbul government in a nationalistic sense led to the radicalisation of Arab nationalism (Trombetta 2004, pp. 15-16; 2013, pp. 56-58).

During the First World War, Arab nationalists rebelled and claimed independence against the Ottomans' domination, who had sided with the Central Empires. As a result, an independent monarchy ruled the country for a brief period under Faysal B. al-Husayn (Kingdom of Syria), crushed in 1920 by the French invasion. King Faysal came from the Hijaz, the region of Mecca and Medina, and reached Damascus in the autumn of 1918 with the help of Britain and its famous agent Thomas Lawrence of Arabia. He brought British promises of Arab independence in a territory stretching from Saudi Arabia via Iraq to Damascus and contributed to a great diffusion of national identity feeling. The Ottoman army withdrew, and the Arab army hoisted the tricolour flag with a red triangle: the black was for Abbasid Dynasty, the green was for the Omayyad, the white was for the Fatimid, and the red triangle was for the Arab revolt. Aware of France and Britain's desire for partition, Faysal's government attempted to oppose colonial partition, even though Lebanon was already under French control while Palestine and Iraq were under British

control. In 1919, the Syrian Congress met in Damascus for the first time, but when they declared national independence in 1920, the French army defeated the Arab army and forced the king to escape. These few months of Faysal's government remained in the collective historical memory, such as the foundation of independent Syria based on territorial unity, central authority and opposition to foreign protection, but also showed the local and inter-Arab divergences that Western powers will exasperate to control the region. Sati 'al Husri (1882-1968), minister of education in the first Damascus government, was one of those intellectual which theorised a Pan-Arab national state from the Atlantic to the Arab Gulf. However, there were other nationalists dissatisfied with having rulers from Hijaz and the Iraqi elite and aimed at strictly national independence (Trombetta 2004, pp. 15-16; 2013, pp. 66-8). Another important public figure of the period was Mohammad Kurd 'Ali (1876-1953), an intellectual and journalist who, after the First World War, founded the Arab Academy in Damascus modelled on the French Academy. Remembered for his work on the Arabic language and his commitment to raising public awareness on education issues through conferences and festivals, he was Public Education Minister several times (Verdeil 2017, p. 17).

In Palestine, there was the traditional kuttāb, which girls attended too, but their enrolment number was lower than boys. The attempt to modernise came from the central Ottoman government but only in high schools for bureaucrats and teachers: Turkish is the language used and remains embedded in religion. There are also Western schools teaching their languages, and a minority of Arab private schools led by local individuals or associations who teach in Arabic (Daoudi, in Kirdar 2017, p. 86). In the latter, it is possible to see an attempt at independent Arab education, which fails to become a system or set excellent examples.

The exception in the Mashreq was the Lebanese province, with its different religious communities and print, which competed in renewed Arabic language and culture (Mermier 2012, p. 12). It is necessary to recall the particular Lebanese composition in the Arab panorama briefly. Lebanon was a country inhabited by Christians since it was inside the Roman Empire and remained Christian under Omayyad Empire. Between XI and XIII centuries, during the Crusades, it was an independent Christian kingdom, then it was conquered by the Mamluks and then by Ottoman Empire. There was frequent contact between the Maronite Christian community and the Italian and French Christian communities for study purposes, with trips to Europe and school opening in Lebanon (Zani 2005, p. 207). Since the 16th century with the Franco-Ottoman Concordat, western countries were able to expand their cultural influence by establishing schools in Mount Lebanon by missionaries, both Protestant and Jesuit, for the education of the local communities, as well as an agency for proselytization (Abouchedid and Zeid, in Kirdar 2017, p. 62). In 1736, the Maronite Clergy decreed that education was a duty of every single religious community. Already in the XVII century, the Druze community tried to gain independence from the Empire, and they

succeeded with the emirate of Bechir II between 1788 and 1840 (Zani 2005, p. 207). The religious sectarianism of this period, with individual religious communities claiming independence from the Ottoman Empire and establishing their education, with the competition between French and British influence, will have repercussions on today's education system. In this country, private education was born and spread as the leading provider of education before it had a national education system and one century before that in the rest of the Arab world (Abouchedid and Zeid, in Kirdar 2017, p. 59). Then, in the middle of the XIX century, Muhammad Ali conquered the country. This provoked a national unitary impulse, which began the rebirth of Lebanon as a Nation (Zani 2005, pp. 207-11). In the meantime, in Beirut in 1834 the first American Printing House was founded and in 1848 the Catholic university, basis of what will be the two most important universities of the country still today: the Syrian Protestant College (founded in 1866, called after 1920 the American University of Beirut) and the Saint-Joseph University (founded in 1875). Born from missionary activism, they represented the competition between France and the United States for the region's predominance and the Lebanese society's linguistic and cultural plurality. They printed the first Arab encyclopaedia and the first anthology of literature studied in the entire Arab world (Mermier 2012, pp. 25-32). Anderson affirms:

> *"Maronites and Copts, many of them products of Beirut's American College (founded in 1866) and the Jesuit College of St. Joseph (founded in 1875) were major contributors to the revival of classical Arabic and the spread of Arab nationalism"* (Anderson 2016, p. 77).

These institutions aimed at socialising Lebanese students along Western cultural lines and served as a niche for Western cultural and political presence in the Levant (Abouchedid and Zeid, in Kirdar, 2017, p.63). A new cultural elite formed, with a new political awareness, especially in the Christian Arab middle class. Poets, writers and publishers founded cultural associations, such as the Society of Arts and Sciences (1847) and the Syrian Scientific Society (1857), to advocate the need for reforms in various fields, including the educational one, and they were open to modern European ideas. They aspired not only for independence from the Ottoman Empire but also to form a new modern Arab State. Lebanese society's cultural and religious plurality was also a cause of disorders. In 1860, the Druze massacred Maronite Christians, supported by Ottomans. For this reason, the French military arm arrived in the country, leading to international agreements for the country's internal security. From this moment on Lebanon acquired a special status compared to other territories of the Ottoman Empire. In 1863, Butrus al-Būstāni (1819-1883) founded the National School, which welcomed students of all religions, races and languages to form the new elite of a country where the education system was still fragmented into different religious beliefs and languages. He was called the *"father of the Renaissance"* for his thoughts and actions guided

by a social and nationalistic perspective. He believed that everyone had the right to education and that the State must provide a secular and equal education to all its citizens, overall those of the lower class. He considered ignorance and religious fundamentalism the cause of the country's disunity and its weakness in front of foreign powers, as well as the reason that prevents the emergence of a nation aware of its identity. Citizenry instruction was the solution he would implement through schools, associations, newspapers and trips; he also theorised on women's instruction in order to be active members of civil society. Al-Bustani school worked well for around 15 years and significantly influenced the future Lebanese education system. It was a secular and national school, in which there was no discrimination for religion or race, and teachers were selected from all religions, nationalities and races for their skills and competencies; there was equality between students and teachers, who *"eat at the same table"*. Some of his ideas are still modern and interesting for today's education. He believed that schools must have total independence and that the number of students could not exceed a teacher's capacity, which is rarely true in actual Arab schools. A school can teach all known languages if a minimum number of students want. However, the Arabic language must have the most important place because it is the mother tongue, and success in other subjects depends on it, and this is still a problem in Lebanese and other countries today -schools. Finally, he stated that curricula must be in accordance with the spirit of the time, meaning that the school must provide all the knowledge available: arithmetic, geometry, history, geography, science, Muslim law and foreign languages (Zani 2005, pp. 207-13). His figure is so important in the democratic pedagogical field that Sultana (2001, p. 393), discussing innovators in pedagogy, mentions him alongside Dewey, Freire, Montessori, Kerschensteiner and the Egyptian al-Qabbani.

Muslim and Druze Lebanese communities tried to develop modern educational institutions to fill the gap with the Christian communities (Mermier 2012, p. 32) and to shield these communities from a perceived Western cultural infringement (Abouchedid and Zeid, in Kirdar 2017, p. 63). The influence of foreign educational institutions was so strong that numerous intellectuals and politicians considered missionaries responsible for the political awakening of the local Arab populations. The Syrian Protestant College is often presented as the spearhead of a modernising policy that extends well beyond the Ottoman period. In attempting to build an education system capable of training skilled technicians and loyal citizens for the state, the Ottoman Empire also tried to resist the proliferation of foreign and community schools and universities. A way to boycott them was the non-recognition of their diplomas on the empire's territory. Perceived as a threat, foreign schools were just as much a spur, prompting the state or individuals to encourage the modest development of vocational education or promote girls' education. There was a progressive institutionalisation of the education system, which became increasingly hierarchic, progressive,

uniform, and controlled by the State. The study subjects were ever less religious and more focused on skills for working, and the State organised study programs and let them be taught inside institutions (Verdeil 2017, pp. 17-24).

On the eve of the First World War, there were many Western schools in the Arab territories: 500 French, 675 American and 178 British (De Poli 2007).

It is possible to conclude that Beirut and Cairo were the cities in which the élite were more in contact with Western teaching methods and that had more independence from Ottoman Empire: from their printing houses, modernistic ideas spread in the entire Arab world (Mermier 2012, pp. 25-32). Egypt's education was also more independent from Western powers, becoming a model for Arab independent education for political reasons. Indeed, Lebanon became a centre of culture and literature for its freedom of expression, multilingualism and openness to the world.

6.3 Education under colonialism. The selectiveness of the foreign powers

Anderson's (2016) reflection on the role of colonial education in building nationalism in colonised countries does not deal specifically with Arab countries as it is based overall on South-East Asian countries, but it found correspondence also in the context investigated here. He talks about how the colonial state created the nation-state, i.e. how the colonisers planted the seeds of nationalist movements that drove them out. He describes three key factors: the administrative unification of a territory, the cultural homogenisation that he calls "Russification" and the spread of modern-style education. A new generation began to feel that they belonged to one nation because, for the first time, young people living in a particular administrative territory studied the same things in standardised books and, progressing through their school career, moved from their village to cities, from cities to capitals, meeting other young people who had followed the same educational path. Young people studying in the capital's colonial high schools got together with their 'compatriot' peers, while Muslim Madrasa admitted scholars from everywhere without any space for ideas like nationality or ethnicity. This youth generation differed from their parents in their European education:

> *"In the colonies, then, by 'Youth' we mean 'Schooled Youth,' at least at the start. This in turn reminds us again of the unique role played by colonial school-systems in promoting colonial nationalisms […and bring] the European 'national histories' into the consciousnesses of the colonized"* (Anderson 2016, pp. 120-122).

This quote well explains the process generally, and not precisely referring to colonial education in Arab countries:

> *"In any given social formation, the PW [pedagogical work] through which the dominant PA [Pedagogical Authority] is carried on tends to impose recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant culture on the members of the dominated groups or classes. It tends at the same time to impose on them, by inculcation or exclusion, the recognition of the illegitimacy of their own cultural arbitrary"* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p.40-1).

Through education, European colonial powers challenged local culture and popular religiosity, describing them as illegitimate, also highlighting its contradictions concerning the Quran and its irrationalities, and pushing Muslims to believe they should prove the truth of their faith, in other words pushing them towards laicism or purist attitudes of unorthodox traditions rejection, namely towards fundamentalism. The debate on Sufism and its adaptability to European social theories developed in this climate. A new Islam, aiming to redefine itself as modern and scientific, purged of its 'popular' and folkloric components, began to consider brotherhoods as relics of the past to be replaced by new forms of association. From being an indispensable element of traditional Islamic culture and his transmission, Sufism became a symbol of the Muslim world's decadence. The erudite and city Islam of the *'ulamā* 'contrasted in many situations with the 'marginal' Islam of the brotherhoods, which were seen as vehicles of superstition and pre-Islamic practices. Nevertheless, in many other places brotherhoods remained official representatives of the Muslim people. Brotherhoods became, in some cases, the symbol of anti-colonial opposition, often seen and described as a reactionary fanatics' conspiracy against the European civilising mission by French, British, Dutch and Italian missionaries and colonial officials. During the colonial invasion, indeed, new brotherhoods sprang up precisely to create anti-colonial resistance organisations. This has led some scholars to speak of neo-Sufi, whose innovative elements were organisational rather than theological. This so-called neo-Sufi spread in the autonomous agricultural communities, thanks to the role of the zawiya, whose organisational structure put in place mass recruitment that, in some contexts, such as Libya, would turn into active political participation. Some brotherhoods became a bulwark against European penetration thanks to their ability to mobilise their members and the prestige enjoyed by the Shaykh among the population. In geographically distant areas, Sufi-inspired movements created defensive jihads (Leccese 2017, pp. 147-8).

This summary description of the impact of colonialism on religion is necessary to understand the links between religion and education in this period. The first country considered is Algeria because it was the first country colonised by the French and the country that has seen the imposition of the French educational system more than any other colonised country (Messekher and Miliani in Kirdar 2017, pp.263-5) and, therefore, the one whose history of education shows better the impact of colonialism on education. Then the analysis extends to French colonial education in the

Maghreb and then into the Mashreq countries it colonised (Lebanon and Syria). Subsequently, it treats countries colonised by Britain (Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq) and Libya, colonised by Italy.

6.3.1 French colonies (including Morocco and Syria)

Before that Algeria could try to develop a local education system like Tunisia and Egypt, it was colonised by the French. French colonisation lasted 150 years in Algeria, starting in 1830 under the reign of Charles X. It was a violent domination aimed at destroying the Algerian identity and substituting it with the French one.

> *"Je n'ai qu'une langue, et ce n'est pas la mienne"* (Derrida 1996).

This statement generally refers to language, which no one possesses as their own, but it is a broad theorisation impossible to discuss here. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the one who elaborated this theory is a French-speaking Algerian, capable of expressing his complex thoughts in the coloniser's language. This was possible due to the French education he received in Algeria, more than 100 years after the beginning of colonisation.

At the time of the invasion, France confined tribes in some districts and transferred some of them to the south, gave the country a European identity and unified its administration with the French one. All Quranic schools were closed (Zani 2005, p. 214), and the establishment of the Missionary Society of Africa and the Missionary Nuns of Africa was encouraged by secular France. Their schools spread both Christianity and the French language and culture, thus creating a cultural consensus around French colonisation (De Poli 2007).

Emir 'Abd al-Qadir (1807-1883), belonging to a Sufi lineage linked to the *ṭarīqa Qadiriyya*, affiliated to the *Shadhiliyya* and the *Naqšbandiyya*, was the most eminent figure of the Algerian anti-colonial resistance. He led it from 1833 to 1847 when he was defeated and exiled first to France and then to Syria. Celebrated as the first Algerian national hero, he was one of the leading exponents of the Akbarian school (referring to Ibn 'Arabi), an expert in Quranic exegesis, dedicated to commenting on complex doctrinal texts and Sufi orations (Leccese 2017, p. 148).

The first indigenous schools were created under the Second Empire (Messekher and Miliani, in Kirdar 2017, p. 263), when the France Imperator Napoleon III (1852-1870) tried to stop the colonisers' aggressive politics, provoking their reaction. He reopened Quranic schools at the primary level and tried to open, without the same success, public schools for Arab pupils. In the Arab-French schools that opened in this period, pupils studied Arabic in the morning and French in the evening. The colonial administration also opened the French-Arab College in Algiers, Constantine and Oran. Colonisers disagreed with this politics, which they saw as dangerous Arabophilia, pushing for closing all schools and madrasas (Zani 2005, pp. 214-5). In 1883, Jules Ferry applied to Algeria the French scholastic legislation that established a secular, free and

compulsory education (Messekher and Miliani, in Kirdar 2017, p. 263). This new system involved a small minority of pupils because it was conceived to form Algerian officers designated to cooperate with the French in controlling Muslim people (Zani 2005, pp. 214-5). Secular French schools, totally French in form and content, educated the colonisers' children and a minimal number of Algerian children belonging to the elite while reserving no attention to the education of the people (Gibbs 1986, *Kuttāb*). The University of Algiers was established only in 1909, and most students were French and Europeans (Messekher and Miliani, in Kirdar 2017, p. 263). From 1930, some ulemā, also belonging to the Salafiyya movement, founded new primary schools where pupils studied the Quran and other subjects, including French. They aimed to protect them from the modernising influence of the French (Gibbs 1986, *Kuttāb*). In 1931, Ibn Bādīs founded the ulemā association that, through publications and a network of schools, promoted a modern education, both religious and secular, against the French attempt to deny the existence itself of Algeria as a national and political entity (Zani 2005, p. 186). These schools became training centres for nationalist militants (Zani 2005, p. 216). By 1948, 5–6 % of the Algerian population was literate. Algerians were mostly educated in kuttāb; a tiny minority was educated in schools that segregated French and Algerian children and transmitted French cultural values. French was the language of instruction, and Arabic was taught as an optional foreign language to a minority. The government abolished segregated schools by 1949, and the consequence was that more Algerians joined schools (Messekher and Miliani, in Kirdar 2017, p. 264). In the 1950-51 school year, just under 20% of Algerian children attended national primary schools, and less than 10% of teachers were Muslim (De Poli 2007). The educated elite was involved in the 1954-62 independence war, mainly under the General Union of Algerian Muslim Students, founded in 1955. Most of these high school and university students joined the National Liberation Front for the armed struggle and thus interrupted their schooling and education (Messekher and Miliani, in Kirdar 2017, p. 264). Despite the Sufi anti-colonial struggle of the previous century, the national liberation movements of the XX century assumed a critical position towards brotherhoods, often accused of complicity with the Western rulers (Leccese 2017, p. 149).

Algeria achieved independence only in 1962 (De Poli 2007). On a social level, Algerians were living in poverty, and the colonial government denied their fundamental human rights, including language, culture and distinctive identity; to understand the situation, suffice it to know that the illiteracy rate was at 85 per cent (Messekher and Miliani, in Kirdar 2017, p. 264).

The educational policies first experienced in Algeria were the matrix of the following French colonial educational policies in the Maghreb and beyond, which could be categorised as follows:

- Military, aimed at building dominated French-speaking elite,
- Republican, aimed at the laicisation of education with Arab-French School

- Colonial, which aimed at workforce training and at preventing the formation of an intellectual elite (Gandolfi 2011, p. 20).

In Tunisia, the second prevailed, probably influenced by the indigenous attempt at independent modern education before colonisation. Tunisia was subject to the French protectorate from 1881 to 1956. Resistance to colonisation lasted from its beginning to its end, and the students themselves led it (Laroui 1982). The French Alliance and the Catholic Church supported the introduction of a modern education based on the French model also through the organisation of study trips in Europe: between 1885 and 1912, about 3.000 Tunisian studied in Paris. The first modern High school in Tunis, the *Collège Sadiki*, was born just before colonisation in 1875, inspired by the French education system. During the protectorate, it trained officials and interpreters who came from the upper classes and acquired new prestige through this training. Tunisian ruling class reproduced itself by enrolling its children in this institution, renouncing its role in traditional society and accepting to acquire a role as a mediator between the French and the people. This created an Arab progressive ruling class close to power but disappointed with European reformism, which had adapted to Western concepts, and sought a renaissance by acquiring foreign languages and modern science (Gandolfi 2011, p. 22).

Zani (2005, p. 213) states that French power also tried to reform traditional education, such as the Zitouna courses started in 1898, and that some intellectuals and religious men collaborated in this attempt. On the official site of Zitouna University, they state that during this period the colonial power tried to impose its educational system and marginalise Zitouna, considered the centre of cultural resistance against France. They also affirm that Zitouna reformed itself for the first time in 1912, organising its education system into three cycles, and again in 1933, arriving to establish, in 1951, a branch of modern studies. In 1956, at the dawn of independence, it transformed into a university (Mazzei 2017). There was undoubtedly a fervent cultural and political debate in the Zitouna madrasa/university, which led to the founding of the *Young Tunisian* nationalistic movement, repressed after the popular uprisings of the early 1900s (Zani 2005, p. 213). Beyond the differences between the two points of view, what is sure is that, throughout the colonial period, European governments used modernity as a weapon of oppression. For a long time the Tunisian people had no choice but to reject the West or admire it living in the complex of the colonised. The colonisation phase gave rise to the paradox of unconscious Westernisation, an adaptation of customs and fashions accompanied by a simultaneous rejection of the basic principles of Western law and civilisation. It was characterised by admiration mixed with resentment, an attempt to emulation and self-identification frustrated by rejection of the other, and an intercultural dialogue often perceived as oppressive interference (Scigliano 2017). From the nationalistic party, *Destur*

born the more radical *Neo-Destur* (1934) that, led by Bourghiba, conquered the country's independence (Zani 2005, p. 213).

Morocco was a French protectorate for 43 years (1912-46), but the Mediterranean littoral and the Rif Mountains formed the Spanish zone, and Tangier had an international regime. Properly it was never a colony as it remained under the sovereignty of the Alawide monarchy, which prides itself on its stability since 1659. It always hosted large numbers of Europeans, and the French shaped its educational policy. During the colonial period, the French divided education into two levels: a professional education for the majority of Moroccans destined for menial jobs and a French model education reserved for the European elite and small local French-speaking elite destined to become the country's leaders. French educational policy is based on preserving ethnic differences, forcing and fomenting the division between Arabs and Amazigh, favouring the latter, and using French as the language of instruction and modernisation (Rose, in Kirdar 2017, pp. 327-48). Classical Arabic remained restricted to teaching Islamic thought and was taught in schools as a secondary language (Ennaji 2005, p. 202). Governor Lyautey established three high schools for young people from the local elite, explicitly stating that it was dramatically necessary to supervise them so that they would not become propagators of revolution and disorder. For this reason, he censored history programmes that deal with the French Revolution and the processes of democratisation in the West (De Poli 2007). Governor Lyautey perfectly embodied the military educational policy aimed at producing a local elite loyal to the colonial government, legitimising it through the meritocracy of an education system for notables (Gandolfi 2011, pp. 20-1). The aim of modern colonial schools and traditional madrasa that colonial power supported was to assimilate the notables' sons, who would contribute to the political control of the country (Zani 2005, p. 217). The high school's initial name was *Collège Musulman*; the first opened in Fez and was renamed *Collège Moulay Idriss* in 1923. It is interesting to stress the linguistic dynamics in this institution, which led to an appreciation of the French language and a contempt for the Arabic one caused by the differences in the teaching methodology. Pupils who came from the traditional *msid* saw the French professors' modern method as a surprising revelation and developed a reverence for French culture as a legitimate culture. The traditional method of Arabic language teaching made learning Arabic appear more difficult than learning French, leading to disaffection with Arabic. Consequently, pupils looked at the study of Arabic as the study of the past and French as the study of the future (Gandolfi 2017, pp. 23-24).

Between 1920 and 1940, Islamic reformists, inspired by Abduh's ideas, developed the Salafiyya movement, condemning both Western cultural influence and the traditional Sufi cult of saints, instead supported by the monarchy and by a part of traditional religious power that, according to the Salafi, had a friendly relationship with French at that moment. This movement's primary

interest was precisely education, and it founded popular schools in many cities. Linked to these schools, political groups of students and teachers developed, and newspapers and journals were born, all asking for Moroccan independence (Zani 2005, p. 217). As in Algeria in the 1930s, the prestige of traditional educational schools grew considerably, precisely because of their role as a centre of nationalist propaganda against the French protectorate (Gibbs 1986, *Kuttāb*). Students of this kind of institution often considered Collège students, who knew French better than Arabic, as betrayers of tradition, naturalised Frenchmen and collaborators with the colonial power (Gandolfi 2011, p. 24). The linguistic battle reached its peak in 1930 when the colonial power went so far as to forbid the use of Classical Arabic in official documents and public administration (Ennaji 2005, p. 202).

Despite criticism from the Salafists, Morocco maintained its unity thanks to the collaboration between the Alawide monarchy, which had ruled the country since the 17th century, and the Islamic brotherhoods. Both institutions enjoyed prestige among the population and managed to keep the Arab and Amazigh components together when the French tried to privilege the Amazigh at the expense of the Arabs (Laroui 1982). Sufi Brotherhoods such as the *Raḥamāniyya* in Kabylia and the *Tijāniyya* fought against French colonisation (Zani 2005, p. 225) and, in 1942, the Algerian teacher Abu Madyan Ibn Munawwar al-Budshish (1873-1955) founded the *Būdshīshiyya*, an offshoot of the *Qadiriyya* (Leccese 2017, p.151). Brotherhoods played an essential role in the Amazigh resistance to French flatteries, such as creating dedicated educational institutions. The French administration established French and Franco-Berber schools like le Lycéés Franco-Berbère in Azrou, in the Middle Atlas Mountains, and Lycéés Moulay Ismail in Meknès, which taught French as the first language and Berber as a second language (Ennaji 2005, p. 203). The most famous colonial Act in this regard was in the juridical field, with the Berber decree of 1930[31]. For the first and last time in Moroccan history since the Arab conquest, a separate judicial system was envisaged for the Amazigh, which should have referred to French courts rather than Muslims. The French tried to play on the Tamazight's original non-Islamic and non-Arabian characters, trying to convince them of their European and Christian roots. However, there was a solid national and nationalistic rejection in response to this decree, which led to its withdrawal within a few years (Hassani-Idrissi 2015).

In 1934, maybe in response to these mobilisations, the colonial government set up a permanent action committee, which published a reform plan with a strong emphasis on education. It provided for significant reform of traditional education, free compulsory primary education, admission of

[31] Full text is available there https://web.archive.org/web/20090102005102/http://www.amazighworld.net/countries/morocco/documents/dahir_berbere/texte_du_dahir_du_16_mai_1930.php

Moroccans to French schools and a high school diploma recognised by French universities (Gandolfi 2011, p. 21). Another significant change was the inclusion in schools of young Arab teachers who had studied in French schools and universities and who began to teach Arabic using modern teaching methods (Gandolfi 2011, pp. 24-5). French colonisation created schools for children taking into account the Moroccan social hierarchy. For the aristocracy children, the French authorities created *"Les écoles des fils de notables";* for the urban working class children, *"Les écoles urbaines"* and for rural people, *"Les écoles rurales"*. However, these types of schools were very limited in number, to the extent that the illiteracy rate was 94% among women and 90% among men (Ennaji 2005, p. 202).

In 1943, Allāl al-Fāsī founded the *Istiqlāl* (Independence) party, depriving the Salafiyya movement of its leading role in the opposition against French colonialism. He also defended Islamic identity but with an open attitude towards Western values and thoughts, fighting against Western colonialism and not against the whole of Western culture (Zani 2005, p. 218). In this period, schools spread, and in 1944, the Commission for instruction reform planned a 10-years plan aimed at opening 200 new classes every year. This reform gave great importance to the study of classical Arabic and unified schools' curricula for notables and urban schools, creating the first national curricula of Franco-Arab schools (Gandolfi 2011, pp. 25-6). The religious authorities of the *al-Qarawiyyīn* mosque allied with the nationalists and the king from an anti-colonial perspective:

> *"Affirmed the right of women to study and encouraged the nationalists to open institutes for the education of girls"* (Mernissi 1996, p. 222)[32].

When France imprisoned Istiqlāl members and forced the king to abdicate, the Independence movement responded with terrorist attacks. Morocco obtained independence in 1956 (Zani 2005, p. 218).

In the Mashreq, after the First World War and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, France and Britain decided, based on their interests, the formation and boundaries of the new Arab states. The "North Syria" became a French colony (Lebanon and present-day Syria), and the "South Syria" (Palestine, Jordan and Iraq) a British one (Trombetta 2013, p. 60). France divided its "Syrian" territories into little states: Damascus, Aleppo, the Druze states, the Alawite states and Great Lebanon (1920). This division added to the traditional Lebanese province the territories of Tripoli, Sidone, Beqa' and Southern Lebanon, strategic for French interests but historically, geographically and culturally diverse from the rest of the country. This increased the proportion of the Muslim population and transformed Mount Lebanon into a broader geopolitical entity with a special status (Trombetta 2013, p. 67; Zani 2005, p. 207).

[32] All translations of Mernissi are mine.

Under French mandate (1918-1946), numerous Catholic (French) and Protestant (British and American) missionary schools competed with each other, contributed to the schooling of the Christian minorities, and served as a cultural outpost for European domination. The most prestigious of these were located in Beirut: the St Joseph's University and the Syrian Protestant College, renamed in this period the American University of Beirut. French colonial administration justified its territorial claims on Syria with the success of these educational institutions, which it considered to be at the root of the Arab awakening and modernising policy and that, in reality, guaranteed France a loyal clientele (Verdeil 2017, p. 14). This education, marked by religious affiliation, was linked to the manipulation of confessional identities implemented by the French colonial government to create networks of clientele loyal to the government, divide the population and control it. Indeed, the French introduced the reference to community membership in the political and social spheres and the distribution of public offices on a confessional basis in a policy of religious communities' politicisation. In Syria, it was progressively abolished after independence from the French in 1949, while in Lebanon it led to the crystallisation of identity differences in a confessional-based political system that still exists today (Zecca 2018, p. 49). On the other hand, colonial administration paid no attention to state public schools, which in this period received less funding than they did from the Ottoman Empire; the contents of these schools were controlled so as not to allow the spread of revolutionary contents and the most censored programmes being those of history (De Poli 2007). The intellectual élite, represented by figures such as Mohammad Kurd Ali, continued to promote a new state that cared about its citizens' education. Thus, education policies resulted from a political game between the colonial authorities, nationalist movements and local powers, alternating opposition and shifting alliances (Verdeil 2017, p. 18).

Nationalist movements, influenced by the colonial division of the *Bilad al-Sham,* became less and less pan-Arab and more particularistic and fractured among themselves, identifying themselves with the newly formed Syrian, Palestinian or Iraqi nations and with particular religious or ethnic affiliations. The Syrian urban elites were predominantly Sunni and looked at Islam as a factor of cohesion and distinction from the occupiers. In the suburbs, however, religious identity groups such as the Alawi and the Druze, who fought against the occupier from the 1920s onwards, grew stronger. The Syrian revolt (*al Thawra al-Arabiya as Suriyya*) in 1925 started in the Druze Mountains, which France had made into a semi-independent state. They managed to boycott the French attempt to break up the resistance by exacerbating communal divisions and allied themselves with the nationalists in Damascus in a national mobilisation. France chose bloody repression for about a year until it restored order. This left an indelible mark on the national political consciousness, which was increasingly marked by the dualism between the Sunni

nationalists of the cities and the nationalists of the religious and ethnic minorities in the suburbs (Druze, Alawi, Ismailites, and Curds). The first group founded the National Bloc in 1927 and prepared the text of the Constitution of the Syrian Republic promulgated in 1930. The National Bloc protested in 1934 when the draft of the Syrian-French treaty did not include the Alawi region in the northwest in the future independent nation. France amended the treaty but ultimately did not ratify it. This, together with the cession of some territories to Turkey and the lack of solidarity with the Palestinian people, led to radical political formations that challenged the traditional nationalist elite. They founded on historical and cultural identities that transcended the boundaries of colonial Syria, defended by the National Bloc. Between these formations, there was the National League of Action, from which the Ba'th was born, theorising an Arab nation from the Atlantic to the Arab Gulf. Other formations are the Social Nationalist Syrian Party, aiming at a secular 'Greater Syria' including Palestine, Transjordan, Sinai, Iraq and Cyprus; the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party, looking at the communist international union; Muhammad's Young movement, allied with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, aiming at unifying all Muslim community in one state. On the other hand, the independent claims of Curds, Alawi and Druze were encouraged by the French and opposed by the Syrian government (Trombetta 2013, pp. 68-74).

From this summary of complex political and identity issues, it is possible to understand how at that time numerous and diverse were the communities imagined (Anderson 2016) by Syrian people, which did not exist as a homogeneous unit.

As regards religion, Sufism was subjected to increasing intensity attacks during this period, not only in Syria but also in other parts of the Islamic world. Although accustomed to restrictions on meditative practices of a theosophical nature and popular ecstatic rituals, with the advent of modernity the Sufis had to face challenges of an entirely different magnitude, resulting overall from the direct impact of the West and its rationalist way of thinking. They caused an increasing intervention of the secular state in education and religion and the contemporary antagonism of growing Islamic fundamentalism. Facing these challenges, represented above all by the spread of school education and political participation, Sufi brotherhoods seemed in some cases to have transformed themselves into a new type of religious organisation, committed above all against the French and to religious education (Weismann, in Stepanyants 2013, pp. 103-9).

The consequence of these political events on education was that in Syria and Lebanon, the colonial government found itself caught between its policy of supporting foreign and community (Christian) schools in the name of protecting Eastern Christians and French interests and the injunction to create a network of public schools as demanded by local nationalists. In Syria, in 1934, the number of pupils enrolled in public schools exceeded that of their peers in private institutions for the first time. As much as they were places of affirmation of imperial power,

schools as spaces of culture and sociability were also contested areas where the French mandate, British interests and nationalist movements clashed (Verdeil 2017, p. 18).

In 1940, the Christian Michel Aflaq and the Sunni Salah al Din al Bitar founded their intellectual circle with other intellectuals of diverse religious belonging, such as the Alawi Zaki al-Arsuzi. The following year they become the Arab Awakening Movement (*Harakat al-ihiya al Arabi*) and, in 1942, the Arab Renaissance Movement (*Harakat al Ba'th al Arabi*). The term *Renaissance* means the liberation of the Arab nation from backwardness and colonialism, and "*Arab Nation"* means a single and indivisible entity bound by history, language and tradition, articulated in different state realities due to the divisions imposed by colonialism. It was a socialist and laic movement but did not ignore the link between Islam and the Arab world, probably also to defend itself from attacks by Islamic movements such as the Muslim brothers. They affirmed the connection between Islam and pan-Arabism, based on the belonging of Islam to the Arab culture. Islam is indeed revealed in the Arabic language and made the history of Arab people, building their legal and social model, their philosophical and scientific theory; so they recognise in the Islamic tradition a legacy of which every Arab, even not Muslim, must be proud (Trombetta 2004, pp. 79-80). Describing in detail the entire history of the party that later came to power and all the political dynamics is beyond the scope of this work. However, it is worth emphasising the relationship that the Ba'th established between Arab and Islamic identity because it has repercussions on the forms and contents of today's education.

In 1943, despite the secular ideas of both nationalist and colonial power, Syria still had a large number of Quranic primary schools, 1,229 (Gibbs 1986, *Kuttāb*). In the same year, Syria gained formal independence from France. However, its territory with arbitrary boundaries was half that of *Bilad al-Sham* Ottoman Province, and the stretch of coastline on the Mediterranean was reduced to one-third. France retired definitively in 1946 while the conflict for Kurds, Alawi and Druze independence had been raging for 10 years and did not seem to end (Trombetta 2013, pp. 61-78).

At this point, we shall look briefly at Lebanon as a separate country, as it was, in fact, about to become from the colonial period onwards. When French mandatory authorities declared the birth of Greater Lebanon in 1920, the secular role of education as a potential national unifier subsided. Under the French Mandate, the rights and privileges of confessional communities in educational and social affairs expanded. Private, confessional, community and foreign institutes of education spread over the country, justified by the freedom of education principle, echoed in the Lebanese constitution in 1926 with a marginal constitutional authority given to the state to supervise private schools (Abouchedid and Zeid, in Kirdar 2017, pp. 60-4). The struggle for power between the different religious communities became harsh and constant. In 1943 these communities succeeded in concluding a national agreement to reduce the political relationship with French and other Arab

Muslims in favour of greater national unity in preparation for the formation of an independent national government in 1945 (Zani 2005, pp. 207-9).

French colonialism also affected three other countries of the Arab League, which are not investigated in detail because they are not Mediterranean countries from which large migratory flows towards Italy and Germany started: Comoros (1841-1978), Djibouti (1894-1977 - French Somalia) and Mauritania (1903-1960). Comoros and Djibouti had a long period of colonisation, which led to a Frenchification of language and education as in the other countries. Their marginality led to decolonisation at a very late stage, and therefore these countries will not enjoy the Arab independence and nationalist period of the 1950s-60s, analysed in the next chapter.

A characteristic feature of French colonial education, found in all the countries it colonised, is the imposition of French language and curricula, in terms of methods and contents, considered superior and necessary for a civilising education. It always omitted the French Revolution and those events in European and world history that could have instilled revolutionary ideas in the colonised people. France implemented a firm assimilationist policy, directly controlling local schools and establishing French schools. In all colonised territories, the local educational system weakened, and any attempt at independent reforms along the lines of the Turkish and Egyptian reforms was blocked; higher education was prohibitively expensive and reserved only for elites made up of colonists and a select few natives. This discrimination separated the population, distorting the meaning of the traditional Quranic education, which was the same for all and freely accessible, and responded to the political necessity of keeping the local population ignorant so they would not rebel. Despite this, or precisely because of this, the traditional system had survived thanks to the efforts to raise its quality and enrich its curriculum, thanks to the generosity of various philanthropists, and because of the importance attached to it by the anti-colonialist movement (De Poli 2007). Another characteristic was French support of non-Arab (such as Berbers in the Maghreb) and non-Muslim (such as Christians in Syria and Lebanon) populations against Muslim Arabs and thus against the national unity of the different countries, fomenting internal divisions and hostilities in traditionally multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies.

6.3.2 British colonies

In 1823, In India, the most crucial English colony, a Committee of Public Education was set, and T. B. Macaulay became its president in 1834. As Anderson reported, he declared: *"A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia"*. He created an education system aimed at building the *English man* in native people, even if they had the inevitable defect of possessing Indian blood. Anderson states: *"From this point on, all over the expanding empire, even if at different speeds, Macaulayism was pursued"*. It built higher local

class figures estranged from their people and for most of whom the capital of the empire, London, was distant and unreachable, as was a career within it, unlike in traditional empires such as the Ottoman Empire (Anderson 2016, pp. 93-6).

Among Arab British colonies, the most important in the educational field was Egypt. Here the British colonial administration (1882-1922) developed sectors that were strategic to its economic interests, limiting expenditures on education despite the great demand for it (Zani 2005). The most significant subsidies in the educational field were directed towards the supervision of Quranic schools, considered centres of nationalist propaganda, whose aim was more political control than improving education. Despite British hostility, the Quranic School continued to work parallel with state schools. In 1900, there were still documented cases of children attending state schools in the morning and Quranic schools in the afternoon or early morning (Gibb 1986, *Kuttāb*). Sir Evelyn Baring, known as Lord Cromer, was Governor of Egypt from 1883-1907; he did not invest at all in the education of the Egyptians, for whom there were only three state high schools in the whole country with 515 pupils, whose curriculum appeared utilitarian and lacking in contents (De Poli 2007). Nevertheless, Egypt was a pioneer in the region in the development of higher education, and in 1908 Cairo University was founded as the country's first public university, which soon opened branches in Khartoum and Beirut and sent many professors to the Arab countries of the Gulf as 'exporters' of education. In 1919, the American University was founded in Cairo (Kohstall 2012).

At the end of Lord Cromer's governorship, tensions erupted between Christians and Muslims Egyptian, previously united by a feeling of ancestral Egyptian national identity rooted in the Pharaonic past. An article that reviewed Egyptian history and its conquest by foreign peoples, equating Arabs, Turks, French, and British appeared in the journal *Misr*, in 1908. It was based on the idea of the Copts as original inhabitants of Egypt who benefited from the alliance with the British against the previous rulers, the Muslims, who were also invaders. This criticism of the Islamic presence in Egypt provoked harsh reactions in the Muslims against the Copts, which led to an anti-Christian feeling and confessional clash, so much so that the Coptic press proposed a Coptic state independent from Egypt with Assiut as its capital. The British authorities did not consider the Copts discriminated against in the country and consequently did not support them. Sir Eldon Gorst said that Muslims and Copts generally lived in peace together if they were left alone, and the worst service that could be done to the Copts would be to treat them as a separate community. He believed that Coptic concerns about education were given due consideration everywhere. British policy did not sympathise with the Copts, unlike French policy, which was always ready to support minorities to divide and rule to its advantage. The British government was neutral and even feared that the Coptic movement would cause unrest in the country, so only the

Protestant Church sympathised with the Copts. Education is one of the central nodes of the controversy: Copts made up 50% of Egypt's intellectual class and had a strong presence in all public offices, but in schools, they made up only 6% in 1911. The most substantial objection concerned the reorganisation of primary education, which was based largely on the kuttāb system. The Copts considered this ~~a~~ serious discrimination against them as pupils and teachers. Copts claimed the right to honour the Sunday holiday, which in Egypt State schools was a compulsory school day. This resulted in many families being forced to enrol their children in private schools that guaranteed Sunday holidays. However, when enrolling in higher education, universities and schools specialising in law or medicine, exclusively state-run, required attendance at government primary schools as a condition of admission. This discriminated against Christian pupils in public schools and, therefore, exacerbated the latent hostility between the two components of the Egyptian state. The Coptic Congress in Assiut in March 1911 was the place where all this was discussed and in which the Coptic community claimed to pay taxes for an education that they could not attend (the Kuttāb), but rather than demanding that the money be invested in separate Katātīb, they proposed a unitary national education guaranteeing equality. Of all the Coptic demands, this was the one that the British considered the most reasonable. Nevertheless, they did not support them, even though they understood their reasons, to avoid antagonising the Muslim majority. Egypt's position as the leading nation in the Islamic world suggested the British be extremely cautious against any initiative that could mobilise Muslim public opinion against British interests, even in other geographical areas. The Muslim majority did not welcome the Coptic proposals and undertook violent actions (Pizzo 2002, pp. 110-132). In response, an Egyptian congress was called in which the prevailing view was that the Copts had been instigated by the British, and they had no right to claim on that matter since they had not solved the problems of education for different religions in their homeland. The Congress rejected the idea of modifying the traditional nature of teaching in the kuttāb, which is religious and based on the Quran, but affirmed that there was no legal impediment to Christian children attending the kuttāb and suggested the creation of Christian "*katātīb*" if Copts did not want to place their children in traditional schools. In any case, they emphasised the large number of Coptic pupils attending school in all grades (Pizzo 2012, pp. 132-142). After that, confessional fervour died down, and nationalism took over. The confessional crisis of 1908-11 represented a turning point in the relationship between Copts and Muslims, as a new awareness was raised: that the only beneficiaries of the division between the two components of the nation were the British. From then on, the conviction matured in both communities that only a 'holy alliance' between the Crescent and the Cross would lead Egypt to success in its struggle for independence and that this was the primary objective on which to focus. Secular nationalism, including non-Muslims, spread within Islam and won the favour of the population. Only after the

events of the First World War did the new nationalist current, inspired by secular values, find a way to achieve national unity in a vast movement of revolt against the British, which enjoyed the almost unanimous adhesion of the population. The schooling of Egyptians, including students from rural areas, many of whom studied in international schools or otherwise with modernised curricula, contributed greatly to this revolt and formed a new elite whose concept of identity was no longer based only on religion (Pizzo 2012, pp. 140-50).

From 1919, the anti-colonialist movement acted under the leadership of Zaghul. The attention paid to the problems of educating young people based on modern acquisitions of Western science and culture won over both students and enlightened teachers. In short, the Zaġlūl group seemed the most suitable to gather around it the consensus of all the elements of the country. The Copts fully supported this secular nationalist current, in fact, this period is known as the golden period in the Egyptian Muslim-Christian relationship. The revolution of 1919, behind this nationalist idyll, hides anti-Christian movements directed against non-Egyptian Christian minorities such as the Armenian minority. In fact, from the very beginning, the movement adopted a hostile attitude towards Armenian, Syrian-Lebanese and Greek Christians, also linked to international relationships (Pizzo 2012, pp. 166-182). Under Zaghul's leadership, Egypt achieved semi-independence in 1922, in the sense that Egyptians managed internal affairs, while the army and foreign policy remained in British hands (Zani 2005, p. 201). In 1923, the Egyptian Constitution was promulgated: for the first time, it established compulsory primary schooling and contained the basic principles of Egyptian educational policy. There are three fundamental articles: article 8 states that the State guarantees free access to education for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, religion or language; Article 18 recognises education as a right and guarantees the independence of universities and science centres; Article 21 states that eradicating illiteracy is task and necessity of the State (Mazzei 2016). The text granted important guarantees to religious minorities, who were free to worship, and no discrimination on religious grounds was permitted. To avoid considering the British as minority defenders, the Copts rejected representation quotas and asked to be elected as usual. From that point forward, for 20 years, the parliament will have a large percentage of members of the Coptic community, higher than their percentage in the population. This will be one of the reasons for the growing popularity of the Islamist opposition among the Sunni population (Pizzo 2012, pp. 200-5).

In 1928, the Association of Muslim Brotherhood was born, in open opposition to the British and the Egyptian government that they considered accomplices; they hoped to restore Islamic principles and opposed the westernisation of customs and education. Its founder was Hasan Al-Bannā (1906-1949), according to whom the economic system suggested by the Quran, based on the ideal of the correct balance, is that of moderate socialism, which allows the coexistence of the

best aspects of capitalism and socialism. This was the foundation of Islamism, according to the definition these groups gave of themselves as *Islamiyyūn* rather than *Muslimūn*. With this definition, they highlight the institutional character of Islam and the political role it should play, contrary to the modern and Western idea of State secularity. Among the cultural references to which they refer, there was the doctrine of Ibn Taymiyya and Wahhabism, which attributes absolute sovereignty to Allah. The Muslim Brotherhood is the most radical manifestation of impatience with the tolerance of the liberal government of the time towards the British armed presence on Egyptian soil. This movement spread everywhere in the rest of the Arab world, taking part in power in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan and Kuwait, and constituting tolerated pressure groups in Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon, or hostile opposition to the regime, harshly repressed, in countries such as Syria and Iraq.

In 1936, Egypt achieved independence with reservation: formally, they abolished the protectorate replacing it with a bilateral alliance between two sovereign countries; practically, the British army remained on Egyptian territory, continuing to control the Suez Canal. Egyptian government repressed the Muslim Brotherhood movement, responsible in 1949 for the assassination of the Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud al-Nokrashī Pasha, which al-Bannā explicitly condemned. Anwar Sadat, King Faruk's young intelligence officer, killed the latter the same year. The co-founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, took his place as the highest exponent of Islamism and harshly opposed Nasser's socialist government in the second half of the 20th century. The permanence of the British on Egyptian territory increased the consensus around the Muslim Brotherhood, which seemed on the verge of taking power. However, they were preceded by the Free Officers Nasser, Nagib and Sadat, who deposed the king, proclaimed the birth of the Republic and brought the country to complete independence in 1952 (Zani 2005, pp. 188- 201). Women's access to education was a central issue in this period and the years following. After the First World War, the first girls' high schools opened their doors. They allowed the most brilliant of them to enter university, exceptionally in the inter-war period, but on a massive scale from the 1960s onwards. The demand for access to school education was one of the main demands of the feminist movements in Egypt in the first part of the 20th century (Verdeil 2017, p. 31)

During its mandate in Palestine (1917-1948), the British tried to secularise and modernise the traditional education system (Gibbs 1986, *Kuttāb*). The British government established schools in about half of Palestinian villages, obtaining an illiteracy decline from 90 to 70 per cent of the male population. Compared to the significant number of schools opened, this limited output is linked to the distance between the education provided and the needs and concerns of the people it was intended for (Daoudi in Kirdar 2017, p. 86). The British difficulties in setting up a unified administration favoured the fragmentation of educational networks. The Jewish settlement had

several schools divided between different currents according to their political affiliation: the most important, linked to the Zionist and liberal parties, educated pupils on the idea that it was necessary the creation of the State of Israel (Verdeil 2017, pp. 17-9). From an Arab perspective, education in Palestine should be covered in this chapter, at least until 1993, if not until the present day: in fact, at the end of the British occupation, Israel replaced them in the governance of part of the territory. As regards territories not under Israeli rule, between 1948 and 1967, the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian rule (and education was supervised by Egyptian authority), and the West Bank was under Jordanian rule (so education followed the Jordanian educational system). Between 1967 and 1993, the Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem fell under Israeli occupation, and education became managed by the Israeli Government. Only in 1993, Palestinian education was transferred from Israeli to the Palestinian Authority (PA) (Daoudi, in Kirdar 2017, pp. 86-7). Thus, in the Palestinian's view, Palestine is still colonised today, and one cannot speak of truly independent national education. Nevertheless, to follow the Western historical chronology to which this thesis refers, only the period of English occupation is treated here.

In Jordan, Britain ruled between 1918 and 1946. In 1923, there were 38 male schools, with 2,998 students, and 6 females, with 318 students. In 1948, at the time of independence, there were 81 schools, so in 20 years of British occupation, the number doubled, but it remained low. On the other hand, 111 missionary or private schools taught far more pupils and 18 of these schools were Arabic-English mixed education. There were also 5 high schools in the country, and there was no post-school education (Maani, in Kirdar 2017, p.39). Iraq was under British colonialism between 1918 and 1945. The educational policy is marked by the figure of Sati' al-Husri (1880-1968), a pedagogue and former Ottoman civil servant in the service of King Faisal (reign: 1921-1933), then theorist of Arab nationalism. Between 1923 and 1927, he was director of education in Iraq, where he promoted the Arab nationalist ideology. Sati' al-Husri clashed with British officials. While he aimed to build a nation on the model of Germany and extolled Arab nationalism, the British pursued a policy of merely reproducing a local elite with general and humanistic education. Education was also a subject of debate within the national intellectual elite: Sati' al-Husri, an advocate of self-sacrifice for the nation's benefit, opposed intellectuals who emphasised the promotion of individual talents (Verdeil 2017, pp. 17-18). Education during the American occupation in this century should be treated in this paragraph from a conceptual point of view. However, choosing to use a chronological order and wanting to refer to colonialism as a phenomenon that ended in the 20th century, this topic is not treated here.

British colonialism also affected other countries of the Arab League, which are not investigated in detail because they are not Mediterranean countries from which there are currently large migratory

flows directed to Italy or Germany: Yemen (1839-1967), United Arab Emirates (1853-1971), Oman (1891-1970), Sudan (1899-1956), Kuwait (1913-1961) Qatar (1916-71), Bahrein (1916-71), British Somalia (1886- 1960). The impact of English colonisation on these countries is evident in the use of the English language in everyday life, but there is something else important to note here. Especially in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula that gained independence later, trade relations with Britain marked their development. These nation-states came into being when the nationalist and socialist drive had already died out, favouring a more globalised and Islamic atmosphere simultaneously (Kirdar 2017).

6.3.3 Italian colonies

Among the Arab countries, Italy colonised Somalia (1889-1960) and Libya (1911-42). In discussing the educational situation in the colonial period in Libya, the primary source is the work of Evans-Pritchard (1979). Italy's attempt to conquer Libya began in 1911 as part of the military operations of the Italy-Turkish war, as Italy wanted to build a colonial empire like other European powers. The Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Lausanne in 1912, formally renouncing Libya, although it had supported the resistance for a long time. The war turned into a conflict between Italy and the Senussi Brotherhood, which was the only political entity in the territory at that moment. In 1917, the Giolitti government negotiated a truce with *al-Hakuma al-Sanusiya*, the Senussi government. The Italian attempts at conquest were unsuccessful for a long time due to the tenacious resistance of the Libyan people, who could prevail in the desert, where the Italian army did not know how to move. At that time, the war transformed the monasteries from places of cultural training into places of military training, and the war effort led to a progressive deculturation of the Bedouin population. The truce ended with Fascism, and from 1923 to 1932, a much more ruthless war was fought than the previous one, in which the objective was the destruction of the Senussi brotherhood and the total subjugation of the population. To this end, the Italian army destroyed monasteries and zāwiye, set up concentration camps for the population, corrupted the leaders and divided the tribes into submissive and rebellious ones. However, Libyan resistance was intense and lasted until the Italians captured and executed publically the last hero Umar al-Mukhtar in 1931.

> *"During the second Italo-Senussite war (1923-1932) the anti-Italian guerrilla struggle was led by the zawiya and tribal leaders, among whom emerged the figure of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, hero of the Libyan resistance, hanged by the Italians in 1931. In all the examples cited, the Sufi brotherhoods carried on a struggle of political resistance, only in rare cases resulting in a nationalist movement similar to that*

which saw the creation of the short-lived Senussite monarchy of the Kingdom of Libya (1951-1969)" (Leccese 2017, p. 150)[33].

Throughout the conflict, an essential element was the border with Egypt, from where the rebels took supplies and where they fled to seek political asylum; al-Idris, head of the Brotherhood with pro-English sympathies, was in exile in Egypt since 1922. From 1932 to 1942, there was domination and colonisation proper, one of the aims of which was to prevent the reconstruction of Senussi and to transform the semi-nomadic Bedouins into citizens obedient to the Italian state. The Fascist government showed proper respect for the Islamic religion and indulged the ulemā in prohibition, banning alcohol and gambling, and in the repression of "heresies", built mosques and maintained Islamic law and Quranic teaching in the kuttāb. It founded a seminary in Tripoli to prevent students from studying in al-Azhar or Tunisia, where they would be subject to British and French anti-Italian propaganda. There had already been some Italian schools since 1911, but, under Fascism, school policy acquired considerable importance as the new government considered it the instrument of moral consolidation of the military conquest. It abolished mixed classes and created separate schools for Arabs and Italians. The only teaching provided by Arab teachers was Quranic instruction for younger children, and the teaching of Italian took precedence over Arabic. The aim was to acculturate the Arabs just enough to form them as dependent employees of the Italians, preventing them from reaching the same levels of education and thus keeping them under control; in short, the aim was to create a bureaucratic elite that would identify itself with Italian interests (Evans-Pritchard 1979). After the end of the Second World War, from 1942 to 1951, Libya was under temporary British military rule (Orafi, in Kirdar, 2017, p.307). In 1943, Idris al-Senussi returned to Cyrenaica; in 1949, the UN approved Libyan independence, and in 1951 Idris became King of the United Kingdom of Libya (Evans-Pritchard 1979).

[33] All translations of Leccese (2017) are mine.

7 Multifactorial analysis of independent national Arab education systems

> *"Denn jedes Volk ist Volk; es hat seine National Bildung wie seine Sprache".*
> *(Because every nation is a Nation; it has its national education as well as its language)*[34].
> Johann Gottfried von Herder (Anderson 2016, p. 69).

This chapter describes the development of Arab education systems since independence from colonial power until today, focusing on central factors such as the model and structure of the system, its political ideology, religion, gender, and minority and language issues. As pointed out in the above quotation, the new Nation States' primary task was to build their citizens' identities as members of the new-borne national communities, and education was the primary tool for that purpose. In educational national projects, language played a fundamental role. Numerous debates arose around the choice of the language of instruction, about what languages to teach as a second language and what languages to ignore or prohibit. Linguistic educational policies in the Arab world converged in the policies of Arabisation and were strictly related to identity issues and political and religious currents of thought that differ from one Arab country to the others but with essential similarities and resonances.

> *"Never before has the question of the 'aims' of education been so completely identified with the discussion of the contribution education makes to national growth"* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p. 179).

The political aim of post-independence education is more evident than in other periods, with governments' educational policies overtly aimed at developing the nation and the national community.

> *"The progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities became its most conscious champions"* (Hobsbawm 1962 *The age of Revolution*, p.166, in Anderson 2016, p.73)

At that time, national education systems became the norm everywhere, one of the main elements to evaluate in assessing each nation's development. Post-colonial governments' leaders tried to establish public and modern education systems linked to local traditions and identity, structuring national education on Western models, especially the French and English ones, giving them cultural specificities linked to traditions and historical and political events of the last century such as colonialism and struggles for independence (De Poli 2007).

[34] English translation is mine.

7.1 Structures and models of education systems.

In the last century, in the Arab world, two different approaches to the modernization of education developed and competed in determining pupils' identities until today. The first is the secular and socialist approach based in Egypt which was the model at the time of independence; the other is the religious and capitalistic approach based in the Arabia Peninsula, which became the new educational model at the time of globalization.

7.1.1 Nationalistic and socialist secular education. Building citizenship through humanities.

After independence, the dominant political and educational ideology was Arab socialist nationalism, within which mass, equal, and state-funded education was essential. Nasser's Egypt was the leader of this Arab independent socialist education (Mazzei 2016):

> *"The influence of Egyptian educational policy certainly does not terminate at Egypt's borders. As other nations in the region emerge from their colonial experience and attempt to indigenise their educational systems, many look towards Egypt"* (Cook and El-Refaee in Kirdar 2017, p. 285).

Even before the coup d'état by the Free Officers led by Nasser, secular nationalism had spread in Egypt, aiming to make the country a modern nation in which political power was independent of religion (Zani 2005, p. 200). Egyptian nationalism had great international prominence, and other countries often imitated its policies because it had gained their admiration immediately after the end of the Second World War; in fact, in 1945, the Arab League was founded in Cairo (De Poli 2007). Among the intellectuals who belonged to this current of thought, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn is particularly important. He lived between 1889 and 1972, studied first in his homeland and then in France, where he learned the functioning of the state and deepened his knowledge of Western culture and civilization; he subjected to criticism the literary and religious texts of Islam and held important positions in the field of education. He was Alexandria University rector, Minister of Education from 1950-1952, and a professor of Arabic literature at Cairo University. He developed a genuine pedagogical philosophy that was put into practice in schools, influencing the education system of the time and today. In his thinking, schools had to be open to all, guarantee equal opportunities and be an instrument of social justice. For these reasons, education had to be free and financed by the state, which also had to supervise religious and foreign educational institutions so that they did not provide teaching contrary to the national education program. Nationalism is the base of his educational thinking, in opposition to pan-Islamism: he believed that it was essential to form national identity and patriotic feelings in young people rather than a feeling of belonging to the *Umma*, the world Islamic community. Following this political viewpoint, he pushed to emphasize Egypt's cultural specificities, focusing, in the teaching of humanities, on subjects such as pharaohs' ancient history, Islam, the Arab cultural heritage, and European cultural influence.

He also accorded great importance to Arabic language teaching as a factor of national unity as opposed to the different dialects spoken in different areas of the country. The education system he established was very similar to the European one. Primary education had to provide everyone with the basics of Egyptian knowledge and culture, high education had to be a tool for the individual and the community improvement, while higher education, deprived of the sacredness it had in the classical Islamic tradition, had to aim at creating skills useful for the development of the country. He was interested in teachers' training and their social role's recognition, stressing that they must be competent and well-paid as national heritage's transmitters and agents of public awareness of national freedom and independence cause; for this, he was the first teachers' union inspirer.

Ismā'īl al-Qabbānī was Husain's successor and his work's continuer. He became Minister of Education in 1952 in the first independent Egypt government. He was a pedagogue by profession and brought to the Egyptian school system the modernism and pragmatism of J. Dewey that he had learned in Britain, so much to be defined as *"Egypt's own Dewey"* (Sultana 2001, p. 393). Loyal to the principles of socialism and Arab nationalism, he sought to create a modern Arab education, independent of Islamic tradition and the West. His initiatives included creating experimental classes, which served as a model for later reforms; institutions for teacher training, which later became Faculties of Education; and the foundation of the Association of Normal School Graduates, for whom he also created the *New Education Journal*. The 1953 school reform provided pragmatic programs and methods, putting pupils at the centre and encouraging the emergence of critical spirit and valuable skills for their future as citizens and workers. It unified primary school and provided for six years of education, with free enrolment and free meals to support attendance. High school was divided into two technical and general branches. Only children with the best results in primary school were allowed to enter general middle secondary school and, after further selection, to continue their studies at university. Middle school was unified with a further reform in 1962 (the same year as in Italy, to understand the level of progress compared to the historical period), and course diversification was postponed to high school.

Nasser served as President of the Republic from 1954 to 1970, adopting a socialist policy that placed a high value on the spread of education and the fight against illiteracy and social inequality. During this period, the number of university students increased considerably, and women gained access to vocational schools. His policy clashed with the unemployment and unskilled work that many young students experienced after completing their studies (Zani 2005, pp. 201-6). Some of the events that legitimised Nasser's Egypt political leadership role among Arab countries were the union of Egypt and Syria in the RAU, the United Arab Republic, which lasted from 1958 to 1961 (dealt with in the paragraph dedicated to Syria) and the war against Israel in 1967. Egypt's education policy led the way for other independent Arab countries. Contrary to Turkey, which

chose secularism and the removal of religion from school curricula, Egypt chose religious pluralism, thanks to the dialectic with the Copts. Religion remained an essential part of the curricula. Egypt education gave great prominence to the role of Arab-Islamic civilisation in the world and the national histories in history programs. This approach is reflected in Article 1 of the 1964 Convention of Arab Unity, which stated that education's primary purpose is the creation of Arabs generations, believers in God, faithful to the Arab motherland, and confident in themselves and their nation. Thus, they placed education and religion together in the nation's service, and secular nationalism did not lead to radical secularism as it did in Turkey (De Poli 2007, pp. 187-9; on Turkey see Caligiuri 2007).

Following the 1953 reform and substantial public investments in teacher training and infrastructures, primary school enrolment increased dramatically, making Egypt one of the African countries with the highest schooling rates in the 1960s. This expansion reflected the country's quest for greater social justice, while curricula nationalisation helped public schools to become a pivotal element in the consolidation of Arab-Islamic national identity. This period is the Golden Age of public schools, during which foreign and denominational public schools barely survived and lost prestige, enrolment and influence (De Poli 2007, pp. 187-9). Congregational high schools, foreign and missionaries, were closely controlled by the state and became instruments for reproducing an urban political and economic elite affiliated with the authoritarian regime. Nationalisation also affected local and Muslim institutions. In 1961, after many attempts at reform, the 'nationalisation' law (the expression used in Arabic means 'reformist revolution') obliged the most prestigious Muslim university of Sunni Islam, Al-Azhar, to develop the teaching of secular subjects. The idea was to make al-Azhar an ally of the state in its attempt to position itself as a regional leader in the field of education, and therefore in religious education, in competition with the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi influence (Verdeil 2017, p. 20; Savelli 2017; Mazzei 2018b).

The two countries on which Egypt's educational policies had the most profound influence were Libya and Syria, which radicalised the socialist approach in two peculiar ways. At the end of the II World War, the UN approved Libyan independence, and Idris Al-Senussi became king of the United Kingdom of Libya, which remained in the British political orbit. The education system was shaped as the Egyptian one, providing free compulsory education for all children aged 6-15, with primary school lasting six years and basic education followed by three years of high education in general education institutions. The numerous Quranic schools organised by mosques continued to be open as in Egypt. In the years that followed, the monarchist pro-Western policy caused discontent in the population that was looking to Nasser's Egypt and wanted to support it against Israel and the British. Students were the social actors who were most in favour of the alliance between Libya and Egypt. The government repressed the demonstrations bloodily; in 1965, it

closed schools, considered the centre of young nationalists' propaganda; in 1966, at the Constituent Assembly of the General Union of Libyan Students in Tripoli, the police arrested all the leaders. In 1969, a group of officers led by Mu'amar al-Gaddafi deposed Al-Idris and created the *Jamāhīriyya*, the Arab Popular Republic of Libya, referring to Nasser's Egyptian experience. Unlike Nasser, Gaddafi aimed to achieve Islamic socialism by implementing the Sharī'a; the two ideologies differed in their conception of the relationship between state and religion but remained similar in their nationalism and anti-imperialism (Mazzei 2017).

A characteristic of most Arab countries, founded on the Egyptian model, is education and curricula development's centralisation, with neither the community nor teachers having much involvement in the process despite numerous studies emphasising the significant contributions that parents and community leaders can make to curricula development and reform. All decisions involving curricula, textbooks, teacher selection, training and placement, and examinations are highly centralised in the Ministry of Education. At a local level, authority resides solely in the hands of the school principal, strict and authoritarian, allowing little decision-making power for teachers to be innovative and creative (Kirdar 2017, pp. 4-8). The most important exception is Lebanon, the other cultural centre of the Arab world. With its brilliant publishing industry, it positioned as a producer of schoolbooks, locally in the interwar period and later for independent countries, also through commercial agreements with Western publishers. Lebanon differs from Egypt in the absence of censorship by the national government on Western production (Mermier 2012, pp. 33-41). In this country, the nationalist push for a mass public school capable of reproducing a solid national identity had less force and results than any other. In 1950, the first law providing state control over public schools was enacted. However, the goal of nationalising education was aborted in the 1958 Lebanese civil war, which was deeply marked by a sectarian conflict. It is possible to summarise education's status in this period *"as a Mirror of a Fractured National Image"* (Bashshur 1988, in Abouchedid and Zeid 2017, p. 64). The peculiarities of this country are dealt with in the paragraph about minority issues.

Jordan and Iraq followed the Egyptian trend. Their post-independence period coincided with a period of substantial economic investments in education but also of political and moral expectations. In these countries, too, governments aimed to reproduce Arab values and identity and to create a nationalistic society through national mass education systems. In Iraq, the Arab socialism of Saddam's Ba'th party drove schooling forward in the 1960s-70s. Its education system focused on mathematical and scientific disciplines, Arabic and English, the four key disciplines in all Arab former British colonies. Schools gave great importance to Arabic as the official language and to the teaching of Islam, but with respect for other ethnic groups and religions and with guaranteed access to education regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity. This golden age ended

not because of a change of ideology in government but because of the socio-economic conditions' deterioration in the country due to the wars against Iran and Kuwait (Kirdar 2017, pp. 21-58).

The time of independence coincided with the establishment of the new State of Israel. It is beyond the scope of this research to go into detail about the Israeli-Palestinian issue, but it is nevertheless essential to mention it for at least two reasons. One is the Palestinians' particular educational situation in their homeland as some of the interviewees are Palestinian refugees in adjacent Arab countries, such as Syria and the other is the importance given to this issue in humanities throughout the Arab world. The 1948 Palestinian exodus from Palestine, dubbed *Nakba* in Arabic or cataclysm, marked a turning point in the contemporary history of the Near East. Palestinians mainly flocked to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and were sheltered in refugee camps where they lived in degrading social and economic conditions. The UNRWA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) was established in 1948 to assist refugees during the Palestine–Israeli War involving neighbouring Arab countries. The UNRWA has been managing the basic education system in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon since then (Abouchedid and Zeid in Kirdar 2017, p. 77), and today even in Jordan. Educated and skilled refugees were able to find a job in the neighbouring Arab host countries and the Gulf States; Palestinian high school graduates rushed to join universities in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, western Europe and North America. Nasser opened the doors of Egyptian universities for Palestinian youth to enter and get free education. In the 1960s, this flow included universities in other countries such as Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, India and the Soviet Union (Daoudi in Kirdar 2017, p. 85). Between 1967 and 1993, Israeli governed the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinians tried to build an independent education system establishing Palestinian universities, part of a Palestinian collective effort to preserve their national identity, as well as to provide young Palestinians with the opportunity to pursue higher education as it became increasingly costly and much more difficult for them to travel abroad for their higher studies. In 1993, Palestinian education was transferred from Israeli to the Palestinian Authority (PA) following its establishment in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This resulted in the Oslo Accord of 1993 between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) was established in 1994, and the Ministry chose to model the Palestinian system on the Jordan one (Daoudi in Kirdar 2017, pp. 86-87).

In regards to Maghreb, Morocco and Tunisia gained independence in 1956, and Algeria only in 1962. Tunisia and Algeria have opposing histories of secularism and religious radicalisation, which had significant implications. Morocco seems to have proceeded in its education development along a more moderate path in balancing religion and modernity, identity and otherness. As Zani (2005, p. 213) states, Tunisian independence was characterised by Habib

Bourghiba, the president of the Republic from 1957 to 1987, who was a strong supporter of secularism, abolished polygamy and granted women the right to vote. Arabisation and secularisation characterised education in the post-independence period. At the time, not even a quarter of children went to school. Bourghiba, considered the father of the nation, planned a progressive education for progress open to modernity. He started from post-colonial nationalist feelings, emphasising Tunisia's unique history and arguing that the spread of education, culture, and social progress promotes democracy. Aiming to change mental structures, he considered education a critical point in any change plan. He built the Tunisian education system on the French one, taken as a model for the country's modernisation, adding the Arabisation of contents and creating a bicultural system. The government considered the revolution in education a priority, in order to break with the elitist education system and develop a qualified Tunisian workforce by focusing on professional and technical education. The reforms led to the spread of education and its unification into a coherent national system. The Education Act of 1958 (*New Conception of Education in Tunisia*) established the nationalisation of education and the creation of vocational schools. The first goal was a universal, free and compulsory primary education, completely "Arabised", with French only taught as a foreign language, and updated curricula and books in order to reduce the religious influence. Expenditure on education raised, and enrolment in vocational and technical schools quadrupled despite their selectivity. Success in increasing enrolment leads to classroom overcrowding and a lack of qualified teachers, thus lowering quality. The government's response is Tunisisation, which gives prominence to Arabic and the training of local teachers, to enable them to focus on language learning, transmit Tunisia's history, revitalise culture and promote gender equality. It aims to create citizens in whom Arab-Islamic and French cultures are synthesised to establish a single Tunisian identity. By 1967, all subjects at all levels were Arabised, except for vocational and technical education. In 1960, the University of Tunis was created by unifying the pre-existing institutes as faculties: the French outposts (Ecole Normale Superieure), the Sadiki College and the religious Zitouna (becoming the faculty of theology). The 1976 Education Law provides for preserving and reinforcing humanity and civilisation values in order to consolidate and preserve national and cultural identity through systematic Arabic language teaching. The Arabization process ended in the 1980s, when the reforms were successfully implemented into the Tunisian education system (Jules 2017, pp. 369-387).

When Algeria obtained its independence in 1962, only 300,000 Algerians could read Arabic, compared to 1 million out of 10 million that could read French, as the language of instruction had been French until that moment. Independent Algeria suffered a lack of teaching staff, the education infrastructures were insignificant, and the teaching programs, designed by and for the French, were inadequate to the local population and could not respond to the challenges of building the nation

of the newly independent Algeria. The nation's biggest challenge was to (re)create an education system that would produce qualified workers, civil servants, doctors and teachers to train future generations (Messekher and Miliani in Kirdar 2017, p. 265). In 1964, Ahmed Ben Bella's new government enacted the first decree to reorganise basic education in relation to the new national needs (De Poli 2007). Between 1965 and 1978, a new socialist political force, 'Arab and Islamic', developed, led by Houari Boumédiène, who generalised and extended schooling, making it compulsory (Zani 2005, p. 216). He considered education a human right that the State has to guarantee to all citizens, not only the elite, as it was during the long colonial period. The anti-colonialist approach merged with socialist principles is at the base of the declared official principles on which education was built. All children between six and sixteen have the duty and the right to education, free and supported by the State. Like in most other Arab countries, the Arabization policy made Arab return to be the language of instruction and French a foreign language. Instead, some university courses, especially those usually considered the most relevant such as Medicine, were held in French. This created a disconnection between school and university, concerning languages and the values and the idea of society they bring with them. School education in Arabic aimed to reproduce Arab society with its values and identity; indeed, universities tended to recognise European culture, values, and, ultimately, identity as superior. This discontinuity also affected the relationship between school's values and culture and those of pupils' families, who were not even so much comfortable with the Arab-Islamic ideology. Parents often spoke French better than Arabic and the young who graduates had an education that was of little use in society and market (Messekher and Miliani in Kirdar, p. 265). The socialist Algerian period finished with the death of Boumedienne in 1978 and the Bendjedid takeover of power.

In all the areas considered, colonial education accelerated the secularization of education, began with indigenous attempts to build independent modern education systems, and became the target of independent states, especially former French colonies in the Middle East. The issue of the secularization of education, especially about its being real or apparent, and its consequences (Verdeil 2017, p. 24), are central in the following period. A weakening of the independentist political climate, characterised by anti-colonialism, socialism and secularism, was accompanied by a revival of debates around religious issues, which were never resolved and never appeased, but more often hidden behind an institutional surface.

7.1.2 Globalization, Scientist breakthrough, Radicalisation

The title of this paragraph links together three different phenomena: the first regards economy, the second a cultural trend, and the last a religious one, highlighting the connection between economic questions and values and culture's reproduction in educational systems. A brief clarification is

needed on globalisation, whose semantic meaning has expanded through the numerous studies and reflections about it. There is no agreement on when globalisation as a global market started: many dates it back to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, others to the discovery of America in 1492, and for some others, the world has been globalised for 5,000 years (O'Rourke & Williamson 2000; Vitale, 2004). Despite a personal inclination in favour of the latter hypothesis, here globalisation refers to the first dating, meaning the end of the last century, because it is the period in which discussion on globalisation spread, becoming a central topic in academic, political and media debate in the Arab world. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p.178) affirm, national values' transmission through education occurs inside a socio-economic system and works for its reproduction, so the cultural sphere is strictly related to the economic one. It is for economic reasons directly dependent on the petroleum boom that, as Verdeil (2017, p.23) stated, the Gulf States' growing influence in higher education and knowledge economy overturned the geographical hierarchies inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates replaced Lebanon and Egypt in the educational leadership of the Arab world. For economic reasons linked to the labour market, masses of graduates in human and social disciplines became unemployed, increasing the social discontent and disillusionment with the model of Arab socialist education symbolised by Nasser's educational policy. Schooling and literacy created a mass of higher educated people who overcrowded university departments of Humanities (Mermier 2012, p.15). The change in the educational trend occurred in the XX century last decades, simultaneously with economic globalisation, starting from Gulf countries' independence (1960-70) and symbolised by the turning point in Egyptian education (Sadat 1970-1981). It sets a more significant trend characterised by former colonies and developing countries, strictly related to the world economy, as Jacob and Gardelle (2020) state:

> *"Development" policies such as the Structural Adjustment Plans of the 1980s, as well as externally defined benchmarks of quality and priorities such as the UN's Millenium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals have shaped the resources available for schools in terms of government and international funding. Since 1998, the WTO has considered education as a market like any other, and in 2004, education is part of the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services signed by more than 130 countries"* (p. 9).

In the last two decades of the XX century, education became more strictly related to the world's global economy than it ever was, especially in former colonial countries. The globalisation of education and the worldwide focus on scientific disciplines necessary for national economic development (Nussbaum 2011) are inextricably linked to a strong return of religion in education in contrast to the secularism of the early post-independence period in the Arab world. Globalisation

and re-Islamization make a *Jihad world* and a *McWorld* coexist, the first described as pre-modern and the second as the last stage of globalisation. Islamization and globalisation are related phenomena in society and schools, and the former can be described as a reaction to the cultural hegemony of the latter. Aid programs for developing countries all speak the language of neo-liberalism without considering local cultural particularities. The homogeneity of these policies is one of the factors that caused the need for *heteromerisation*, i.e. to preserve and emphasise differences even to the point of exaggerating them, as is the case with Islamism (Diana 2010). This new trend was born in the Arabian Peninsula from Wahhabi ideology and spread all over the Arab world.

7.1.2.1 Religion-based education and its relationship with the economy, humanities and sciences in the Arabian Peninsula

Wahhabism developed alongside the Saudi monarchy as a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, borders on heresy, that other Sunnis tolerated. It mainly spread thanks to the monarchy's oil power and Western support from an anti-Turkish perspective. Its conservative and not at all revolutionary character, with little concern for social problems, soon made Islamist social and revolutionary movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt distance themselves (Ventura 2005, pp.12-14). The education systems of the Arabian Peninsula, their ideologies, and their educational approaches are important for the hegemony they were starting to have on the other Arab countries in the educational field. For this reason, the educational developments in the Gulf countries at the time of independence are described here, starting with Saudi Arabia, the only country of the Peninsula that was never colonised and can therefore be described as having always been independent, and where colonial education did not affect the transition from traditional education to national, mass and state education. Since the establishment of the Wahhabi (1750) regime in part of its current territory, Saudi Arabia has been a theocratic Arab Muslim country in which education has continued uninterruptedly in the traditional way since the XX century (De Poli 2007). The shift from tribal to state supremacy occurred with the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 under King Abdul Aziz Al Saud. In 1934, the oilfields discovery transformed the country from one of the poorest to one of the richest in the world. The country experienced a substantial demographic increase, and the king believed that this large new generation needed the development of education, considered fundamental so that this demographic boom would become an asset and not a problem. Higher education was born only with the first KSU University in 1957 in Riyadh, which today is the best-ranked among Arab universities. New national Saudi education is free of charge at all levels and funded exclusively by the state, with highly centralised governance; it focuses on teaching Islam, with two-thirds of the timetable devoted to Islamic and

Arab studies, and is gender-segregated. The new school system maintained the traditional religious approach, to which it added modern disciplines, especially scientific and technical ones, to manage technological development (De Poli 2007). This approach marginalised humanities - fundamental in Arab nationalist and socialist pedagogy to build the identity of new citizens- focusing on Islamic religion and membership to the *Umma* to build identity and on sciences for the nation's economic advancement.

This approach became dominant in the other independent Arab Gulf countries in the following period. Their independence were achieved chronologically later than the Mediterranean Arab countries' ones, corresponding to a difference in political ideology and educational approach. These independent countries looked to the market economy and not to socialism; therefore, they did not fall under the independent Arab socialist education but under what could be called "the independent Islamic capitalistic education", dominant in the following period. After independence and the oilfield discovery in Bahrain and Kuwait, there was a solid investment in education. The focus was on the subjects considered the most important in order to be competitive in the global market, Arabic, English, mathematics and science, and on the subject considered the most important for identity and belonging, namely Islamic sciences. The focus was on vocational education at a higher level, and on engineering and computer science at university. The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain are excellent examples of how science and Islam combine well in a vision of development in which citizenship training is essential but leaves aside humanities (Kirdar 2017, pp. 117-156).

The same can be said for Oman, where, with independence (1970), education has become a top priority for the country's economic development in the global marketplace. Here education aims to maintain local culture and values, emphasising Muslim, Arab and national identity, to raise a generation proud of their nation and past achievements' legacy. After having reached the maximum level of schooling, education has focused on teaching quality and on keeping up with international standards and innovative pedagogical techniques. Much importance has been given to preschool education, even though it is neither compulsory nor free (unlike general education), but entrusted to the private sector, overall Quranic institutes followed by private and international ones. One of education's main objectives is reinforcing Islamic, Arab and national pride (in order of importance). On the other hand, official documents about national education also deal with the importance of enhancing the appreciation of world diversity, values such as justice and peace, critical thinking, global issues awareness, technological and artistic skills, and the use of English to communicate with the world (Kirdar 2017, pp. 157-178).

In Qatar, the situation is similar, as it is characterised by the Wahhabi ideology and the correlated traditional strong values and identity, combined with immense technological development and

80% of the population made up of migrant workers. Qatar also developed its education system at the turn of independence and the oil boom. Its status as a past English colony is characterised by the prominence given to learning this language at all educative levels and by its international relations, including the educational field. The relationships between Qatar and the English world can be seen in the latest attempt at reform in 2001, with the *"Education for a new era"* program, inspired by America, focusing on "independent" schools. International teams supported the process, seeking to meet international quality standards and increasing the educational offer by offering different choices for pupils. There are five types of schools: independent, ministry, and three different types of private schools, that are international, Arabic, and communitarian). The private international ones are British, with English as the language of instruction, but they are not dependent on the British embassy and offer Arabic courses and Islamic education. Community schools depend on the foreign communities of reference, i.e. the embassies, and teach the national curriculum in the mother tongue. Independent schools are like US charter schools. Arab private schools are mostly Islamic, follow the ministerial curriculum and have lower fees than other private schools (Kirdar 2017, pp. 179-196).

The United Arab Emirates is another country that, after independence from Britain in 1971, benefited from the influence of the English education system. The national school system developed alongside the oilfield discovery with which the country transformed from a desert to an urban centre of global trade, with 80% of the population made up of migrant workers and a State determined to fight against illiteracy. The literacy rate is today almost 100%, and the education system is based on English, science and information technology, as well as on the transmission of Arab-Islamic belonging, identity and tradition (Kirdar 2017, pp. 217-234).

The countries of the Gulf seem to have found the balance between Arab-Muslim identity and economic and scientific development that Wahhabism theorized. They have excellent results in education at all levels, but it is important to say that, unlike other Arab countries, they can rely on substantial oil revenues and that some of them have softened the Wahhabi doctrine, which has not led to the same results in Saudi Arabia. Although the results are excellent and lead to praise for these education systems, it is worth noting that humanities are marginalized and do not play an important role. The two exceptions to this relatively homogeneous picture[35] are Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Yemen has an education system devastated by the conflicts that have characterized it since its independence up to the present day (Kirdar 2017, pp. 243-259).

[35] There are, of course, important political, doctrinal and social differences between the various Gulf countries, but describing them would be beyond the scope of this thesis, which aims to provide a simplified picture of the major educational trends.

Paradoxically, despite the introduction of independent education in the region and the massive funding related to the oil boom, Saudi Arabia is the worst-performing country in education: enrolment rates are relatively low, and dropout rates are high. Scholars found the reasons for this in the education system's ideological and religious foundations, in the traditionalism of pedagogical practices involving teaching based on memorization and in outdated textbooks (Aljughaiman and Grigorenko 2013), differently from the other Gulf countries that have softened the Wahhabi ideology and allowed advanced educational practices to enter the country, mainly British and American ones. What discourages change is the lack of plurality in the official pedagogical approaches that base on memorization and dependence on a single textbook, and does not allow the development of creative and applied thinking. Priority is given to the study of Islam, which has recently become a discipline in itself and not the context of all studies. Nevertheless, Islamic principles and doctrine are also dealt with in Arabic language and social studies classes (Aljughaiman and Grigorenko 2013). Religious education is the discipline to which the most hours are devoted at all school levels. At primary schools, there are 9 hours per week of religious education and geography and history are taught for only 1 hour a week for the last 3 years. In middle schools, religious education takes 8 hours a week and history 2 as geography and artistic education. High schools mainly focus on Islamic tradition and sciences. The education system's reform processes over the last twenty years aim at making the country competitive in the global market without losing its cultural characteristics and identity. Emphasis is placed on building a national identity based on religion and scientific development, especially regarding information technology, updating schools with e-learning and teacher training (Kirdar 2017, pp. 117-156).

7.1.2.2 Diffusion of the new educational trend in the Arab Mediterranean world

Salafism is a trend that developed as part of what is known as *Islamic modernism* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is so called because of the ideal return it proposes to the era of the Salaf, the ancient ancestors, seen as representatives of a purity that was lost due to subsequent developments in Islam. Ibn Taymiyya's theorization is the foundation of Wahhabism in the XVIII century and of Salafism in the age of Arab struggles for independence (Ventura 2005). Contemporary Islamism developed as a reaction to the rapid processes of social transformation in the Arab world. It owes its success to rural exodus, urbanization, industrialization and globalization, all phenomena that destroyed traditional cultures and created a low class without cultural reference points, far removed from the modernization benefits brought about by Nasser. These people were in favour of an internationalist Islamism that opposed nation-states. Their leader Sayyid Qutb (Quṭb 1906-1966), judged democracy and nationalism negatively and proposed a totally Islamic social order (De Poli 2007, pp. 187-9). His position is more radical and

less religiously orthodox than that of his predecessor, al-Banna, since it gave greater weight to the warrior aspect of the doctrine, recommended the use of violence and turned jihad into a holy war, which he described as compulsory for the good Muslim as the five pillars of Islam. In addition, he considers Sufism as the first blow to be struck at the integrity of Islamic thought and the existence of the "Islamic nation" (Cornel 2004). He elaborated socio-political theories that have more to do with revolutionary and Third World ideologies than religion. He reinvented *Jihād* as a justification for the revolutionary armed struggle against the Islamic countries' corrupted regimes. In his political proposals, Islam only seems an ideological pretext, deprived of its tradition and culture. Qutb systematically dismantled Sunnis' supporting structures, completing the work already begun by the Wahhabis (Ventura 2005, pp. 14-17) and spread his vision through his Quranic commentary, which has enjoyed wide circulation (Ventura 2010, pp. XLI-XLII).

Since the beginning of his mandate, Nasser clashed with the Muslim Brotherhood, who opposed his secularism and the British permanence on Egyptian territory. The government responded to the Muslim Brotherhood's protests with repression, and the attempt to Nasser's life led to the official dissolution of the Association by the Government and the arrest and killing of some of its leaders. From this moment on, the Muslim Brotherhood has been considered a terrorist group. In the 1960s, their activity grew and became more radical, partly in response to protracted wars of independence in other countries and the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Quṭb was sentenced to death in 1966, but the Muslim Brotherhood has continued to exist illegally, also in the form of legal charitable groups under other names, operating as volunteers among the poorest population, providing them with necessities, assistance and education, gaining people's appreciation (Todorov 2009, pp. 138-148). With Nasser's death, the socialist educational policy ended, influencing the new educational trend of the Arab world (Mazzei 2016; Mazzei 2018; Kirdar 2017). Muḥammad Anwar Sadat was Nasser's vice-president and became his successor as the third President of the Egyptian Republic from 1970 until 1981. From an economic point of view, he acted oppositely to Nasser, with a program of economic liberalization, known as *Infitāḥ* in Arabic (literally opening up), which brought Egypt into the global market. He accompanied this economic policy with a cultural and development model summed up in the motto '*Science and Faith*', which symbolized the intention to benefit from globalization and scientific development while maintaining religious identity (Diana 2010). There are similarities with the economic and cultural model that the Arabian Peninsula's States were building, starting from the Wahhabi ideology. It is useful to read this text to understand better the relationship between the Islamic faith and modern sciences:

> *"As long as humanity exists, the struggle among dogma and free thinking, religion and philosophy, will not end […] also because science, however beautiful it may be, does not completely satisfy humanity, which thirsts for the ideal and loves to venture into obscure and distant regions that philosophy and the*

scholars can neither approach nor explore. Only the Islamic religion is able to settle the perennial rivalry between the different forces that move the human soul, showing its superiority over other world religions. In this way, Afġānī intends to reject Renan's accusation of the alleged incompatibility between Islam and science, launching into a dissertation on the conformity between the essence of the Islamic religion and that of modern rationalism" (Hourani 1962 *Arabic Thought,* in Pizzo 2002, p. 77)[36].

In front of the scientism dominant in the world, Muslim thinkers sought to emphasize the non-contradiction between Islam and science, attempting to extricate from the opposition between Catholicism and the Enlightenment that had marked Europe and attempting to hold science and faith together. Sadat embraced this vision and, in order to compete with the popularity of socialist ideas and to legitimize his policies, began to support Islamist groups, calling himself the 'Believing President' and defining the Sharī'a as the valid basis of the law. He released Islamist organizations' members from prison and allowed them to strengthen their influence over civil associations and education so that Islamists finally controlled entire university campuses and were employed en masse to work in educational faculties and schools, the quality of which declined considerably. He believed that granting more influence to Islamists would strengthen his regime and reduce public spending by avoiding protests and confrontations (Sobhy 2015). Contrary to expectations, protests erupted in 1977 against the increasing national debt and the food crisis with violent clashes in the streets. Sadat's response was a further increase in the weight of religious education, which he considered capable of restoring political stability. He demanded that religious knowledge become a compulsory subject for university students to pass the academic year, in order to remedy the moral crisis and corruption caused by Nasserism. These measures did not solve the economic and social problems, nor did they prevent violence in the streets; on the contrary, they radicalized the protest movements that turned into Islamist groups. Subsequently, the internal policy became extremely repressive against the opposition, with thousands of arrests in Muslim and Coptic organizations, including the students' ones. To win the favour of Islam's most affectionate population, the government strengthened its relationship with Al-Azhar University (Diana 2010), allowing it to express ideological and political positions, making it a protagonist of public debates (Zeghal 2010).

From the point of view of international relations, with the Camp David peace with Israel in 1978, Sadat deviated from the Egyptian foreign policy of the last thirty years, losing in the eyes of many Arabs the role of defender of the Arab Nation that Nasser had built. Therefore, globalization and the re-Islamization of the country and its education are two sides of the same coin. Sadat abandoned socialism and his foreign policy position as a non-aligned country by opening the door

[36] All translations from Pizzo (2002) are mine

to economic liberalization and signing agreements with the USA and Israel. Consequently, Egypt had to implement new reforms based on international neo-liberal principles: balanced budget, efficiency and cost-benefit demonstration, privatization, free elections, decentralization, human rights, etc.; compliance with these principles allowed it to receive foreign funding. Thus, the US, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank gained a dramatic influence on Egyptian politics, especially on the development of education through the SAP (Structural Adjustment Programme). This meant a significant reduction in state funding, the consequent lowering of teachers' salaries, a lack of interest in the problem of illiteracy, the promotion of schools and universities' privatization, and the decentralization of the public school system. Sadat used Islam as a mask to hide uncontrolled liberalism and the resulting widespread corruption in the ruling class. The Islamist organizations exploited the space he had given them to nourish the widespread discontent against his pro-western and pro-Israeli international policies with Islamism (Diana 2010).

The following president, Mubārak, elected in 1981, considered education one of the three national priorities, along with economic development and the strengthening of democracy. He also cooperated with the IMF and the World Bank to establish general economic reform programs to restore public accounts balance. These reforms planned a decrease in state control and financing in favour of private investment in all sectors, including education. This affected the functioning of public schools and lowered their quality: infrastructures were inadequate and numerically insufficient, the radical devaluation of teachers' salaries contributed to a lower quality of education, and widespread intellectual unemployment contributed to the population's distrust of the education system. This situation benefited private fee-paying schools, both foreign and Islamic, which began to flourish throughout the country, accompanied by a growing Islamist influence. Among public school pupils the practice of taking private lessons for a fee, often taught by religious organizations members spread, and Muslim organizations run most early childhood nurseries. Therefore, Islamist content was widespread everywhere, as it was propagated in nurseries, private lessons, Islamic schools, and public schools, without real state control. In public schools, there was a return to reading out and memorizing the Quran while cultural, artistic and musical activities gradually disappeared. Textbooks changed from those of the socialist period: they increasingly presented Islam as the key to interpreting the general political and social framework, transforming secular values into religious ones. The disciplines most concerned were humanities: in literature, novels and short stories in textbooks were written by affiliates of Islamist groups, whose underlying moral is Islamism, for which abandoning Islam leads to foreign occupation and misery, while a return to Islam will allow the nation to recover. Islamist teachers omitted Arab and Egyptian literary works that conveyed other ideas.

After the early 1990s terrorist wave, the regime began to consider education a matter of national security and to take measures to diminish the influence of Islamists on it: thousands of teachers suspected of extremism were transferred to administrative positions or remote areas of the country. This was not accompanied by a revision of textbooks and a real change in school activities. Islamists continued to exert influence in the more marginalized territories where they gained even more support (Sobhy 2015). At the same time, Mubarak implemented several measures to reform the education system, such as *Education for all*, definitively opening up the country to the West and international organizations. The improvement of the Egyptian school system became a priority issue on the agenda of various international institutions, and educational projects received funding from several donor countries to the point that in 1991, the Egyptian Development Assistance Fund accounted for 10% of the world's total development assistance funds (Diana 2009). The contradictions within the education system remained strong, as it was subjected to an official process of globalization from the outside and an unofficial process of Islamization from within.

The Minister of Education at the time, Ḥusayn Kamal Baha Eddin, defined schools as terrorism incubators and established the transformation of education into an instrument of national security as a priority. When he tried to secularise the curriculum through textbook revision, some sectors of religious and educational institutions felt that this revision would cut the connection between the Arabic language and literature, its classical roots and the early 1900s uprising. In addition, if the government had failed to guarantee a scientific education imbued with Islamic values as demanded by Muslim families, they would abandon public schools and enrol their children in private Islamic schools. These provided religious courses, prayer times, and a greater attention to morals and pupils' personality as well as modern practices, tools, languages, and computer classes (Diana 2010). In a few words, they offered the same instruction offered by public schools in the Gulf countries (except Yemen and Saudi Arabia). Despite significant funding and many measures and projects, public schools' day-to-day reality remained almost unchanged. At the end of the century, the economic differences were enormous and the state school's crisis seemed to express fully the contradictions inherent in the country's political and economic development: state schools had become the schools of those who could not afford private education, in a classist two-track system (Diana 2014).

In 1999, the state established an identical curriculum for both public and private schools, with private schools allowed to add Islamic or other disciplines but not remove any (Diana 2014). This reform strengthened religious schools that evolved from the previous century: more than 7,000 Kuttāb schools catered to about 300,000 children in 2003. These Quranic schools were non-governmental institutions that owed their dynamism to their integration into the al-Azhar's network. Al-Azhar, in fact, heads a network of institutions parallel to public secondary and higher

education institutions, which today enrols nearly 10% of the pupils and 20% of the Egyptian students, exclusively Muslims. These pupils follow the official curricula, supplemented by a solid religious education (Verdeil 2017, pp. 28-9).

In Libya, a country strongly influenced by Egypt, President Gaddafi explained his political ideology in the *al-Kitāb al-Akhḍar*, The Green Book. In the third part, in a chapter dealing with education (*at-ta'alim*), he denounced the globalization of education on the Western model as conformist and disrespectful of peoples' culture (Chiauzzi 1980). The Green Book was sacred during the regime, which ended only in 2011, and pupils had to study it for 2 hours a week. On the habitus that schools reproduced, these passages are illuminating:

> *"Libya is a highly conservative Islamic society and many of the cultural norms that are common in the Libyan society stem from the principles of Islam. Many Libyan parents tend to send their children to Quranic schools at early ages […] children are not encouraged to dispute and argue with people who are older than them. The influence of the Islamic religion extends into how parents raise their children* […] *Libyan students often assume that their role in the classroom is to sit quietly and to memorize the information imparted by the teacher. It is considered rude and impolite to interrupt the teacher or argue with the teacher. Students try to be quiet as much as possible to show respect to their teacher"* (Orafi 2017, pp. 311-2).

In religious schools, pupils learnt to behave, and continued to attend all the educational paths behaving as they had learned there. The master-disciple relationship was reflected in the relationship between pupils and teachers in public schools, with memorization as the only method and no space for discussion or questioning. After the defeat of Gaddafi, considerable efforts were made in the field of education to remove ideological elements from the curriculum and to sign agreements with other states to send Libyan students out to acquire skills for national development. Since 2014, political instability has stalled this process: destroyed school buildings and a lack of security have led parents not to send their children to school (Orafi 2017).

Another country whose educational development was stopped by war was Iraq. Since 1993, a religious campaign to teach the Quran at all levels of education was launched, accompanied by the creation of courses to train teachers in Islamic culture. This did not prevent them from providing Christian teaching in predominantly Christian areas. The educational boom of the socialist period ended in the last decade of the past century due to the drastic reduction in funding for education, although not for a political choice. After the American occupation, massive international aid failed to boost education since the population was too poor and frightened by internal wars and terrorism, and the dropout rate was very high, except in the Kurdish region (Kirdar 2017, pp. 21-38).

Jordan is a country where the end-of-the-century educational crisis has never occurred. Indeed, it has continuously developed and improved its education system from nursery school to university,

has high literacy and low dropout levels, and is the first Arab country in terms of the human development index. However, the trend in favour of scientific studies is confirmed in Jordan too, as academic literary training is unattractive to young people and offers little choice in universities (Maani 2017).

High enrolment rates, overcrowded classes, double shifts, high dropout rates, and teachers with low social roles and salaries characterize Palestinian education, run by the Palestinian Authority since 1994. Moreover, there are UNHCR schools and public schools. In 2006, Hamas's election victory led to a freeze on international education funding, worsening an already critical situation. The major problems were security, which, during a conflict, is not guaranteed to pupils all the time, and pupils' international mobility, which Israeli authorities severely controlled and blocked (Daoudi 2017).

In Lebanon, the freedom of education, protecting the private and religious education system, was legitimised by an amended constitution, known as the National Reconciliation Charter or the Ta'ef Agreement, in 1989. Lebanon's educational system derailed from the path of national integration and social cohesion due to the radicalization of religious differences, as is made evident in the history curriculum that has not been standardized due to a deep split among confessional communities over the interpretation of historical events. There is a lack of elaboration on civic responsibility in the curricula and a weakness in the inculcation of civic skills and competencies needed for living together in multi-confessional Lebanon. The MEHE was not able to elaborate on a history curriculum or to develop textbooks after the issuing of the Ta'ef agreement in 1989 and the approval of the new curriculum in 1997. New history curricula were issued in 2000, and textbooks were written accordingly. However, curricula and textbooks have not been implemented thus far. Therefore, students are still studying history textbooks of the obsolete 1968 curricula for the second cycle and the 1970 curricula for primary and intermediate cycles (Abouchedid and Zaid in Kirdar 2017).

The end of the golden age of Arab nationalist education was also evident in the Maghreb. In the 1970s and 1980s, Maghreb families still considered school a way out of poverty and a place of social promotion for their children. At the end of the millennium, they have become disenchanted and convinced that educational institutions are of little use because they do not produce knowledge useful for the future and for a job. Unemployment and lack of economic means dominate among young people in working-class neighbourhoods of large cities, from Casablanca to Algiers, so their hopes do not lie in school but in migration (Zani 2005, p.237). Young people, who have lived a process of global homologation thanks to media diffusion, have already acquired the cultural orientation of the hosting society in their homeland.

In this context, the overwhelming return of religious issues in Tunisia, the most secular Arab country, should be placed. To contain the Islamist wave, the government forbade the hijab in schools in the 1980s, and this prohibition was removed only after the 2011 Revolution (Jules 2017). The Bourghiba's successor, Zin al-Abdin Ben Alì, took power in 1987 and maintained his position until 2011. He continued his predecessor's secular policy. He began reforming the education system through five-year plans with the financial support of international stakeholders such as the European Union (Zani 2005, pp. 213-4). He aimed to attract foreign funding, so he began a period of political liberalization thanks to which the state recognized Islamic associations, one of which was Ennahda. This allowed it to take part in elections, winning 17% of the vote. After this result, the government immediately prosecuted and banned it again. Between 1989 and 1994, the Minister of Education, Charfi, promoted the introduction of topics such as human rights and tolerance in the curricula, clearing them of anti-Western content and intolerance towards other religions and groups to fight Islamism. At the same time, he tried to maintain the liberal characteristics of Muslim thought in religious education. The main objectives of education remain Arabisation, secularisation, and full schooling to show the world a democratic and modern Tunisia. With the modernization of education, the focus shifted to practical skills such as mathematics, science, computer science and technology, and strategic, creative and behavioural skills. The government included Darwin and the Bing Bang theory in science curricula. Despite this, in 2011, unemployment among young people, especially university graduates, reached 45%. The revolution was born from this frustration, from the unions' disappointment (especially teachers), the religious world, and from social inequality. After the revolution (14 January 2011), the country was governed by a troika (Islamist Ennahdha Party, the Congress for the Republic, and the Democratic Forum) under President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki from 2011 to 2014. The new Constitution of 2014 affirms that education has to:

> *"Consolidate the Arab-Muslim identity and national belonging in the young generations, and to strengthen, promote and generalize the use of the Arabic language and to openness to foreign languages, human civilizations and diffusion of the culture of human rights."*

When Essebsi won the election, there were high dropouts, unemployment, and a proliferation of private Islamic kindergartens on the Wahhabi model. The government's first aim was to close these Islamic private schools (Jules 2017).

In Algeria, a bloody civil war followed in 1990 the Benjedid presidency period. The FIS (the Islamic Front) won the 1991 election in opposition to the left-wing National Liberation Front, but the army outlawed the Islamist party. The FIS armed groups then resorted to terrorism. The civil war ended in 1996 with the enactment of a new Constitution based on Parliament (Zani 2005, p.

216). The model underpinning the education system remains the French one, however with a significant effort at linguistic and curricular Arabisation that clashes with the fact that, in the most prestigious faculties, French continues to be the language of instruction. The problem was and continues to be mass literacy at school and disconnection between school and university at a linguistic level. Religion has little relevance in this education system, based on French secularism and full formal equality between men and women (Messekher and Miliani 2017).

In the Maghreb, the result of this two-century-long transformation process does not seem to have led to a homogeneous and efficient outcome. What characterizes these countries today is the presence of parallel education systems, among which the public state education system is of low quality. There is a traditional private Islamic educational system, with the survival of the katātīb in some territories; a modern private Islamic education system that combines religious education with effective technological and foreign language learning; and a widespread system of private international schools (French, English, Italian, American, etc.), providing education according to European reference models. This situation led to inequality in access to education, given the conspicuous discrepancy in the price of enrolment in these different schools and the difficulty of gaining access to university after attending state public schools. The reform processes seem to have failed in their objective of bringing together traditional culture and European sciences within a quality public education system that guarantees equal access, equality of opportunity, right to education and quality of teaching.

Television and digital tools imposed themselves on societies at large illiterate. In the literature field, most Western bestsellers are not translated into Arabic and are at large unknown among young generations. One could think there is a cultural motivation of opposition or prejudices against Western culture, but this is not the point. In fact, on the other hand, there is a significant diffusion of American television series and Japanese cartoons. This confirms how much globalization in the Arab world runs on satellite and digital media and how education systems have failed to entrench deeply reading as a widespread cultural practice. Reasons could be found in the pedagogical methods favouring mnemonic learning and the rigid separation of skills to the detriment of education in critical thinking and individual research. How the Arabic language is taught and the ideological nature of Arabisation, especially in the Maghreb, may have produced negative consequences, making written Arabic perceived as a scholastic, official and religious language towards which pupils feel alienated. These policies have not solved the problem of diglossia; on the contrary, the competition of foreign languages in schooling exacerbated it, so many students speak local Arabic and read in a European language rather than classical Arabic. In addition to this strictly linguistic problem, there is a rigid conformism in teaching Arabic literature

in schools that does not encourage young people to take an interest in it (Mermier 2012, pp.16-19).

The educational systems' challenges magnify the tensions between the state, the secular intellectuals, and the growing Islamic populace in defining Islam's place and role in the changing societies of the Arab world. Islam, from its side, attaches a great deal of importance to education, with numerous references relating to education in the Quran and a long history of Islamic education. As Western paradigms failed to resolve socioeconomic problems, Arabs societies, to varying degrees, have begun demanding a return to Islam to find solutions, which is reflected in the significant presence of religious and moral teachings in the curriculum. The educational systems in the Arab world have not found a balance between religious and cultural traditions and Western culture and way of life. They seem to have renounced it in favour of a synthesis between the economic development needs of a modern world and the moral imperatives of a religious society. In regards to humanities, there is a heavy reliance on Islamic sources in this latter period: Islam is the foundation of the national characters, and this prevents fundamental changes to the curricula and the system as a whole. In subjects that affect and influence pupils' ideas and convictions, as in the humanities and social sciences, authorities impose their supervision, designing curricula and issuing schoolbooks. Consequently, such subjects praise past achievements and indulge in self-praise and blame others to instil loyalty, obedience, and support for the regime in power, symbolized by a ruler's picture on the front page of schoolbooks of many Arab countries (Kirdar 2017, pp. 4-8).

7.2 Gender issues

Nationalist education takes care of both male and female education, aiming at all young people's full schooling and offering them the same opportunity. Starting from Egypt, the educational boom also concerned the female population so far largely excluded from formal education. On the Egyptian model, most Arab countries provide women with the same right as men to education: some countries offer gender-mixed and gender-segregated classrooms inside public education systems, so pupils and families could choose what they prefer, and some others offer only mixed or only segregated classes. Among the countries that offer only mixed classrooms in public education, there is Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq. The most advanced country in terms of women's rights in general, and educational rights in particular, was and is Tunisia, thanks to the Code of Personal Status of 1957, considered the most advanced civil code in the Arab world concerning women's rights. It established the right to equal education for men and women and created the first kindergartens. In 1967, all classes were gender-mixed, and 90% of school-age boys and 50% of girls participated in education (Jules 2017, pp. 369-387). It was a

very high result for the time and in comparison with other Arab countries. However, it is worth saying that the goal of women's full schooling was not achieved in this period, and, in many Mediterranean Arab countries, it is still distant. This is the case for Morocco, where formal equity between male and female pupils corresponds to the reality of a low enrolment rate among women in rural areas. Lebanon and Algeria are the countries that appear to have less formal inequalities between female and male pupils.

In Egypt, the re-Islamization of education at the end of the century creates an environment that pressures female pupils and teachers to wear the hijab (*ḥijāb*) and not play sports (Sobhy 2015). Many families who prefer a more religious education choose to enrol their sons and daughters on private religious education, where gender segregation is applied following the Wahhabi model (Diana 2010). In Iraqi education, characterised first by socialism and then by Islamization starting in 1993, no significant discrimination concerning gender is reported on a formal level. There are gender-mixed schools with courses addressed to women only about family and health education (Kirdar 2017, pp. 21-38).

Jordan is, with Syria, one of the countries where public education offers both gender-segregated and mixed classrooms. The decisive role of religion in the Jordan education system does not prevent women from having as much access to education as men, even though 40% of schools remain gender segregated (Maani 2017). In Libya, there are both types of classrooms, but studying with people of the opposite sex is considered a violation of social norms, so even if they have mixed classes, pupils stay divided by gender (Orafi 2017). The same often occurs in Syria and Egypt as well. In Palestine, there is mostly gender segregation, although some progress is achieved in the spreading of coeducational schools. Female pupils experience movement restrictions and threats to their security, suffer from a higher dropout rate, and, in some places, there is no access to female higher education (Daoudi 2017).

The countries where gender segregation is stricter are those of the Arabian Peninsula, built on the Wahhabi ideology. However, it is worth saying that widespread private international and community schools are mostly allowed to have boys and girls together, but, in some countries, only up to a certain age, for example, in Qatar, up to grade six (Kirdar 2017, pp. 179-196). Gender segregation does not mean low female schooling rates. On the contrary, compared to Mediterranean countries with mixed classes, most countries in the Arabian Peninsula have very high female enrolment rates. For example, in the United Arab Emirates, full schooling has been achieved for both boys and girls (Kirdar 2017, pp. 217-34). In the state ideology and people's opinion, gender segregation helps women who would not or would not be sent by their families to study in mixed institutions to receive an education (Hamdan 2017), and gender segregation seems not to affect the quality of education. Indeed, KSU University in Riyadh is the best ranked among

Arab universities despite gender segregation (De Poli 2007). Saudi Arabia's first school for women was only authorised in 1961. In the last 30 years, female enrolment in universities has risen by 512% (De Poli 2007), and women have better results than men, even if Islamic and petroleum-related studies are not allowed (Hamdan 2017).

All the countries of the Arabian Peninsula built separate national education systems for males and females, and female schools have better results. Scholars attributed this to teachers' motivation, which is higher for women, who consider teaching a good job, and lower for men, who perceive it as lacking social prestige, and explained the tendency of women towards teaching precisely by gender segregation because they prefer to work in an all-female environment (Kirdar 2017, pp. 117-156). Gender issue, therefore, appears connected to religion, but it does not mean that the more education is imbued with Islamic values the more women are excluded from education. The religious approach impacts more on the type of education provided, i.e. gender-segregated or gender mixed, than on women's entitlement to education, enrolment rate and outcomes. These last points seem to be more dependent on socio-economic factors such as the general richness of a country, women's family richness and the gratuitousness of the education system. For these reasons, gender appears not to be a distinctive factor in the identity building undertaken by the educational system since women's identity in education is influenced in the same way as that of men by economic, religious, and political factors.

7.3 Minority and language issues

The Arabization policy has characterised all the Arab countries after independence in different ways. In education, it aimed at making Arabic the first language of instruction again and was primarily directed against the colonial languages that had appropriated this role. It linked to a general policy aimed at rebuilding a robust Arab identity that could overcome the feeling of inferiority caused by Ottoman and European domination. In reality, this linguistic and identity approach has a more significant impact on the linguistic, ethnic and cultural minorities in the various countries considered than on the prestige of foreign languages as languages of instruction and success, which have mostly been maintained.

In Algeria, the Imazighen language, culture and identity issue will not find a place immediately after the independence, characterized by the polarization between French and Arabic language and culture. Only in 1996, at the end of the civil war, the constitution recognised Amazigh culture as part of the national identity. However, the government has not recognised yet the Imazighen language the dignity of a national language and the need to teach it in schools (Zani 2005, p. 216). The Imazighen language was recognised as national only in 2003 and as an official language in 2016 in the new Constitution and therefore taught in schools relating to this community. This is

an important step towards overcoming the Arabic/French linguistic dichotomy imbued with international political meanings (Messekher and Miliani 2017). The other countries in which the Arabization issue is connected with the Amazigh people's rights are Morocco, analysed in a dedicated chapter, and Libya. In this country, 10% of the population is Amazigh, and according to Gaddafi, they were of Arab origin and their language was an Arabic dialect. On these bases, he persecuted anyone involved in the Amazigh cultural revival. Only after his defeat in 2011 did schools begin to use and teach the *Tifinagh*.

On the contrary, in Tunisia, there is a homogeneous Sunni population whose official language is Tunisian Arabic (*Maghrebi* or *Dariji*), and the elites speak French. Many disciplines are taught in Tunisian, with French as a foreign language.

Concerning Mashreq, Iraq has a population of 65%Arabs, 23% Kurds and the presence of other ethnicities. The official religion is Islam, with a population divided between Shi'a (62.5%) and Sunni (34.5%). There is equal access to education for all citizens. It was and is the first country that has recognised the large Kurdish minority (around 20% of the population) and its autonomy since the 1990s, with the possibility of using books in Kurdish, tailoring history and geography curricula to their community history, and having courses in Kurdish in preparatory schools. This autonomy allows for very high levels of schooling in the region. This excellence in education did not fail even during the Iraqi education crisis, which coincided with the war (Kirdar 2017, pp. 21-38).

Iraq, differently from Algeria, is a country that did not need to be Arabised because, apart from the Kurdish minority, it was already deeply Arab. Therefore, the conflicting relationship between Arab-Muslim belonging and French colonialism has weighed more on the possibility of minorities to be recognised than Arab-Muslim belonging itself has.

As the chapter on Syria will show, the excessive focus on Arabisation as a tool to fight foreign interferences has oppressed minorities more than the religious element. Indeed, following the Egyptian model, the right to education for a religious minority is respected almost everywhere. In Egypt, the Christian minority can attend private confessional schools and join national public schools in which they are entitled to an hour of Christian religion class instead of a Muslim religion one, their holidays are respected, and programmes recognise them as part of the Egyptian people's history. Jordan is an ethnically homogenous Muslim country where the Christian minority has its educational rights. In fact, the minorities that undermine the education system are national minorities of refugees, namely Palestinian and Syrians, who increase the number of pupils and force schools to work double shifts. In order to avoid this problem, the government prefers refugees to attend lower-quality UNHCR schools that rarely allow university access (Maani 2017). Despite the focus on Arab identity and unity and the common belonging of Palestinian and Syrian to the

Arab motherland and the Islamic *'Umma*, this does not prevent Jordan from marginalising refugee pupils without including them in public schools. This occurs although Palestinian schools follow an Arab curriculum similar to the Jordan one. It is noteworthy that there is a complete absence of elements of Jewish culture, historically and currently, up to the Shoah, which never appears in the texts (Daoudi 2017). This certainly does not help pupils to relate to a reality with which, in one way or another, they will have to deal with as Arab Palestinians live as a minority within their home country.

The Jordan problem of Palestinian and Syrian refugees is particularly felt in Lebanon, a country propelled into the epicentre of Levant history as a magnet for refugees and ethnic minorities. The latest addition to the Lebanese multi-confessional and ethnic society were Armenians, who fled persecution during the Great Anatolian Genocide in 1909 and arrived in Lebanon as immigrants in 1915. Their community is mainly composed of several Christian sects. Today it is possible to distinguish between minorities who fled religious persecution from neighbouring countries (Christian Maronites, Armenians, Muslim Shiites and Druze), minorities who were proselytized by Protestant and Jesuit missionaries (Greek Orthodox), and minorities who lived in territories annexed to Lebanon by the French Mandate in 1920 (Sunnites and Greek Orthodox). In addition, Kurds, Iraqis and Palestinians also fled persecution from neighbouring countries and resided in Lebanon as refugees. An unprecedented influx of refugees from Syria since 2011 has characterized the current period. Tension among confessional and ethnic communities is mirrored in education, with a general tendency to articulate their distinctive value systems through private education that the Ottoman rule established, the French Mandate strengthened and the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 and its amendments in 1989 confirmed.

Most pupils attend private schools of all ethnicities and religions, each with its own history curriculum, so national integration is far from being a goal reached through national education. Concerning refugees, Lebanon's role as a host country is so significant that it would be worth covering it in the next section, on the educational inclusion of Arabic-speaking pupils in host countries. The analysis setting based on the distinction between Arab home countries and European host countries prevents us from doing it; however, it is worth describing briefly the situation of migrant pupils in Lebanon. Today, there are approximately 450,000 refugees registered with UNRWA, half of whom live in the twelve recognized Palestine refugee camps. Palestinian refugees have limited access to the public school system, and the cost of private education in Lebanon is among the highest in the region, so much so that it is unaffordable to most families. There is a high rate of schooling at the primary education level, which falls to a quarter of the children at the secondary education level, so dropout is their primary problem, mainly due to no opportunities to attend university, economic reasons, and Palestinian exclusion from various

job sectors. The most interesting aspect is that they studied mostly in separate schools, not attended by Lebanese pupils. After 2011, when the minister of education declared the willingness of the state to include Syrians in schools, in 2015 only 25% of Syrian school-age refugees attended education (Abouchedid and Zaid in Kirdar 2017), and even in the following years most of them studied in parallel afternoon classes (Crul et al. 2019, p. 2). The fundamental problems with Palestinian and Syrian inclusion in national schools are economic because the State does not have the economic means to support their schooling. However, there is also racism and discrimination, both institutional and in teachers, and difficulties linked to the differences between Lebanese and Syrian curricula and language barriers. In Syria, lessons are taught in Arabic, whereas in Lebanon, French and English are the official teaching languages for instruction in mathematics and sciences (Abouchedid and Zaid in Kirdar 2017). This allows us to see how different Arab education systems are and how Arab identity is not enough to feel at home in another Arab country when national differences are as marked as between Lebanon and Syria, as shown in the interviews with today's Syrian refugees in Europe often spent several years in Lebanon.

The model of separate schools for minorities is dominant in Christian Lebanon as it is in the Arabian Peninsula. In this area, private schools were broadly spread, starting from missionaries and colonial schools, and they continued to grow thanks to the high number of immigrant workers attracted by the growing demand for jobs linked to the oil boom. In Bahrain and Kuwait, migrant workers send their sons and daughters to study in private foreign schools with their own national curriculum, in which it is compulsory to add classes of Arabic languages and Islamic education and, in Kuwait, of citizenship. National free education was mainly for native pupils only; in some Gulf countries, such as EAU, Arab and Muslim pupils from other nations can access it. In this educational policy for migrant pupils, it is possible to see one concept of identity and belonging in which the language community (Arabic) and the religious community (Umma) are of greater importance than the national one (Kirdar 2017, pp. 117-156). Community schools in Qatar depend on the foreign communities of reference, i.e. the embassies, and the national curriculum is taught in the mother tongue (Kirdar 2017, pp. 179-196). In the UAE, private schools for foreign communities, overall British and Indian, were born before the national school system. Here, too, there is a state-funded national education accompanied by a rich panorama of private, international and community schools on the Anglo-Saxon model, with courses in Arab culture and Islamic religion also provided in non-state schools so that migrants could learn about the host society (Kirdar 2017, pp. 217-234). The idea of a school for everyone, natives and immigrants of different ethnicities and faiths, is not even considered, so there are no attempts at inclusion or coexistence.

8 Case study: Syria

As reported in the pedagogical literature, the Syrian education system has been strongly influenced by the ideas of nationhood and Arab socialism coming from Egypt, also to contrast the colonial model of Western education imposed in the country by the French and British (Zani 2005), and then characterized by the Ba'th party's policies. This party has focused on nationalism but even more on the construction and transmission of the Arab-Islamic identity (Landis 2003), as shown by the following historical reconstruction of the country's development after independence and by the analysis of its education system.

8.1 Arab national identity building between internal minorities and external enemies

Independent Syria was a mosaic of identities; aware that only a brief and summary picture can be given here, it is nevertheless important to recall it in order to understand on which population the political and consequently educational attempt at identity homogenisation, based on Arab identity, acted. The majority of the population was Sunni Muslim; they formed an elite that dominated the cities, inhabited by the most numerous Syrian Christian community, the Orthodox. There were several territories in which different shite communities lived: Duodeciman, Ismailit, the Druze, and the Nusayrite renamed Alawi in recent times. They have changed their name due to the persecution they have always experienced and the mistrust of Christians and Muslims towards them. Bedouins lived in the desert, forced to sedentariness by nationalist governments who saw nomadism as a problem. Finally, on the borders with Turkey, there was the Kurdish community, which represented almost a tenth of the population, not to mention other small religious (Jews, Coptic, Protestants, Maronites, etc.) and ethnic minorities (Circassians, Turkmen, Armenians, Syriacs) (Trombetta 2013, pp.61-4). All the political actors of the independent Syrian State tried to manipulate these ethnic and religious identities for their specific aims, starting from 1946 and arriving at the Assad family in 1970, passing through the Muslim Brotherhood's opposition and the influence of foreign powers (such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey), all focused on the politicization of Sunni religious identity. Unlike its neighbour Lebanon, Syria has not institutionalised the reference to confessional identities constructed by the French but made them taboo in the public sphere (Zecca 2018, pp.49-50).

In Syria, such as in most of the Arab world, in the decades after the independence, the key words were independence, nationalism, Arabism and socialism and the main aims in the educational field were all Syrian children's full schooling) and the creation of a national identity.

The first President of the independent republic was the nationalist Shukri Quwwatli (1946-9). He favoured the conservative elite who managed local power in both the Ottoman and colonial periods but he also permitted free elections in 1947, in which even women could vote, abolished

parliamentary sectarianism and laid the foundations of primary education for all. Syria's history, education and political identity building immediately connoted themselves as anti-Zionist and anti-American with the first war against the newborn Israel State in 1948. After the defeat in the war, fought with a modest army, the authorities allocated half of the state funds to army modernisation. This led to a massive army reinforcement, which was the basis for numerous subsequent military coups. Colonel Za'im, a Nazi supporter, carried out the first in 1949, supported by the CIA, which assigned him the primary task of recognising the state of Israel. A pro-Iraqi and Jordanian government soon replaced him with another military coup, but General Shishakli interrupted this government after less than a year, supported by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He carried out the desectarianization of politics, eliminating negative differentiations between citizens of the same State, but also deprived minorities, accustomed to self-government, of their historical autonomy (Zecca 2018, pp. 49-50). The revolt against his authoritarian regime started in the Druze Mountains and forced him to resign in 1954 when there was the first and last free Syrian election with the secret vote. From 1955 to 1958, the conservative elite and the progressive force cohabited in the Parliament, dominated by the Ba'th Party into which Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party had converged: it was widespread among the millions of peasants in the countryside and was the link between the countryside and the intellectual elite. The Muslim Brotherhood did not officially participate in elections but supported independent candidates, who were tribal chiefs and businessmen, against the advance of progressive political forces. The reconciliation with Nasser's Egypt brought Syria into the orbit of the Soviet Union for anti-American rather than communist reasons, with the supply of Russian weapons and the first trade treaties (Trombetta 2013, pp.79-91).

In 1958, Egypt and the Ba'th party announced the birth of the RAU – United Arab Republic (*al-Jumhuriyya al-Arabiyya al-Muttahida*), ratified by a popular referendum. The political dream of breaking down the boundaries imposed by colonialism and unifying all Arab people in one state seemed to become a reality. Instead, reality soon turned out to be different from dreams, and the reality of Syria's incorporation into Egypt emerged, with Cairo as the capital of the newly formed "Republic" and Nasser as its authoritarian leader (Trombetta 2004; 2013). On the Egyptian influence on Arab education, Landis (2003) remembers us:

> *"Many textbooks, printed in Egypt, were used for years in Jordanian and Syrian schools. They established an academic orthodoxy that guides textbook production today. The genesis of this Arab nationalist school system during the time of Nasser helps explain much of the pan-Arab and Sunni rigidity in the Syrian curriculum. In order to promote cultural and political unity among the Arab peoples, Nasser's academics hued to a narrow and integralist vision of Arabism just as they reduced Islam to the simple and rigid prescriptions of Sunni orthodoxy"* (Landis 2003, pp. 5-6).

After only 3 years, the Syrian conservative opposition, allied with Jordan and Turkey, took power and declared the death of the RAU. The clash with Nasser marked a turning point for the Ba'th party, which stopped looking at Egypt as a model and saw the most intransigent military branch (coming from the lower classes and the countryside) expand (Trombetta 2004, p.80, pp.170-2; 2013, pp.92-3).

In 1963, after 2 years of an unpopular government, expression of the urban bourgeoisie, which had brought down the RAU, the Ba'th party (that had taken power also in Iraq) took power marking the end of republican Syria and the beginning of a socialist policy, independent also from Egypt. In the party, the left-wing area prevailed, with its officials coming from the countryside and the suburbs, belonging to religious minorities traditionally excluded from the power and frustrated by decades of subjugation, more interested in internal revolution than in pan-Arabism, which nevertheless remained part of the national ideology even if the pragmatic political line became socialist and pro-Soviet. However, ideological strength faded in favour of a robust organisational structure capable of maintaining strict control over the country through the crystallisation of political power around a military body that took decisions behind the apparent institutional activity of the state. The protests and their violent repression began as early as 1964, starting from the peasants of Hama for economic and religious reasons and expanding to students and other cities, with significant but not exclusive participation from the Muslim Brotherhood. It is impossible to reconstruct all the events here, but the confessional and identity issues related to them are essential because of their implications for education. The point is that the Ba'th secularism did not convince large sectors of the Muslim population, who identified the party with the Alawi, Druze and Ismaili minorities. One of the most unpopular decisions in this regard was to abolish religious teaching, both Muslim and Christian, in state schools (Trombetta 2004, pp. 80-1; 2013, pp.93-101).

In 1967, the government established the current educational system composed of six years of primary school, three years of lower secondary school, and three years of higher secondary school, establishing norms for curricula, examination procedures and teacher training. It nationalised all the existing religious and foreign private schools; since then, education has been essentially public (Landis 2003). The Ba'th Party promoted the idea that education is one of the foundations of national economic development and the educational policy found a vital place within the party. Four of the 20 principal local sections of the party's representatives were included at the highest levels of the four universities in the country; there were pupils' and university students' associations among the popular organization through which the party controlled society (Trombetta 2004, pp.83-4).

What is interesting about this period is the building of an educational system totally focused on building and reproducing the Arab identity in an openly declared way. An ideological education

system used by the regime for its political ends, in which minority languages and cultures had no place. An education system that is still the same today - in which, for example, the Kurds and the Kurdish language have no place. As for religious institutes, the secular, socialist-inspired Ba'athist regime, unlike Egypt, has renounced the nationalisation of secondary Islamic schools, and did not encourage the establishment of a public higher *Sharī'a* faculty, quite the contrary: the regime limits the scope of clerics and excludes them from the bureaucracy and its training channels (Verdeil 2017, p.21).

With the so-called 'corrective revolution' within the Baʿth party, General Hāfiẓ al-Assad, leader of the nationalist wing, took over the government of the country in 1970. He established a dictatorial regime and became a point of reference for Arab radicalism and a supporter of anti-Israeli and anti-American terrorist groups, such as Islamic Jihad and some Palestinian resistance groups. His regime vigorously promoted the development of national identity and consciousness, rejecting and repressing any reference to community identities (ethnic and confessional) to create a great Arab nation, of which Syria was a region.

8.2 Radicalization, Globalization and the Arabization of minorities

The definition of Syria as an Arab nation has been problematic from the outset for the presence of other ethnic identities, such as Kurdish and Yazidi. Although the regime's ideology declared itself super-partisan concerning ethnic identities and religious affiliations, the president's family belonged to a specific religious group, the Alawi. It is not relevant for this work to analyse the theological peculiarities of this religious group, as they are not relevant to the educational policies implemented by a regime that officially did not discriminate against any religion and required all religious communities to be part of the Arab nation. It is relevant that many Muslims did not recognise Alawi as Muslim, and that the Muslim Brotherhood, in its defence of the Sunni majority of the population, accused the regime of favouring the Alawi minority. These accusations were based on the real system of patronage and co-optation in the civil service and the army that the president had set up in his religious community to ensure its support, or at least control and non-rebellion.

The economic crisis of the late 1970s exacerbated the discontent and resentment toward the Alawite community and its special relationship with power, which was inconsistent with the propagated ideology. Not all of the Alawite community supported Assad and received favours in return, so it was a patronage policy rather than a religious or communitarian one; however, the Sunni extremist opposition made it a matter of religious identity (Zecca 2018, pp.49-50). This led to an escalation of religious tensions and a return of religion to the centre of the political discourse. The widespread popular protests forced Assad to give Islam a central place in the new Syrian

constitution of 1973, with the controversial article stating that the President of the Republic had to be Muslim. The president allowed to enshrine Islam in schools and the constitution, but at the same time, he pursued an aggressive policy of redefining the Alawites legally and socially as Muslims. The religious class returned to schools, and the relationship between pan-Arab nationalism and the Sunni Islamic orthodoxy in Arab pedagogy consolidated, remaining a barrier to liberalism and the open discussion of religious and ethnic diversity. Syria's Alawite leaders considered it politically dangerous to challenge Sunny religious orthodoxy and inconvenient to dismantle Nasser's curriculum in the school system because it would cast doubt on their nationalist and Islamic credentials. They preferred to conform to the majority Sunni approach rather than to enhance their initial and official secularism (Landis 2003).

Consequently, the only recognised religions in the educational system are Islam and Christianity, with Christians having their own religion classes, whilst the other minorities (Alawis, Druze, Isma'ilis, and Yazidi) study the same Muslim texts. Although about 16% of Syrians are Muslims but not Sunni, in their textbooks there is no mention of the different Islamic currents, including Shi'a and Sufism. Textbooks present Islam as a monolithic religion that coincides with Sunni Islam and offers no guidance to pupils on how they should relate to Muslims, whose ritual practices and interpretation of the Quran differ from their own. Likewise, they do not explain to heterodox Muslim children why their communities practice Islam differently than the instructions given in their school texts. Religious education is an integral and compulsory aspect of the curriculum, and every pupil studies either Christianity or Islam for two to three hours a week from the first grade to the twelfth, with no possibility of exemption, even if the pupils' annual average point score does not take into consideration its score. For this reason, many pupils consider it the least important of their classes and remember little of the contents, showing indifference to it, as Landis (2003) quotes from one of his interviews:

> *"The textbooks are medieval and political, but at the end of the day everyone knows in these countries that you do not pay attention to such classes".*

Nevertheless, it is important to analyse its contents, characterised by traditional and rigid Sunnism, lacking references to tolerance or respect for religious traditions other than Sunni Islam. Books depict all religious groups other than Christians as enemies of Islam who must be converted or fought, and the Jewish people, who deny their prophets, fated to go to hell and to be eliminated (Landis 2003). Landis examined school textbooks written between 1967 and 2001 and found them similar in their anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, tracing this approach to the regime's political propaganda against Israel, which manipulates religion (Landis 2003).

Otherwise, Syrian textbooks do not distinguish between Judaism in general and Zionism in particular, and often link the religious concept of jihad to the current political situation regarding Israel. The issue is essential in this type of identity building based on the opposition to the other, seen as an enemy, so much that:

> *"The Ba'thist government in Syria will have a very hard time making peace with Israel because recognizing the Jewish state will shake the ideological and structural foundations of Syria's Ba'thist regime"* (Wurmser in Landis 2003)[37].

About identities built on opposition to an external enemy, religious textbooks teach that backwardness in the Islamic World is due to the incorrect understanding of Islam caused by colonialists that have perverted some aspects of Islam causing false understandings, in order to lead Muslims away from science and productive work in all fields of life. Colonialism has harmed the colonised population greatly, something the American Landis forgets to point out. On the other hand, it is also true that posing the question in religious terms, rather than promoting a severe capacity for historical and economic analysis, does not help the young Syrians understand and develop a better society.

More interesting here is the identity propagated by these texts, which overlaps the Islamic identity with the Arab one, without any mention of the Syrian national identity. According to this narrative, the Arabs are superior to other peoples because they have received Islam from God, and therefore converting to Islam is like being arabised. Therefore, through Islamization, the whole world will become arabised. In these religious books, there is no trace of the Baathist secular version of Arab nationalism, in which the '*Umma arabiyya',* or Arab community, is the proper unit of analysis: the party had to submit to pressure from the Sunni majority not to antagonise the Sunni business elite. One of the consequences is the identification of (Arab) Christians as non-Arab, even though they are Arab by ethnicity and language, as they have moved away from the true Arab tradition and towards the European and American ones. Nowhere in Syria's Islamic textbooks it is explained that Christians and other religious groups are Arabs equal to Muslims. The Ba'th Party apparently embraces secularism and equality between all Arabs regardless of their religion, but the state-provided curriculum of Islamic religion undermined this message of equality. The process that the Ba'th party has implemented is one of national homogenisation, which looks at the differences as a weakness and danger, something not to talk about and possibly forget, and Islamic education is an integral part of this nation-building. Young people from minorities know very little

[37] Egyptian and Jordanian textbooks are the same as the Syrian ones and they have not been substantially changed despite the peace these countries have made with Israel. Popular animus in Jordan and Egypt remains anti-Israel, probably for the unresolved conflict over the West Bank and Gaza for Jordan and over the Sinai for Egypt, but cultural transmission in schools has its share (Landis 2003).

about their traditions, and the little they know about Islam is what they have learned from the school religious education just described. Finally, it is worth saying that the Ministry of Education is Sunni but not extremist, traditional and Sunni but not fundamentalist, and the government runs campaigns against the Muslim Brotherhood and fundamentalist opposition. Radical Islamists have not contributed to defining the curricula, as it is possible to deduce from the absence of the notions of *takfir* (declaring others unbelievers) as expressed by radicals such as Qutb or B. Laden. Jihad is limited to Israel, Syria's national enemy; indeed, the West is not identified as a target of *jihad* or described as an unbeliever (Landis 2003).

Apart from religion, the Constitution states that education is a right guaranteed by the state and based on free access; that the primary task is to transmit to pupils the values on which the Arab nation is based, i.e., unity, freedom and socialism; and that it is necessary to eradicate any form of fanatical familiar, sectarian or regional obedience. Arabic is the only language of instruction, although people in the country also speak Aramaic, Armenian, Circassian and Kurdish (Cal et al. 2006, pp.65-8; Sultana 2001, p.389). From the French mandate to today, the central authority, despite the strength shown, has not succeeded in harmonising the different communities in the area; on the contrary, control and repression have only served to motivate further separatist impulses. Despite the propaganda on the importance of being an independent country, Syria has continued to suffer from the foreign tutelage of Iran and Russia (Trombetta 2013, p.67). The regime's propaganda, which was totalitarian and unchallenged in the country's schools, continued to propagandise Arab identity and the need to unite Arab countries against Western and Israeli invaders. The totalitarian regime that the *ra'īs* set up was based on his personal power, his family networks based on his Alawite clans, and his patronage networks with significant participation of wealthy and influential Sunnis, starting from his Sunni wife's family.

It is not a religious regime, as religious belonging is secondary to the national one, which is, in propaganda, the most important, along with Arab belonging. Indeed, the regime was and is very interested in appearing secular and seeing the claims of religious and ethnic communities as a betrayal of the united Arab socialist nation. In reality, some of those communities were involved in the regime, and those against it were in all ethnic and religious communities. Power moved along familiar and sectarian lines of clientele and blackmail, and privilege had more to do with clan affiliations than religious or ethnic belonging. The Sunni majority began to show its discontent, blaming the Alawite community itself, and the regime, although not a confessional one, began to manipulate religion for its own defence. While the Sunni elite was co-opted into the system, radical Islamic factions grew among the most marginal population, without economic and political power, and their claims were linked to those of the workers and the communists. The regime needed to deny the economic and political causes of the protests; thus, from the 1980s

onward, it began to accuse anti-secular religious terrorists of being responsible for the riots and of being instruments of Americans and Zionists. The culmination of this process of religious radicalisation of the political conflict was the 'liberation' of Hama in 1982 by the rebels, to which the regime responded by destroying the city in a month, killing thousands of civilians and claiming to have defeated the reactionary enemies of the homeland and the revolution.

At the same time, the socialist regime, like all other Arab countries, operated the economic openings (*infitah*) which benefited corrupt elites in a mechanism that dissidents described as mafia (Trombetta 2013, pp.105-126). It is essential to analyse how Syria entered the period defined in this work *"Globalization, scientific breakthrough, radicalisation",* and how this has had significant educational repercussions. Here, religious radicalisation preceded economic liberalisation (symbolised by the *infitah*) and a scientific breakthrough, which occurred even later. However, they did not weaken Arabist policy and public schools as in many other Arab countries. Economic liberalism is not accompanied by political liberalism and even less by liberal education. In fact, as in all totalitarian regimes, schools had the task of inculcating the regime's propaganda and training young people in obedience. What schools had to produce were generations of young people who had to identify with the party and the Arab-Islamic nation, ready to fight against Syria's external and internal enemies: the West, Israel, the Muslim brothers and the ethnic minorities who did not espouse nationalism, such as the Kurds. In state institutions such as schools and universities, all people were forced to participate in pro-government marches at least to avoid losing their job. At the same time, the government arrested and tortured the participants in anti-regime marches to obtain confessions about foreign plots against Syria (Trombetta 2013, pp. 167). Therefore, the national education system played and continues to play a crucial role in building the national community imagined (Anderson 2016) by the Ba'th party and in trying to build a precise identity in pupils. The religious tension of the current decade increased the regime's religious conservatism, which propagated the 'correct' national interpretation of Islam within the religious class in schools. One might expect Syria to promote a liberal and tolerant view of religious differences in its religious curriculum because leaders belonging to a religious minority, the Alawi, are ruling it and because it is home to many religious minorities who enjoy greater security and opportunity than in any other Arab country. Nevertheless, Syria has chosen not to follow a path of religious liberalism but, on the contrary, an integralist policy of nation-building and homogenisation based on rigid Sunni Islam (Landis 2003).

In the last decades of the century, there has been a high rate of demographic growth, with half of the population of school age and a significant migration from the countryside to cities. This has led to an exponential increase in the pupils' number, with the enrolment rate at 100% for males and 98% for females, with a significant variation in peripheral urban zones (about 91%) and the

north (about 92%). Syria has been an exception in regards to the spread of private schools in Arab countries; only 3% of the schools are private, and UNRWA runs 2%. Secondary levels (low and higher) are free but not compulsory, and a selective examination determines whether students will enter a general or technical course of study. The high enrolment rate dramatically decreases in secondary schools, especially in peripheral and northern schools, where it is about half of the school population; on the contrary, girls have a higher enrolment rate. Curricula are traditional and theoretical, focusing on the memorisation of information rather than on the development of the scientific method, attitudes and skills, with an over-concern on selection and channelling, such as in most of the Arab world.

A curriculum review began in the 1990s, aiming to introduce children's rights and environmental and health issues; it is accompanied by pilot projects to get children living in rural areas back to school, also through summer and mobile schools (for rural and nomadic pupils) and VET program for girls. There are numerous initiatives to enhance access to and quality of education, to make primary education more relevant and to provide a more interactive pedagogy because educators feel the need to innovate to cope with the rapid changes taking place in the world, and finally to liberalise and globalise education, aligning it with the rest of the world. Since 1992, after a MENA Regional Meeting in Damascus where UNICEF proposed using Global Education to upgrade the school system, the Ministry of Education has attempted to modernise education by adopting the GEI (Global Education Initiative). This approach concerns contents, methods and the whole functioning of both the single school and the entire national education system. It is based on the Freirian approach that sees education as a process of human empowerment and de-coding of reality in the relationship between local and global, past, present and future (Sultana 2001, pp.392-3), an approach that can hardly converge in theory and practice with an ideological and totalitarian pedagogical approach. Global Education is based on critical thinking, cooperative and experiential learning, knowledge building rather than transmission, and values such as tolerance, peace and non-violence. It is a humanistic vision of education that sees pupils not only in terms of learning outcomes but also as persons who should be active members of a participatory democracy. The quality and values that humanists advocate on an ethical level have become essential on an economic level to study, work and operate flexibly in today's globalised information society. For these reasons, in the Syrian context, the GE innovation in the classroom is challenging for the entire educational institutional system and society. A core team formed by the Ministry of education worked on the implementation of the project, the preparation of activities and materials and teachers' training. Between 1999 and 2000, the project was implemented in many schools in the country with enthusiastic teachers and pupils. It must be noted that the Syrian interpretation of GE focuses more on method than on contents; in other words, it was interpreted as a new method

to teach the already existing curriculum without particularly affecting it. Global issues and history rarely find space inside the lessons, and teachers are faced with criticism and reservations about content such as tolerance and peace education. On the method's level, teachers and pupils are enthusiasts to shift from traditional teaching to cooperative and interactive learning, but there were significant practical problems. Overcrowded classrooms and small rooms make an interactive lesson much more complex to manage than a traditional one, as interactive teaching methods and group works are almost impossible without enough space. Low salaries were another cause of teachers' demotivation. Hence, they preferred to avoid doing additional work for lesson preparation for which the state did not compensate monetarily and from which teachers did not gain social recognition. However, the enthusiasm of teachers and pupils has also led teachers who were not initially involved to introduce these methodologies into their lessons, influencing the pedagogical style of the school as a whole. Yet, these methodologies took longer, and teachers were late in implementing national curricula; therefore, pupils were unprepared for final exams. The contradiction between implementing this new methodology and an examination-oriented competitive traditional education system emerges if the former is done without changing the curriculum and the system itself. The last limitation of the experiment was its overlap with other initiatives and the competition between the different education projects instead of their integration. When the president supported a Health Education Project, all the educational efforts in the country preferred to focus on it (Sultana 2001).

Despite its limitations, this experiment was an element of the change introduced into the Syrian education system. A project that offered a framework within which teachers and pupils could legitimately debate content and methods concerning concepts such as citizenship and democracy. In a centralised education system managed by an authoritarian political party, the impact of such a project has not to be underestimated. In order to provide analytical elements to investigate the educational experiences of migrants and refugees in Europe today, it is helpful to draw attention to the fact that the 30-year-olds living in Europe today, who a decade ago were the protagonists of the anti-regime protests, were educated in the Syrian schools of that historical period. They grew up in these contradictions between renewal and preservation, between attempts to import alternative pedagogical models from the West and a strenuous attachment of the educational institution to the nationalist, anti-Western and anti-Israeli Arab model.

Meanwhile, economic opening measures have enabled wealthy Syrians of all confessions to build private schools in major cities to meet the growing demand for high, and expensive, education since the early 1990s. At the beginning of the new century, about 10% of high schools are private. If there are significant differences in the methodologies and especially in the importance attributed

to the teaching of foreign languages between public and private schools, there is no difference in religious education because all schools have to follow the same national curriculum (Landis 2003)

8.3 Education in the new millennium. Scientist breakthrough and liberalization

For the scientific breakthrough, Syrian education had to wait until 2000, when Bashar al-Assad took his father's position. He carried out important liberalisation policies, dismantled the Baathist system and weakened the state's role, leading to the loss of support from some key sectors, such as the rural one, and altering the balance created by his father. Economic liberalization widens the gap between the small elite surrounding the President's family and most of the population (Zecca 2018, p.51).

The new young president launched modernisation and technological development plans in all areas: in the renovation of cities with new state-of-the-art buildings, with rural development plans for poor areas of the country, and in schools with the implementation of the study of English and technological and computer sciences. With these plans, the government chased global economic development, following the "Dubaization model", without much consideration for local realities. For example, Kurdish minority communities in the rural areas concerned were not consulted about these development plans to collaborate in their implementation Rather, they were considered an obstacle to development and national unity (Trombetta 2004, pp. 174-190).

In schools, the ideology of the Ba'th party is still intrusive, with images of the president everywhere in buildings and school textbooks depicting him as a patriot and builder of the homeland. The focus remains on the Arab identity without changing the restrictions on minority languages, which schools ban, just as well as totally ignoring the communities' histories and cultures in the curriculum. On the other hand, it is worth saying that it is a well-functioning education system, a source of national pride, with high enrolment rates at all levels and good learning outcomes, without gender discrimination. Arabic is the language of learning, English and French have been introduced relatively recently, the curriculum is broad, encompassing all disciplines, and all university faculties are present in the country (Fayek 2017). On this issue, also Landis (2003), who is very critical of the contents of Syrian education, said:

> *"The government is among the best in the Arab World at providing basic education to its citizens. Today, most Syrians are literate and go to school for more years than they have at any time in their history. According to World Bank statistics, some 93% of Syrian children enrol in primary school, although only 38% continue through secondary school. In 2002, the government extended mandatory school attendance from the sixth to the ninth grade. The government has also undertaken an ambitious plan, backed by UNESCO, to extend preschooling into the countryside"* (Fayek 2017, p.4).

Thanks to the extension of compulsory schooling, the enrolment rate in lower secondary schools will rise to around 90% by 2011 (UNESCO 2016). Despite achievements in literacy, enrolment rates and equal access by gender, it is in terms of contents and cultural rights that the discourse becomes more critical. The modernisation of school contents concerned only scientific disciplines, while humanities contents continued the regime's propaganda, identifying and devaluing enemies while celebrating the Arab-Islamic homeland. As an example, both the Syrian Schoolbook of National and Socialist Education and that of Modern Arab History (scholastics years 2001-2 and 2002-3) report the 1973 conflict of Syria and Egypt against Israel as a glorious war of liberation, despite the defeat, and as an important part of the struggle against colonialism and its protégé Israel. It is a great example of the narrative on Arab identity building throughout history lessons. As for the causes, the books mention Israel's arrogance in ignoring UN resolutions on its withdrawal from the occupied territories and in intensifying hostilities in southern Lebanon. That is why Syria and Egypt agreed to punish Israel and end its expansionist aims. The narrative of the war speaks of the overwhelming superiority of the Arabs despite American aid flowing to Israel. The armistice imposed by the UN halted the conflict, requiring the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The books reported that only the Arabs complied with the terms of the resolution, and Assad's words on the issue: *"We liberated what needed to be liberated. We have freed our will from every bondage (...) we have freed our hearts from fear"* (Trombetta 2004, p. 116)[38]. As for the final balance of the conflict, the books reported that it had the strategic importance of breaking down the wall of fear regarding the confrontation with the Israeli enemy, destroying the myth of the invincible army (Trombetta 2004, p.116).

As for religious education, since coming to power, Bashar al-Asad has promised to reform the Syrian education system, including religious education programs. Nevertheless, the Islamic textbooks used in compulsory religious instruction in Syrian schools have not changed. The texts of 2001, however, mark a change, with Jewish religion discussed respectfully, without any reference to actual Israel (Landis 2003).

Remaining on the religious theme, the exclusion of the ulemā from the national education system due to the 1967 law caused the spread of private Islamic high schools and courses inside mosques, out of government control and against it (Verdeil 2017, p.30). These places were not only training centres for violent Islamism, on the contrary, but there are also numerous testimonies on non-violent cultural centres, where democracy, pluralism and human rights were debated outside the rigid limits imposed by the regime. Numerous non-violent Sunni activists were formed, who

[38] All translations of Trombetta are mine.

animated the street protests since 2011, until the militarization of the conflict made it impossible for them to continue their peaceful political action (Trombetta 2014, pp.220-238).

8.4 2011 revolution and its consequence on education

In this context protests against the regime began in 2011, bringing forward requests for renewal of the political system, against the predominance of the Ba'th party, the emergency laws, censorship and discrimination against ethnic minorities. The sectarian aspect will emerge only after the militarization of the conflict, and the radicalization of opposition fringes transforms the country into a battleground between armed factions and foreign powers (Zecca 2018, p.51). In this radicalization of the conflict, the regime played the main role, arming the traditional minority religious communities against the rebels, depicting them as "terrorists", and spreading confusion, terror and discord. The instrumentalisation of religious and ethnic divisions was essential for the regime to break the popular opposition front that saw citizens of all ethnicities and religions peacefully united against it (Trombetta 2014).

The Syrian civil war over the past decade has destroyed many schools, while many others have been used as hospitals or military camps. The education system has collapsed across much of the country, and only a few schools are still operating in regime-controlled areas, with attendance rates dropping to the lowest in the world. In the schools controlled by the regime, things are relatively unchanged, although worse. The situation is more serious in the rest of the country, with schools targeted as military objectives and lacking teachers and books (Fayek 2017).

In 2016, some 4.3 million out-of-school children and young people needed education assistance, millions of people were displaced in the country, and millions of refugees in neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In those countries, local communities and authorities have suffered from the impact of the crisis on the national economy, infrastructures and social services, including education. The growing tension is evident, especially in Lebanon, where there is no good public education system to manage the situation, leaving about 50% of Syrian children and 90% of 15-24-year-olds out of school (UNESCO 2016). Many refugees have flocked to Jordan, with repercussions on the host education system: an increase in the number of pupils per class, double shifts, etc., without resources to deal with their inclusion (Fayek 2020). Jordanian universities are willing to welcome Syrians eligible for higher education only if they have the required documentation and can pay the fees applicable to international students, which are unaffordable for most Syrian families. Hence, 92% of young Syrians eligible for higher education are inactive (UNESCO 2016). Generally, international humanitarian aid stops at the primary school level. No university plan has been set up for the generation of young graduates to whom the Syrian state does not issue documents and certificates on their studies at home, and who

are therefore unable to enrol in foreign universities. Sporadic scholarships have been offered across Europe, but the reconstruction of Syria depends on what future can be offered to this lost generation of young graduates (Fayek 2017). The London Conference "*Supporting Syria and the Region*" addresses this situation recognising the strategic role of education and the critical need to make long-term commitments to education and to ensure adequate financing for Syria and the Region (UNESCO 2016).

UNESCO works to strengthen the Syrian national education system (UNESCO 2016). UNICEF also supports education by working only with partners approved by Assad in regime-controlled areas, funding teachers' training and reprinting formal school curricula. Arab sources denounce the use of international funding to support the regime's propaganda through school programs, which report the government's version of events over the past decade. The Syrian regime's Ministry of Education, Darem Tabbaa, announced that he would add a new cross-curricular content called *The Causes of War in Syria*, whose materials will be included in subjects such as Arabic, History, Social Studies, Religious Studies and National Education. There are well-founded fears that events could be distorted to the regime's advantage, since the regime's exploitation of school curricula and manipulation of the educational system in Syria is nothing new, as, since the Ba'th Party took power in the 1970s, it tried to influence Syrian youth with its ideologies. Through this project, the regime presents its army as the defender of Syria's independence and freedom against the terrorist financed by external enemies, Western and Zionist, influencing Syrian youths' minds. So far, UNICEF has worked together with the Ministry of Education to develop a "Curriculum B", an intensive programme for pupils who have missed years of study, useful to fill the educational gap, and which involves doing two years in one, and a self-learning programme for pupils in critical health conditions that do not allow them to attend school. Indeed, the Syrian national curriculum is not within the scope of the UNICEF-supported curriculum review process. As for the reprinting of formal curricula, requested by the Ministry as an area of support due to the severe lack of learning material and resources, UNICEF conducted a pre-printing review of the books based on the criteria of cultural sensitivity and neutrality. After this review, UNICEF decided to support the printing of English, French, Maths, and Science textbooks, considered neutral, and not History, Geography, Citizenship or Social Studies textbooks. It is not clear what they did with Arabic and Russian textbooks. In addition, in partnership with the Minster of Education, UNICEF is training teachers in pedagogy and child-centred approaches, psychosocial support, early childhood education, active learning, inclusive education, classroom management and life skills, spending more than 22.5 million USD on education in Syria in 2018. These expenses included training about 28,000 teachers in the "new national curriculum," active learning methods, launching Curriculum B, and providing a self-learning program (Masri and al-Issa 2021).

The revision of educational content was made in 2017, and Jacobi and Pardo (2018) examined it in a report part of the IMPACT-se collection (Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education), a world leader in researching, translating and denouncing intolerance in school textbooks from the Middle East and beyond. This research centre, based in Tel Aviv, has produced countless in-depth studies on the contents of textbooks in many Arab and Muslim countries and the rest of the world with a transparent and reproducible methodology. Their work is, therefore, incomparable in the analysis of humanistic contents concerning peace between peoples, but they are not free from criticism because they are decidedly pro-Israel. Nevertheless, their analysis is the most recent, thorough and reliable. First of all, they underline the entry of Russian as a foreign language into the school. Russia is described as modern, powerful, scientific, secular and friendly, as the Russian empire does not overlap with the Arab world. Instead, the Persian, Greek and Roman empires are depicted as greedy foreign occupiers, there is no acknowledgement of Iranian cultural heritage and contributions over the millennia and no Persian language classes are offered due to the rivalry between the two countries. However, in the name of their current alliance, Khomeini's revolution is presented as positive in its revolutionary and militant nature against Israel and the West. Ancient empires within the Arab Homeland, such as ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, are presented positively; conversely, the ancient cultures of Iran, Turkey and Israel are ignored. As for the contemporary world, textbooks recognise other Arab countries only as part of the Arab Homeland, divided into regions, one of which is Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*), replacing current-day Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. This is evident from the very name of the history book: *History of the Modern and Contemporary Arab Homeland*. Syrian education presents what the authors of the study called "*a pan-Arab revolutionary-imperialist worldview*" (Jacobi & Pardo 2018, p. 3) in which there is no place for Israel, defined as a racist, terrorist and Zionist entity, a terrorist state against which all means are legitimate, including terrorism and suicide attacks. Textbooks often contain anti-Semitic contents and ignore the Holocaust, while the curriculum describes terrorism in Lebanon, Iraq and Israel as armed struggle or resistance. In relation to the West, the attitude is largely negative, with stress on the evils of colonialism and imperialism. As for the civil war, the new curriculum encourages assistance to the victims and emphasizes everywhere the loyalty and commitment of the national army, which plays a central role as a builder and defender of the national identity. The concept of tolerance relates to Christianity, the only religion mentioned besides Sunni Muslim, whereas the Syrian population's complex ethnic and religious composition is denied and not described. There are no Kurdish language studies or references to the heritage and identity of the Kurdish, Alawite, Druze, Shiite and other religious groups. The collective identity is still monolithic and Pan-Arab and textbooks present the borders dividing the Arab states as artificial, having been imposed by

European colonialism. The only positive remark reported by the authors relates to the gender equality issue, which school textbooks deal with even if it relates to a rigid and tradition-bound idea of the family. The conclusion of their analysis is that:

> *"The Syrian curriculum does not meet IMPACT-SE's UNESCO-derived standards on Peace and Tolerance, with the exception of gender equality and tolerance toward the Christian minority. It professes an ideology that is exclusionary, militaristic, narrow-minded and authoritarian […] ignoring the 2011 uprising and dreams for democracy and freedom - which ultimately led to civil war. Rather, it ignores atrocities committed by the regime and denies any non-Arab national aspirations or group identities in the region. […] Assad curriculum does not engage in self-doubt, let alone self-reflection on such topics as peace at home or in the region. The curriculum teaches students that all means are justified to destroy the Other (as exhibited in reality by the use of WMDs). Looking forward, we see a continued alliance with Russia […]. If there is any policy recommendation from this research, it is that the international community should not compromise on meaningful peace education in Syria. The ruthless and rampant violence is the result of a faulty worldview which cannot be resolved without tackling the issue of education"* (Jacobi & Pardo 2018, p.5).

However, if this conclusion is shareable, clarification is needed. It is not peaceful protests that led to the civil war but rather their manipulation and fierce repression by the regime and foreign interferences that caused the conflict to escalate. The work appears biased in considering negatively some historical truths reported in the Syrian curricula, such as the artificiality of the Arab states' borders decided by the European powers:

> *"Syria had been one of those states whose borders were defined by European imperialists rather than the culturally distinct population groupings that were enclosed or divided by them […] the state was 'invented' by the post-First World War settlements"*(Menshawy 2019, p.335).

It is, therefore, necessary to reflect on the educational contents that should replace the existing ones and on how the very different contents in the curricula of the host states of Syrian refugees affect the already strained psychology of young pupils.

It is worth saying that in the areas of the country out of the regime's control, three other educational systems have also imposed themselves with varying fortunes: the Arab rebel, the Kurdish and the Islamist education. In the area under Arab rebels' control, teachers have used private houses and bunkers to hold classes. They have maintained the national curriculum, purging it of images of Assad, nationalist teaching and historical narrative in which Assad is depicted as the builder of the homeland after independence. In Kurdish territory, the autonomous schools declared Kurdish the language of instruction (with autonomy for Arabs and Assyrians), modified the curriculum, and printed new humanities textbooks, especially history. Additionally, they authorised the study of

the Yazidi religion for the first time in Syria's recent history (Fayek 2017). Another important innovation, along with the linguistic one and those on history and religion, concerns gender issues. The Kurdish Women's Movement initiated *Jineolojî*, the science of women and free life, in 2012. The term is composed of the Kurdish word *Jin*, meaning 'woman' or 'life', and *logos*, in Greek meaning 'reason', 'discourse' or, in a broader sense, 'science'. *Jineolojî* is a new science that criticises male hegemony, and the connection between hegemony, oppression and science in history. It considers history the basis of our understanding of the present, pointing out that there has always been an attempt to hide and destroy women's history: it expresses this question in a wordplay in English between *HIStory* and *HERstory*, symbolising how the story "of him" has always been told and how they want now to tell the story "of her". *Jineolojî* wants to reinterpret Mythology, Religion, Philosophy and Science, rediscovering the traces and the truth of women to find paths for the liberation of women, through which aiming at the liberation of the whole society and the construction of a free and communal life. In the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, *Jineolojî* has become an official part of the education system, taught in schools and at Rojava University (Retejin website)[39]. In the area under its control, Daesh also gives education a great deal of importance to transmit the ideology and recruit new militants. Its schools abolished music, art, evolutionary science, history, philosophy and sports, maintaining only the classical subjects: Arabic, mathematics and religious sciences in kuttāb style, and reducing the study cycle from 12 to 9 years. They established compulsory courses in Islamic law for teachers and changed the method of teaching Arabic basing it on the Quranic and medieval texts. Boys and girls had to go to school separately, and girls from six onwards had to wear the hijab. In the only university under their control, they closed all the faculties of humanities, art and literature. They remove images from the classrooms and revise textbooks based on Islamic sources aiming to form not patriotism or nationalism but belonging to the '*Umma*. Geography and history curricula contest the 'colonial borders', as is already the case in government schools, but instead of the Arab motherland, they teach the existence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, which is the full definition of ISIS itself (Fayek 2017). In the meantime, within the Sufi circles, the most articulated critique of Jihadist Islamism advocated by ISIS developed in the doctrinal field itself. While the political positions of Islamic countries have often been ambiguous, in the religious debate there are precise and articulate responses, such as in the book *The Rejection of Isis. A refutation of its religious and ideological foundations* (Al-Yaqoubi 2015). Published by a Syrian Sufi shaykh belonging to the Shadhiliyya, it is among the most noteworthy documents in the panorama of Sufi political

[39] On the topic it is possible to see this video showing a Jineology lesson [Video] Jineolojî in the schools of North and East Syria – JINEOLOJI

commitment in recent years, aimed at countering the spread of Islamic radicalism. The work follows a document drafted in Arabic and published in September 2014, entitled *Open Letter to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi*, and signed by 120 Islamic authorities - many of them Sufis - from around the world. Both texts questions Daesh's ideological and doctrinal principles according to the classical tools of Islamic doctrine (Leccese 2017, p.152).

Today, the regime has regained control of the country, and most of these autonomous educational experiments have ended. In any case, they represent, together with Sufi reflection, a picture of the intellectual, religious and educational ferment in a country still repressed by an authoritarian regime.

9 Morocco

"Le Maroc ressemble à un arbre dont les racines nourricières plongent profondément dans la terre d'Afrique, et qui respire à son feuillage bruissant aux vents de l'Europe.
Cependant, la vie du Maroc n'est pas seulement verticale. Elle s'étend horizontalement vers l'Orient, auquel nous sommes unis par des liens culturels et cultuels séculaires… Ce sont les liens du sang et de l'esprit qui, durant des siècles, sont demeurés vivaces. Nous sommes les héritiers de ceux qui jadis, restituèrent à l'occident toute une culture grecque et méditerranéenne qui, en Europe, était ignorée." (Hassani-Idrissi 2015, p.53).

9.1 National Education, Arabization, and identity synthesis through history.

In the delicate transition period between French Protectorate and the independent Republic, in which centrifugal forces, as in all other Arab countries, played out between internal minorities and Western influence, Morocco maintained its unity and political stability thanks to the collaboration between its historic Alawite monarchy, the Islamic brotherhoods with their religious education institutions, and the nationalist movement (Hammoudi 1997). All of them (monarchy, brotherhoods, and nationalists) enjoyed prestige among the population. They gave great importance to the masses' literacy, especially women, considering schooling as a means of cultural resistance and consolidation of the new nation (Mazzei 2016; 2017). The idea of education propagated by the nationalists was an education open to all, boys and girls of all social classes, capable of teaching young people both Muslim tradition and the modern knowledge necessary to move in the contemporary world. Education, happiness, and freedom were closely linked to the dream of national independence: Moroccan nationalist ideology had succeeded in linking women's dream of personal independence to the whole people's dream of national independence. This change in mentality first appeared in a change in clothing linked to female schooling: when the nationalists began to send their daughters to school for the first time, they allowed them to wear the *jallàbiyya* (traditional male dress) because it was lighter and more practical than the *hayk* (traditional female dress) (Mernissi 1996).

Overlapping cultural influences reflected in education, especially in high social class nationalist families' children, with educational paths starting in Quranic schools, continuing in national primary schools, and ending in French high schools. This mixed education ensured parents that their children would first acquire a traditional education based on the fundamental values of Islam and belonging to the *Umma*. The educational concept of the traditional *msid* still considers that educating people means educating them to be good Muslims and educating them to respect the sacred boundaries, such as, among others, those existing between men and women or between Christians and Muslims, and that children must obey authority to respect these boundaries. The

teacher ensured this obedience by all means, including the *falaka*, a long whip that instilled fear and induced complacency. The only content was the Quran, and pupils learned it with a mnemonic method. The mixed education path permitted to add to this traditional education the nationalistic one, based on the Arabic language and belonging, on civic values such as patriotism and national belonging. Finally, it added a European education through which pupils would learn French in order to enter university, find a good job, and feel they belong to the international elite. In this way, the "independence" generation could master the two European and Arab cultures and move between the two worlds, feeling that they belong simultaneously to the *Umma*, the Arabic-speaking nationalist community, and the international French-speaking elite. In the nationalist pedagogical ideal, a modern young man (or woman) needs a broad knowledge of both Arab and French culture; this latter is considered essential for reading French newspapers and possibly understanding the enemy's intentions. The nationalists encouraged young students to assimilate Western knowledge, starting with languages and traditions and ending with the fields in which they are more up-to-date, such as science and mathematics. At the same time, they encouraged them to become acquainted with the works of prominent Muslims, such as Avicenna and al-Khwārizmi's treatises, because they considered it essential that young people value their ancestors and be aware of the great minds of the Arab world (Mernissi 1996; Mazzei 2018c). The clash between the values and narratives taught in the three different education systems is remarkable and creates confusion among young people. The traditional system taught gender segregation; the nationalist system rejects it even if it is based on Muslim tradition, teaching Islam in religious classes and following the Islamic calendar for festivities and daily prayers. In contrast, the French system is based on secularism, equality, and alleged universalism.

Morocco gained its independence in 1956, and, since education in the first half of the century was primarily reserved for the elite (Gandolfi 2011, p. 19), very few Moroccans had a university degree, 80% were illiterate, and only 13% had benefited from French education, which absorbed 80% of education resources. Alongside the French-speaking Moroccan elite, an Arabic-speaking elite graduated from the traditional universities of Qarawiyyīn in Fez and Yusufiya in Marrakech (Rose 2017, pp. 327-348). The nationalist movement boosted the modernisation of education and its accessibility and gratuitousness for all, instilling high hopes in the population. The constitution of independent Morocco affirmed the right to education for all citizens regardless of gender, ethnicity, and social conditions and established free public education from primary school to university. The country promoted the nationalisation of curricula, introduced Arabic as the language of instruction in primary schools and partly replaced French in subsequent cycles in a system developed on the French model. The generalisation of education also resulted in a more

significant proportion of the population learning French, a privilege previously enjoyed only by the elite (Mazzei 2018c; Ennaji 2005, p. 205).

The most problematic colonial legacy in education concerns precisely language, one of the first and most important challenges facing independent national education until today. During colonialism, French grafted onto a multilingual and multi-ethnic context: Morocco had its Arabic dialect (*Darija*) and numerous Amazigh dialects spoken by the local non-Arab population, the main ones being *Tarifit*, *Tashilhit*, and *Tamazight* (see Chapter 4.4). None of these was the traditional language of education, religion, and culture, a role played by Classical Arabic (*Fuṣḥā*) with which French competed, polarising the linguistic and educational landscape between Arabic speakers and French speakers. French has quickly become not only a foreign language but also a language necessary to succeed in study and work, and part of the population daily speaks it in interpersonal relations. Modern higher education was inaccessible to those without a high proficiency in French, and traditional higher education was inaccessible to those without a high level of Classical Arabic. Literature often refers to the linguistic situation briefly described as *triglossia*, i.e. the coexistence of three languages in the same population with overlapping and conflicting relationships. In reality, there are more than three languages, namely Classical Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Amazigh languages, and French, so it is preferable to speak about multilingualism (Gandolfi 2011, pp. 55-8; Rose 2017, pp. 329-30; Ennaji 2005). The present research is not about linguistics or socio-linguistics, but from these fields, it is possible to draw useful information. As Ennaji states in his book:

> *"Colonial and postcolonial political forces have endeavoured to reconstruct the national identity of Morocco, on the basis of cultural representations and ideological constructions closely related to nationalist and ethno-linguistic trends [...] the issue of language is at the centre of the current cultural and political debates in Morocco"* (Ennaji 2005, p. xi).

Since independence, Moroccan education has seen decades of contradictory reforms, alternating between secular modernism and religious traditionalism. Among the early goals of independent nationalistic education was the training of a new generation of administrative staff, to replace civil servants of the French protectorate, and the Arabization of the education system, by replacing French with Arabic as the language of learning, to connect with the rest of the Arab Islamic world and break with colonialism. Arabization proceeded slowly, partly due to the absence of Moroccan teachers able to speak and teach Arabic, as the few Moroccan graduates had studied in institutions where French was the language of instruction. To cope with this, the minister of Education hired teachers from Egypt (Rose 2017) and recruited others from Quranic schools (Ennaji 2005, p.206). Arabisation was certainly not just a linguistic issue. However, it responds to the search for a unified

national identity transcending the multiple identities that characterised Morocco and that colonialism tried to manipulate to divide the population. In opposition, nationalists saw the pride in Arab identity as the instrument for cultural independence from France. For this reason, they attempted to spread it in education through language policy and humanities content. Arabic replaced French in primary school, with the return of the mnemonic method to teach it. However, scientific disciplines continue to be taught in French because they do not have good translations in Arabic, and the first history textbook was still in this language (Hassani-Idrissi 2015). Arabization never reached the private education sector and the higher education system: the elite continued to study in French-speaking institutions and maintained preferential access to universities and the world of work (Rose 2017).

In 1963 compulsory primary school attendance was decreed (Mazzei 2018c); in the 1970s, about half of all children received an education (Rose 2017). The independence generation had unique job opportunities after school and university to work in public administration and education and to contribute to nation-building. Education in this period was the engine of social mobility, ensuring access to the labour market (Rose 2017). In the first decades after independence, schools were the primary means of introducing modernity; teachers encouraged free and critical thinking and openness to the rest of the world (Ennaji 2005, p. 209).

In regards to the relationship between public and religious education, the royal decree of 1968 emphasised the importance of Quranic schools, now considered in the system as kindergartens (Ennaji 2005, p. 216). Therefore, there is no competition between public and religious schools: the state's highest authority tries to avoid conflict between the two education systems and lays the foundations for their subsidiarity. As for Islamic universities, King Hassan II tried to diminish the power of the *'ulamā'* educated in the madrasa of *al-Qarawiyyīn* by creating other institutes that could compete with it, such as the *Dar al-Hadal-Hassaniyya* in 1964 and the Departments of Islamic Studies in modern universities since 1970. In this period, the religious framework was fragmented and internally competitive, and in these new religious institutes, today's most important Sufi brotherhood in Morocco, the *Būdshīshiyya*, began to emerge (Chih 2013).

A major educational reform was enacted in 1970. One of its objectives was to develop a history curriculum that taught history from the Moroccan point of view, considering it essential for an education truly independent from Europe. That year, the first history textbook was printed in Arabic, and the identity function of history teaching was predominant over its cognitive function. One of the main issues is the assimilation of the Amazigh population to the Arab Nation that nationalists want to build, manifested through a historical vision that highlights the community of origin and the mixing of ethnic groups throughout history. It explains the antagonisms arising from the Arab conquest and invites all Moroccans to consider the history of the Arabs, even in its initial

stages, as their own and to be proud of it, just as they are invited to consider the Amazigh their ancestors and their history as their own. This historical vision has a psychological potential that leads young Amazigh speakers to learn Arabic language and history, even pre-Islamic ones, as their own language and history. History textbooks aim to construct a homogeneous image of national identity that transcends ethnic diversities. This concern is reflected in the question of origins, where the primacy of the Eastern contribution over the European one was initially chosen to be taught based on the supposed similarities of the local Amazigh languages with the Egyptian and Ethiopian languages. The same concept is found when the books teach that, during their long coexistence, peaceful relations were established between Arab and Amazigh tribes resulting in ethnic mixing and mutual influence leading to the sedentarisation of the Arabs and the Arabisation of the Berbers.

Regarding the positioning of Morocco within the world, history curricula inextricably link national history to the whole Maghreb, from ancient times until independence, when the national realities were formalised. The Maghrebi unity was founded exactly on the common ancient Amazigh inhabitants. After the Maghreb, Arab history, in general, played a significant role; the one of Sub-Saharan Africa is ignored while the European one found space, especially in the contemporary age. Textbooks narrated the history of Europe in an ambivalent manner. The innovative aspects of the Greeks, Romans, Renaissance, and Enlightenment civilisations are valued, as well as modernisation and industrialisation. The expansion of Europe into the world in any historical period is treated negatively, attributing to it the squandering of wealth, the brake on development, and the extermination of others (Hassani-Idrissi 2015).

Compulsory schooling policies, supported by substantial public investment, enabled a strong increase in schooling rates after independence: 83% of school-age children attended primary school in 1980. In this period, also Arabization was complete and showed its limits: ordinary Moroccans had no social mobility because they were not competent in French (Rose 2017). This contradiction is an example of the inequality between the different languages and one of the consequences of the unequal distribution of languages in terms of status, functions, and domains (Ennaji 2005).

9.2 Globalization, Scientific breakthrough, Radicalization

The linguistic return to Arabic brought with it a general return to tradition, also because the lack of Moroccan teachers competent in Arabic led to hiring teachers from Egypt with their Islamist background (Rose 2017) and recruiting others from Quranic schools (Ennaji 2005, p. 206). These teachers used religious and traditional sources to teach Classical Arabic. In addition, there was a new emphasis on Quranic schools (*msid*) and Islamic studies, which even replaced philosophy at

university, as philosophy was mainly understood as European philosophy to be studied in French. As reported by Rose:

> *"Islamic studies is a discipline for monolingual students of low aspiration; its introduction in the 1980s was designed to displace the teaching of philosophy which the king saw as radicalizing the country's students: its employment prospects are dismal"* (Rose 2017, p. 340).

While history was used as a discipline through which to build a national identity, philosophy was considered a dangerous Western import that would sow rebellion among young people. As in other countries, the danger of rebellions and protests stemmed from the economic crisis of the time characterised by a global economic measure such as the Structural Adjustment imposed by the World Bank. It caused a decrease in the government's budgetary allocations to public education and the consequent governmental encouragement of the private sector in order to fill the deficits of the defunded public one. The economic situation also affected the emergence of Muslim fundamentalism in education, where conservative and Islamist teachers used public schools to promote a strict version of Islam. Poor scholastic environments, which have limited links with Western institutes and universities and rely on poor and biased translations of Western thoughts and studies, helped Islamists in their propaganda (Ennaji 2005, p. 209).

The 1987 reform introduced objective-based teaching in the direction of the current worldwide pedagogical trend. However, the history curriculum underwent substantial changes under the influence of a growing Islamist ideology. The government preferred to exclude any possibility of addressing the question of Amazigh origins, removing Ancient history from the list of topics. Instead, some lessons on the history of sub-Saharan Africa were added, for the first and last time, as the Islamists wanted to give importance to the partial belonging of this region of the world to the Islamic community (Hassani-Idrissi 2015, p. 55, 62). In these decades, schools, as agents of the State, dedicated their efforts to assimilating the Amazigh population through the promotion of Islam and the policy of Arabisation. School curricula stressed that Morocco has one religion, Islam, and one language, Arabic. Most of the teachers are non-Amazigh and express their negative attitude toward this population and their language, defining them as uncivilised and forbidding them to speak their language to learn Arabic (Ennaji 2005, p. 217).

In Morocco, there was not a significant scientific breakthrough. University and private schools continued to use French for scientific subjects in order not to lag behind the rest of the world in science and technology. In fact, full Arabisation collided with the possibility of accessing the most up-to-date scientific knowledge and pursuing the scientific progress of the West.

The steady expansion of schooling began to decline in the mid-1980s. In 1988, only 68% of school-age children attended school, and there was a high dropout rate. Demographic pressure and

national policies of curbing public expenditure are among the causes of this reversal, which is familiar to many Arab countries. The spread of child labour, common among boys and permitted by law from the age of 12, prevented the expansion of schooling in rural areas and among the most disadvantaged social groups. The educational environment was inadequate and characterised by overcrowded classrooms, poor teaching aids, and rigid educational models (Mazzei 2018c).

9.3 Education in the new century. Minorities' rights, loyalty to the monarchy, and Sufism

The awareness that it is unreasonable to define Morocco's identity as only Arab began to emerge (Rose 2017) and appears in the latest version of the constitution (1996) stating that: *"The features of socio-political continuity are Islam, the linguistic and cultural plurality of the Moroccan society and the monarchy"* (Ennaji 2005, p. 200). Therefore, the Muslim religion and monarchy are the two cornerstones of Moroccan people's sense of belonging and unity, not the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic unity, in recognition of structural plurality. However, this has not yet resulted in clear language policies, and in recognition of Tamazight as an official language. Increasingly more people advocated the need to teach Tamazight in schools, considering the sole use of standard Arabic in education in the same way as the sole use of French, namely a legacy of the Arab conquest, such as the second is a legacy of the French conquest. Leaving aside ideological reasons, in schools' reality, Amazigh children find it challenging to assimilate material taught in Arabic or French, especially when their parents are illiterate (Ennaji 2005, pp. 199-209).

At the beginning of the 21st century, illiteracy had diminished to the 50% of the total population; among women, it had decreased to 65%, but it was still a major social and pedagogical problem, as it was very high, particularly among rural people and women, contributing to widening the socio-economic gap between lower and upper-class people. With the death of the old king and the ascension to the throne of Mohammed VI in 1999, one of the government's primary objectives was to modernise education in terms of literacy, language policy, and curriculum content.

Official documents began to admit that it is more correct to speak of an Arab-Amazigh identity, also linked to the Iberian Peninsula and West Africa and looking towards a Europe that is increasingly becoming a destination for young Moroccan migrants. An important change in school language policy came with the National Charter of Education (2000). For the first time, it recognised Tamazight as a country's official language and gave it a role in primary education as the mother tongue of almost half of the Moroccan children (Rose 2017). At the same time, it introduced local autonomy in contrast to the centralism that dominates education in the Arab countries, affirming that about 30% of the curricula must be adapted to each region to meet its needs. As a result, Tamazight was tentatively introduced in 300 primary schools for the first time in Moroccan history in the 2003-2004 school year, and the Royal Institute of Berber Culture in

Rabat planned to standardise and codify it (Ennaji 2005). This recognition of the Amazigh language raised awareness of the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism in building a tolerant, democratic, and open society (Rose 2017). Despite the enthusiasm shown by some authors, the National Charter was criticised by Amazigh activists because only two of its hundred articles deal with their situation and in a questionable way. The first article states that Tamazigh can be used in primary school *"to facilitate the learning of the official language"*, i.e., Standard Arabic; the second article mentions that some universities will soon be able to teach Amazigh language and culture. They considered the charter's provisions insufficient because they claimed compulsory and generalised teaching of Tamazight in the educational system. Despite the criticisms, it is undeniable that the text represents a progress in this population's rights and in recognition of that language. It is not possible to say the same of Moroccan Arabic, excluded from education and official communication and not considered a national language. The pressure towards total Arabisation, now supported only by the most conservative and religious fundamentalists, waned in favour of an emphasis on the advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism. French continued to dominate in the labour market, administration, media, and overall in science and technology, which is why French-Arabic bilingualism is still often preferred in education to allow students to approach these fields. Primary education has been Arabised, and Arabic is the language of instruction for both literary and scientific subjects; in high schools, however, technical studies such as economics, mechanics, computing, and accounting are taught in French, and there is also a remarkable tendency to reinforce English, Spanish and German in school curricula. The primary language of instruction at the university level is French, especially for economics, management, science, and technology (Ennaji 2005, pp. 200-18).

In 2001, The King launched a vast campaign to fight illiteracy by organising literacy courses in mosques throughout the country and, in 2002, he set up a national literacy department with the aim of disseminating literacy in the country as one of the government priorities. In the same year, the authorities reformed and modernised the education system, primarily by extending the duration of foundational education from primary school to the end of junior high school (Ennaji 2005, pp. 199-208). This reform adopted the competence-based approach and aimed at developing learners' autonomy by placing them in situations of knowledge construction. New history textbooks began with the Phoenicians' arrival, thus continuing to use the old concept of 'discovery' of a territory, which implies a denial of the local other, and therefore obscuring the issues of origins, of the Amazigh, and the various theses about them again. Furthermore, these textbooks often evoke protests against the *Berber Dahir* of 1930 because of the capacity of this event to prevent any attempt at ethnic or cultural division within the Moroccan nation and to emphasize the unity of the Moroccan people and its cohesion. Pupils are invited to recognize themself in the national identity

and thus to suppress any tendency towards particularistic identification. In the repeated evocation of this *Dahir*, it is possible to see the desire to reproduce the immunity that Morocco showed in the face of colonialism's attempts to divide the Moroccan people. The reference to colonial practice aims to create guilt dynamics in the pupil, repressing any particularistic impulse that does not conform to the standard national ideal transmitted by the textbooks. The narrative of the colonial period portrays the homeland as a sacred territory that has to be defended, preferring a nationalist perspective to social analysis. Completely absent from this narrative are the Moroccans who favoured foreign penetration, the notables who worked with the French administration and benefited economically from it. The monarchy's role in this period was also scarcely treated, as it was subordinate to the French administration.

On the other hand, the story of the exile of King Mohammed V, who preferred exile to the renunciation of his nationalist commitment, is highlighted as it strengthened the loyalty between the people and the monarchy. His figure has acquired more and more space in the official historical narrative, overshadowing other Moroccan and Maghrebi or Arab anti-colonial heroes. In general, monarchy-based nationalism has supplanted the Unitary Maghreb approach of the 1970s. The history of the rest of Maghreb and Andalusia is only considered when it is incorporated into the history of Morocco and its Idrisid, Almoravid, Almohad, or Merinid dynasties. The modern era allows the authors of history textbooks to present a Morocco that differs from the rest of the Maghreb by a national identity whose strength enabled it to repel the Iberians and the Ottomans, unlike Algeria and Tunisia, which had to submit to the Ottoman Empire. The advent of Sharifism and the birth of national sentiment marked the singularity of modern times for Morocco, bringing it closer to European countries. Contemporary Moroccan history is now treated only on a national scale and no longer on a regional scale, telling about colonialism in the region and the transnational Arab, Muslim, or Maghrebi anticolonial movement. The downsizing of the Maghreb dimension is linked to the Algerian-Moroccan problems over Western Sahara and their negative impact on the construction of the Arab Maghreb Union (Hassani-Idrissi 2015). Finally, it is important to stress that European history gained more space with this reform.

Regarding modern and contemporary times, after the terroristic attacks at the turn of the century, the government decided to mitigate the predatory image of Europe and the West in textbooks to avoid instilling hatred in the younger generations. Changes are significant also for Ancient history, now narrated more as a Mediterranean history:

> *"Isn't the rehabilitation of the history of Antiquity in the 1st cycle and the adoption of the Mediterranean scale in the second cycle aimed at building bridges between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, in a way so that Europe does not seem distant or foreign?"* (Hassani-Idrissi 2015, p. 62).

To use Mernissi's concepts (2002), it is possible to read this choice as a pedagogical attempt to teach how to cross cultural borders, often built ideologically for political reasons. The links between awareness of historical moments and becoming a "good citizen" are present in textbooks and policy guidelines and are also enacted in the classroom. Both curriculum content and classroom interactions contribute to building a sense of Morocanness based on national and religious belonging. Pupils are expected to become celebrants and guardians of this Moroccan identity (Pellegrini 2020). Alongside the linguistic and historical fields, it is worth analysing the role of religion. While fundamentalists prevailed in the 1980s, the picture changed at the dawn of the new century. The Būdshīshiyya Sufi Brotherhood has among its affiliates Ahmad al-Tawfiq (b. 1943)[40], historian and university professor, appointed Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in 2002, and Ahmad Qustas, an influential pedagogue who is also part of the government. Chic (2013) reported his idea of education and instruction:

> *"A well-educated man is the one who has a good general culture, knows the rules of dialogue, contemporary ideological systems and modern forms of communication, is open to foreign languages and cultures, knows the Shari'a and Islamic sciences, the Quran, the Prophet's acts, jurisprudence, the lives of the disciples and saints of Islam, the history of the different religious currents and, finally, is one who puts into practice what he preaches"* (Chic 2013).

Equal importance is given to Islamic knowledge and foreign language and culture, but above all to the rule of the dialogue and the knowledge of the different religious currents: in this way, a man's thoughts can be defined as moderate and open to the world. The participation of tolerant and non-extremist religious personalities in politics plays a vital role in the direction in which education is heading from the point of view of democracy and tolerance. Indeed, the Moroccan state of that time seemed to be trying to respond to the social changes in Moroccan society, summarised by Mernissi's (2002) words:

> *"The static Arab world of my generation, which was taught by parents and teachers to <<sit, obey and be quiet>>, has disappeared. A new and dynamic Arab world emerged in which our youth instinctively adopted constant mental and physical mobility as a survival technique, juggling divergent opinions and drawing on different cultures"* (Mernissi 2002, p.14).

[40] Al-Tawfiq is a strong supporter of Sufi groups. He is a writer for the Association of Moroccan Authors for Publication, as well as the Vice President of the Moroccan Association for Historical Research. Al-Tawfiq is an advocate of interfaith dialogue, and is currently on the Board of World Religious Leaders for The Elijah Interfaith Institute. https://themuslim500.com/profiles/ahmad-al-tawfiq/ . He also directs the King Abd al-Aziz Al-Saoud Institute for Islamic Studies and Humanities in Casablanca and taught history at Muhammad V University in Rabat from 1970 to 1989, and was director of the Centre for African Studies at the same university. In 1995, he became director of the National Library. Tawfiq, Ahmad at- (1943–) | Encyclopedia.com

She bases her educational analysis on the two opposing concepts of static and dynamic to describe two different models of education systems: a static one, based on respect for borders, and a dynamic one, which invites people to cross them. Both could be based on Islam, depending on the interpretation. Traditional education in the *msid* is still based on a static concept against which Mernissi reaffirms Islam's humanistic and rationalist tradition, represented for her by the *Mu'tazilist*[41]. The writer wants to emphasize the existence of a humanistic and rationalist Islamic tradition, often overshadowed by the stereotyped opposition between the rational West and the dogmatic, irrational, and static Islam. She affirms that, unfortunately, only in elitist educational structures can a humanistic and rationalist Islamic education open to modern sciences and languages be found. However, there are no traces of it in public schools at the beginning of the century (Mernissi 2002).

The new educational Moroccan trend is based instead on a dynamic concept, aiming at providing pupils with the conceptual tools to cross religious, ethnic, and national boundaries, to understand the other and the world in its differences, being theoretically in agreement with what the author claims. Morocco is continuing its educational development in the way marked at the beginning of the century. The presence of *Būdshīshiyya* is particularly relevant in the country's politics, with many members among intellectuals and senior state leaders. It plays a fundamental role in social mediation in a context strongly imbued with Sufi culture and in which the policy of Muhammad VI aims to counter Islamist movements not only with repressive methods but also through cooperation between the state and the Brotherhoods (Leccese 2017, p. 151). It is perhaps this alliance that creates the Moroccan exception to the 'globalisation, scientific breakthrough and radicalisation' paradigm in an education system that allows the humanities to play their role without sacrificing them to faith and science and which tries to harmonise economic globalisation with a tolerant approach to religion.

One example of content influenced by this religious approach is the Moroccan relationship with Europe and Israel. The Marrakesh Declaration (2016) already quoted states that from a tolerant Muslim perspective, one should not reject everything that comes from the West in order to defend traditions but should separate what is good from what is evil. This declaration was the result of the *Marrakesh Conference on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities (25-27/01/2016)* organised by the Moroccan Minister of Endowment and Islamic Affairs Ahmad Al Tawfiq, together with the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates. This conference was held under the auspices of The King

[41] Movement of thought that in the IX century brought together scientists, philosophers, mathematicians and lovers of Greek culture in an attempt to introduce reason and personal opinion into the political process within the '*Umma*.

Mohammed VI of Morocco. Hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from over 120 countries took part in it, including representatives of Islamic and international organizations and leaders from different religious groups and nationalities. The conference was born out of a need to reflect on and react to the severe violence and religious extremism experienced within the Muslim world, affecting Muslims and people of other faiths worldwide. It aimed to reaffirm the principle of the Charter of Medina, described as:

> *"A constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and blessings be upon him, and the people of Medina, which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith"* (Marrakesh Declaration 2016, p. 1).[42]

This not means that the Muslim religion loses its role in the education system; on the contrary, it keeps a central one. In primary school, Islamic education is taught for four hours a week for the first two years and three hours for the remaining four years, while history, geography, and civics are taught for one and a half hours a week only in the last two classes. In middle school, Islamic education occupies 2 hours a week yearly and social studies 3 hours a week. Islamic education is taught in all secondary schools, with more hours in the literary branch, where it is taught in the same number of hours as history and geography. A unique feature is the existence of the subject of 'Islamic philosophy', which is not combined with general philosophy: this subject is added to Islamic teaching in the instruction of the younger generation in the second and third year of high school (Mazzei 2016). However, what is more interesting is the inner message of this religious teaching. While most Arab countries refrain from addressing the issue of anti-Semitism and from including the topic of the Holocaust in their school curricula, Morocco appears to be taking a different approach. King Mohammed VI has frequently spoken of the need to condemn anti-Semitism, instil the values of tolerance and religious coexistence in Moroccan society and learn the lessons of the Holocaust while stressing the pivotal role of education in this context. At a 2018 conference in Marrakesh, Moroccan education minister Sa'id 'Amzazi said, that Morocco was considering *"teaching the lessons of the greatest tragedies in history, including the Holocaust, as an important component of high-quality education"*. This means that when a pupil from Morocco deals with the Holocaust issue in European schools, he has already studied it in his country, and there is a shared awareness of the problem, unlike pupils from other Arab countries where the topic has been omitted or distorted because of the current conflict with Israel. In addition, the King stresses that the Jews and Christians living in his kingdom enjoy equal rights and freedom of worship. The king's position on the issues of coexistence, tolerance, and pluralism is clear:

[42] Topic already dealt with in Mazzei 2021

"Racism in general – and anti-Semitism in particular – are by no means just a way of thinking. Anti-Semitism is the antithesis of freedom of expression. It implies a denial of the other and is an admission of failure, inadequacy and an inability to coexist. It implies an anachronistic return to a mythicized past […] That battle is neither military nor financial. It is, above all, educational and cultural. And that battle has a name: education. For the sake of our children, it is crucial to win it because it is they who will benefit from it and be its torchbearers […]. *Through this quality education, our children must be taught history, using, to this effect, a wide range of historical sources and narratives and shedding light not only on humanity's glorious moments, but also its darkest hours. Education must help children to embrace openness and human and cultural diversity. It should foster the emergence of curious, tolerant and enlightened minds that can flourish and thrive in countries like Morocco, where cultural interaction and mutual enrichment are part of everyday life. My country, where Arab-Islamic, African and Judeo-Christian civilizations have long mingled, honours an immutable tradition of moderation, coexistence and mutual understanding"*[43].

These speech excerpts do not need much explanation, given their clarity and explicit reference to the topic of the present research. The topic of history teaching is treated, providing for the use of different sources and narratives, thus repudiating a sensationalist nationalist approach that only shows the nation's greatness and the miseries of others. The official Moroccan narrative tells that King Mohammad V, during World War II, defended the Jews during the Holocaust and adds that, for 3,000 years, Morocco served as a haven for Jews who fled from Judea, the Roman Empire, Andalusia, and Europe: for these reasons, the Jews and Muslims in the Moroccan kingdom are proud of their shared history. On the other hand, it is worth saying that not all agreed with this policy. The pro-Palestinian organizations in Morocco condemned the discussion on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the country and the participation of officials in conferences dealing with the Holocaust, accusing them of abetting the falsification of history. They opposed the inclusion of the Holocaust in the curricula and called for material on the crimes of the Zionist occupation to be included instead (Chernitsky 2020). Unfortunately, there seems to be no room to escape the competition and narrate the Shoah and the Palestinian Apartheid. In this light, the Moroccan choice appears motivated by good values but also by geopolitical and financial convenience.

Leaving aside how national education deals with the specific Jewish and Israel issues, which is nevertheless representative of a particular way of understanding Islamic belonging, it is necessary to stress how Muslim belonging in Morocco is transmitted as detached from the Arab one more than in any other Arab country, especially Syria, as showed in the previous chapter. Islam in Morocco is superior to Arabism. This emerges clearly from textbooks that speak about the

[43] September 2018, message for the UN round table *The power of education in preventing racism and discrimination: the case of anti-Semitism*, New York

Ottoman Empire in favourable terms because it spread Islam throughout the world and not in the negative terms of the Arab historiography (Hassani-Idrissi 2015, p. 60). It should be noted, however, that Morocco was not conquered by the Ottoman Empire, unlike other Arab countries, and therefore can speak of it as a worthy adversary rather than an enemy that subjugated it for centuries. This clarification, however, does not minimise the previous argument, i.e. that there is no trace of ethnic or religious intolerance in school textbooks, but rather a glorification of the nation, Islam, and the monarchy.

The Moroccan education system tries to build a solid Muslim identity tolerant toward other religions, in which the religious element prevails and eclipses the ethnic one, especially after the weakening of the pan-Arab ideological drive. It is a Muslim identity strongly connoted at the national level, aimed at emphasising Morocco's independent history and current special features. Morocco appears characterised by a broad theoretical convergence with Western education on the values of tolerance, pacifism, and respect for others, also for the recognising of the state of Israel and the right of Jews in Morocco, as well as the cultural rights of the Amazigh ethnic group. The authorities seem interested in spreading this idea of Morocco as the most moderate, peaceful, and tolerant Arab-Muslim country. This claim is based on the stability of the monarchy and of the country as a whole, reflected in the absence in Moroccan history of bloody coup d'états and conflicts based on religious or ethnic fanaticism similar to those in other Arab-Muslim countries.

9.4 The critical status of education today

All the literature agrees that, despite the reforms, in 2013 the quality of education is still low, and there are still disparities in access to high schools between boys and girls and between urban and rural areas, as well as high illiteracy rates, and a shortage of personnel (Rose 2017). A large part of the Moroccan population lives in rural areas. Life in these peripheral areas is what the Moroccan way of life represents: low school attendance and high dropouts due to the distance between schools and children's homes; lack of public transportation and lack of motivation among parents who are often illiterate; absence of junior and senior high schools (Ennaji 2005, p. 208).

Like other North African countries, there is a large expenditure on education, which does not produce the desired results. This failure is attributed by some to the non-implementation of language reform and thus to the gap between the languages spoken by pupils and the languages of instruction, Classical Arabic and French, so much so that it could be argued that the local population has long lived as foreigners in their own home (Rose 2017). Many people prefer the bilingualism between French and Arabic for practical reasons: they see French as the technical-scientific language and Arabic as the literary, religious, and political language. Despite the policy of Arabisation and the criticism against the use of French, considered a colonial legacy, French is

still the language of social promotion, allowing access to secure jobs and raising one's social status (Ennaji 2005).

The parallel French education system continues to train the elite and offer job opportunities, while the public system is free but low quality (Rose 2017). In addition, there are Arab and other international private schools and an uncommon but present system of reformed Quranic schools, which offers all levels of education (Mazzei 2018c). Private education has developed rapidly from kindergarten to higher education, and it is usually so expensive that it is affordable only to middle and upperclass families. They are characterised by a massive use of French and English, modern syllabi, equipment and facilities, and information technology. The job market increasingly demands graduates from these schools (Ennaji 2005, p. 210).

Traditional education is mainly reduced to *msid* used as pre-schools, thanks to which preschool attendance is high for the region (67%). Without that, preschool education would be almost non-existent. Few continue the traditional educational path, called *ta'alim asil*, the authentic education, at *al-Qarawiyyīn* University, now in decline and attended by the rural population.

The primary school enrolment rate is high for males and females, but the non-enrolment rate is high too. In colleges, there are higher enrolment rates for women and in the cities. Linguistic factors continue to influence the students' choice of university courses. Those with an excellent education in French and English access to scientific faculties taught in these languages, while the most popular faculties are humanities, social sciences, and Islamic sciences taught in Arabic, with the aim to find employment in an overburdened public sector; this makes these graduates mostly unemployed. There is a class division based on language and a high functional illiteracy rate. The population is young and growing, 60% urbanised with internal migration to coastal cities and external migration to Europe, mainly illegal and male, due to unemployment and the relative failure of the education system (Rose 2017).

Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia developed similar education systems, even if they differ in ideological and religious aspects. The main common feature is that they have tended to re-appropriate their identity through the Arabic language, considered the unifying element of the country against the French culture imposed by colonialists, despite the Amazigh component of their population. The adoption of the Arabic language found a broad consensus, but today it is possible to see it as a block to these countries' development (Zani 2005, p. 234; Jacob & Gardelle 2020).

In comparison with the other Arab education systems, Morocco also has a centralised education system, but in recent decades, efforts have been made to create areas of local autonomy through which historical minorities, whose language and culture are at least formally recognised, can be culturally included. As regards the inclusion of historical minorities and migrant pupils, Morocco

is the Arab country that most attempts to conform to the European model of protection and inclusion, at least theoretically and with significant limitations. This attempt is reflected in the inclusion of West African pupils in schools and the legitimization of the Tamazight language. However, this shift in educational policy reported in the literature should also be analysed in its practical implications, which in reality do not seem very widespread. Despite the proclamations, there seems to be a lack of financial and human resources to implement courses of study in the Amazigh languages.

The poverty that characterises the country and the corruption that characterises its public administration, the lack of qualified personnel and adequate school facilities, and the high percentage of the rural population whose children more often go to the fields with their parents than go to school, are the reality that prevents the creation of an efficient education system.

The very recent publication cured by Jacob & Gardelle (2020) demonstrated that the issue treated in this work is a relevant topic in current literature where it is possible to find similarities between approaches and reflections. Identity construction in schools of West (French) African countries is analysed through similar conceptual tools, such as Anderson's concept of imagined community (Jacob and Gardelle 2020, p.2) and the critical analysis of national identities and their political building. Scholars have developed these analyses through long and in-depth fieldwork, providing solidity to these reflections. Countries such as Morocco, treated in chapter 9 by Pellegrini (2020), are favourably disposed towards foreign scholars, especially European ones, because of their desire to appear open and tolerant. The same cannot be affirmed for Syria, where it is undoubtedly challenging to conduct fieldwork research that questions government policies in identity construction through education. This has supported the decision to interview Arabic-speaking migrants in Europe, mainly Syrian, far from the limits to freedom of expression imposed by the regime, so that they can provide details and information on how identity policies were implemented and negotiated, and how much they were appropriate in their school experience. Although the interviews concern people from many Arab Mediterranean countries, the most significant number of interviews will be devoted to Syrians to fill the gaps in the literature.

SECTION 2 – EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

10 The empirical research design

The introduction already explains the research questions behind the empirical research and its aims and objectives, and the chapter devoted to the theoretical framework explains the link between theories, historical and cultural reconstruction, and field research in the framework of the multifactorial analysis of education systems (Nussbaum 2011) and subsequently of people experiences inside them. In this chapter, aims and objectives are briefly recalled and summarized, leaving room for a more detailed description of the empirical research methodology, its tools and procedures, and the data analysis method.

10.1 Aims and Objectives

The main aim is to explore how educational identity building emerges in Arabic-speaking pupils, parents, and teachers' educational experiences between the Arab countries from which they arrive and the European countries where they live. Most interviewees come from Syria, and the Syrian context is the one that, according to the literature analysis, needs a deeper exploration since it is studied less in the literature compared to the Moroccan and other Mediterranean Arab countries. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the interviews with Syrian people, comparing them mainly to the interviews with Moroccans and using the interviews with other Arab people to understand how the results can be generalizable to the entire area.

The objectives could be summarised as follow:

- bringing out the most important historical, sociological, and pedagogical elements from the in-depth analysis of individual life stories focusing on identity building, belonging, and diversity;
- interpret today's educational individual experiences in Arab countries through the history of education and bring out historical and traditional elements that influence them today, relating, especially, to religion, colonialism, and independence.
- interpret what newly migrated parents, pupils, and teachers think about European education in the light of this knowledge, understanding the cultural and traditional background behind their narratives.
- see how social and ideological reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) has acted on them and how they have perceived it.

These aim and objectives are pursued by looking at educational experiences in Arab and European countries, focusing on the same central topic in both educational systems: educational systems'

structure and model, religion, humanities, teachers' method, attitudes and relationship with families, minority issues and how identity and belonging are experienced in schools.

10.2 Methodology

A qualitative methodology (De Rose 2003; Silverman 2008) is used; it is based on semi-structured interviews and supported by one focus group in each country (Italy, Germany, and Sweden). About 50 interviews are carried out with Arab people living today in Europe: 17 teachers and educators, 13 parents, 9 pupils, 9 students, and 7 young adults outside education.

At the beginning of the research, the possibility of using the biographical interview, extrapolating from it an educational biography, is evaluated. It allows analysing of in-depth individual life stories by bringing out the most important historical, sociological, and pedagogical elements from the experience of individuals (Erben 1998, Atkinson 2002, Bichi 2002, Breckner & Massari 2019). As it is possible to understand from the mentioned works, a biographical interview is the best option to analyse in depth one life history, or otherwise, a limited number, considered paradigmatic to explain a phenomenon. After some first pivotal interviews with Moroccan people in Italy, carried out with this approach, the necessity for this research not to choose a single person or a limited number as an example for their remarkable history emerged. On the contrary, it needs a significant number of people, between 40 and 50, living ordinary and not exemplary lives within the three different host countries and at different points of their educational paths. Consequently, the structure of semi-structured interviews is determined by a set of questions through which it is possible to compare the data from numerous interviews with people living in different situations in different host countries.

Nevertheless, the biographical and narrative approach finds a place inside the interview methodology, based on the interviewee's narration, who is first invited to tell his or her educational story without further specification. Only after his or her first spontaneous narrative, in which the interviewee freely chooses the main topics, the predetermined questions are asked if they have not been sufficiently covered. Therefore, the questions are based on the interviewee's narrative, changing from interview to interview based on what needs to be explored more and on interesting insights from the interviewee, using the pre-established structure of the interview as a guideline.

From the biographical narrative approach, a valuable attitude helpful in conducting and analysing the interviews related to the problem of reticence is gained. Erben (1998) poses methodologically the problem of relating the narrative's veracity to the context. In the case of the autobiography, he addresses the context of the struggle for the abolition of slavery, so the narrator is keen to give a good picture of himself and Africa. Part of his purpose is personal revenge. He needs to positively impress and win over the white, educated, and politicized reader. It is possible to say the same for

a migrant, or even more, for an asylum seeker or refugee, who is telling his or her educational story to a European researcher today, with the same desire to appear positively in the eyes of the European "public," aiming at obtaining more rights, protections, and opportunities for migrants. This does not deny the veracity of their accounts but allows us to set their purpose and perspective and understand some omissions and reticence, as shown in the analysis.

10.3 Tools and Procedures

Data are collected through qualitative interviews conducted with a guideline constructed first inductively and then modified deductively during the first pilot interviews, and through focus groups inside the project Erasmus plus *ParentAble*[44].

10.3.1 Interview sampling procedure

The first step to select people to interview was to identify a target and then carry out some pivotal interviews to test it and define precisely the sample of the interviews. As can be seen in Table 6, the pivotal interviews were conducted at the beginning of 2020 with Moroccan people, as they are the most numerous Arab communities in Cosenza, and therefore it is easy to speak with people of diverse ages and education. They were one woman, that is a pupil's mother in Cosenza, one man with a bad experience in Italy due to the non-recognition of his university degree, and one pupil aged 15 who migrated to Italy at 13. Instead, the fourth of these pivotal interviews was carried out on the Internet, aiming at interviewing someone who studies in Morocco as a migrant. After these first pivotal interviews, the target widens compared to the initial intentions both from the point of view of national origin, in order to have a broader spectrum including all Mediterranean Arab countries from where numerous migrants arrive in Europe, and from the point of view of age because every age has something particular to tell us.

The youngest (primary-middle school) have a recent educational experience in their home country, fresh, but not very rationalised, reasoned, having not yet produced tangible results in their lives, as was the case in the second pivotal interview. Adults have experienced more distant in time but internalised and reasoned, also based on the effects produced in their lives. The adult interpretations and conceptualizations can even be excessive, leading people to talk more about their ideas and judgments than about their actual personal experience, as in the 1st and 3rd pivotal interviews. For this reason, interviews with adults mostly concern pupils' parents who attend school in Europe or adults who were teachers in their home country and are or would like to be educators or teachers in the host country. In this way, their experience related to education is richer

[44] PARENTable | About (parent-able.com)

in events closer in time than their schooling period, and their narration could be more beneficial for the research. Between the two extremes, pupils in high school, university students and young people aged about 20-25 not involved in education were the best groups to interview, as they are in the middle between the youngest with ongoing experience, not yet interpreted, and adult with an experience very distant in time. The interview sample also includes young adults the same age as university students, so their school experience is also close in time and is similar to university students' one. To the difference in their experiences, some space will be reserved in the analysis. With this target, there is the benefit of speaking with people who have attended all or most of their school paths in their country of origin at the time of the 2011 uprisings, therefore in a period in which there was much public debate on education. These more adult pupils and students have already reflected on their educational experience and have developed, through their European education, more articulated ideas on it. Interviewing people of different ages also allows seeing the generational difference in the experience of those who studied in the previous century and those who studied after the turning point of 2000 in an Arab country.

The interviewees have been selected using different strategies. As far as Italy is concerned:

- inside the net of the well-established community of Egyptian students at the University of Calabria;
- inside the net of the Arab cultural mediators of the city;
- inside schools, asking head teachers and teachers, but this way proved complicated. Indeed, schools require many authorisations and insurance to be officially the research medium. This obstacle became insurmountable with the pandemic outbreak, the management of which absorbed schools and made them closed to outsiders;
- on the internet, primarily through Facebook, finding numerous people available for online interviews, given the impossibility of meeting due to the pandemic;
- by word of mouth, asking each interviewee if he/she knew anyone available to be interviewed.

As for interviews abroad: in Sweden, the University of Gävle selected people among the participants in a course to become supportive teachers, and in Germany, the NGO Back on Track, do the same within the first course they organise for migrants to become teachers in Germany and among their own volunteers.

As for the parents, the interviews and three focus groups were carried out inside the ParentAble project, which I am going to speak about in the fifth paragraph.

As it is possible to see in Table 6, finally the interviews are as follows:

- 8 with teenagers who are all pupils living in Italy, primarily Syrian and one Moroccan;

- 19 with young adults: 1Syrian pupil living in Italy, 13 students (mostly living in Italy and coming from Syria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria except for 1 Syrian living in Germany) and 5 Moroccan and Syrian living in Italy who are out of education;
- 26 with adults: 6 parents living in Italy coming from Syria, Morocco and Jordan; 12 who are both teachers and parents (primarily Syrian in Germany and Sweden, one Jordan in Germany and 2 Libyan in Italy); 4 Syrian teachers and educators, in Sweden and Germany. There are also 2 Moroccan men in Italy, neither parents nor teachers, one Palestinian educator, born and who studied since primary school in Italy, and a Ghanaian educator working in Morocco.

As for the countries where the interviewees come from and on which there is more information, the interviews addressed people coming from each Mediterranean Arab country; at least one for each country, and a more significant number for Morocco and Syria. Most of the interviewees come from Syria. Of 24 interviews with Syrian people, 12 were conducted in Italy, 7 in Germany and 5 in Sweden. Among them, 10 people (primarily interviewed in Italy) passed through Lebanon and had educational experience there. The other big group concerns Morocco and is composed of 12 interviews, of which 11 were conducted with Moroccan people living in Italy and one with a Ghanese educator living in Morocco. There are 4 interviews with Egyptian students living in Italy; 5 about Libya with people living in Italy; 2 about Tunisia with students living in Italy; 2 about Jordan with parents living in Italy and Germany; 1 with a Palestinian; 1 with an Algerian student in Italy.

Most of the pupils and students interviewed began their educational paths in their home Arab country and continued in a host European one. The same is for interviewed parents' children, but some exceptions can confirm what is found inside this first bigger block of interviews. The first exception concerns people born outside their Arab motherland, in Italy and Syria. As for the people born in Italy, they are a Palestinian educator (he attended primary school in Italy and went to an Arabic middle school in Israel), an Algerian student (she attended primary and middle school in Italy and returned to Algeria in high school), and a Jordan mother (she grew up in Jordan and returned to Italy to study at university). As for the people born in Syria, there is a Syrian/German student born and who attended school in Syria and came back to Germany in high school, and Palestinian teachers who were born and who studied and worked in Syria and then moved to Sweden.

These latter are also part of the subgroup of minorities in the Arab country from which they arrived in Europe. This group allows for a better understanding of the dynamics of identity-building in those countries. As for the people who were born in Syria, this group comprises 3 Kurdish (1 student, 1 teacher and 1 parent), 2 Palestinian teachers, 1 Armenian pupil, 1 Christian teacher and a German/Syrian student. Syrians themselves experienced being a minority in an Arab country

when they lived and studied in Lebanon, and some of the Syrian interviewees lived in Turkey for a certain period and had educational experiences there, where they are an ethnic and linguistic minority. For what concerns Libya, there are the experiences of belonging to a minority group from 2 Amazigh (1teacher and 1 pupil), 2 Pakistani pupils, a Moroccan mother, a Syrian father, and a Syrian student.

The last is a Palestinian who grew up in Italy and then in Israel, where Arabs live as a minority.

10.3.2 Interviews' guideline and procedure

The interviews guideline changed during the 2 years of the field research (February 2020 - March 2022). The main themes remained the same, but after each interview, it improved in terms of how to ask certain things and in what order. Some topics provoked more reticence in the respondents, being more sensitive, so they were moved to the end of the interview when confidence and trust had developed more, and the interviewees felt more at ease. It concerns questions most closely related to religion, gender, ethnicity and national policy in education, some of which are at the core of the research and which it is better to ask at the end of the interview. People are asked to tell about their educational experience and then to elaborate on interesting topics of their story, with questions about gender differences, the ethnic and religious composition of their class, history and humanities programmes, religion class, and the school-family relationship. Sometimes the topic of the instruction language comes up spontaneously as central in people's educational experience; therefore, a specific question about it is added to the guideline. The same was for preschool education, science, and technology. The connection between identity building, belonging, diversity and religion and the history of education, especially colonialism and independence, often occurs spontaneously in the interviewees' speech, but not always; therefore, direct questions on these themes are added at the end of the interviews, if needed. After 15 interviews, the guidelines' improvement slowed down as the pattern reached quite satisfactory levels. The skeleton of the interview is the following:

I. Introduce and describe yourself
II. Tell me about your educational experience from kindergarten up to now.
III. Why did you not attend kindergarten? / What type of kindergarten did you attend?
IV. Were you male and female together? Were teachers of both sexes, were there differences in how you related with male or female teachers?
V. Can you explain to me the composition of your class regarding ethnicity and religion?
VI. What was the instruction language? What other language were you and your classmates speaking in your life? What other languages were you studying?

VII. What were the most important topics in history? In the humanities (literature, geography, social sciences, citizenship education, philosophy)?

VIII. What did you do during religion class? Did you speak about other religions? What people of different religions did during the Islamic religion class?

IX. What was the role of science and technology?

X. What relations were there between the school and your family?

If enough information is not obtained through these questions, further reflections are stimulated with the following questions:

XI. How was the subject of colonialism dealt with? Can you make a comparison with European schools?

XII. Did your teachers deal with the theme of tolerance somehow? How was it experienced? Can you make a comparison with the school you attend in Europe?

XIII. In your opinion, what was the identity that the school tried to transmit to you, to build in pupils? Are they more interested in Islamic, national or Arab belonging?

XIV. What about the differences with your experience in Europe? Do you think schools are more interested in Christian, national or European belonging?

The first interview with this scheme lasts one hour and is complete, so it is used until the last interview, with the necessary changes due to the specific person and narration. For parents and teachers, every question regarding their own experience as a pupil and then their experience with their children's school, for what concerns parents, or their experience as teachers. In this way, it is also possible to understand if significant differences occurred between one generation and another. With the same perspective based on the personal biographical narrative of each different person, the three different age groups needed to be addressed differently, although the guideline used is the same. In interviewing the youngest pupils, it was useless to stress them on some topics, as they would remain on a superficial level, also because they do not always remember their brief experience, marked, in many cases, by wars and displacement. This was the case for numerous Syrian pupils who have had little attendance at school in Syria and in other cases did not attend school at all; some of them moved to Lebanon at an early age and can narrate only their educational experience in that country. Instead, in interviewing the adults, the effort is to focus on their experience and avoid them going too far in producing their analyses and comparisons, as they are prone to do.

Regarding the performance of the interview, permission to use the recording of the interviews is asked through an authorization form, in which the person can choose to remain anonymous and other types of restrictions. This module allowed for using the interviews for the present research and for sharing them with the partner of the ParentAble project. A parent or legal representative

has to sign the module if the subject is a minor. Parents preferred to remain with the children during the interviews. This request is accepted because their presence does not interfere with the successful outcome of the interview, as it does not deal with particularly intimate topics.

The place of the interview is chosen in agreement with the interviewees, preferring quiet and silent places. In some cases, the only option available to have silence around us is to opt for my house or the interviewees' house. The second one sometimes is a good solution because the person feels more at ease in his or her environment and speaks freely, even showing his family, objects, schoolbooks and other details. In other cases, instead, the presence of the family has the effect of making the respondent not very conversational. In this case, and when the person was uncomfortable in my house, I opted for quiet public places, including the outdoors, cafés, university lecture hall or office. In general, the choice of location is based on the respondent's feeling of serenity so that he or she could feel comfortable.

The pandemic crisis and the consequent restrictions to movement and social relationships caused delays in the realization of the interviews and changes to their schedule. Starting from the beginning of 2021, to obviate the problems related to the pandemic and the consequent restrictions, in-person interviews, which are still preferable, were combined with online interviews when a meeting was impossible or unwanted by the interviewee, who finally was the one who decided about the online or in-person mode. Finally, only 9 interviews took place online in the first half of the year because, starting in the summer, all the interviewees preferred to have the interview in person. Interviewing online made the initial approach more difficult as it did not allow pre-interview socialization activities, such as having coffee together, which made the conversation flow more smoothly. On the other hand, this mode enables the enlargement of the group of interviewees to people living and studying throughout Italy and not only in Cosenza and makes it possible to know the experience of different people also belonging to different social classes and with different educational backgrounds. Children of intellectuals or somewhat more wealthy families were able to choose to go to cities such as Rome or Milan and have different educational paths compared to most of the people interviewed in Cosenza in person.

Most of the interviews in person in Italy took place at the University of Calabria (in Table 6, the exceptions are reported), where there are the most significant communities of Arab students in the Calabria region. Several others took place in the little village of Camini, where there is a well-functioning reception centre for asylum seekers hosting the region's most significant community of Syrian refugees. In Sweden, interviews were carried out inside the University of Gavle during the ParentAble project workshop. In Germany, interviews were carried out in Berlin, mainly in the buildings where the association Back on Track, a partner of the ParentAble project, works, one online and another in a public outdoor place. Having interviews in different countries and, inside

them, in different contexts such as big cities, small towns or countryside villages, allows for a better understanding of how much the found results could be generalizable or if, instead, they relate only to a specific host context.

The language used in the interviews has been primarily Italian in Italy (Int. 1-30) since pupils and students who attended school and university have sufficient knowledge of it. In the few cases (Int.3; 17; 23; 24; 25; 26) in which they did not know it enough - primarily young adults and parents - they spoke in Arabic, and the interviews were conducted with the help of a linguistic mediator. In Germany and Sweden (Int.31-41), English was the most used language, and, in the few cases (Int.36), in which they did not know it, they spoke Arabic, and the interviews were carried out with the help of a linguistic mediator. The cultural mediators did not often report the answers of the interviewees word for word but made a summary of them, and very often had to explain the questions to the interviewee and had short discussions with him/her. The mediator's presence was functional but also made the interview less spontaneous and prevented the creation of a free flow of communication between interviewees and the interviewer. For these reasons, when people can speak both Arabic and English, having the choice between an interview in Arabic with a mediator and an interview in English without, the latter is preferable. Even if the linguistic level of the interviewee was higher in Arabic than in English, the nuances of meaning are lost more in the translation (and synthesis) of a third person than in the effort of expressing themselves in English since the interviewees had a good level of English anyway. All the interviews are been translated into English to compare them and to use quotations within the thesis. The translation into English from Italian required grammatical and syntactical corrections, as newly migrated people do not always have a perfect command of the Italian language. Therefore, a word-for-word translation would have been impossible and would have given an incomprehensible result. In addition, such a faithful translation is not essential in this kind of research, which does not focus on analysing the language used to express concepts.

10.3.3 Data collection within the PARENTable project

The Erasmus Plus project ParentAble deals with communication between parents of newly migrated children and teachers in Europe, aiming at building bridges between newly migrated families and schools. To this purpose, the project's research team collected knowledge and interesting practice examples about functioning parent-teacher communication in Europe and organised one workshop that put teachers and parents together in each of the 4 countries involved (Germany, Italy, Sweden and Turkey). The first step was the background research carried out in the four countries through semi-structured interviews addressing parents and teachers. Of these

background research interviews, 9 interviews with parents are taken into consideration here (see table 6), and in particular, the answer to the following questions:

- How do you perceive the Swedish/Italian/German school system and teachers? (What is good/not so good in contrast to another school system you know? Do you have any specific expectations or fears connected to schools?)
- Can you tell us something about the school-family relationship in your home country?
- What would you like the teachers to know more about the situation of your children and their previous education? What do they (already) know?

These interviews are analysed with the same method as the others, described in the next chapters. Concerning the focus groups, they take place inside the workshops in Berlin (Germany), Cosenza (Italy) and Gävle (Sweden), more specifically inside the second module named "*Parents' attitudes and expectations between parents and educators*" [45] through 2 interactive activities.

One activity is *"What was your own Experience in School?"* in which the participants have to take sticky notes and write down what they liked and disliked about their schooling when they were children in a few words. Then they must stick their notes to a wall in the two columns like/dislike. In the end, these notes are discussed, and anyone can explain what he or she wrote down if they like. Through this activity, it is possible to understand the most significant feature of their educational experiences and found similarities and differences.

The other activity is *"How do you Experience your Role as a Parent?"* which deepens this knowledge and comparison through a table (Table 7) to fill in about:

1) their parents' experience with their school when they were pupils;
2) their experience with their children's school in their home country and travel country
3) their experience with their children's school in the host country (Sweden, Germany, Italy).

When participants have filled out the table, there is a reflection on how people experienced their role as parents and teachers, discovering what influenced their perspective. This activity reveals insights about generational differences, differences between rural or urban environments, or class differences that influence the school experience.

In the first workshop in Sweden in 2021 (for additional information, see Table 6), both activities were carried out. The discussion among participants was transcribed and used as a document in the analysis. In addition, 13 tables filled in during the second activity were used as documents for the analysis. In the second workshop in Berlin, only the first activity gave an interesting result, reported in a document analysed according to the same categories used for the analysis of the

[45] The format of the workshop find a correspondence inside the online course consultable on the project website e-Learning | PARENTable (parent-able.com)

interviews. In the third workshop in Italy, only the second activity was carried out, and the results are reported in a document analysed with the same method. Therefore, most of the interesting focus group material regards the Swedish workshop.

10.4 Data analysis

The method of analysis is both deductive and inductive. After the transcription and anonymisation of the interviews, the analysis began with a deductive coding approach with the help of the *MaxQda* software, taking into account the interviewed people sampling. This early coding is carried out on the first 10 interviews, selecting the speech's relevant parts on the following codes reflecting the factors of the multifactorial analysis: contents of scholastic subjects, religion, gender, linguistic issues, identity, colonialism, tolerance and discrimination, comparison between home and host country's education systems. During the coding itself, the need for an inductive analysis arose. Some codes need to be divided into more specific ones; others need to be deleted entirely because they are not related to the focus of the research and, overall, the need to add specific codes arose as they relate to interesting topics outcoming from the interviews' analysis itself. C*ontents of scholastic subjects* changed into two different codes, the first named *humanities* and subdivided into the different school subjects, and the second named *Maths, sciences and technology* and subdivided into *Technology - Approach and theory in sciences*. The codes of *preschooling* and *school-family relationships* were added inductively.

The definition of the codes developed during the interview period continued during the coding itself and reached its final form in the early analysis. The analysis followed the coding pattern with some arrangement due to the results themselves, giving more space to the most interesting issues on which more material is present. The initial result of the interviews' coding is to clearly understand which issues stimulate more reflections in the interviewees and, therefore, which topic they focus on regarding education and identity. The intersection between codes is considered to understand how each factor influences pupils' identity and belonging in general and their educational experience in Europe.

The codes richer in content are divided into sub-codes to analyse the issues better. *Educational experience in Europe* is the richest in content and intersects with all other codes. Inside it, a little space is also reserved for educational experiences in Turkey, a (non-Arab) transit country. The second area in which there are more codifications relates to *humanities*, wherein *history* prevails. The third is *minority and language issues*. Then there are, in order, *religion, teaching methods and attitude, system structures and models of education systems, identity and belonging, school family relationships* and the transversal *social role and economic issues.* Other codes appear to play a more marginal role, like *maths, sciences and technology*, whose results are discussed separately:

maths and technology are discussed inside the education system's structure and model with particular reference to generational differences; instead, sciences are discussed in the relationship with religion, as it happens in the interviews. *Gender* also results as not so central, except for those quotes that relate to religion and European experiences; therefore, their analysis finds a place inside this paragraph. The last two are *generational differences* and *pre-schooling*, analysed inside the codes with which they relate more. *Social role and economic issues* and *generational differences* are considered transversal factors to all code categories. The final pattern of the analysis categories is ordered starting from the most general to finish with the more strictly related to the research focus, "*identity and belonging*" so that the previous ones gradually contribute to the understanding of how these are built and in what framework.

Therefore, the major topics analysed and discussed in the results are:

- The historical development of education systems and its influence on individual educational paths
- The structures and models of Arab education systems, focusing on the public/private dichotomy, channelling and selectiveness, and the classification of sciences.
- Religion in Arab school (Religious class, Religious differences and tolerance, diverse religious interpretations, Religion and science)
- Humanities in Arab school (Arabic Language and Literature, History and Geography with a focus on colonialism, Philosophy, Citizenship or national education)
- Educational experience in Europe (The structure of the education system; Religion; Humanities)
- Teaching methods and attitudes and School-family relationship in Arab and European context
- Minorities issues (belong to a minority in the Arab and European context: Channelling and selectiveness; Language, Composition of the classroom, Relationship between pupils, Racism, discrimination and tolerance in teachers; be a teacher belonging to a minority)
- Identity and Belonging (the interviewees' reflections that deal directly with their identity and belonging are analysed through the Yampolsky identity configuration).

During the analysis of the contents, for each coding the experiences, concepts and opinions that are broadly reflected in the majority of the interviews were underlined, reserving a space for discordant experiences, concepts and opinions when they came up, understanding the reason for the discrepancy based on the interviewees' sample.

11 Results

> *"I: and can you tell me something about the school that you remember in particular, teachers, classmates, and how the school was made?*
> *R: eh... normal, school, how do you...? I did all subjects, Arabic, many things... and so ..."* (Int.18)

This quote shows a *defensive attitude* common among people who came from Syria and live in Italy. At the beginning of many interviews, these people have shown this attitude, with first answers that often contain the expressions *normal school, normal subjects, normal building*, and so on, as they would like to highlight the "*normality"* of their educational experience.

It is necessary to clarify what they mean by "*normality"* regarding education. They mean an education similar to the European ones that they have experienced later and, with these statements, they aim to free the mind from bias, which they have evidently often encountered, that schools in their home country are profoundly backward, religiously fundamentalist and finally different from European ones. If this attitude here concerns the whole experience, it appears again with regard to religious and gender issues.

Approaching their educational experiences, therefore, there is a need to consider first of all that it is very similar to studying in Europe, as it is understandable from the results of focus group 2 in Germany. For many participants, whether they were German teachers or Syrian parents, what they liked about school related to friendship, relationships with classmates and socialising. Both did not like the stress of exams, group pressure and schedule adherence. The similarity in the narrative about their childhood experiences at school is more significant than the differences. These last are, of course, also very important; for example, in this focus group, they stressed the effort to develop critical thinking as a positive element of the German system, and instead being beaten as a negative element of the Syrian system (focus Group 2 Germany). Therefore, there are similarities in their experience linked to friendship and evaluation and significant differences linked to teaching methods and attitudes.

As in this case, also in the following chapters, overcoming the limits given by stereotypes, defensive attitudes and an empty concept of *normality*, the analysis goes deeper into the characteristics of the educational experiences by capturing similarities and differences.

When interviewees are asked about their educational experience, they begin to speak about the education systems' structure in general and the models on which these systems are built. They mostly linked this topic with *minority and language issues* and *social role and economic issues*.

Before analysing this topic, however, it is helpful to refer to interviewees' reflections on the historical development of Arab education systems, explicitly linked to colonialism and politics' influence on the existing systems in some interviews. After that, results are presented based on the

major topics. First, there are the results on Arab education systems, referring to their structures and models and to religion and humanities. Then, there are the results about the same factors in Europe, followed by comparative chapters on teaching methods, attitudes and relationships with parents and minority issues, and finally results about how interviewees spoke about their identity and belonging.

11.1 The influence of Arab education systems' history on people's experiences

Through interviews analysis, it is possible to see how the history of Arab-Islamic education, especially colonialism and current politics, influences the interviewees' experience and how they lived and interpreted it. Looking at how they relate the influence of history and politics on education with religion, it is worth saying that only students coming from Tunisia linked colonialism to secularisation when they talked about the structure of the education system:

> *"So since they have been colonised by France, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, they study with the same program, the same program from the beginning sent by France, and we have to be a secular country… […] We are good however, the model [the educational French model] is there... school in Tunisia is well known all over the world, recognised as a diploma, of course, it is recognised here and all over the world. […] Nevertheless, you cannot; the problem is that you cannot reflect on yourself, you cannot reflect on your country. That is why Tunisia is still a bit behind because they do not make you reflect on yourself. You study, you consume the program, and you also consume then the product"* (Int. 14).

This young man experienced the distinctive secularisation of the Tunisian education system as an outcome of the colonial imposition of the French educational model. Despite its positive effects, consisting in the increased ease of finding work abroad, he emphasises the negative side, i.e. the impossibility for pupils to reflect on their own identities free from colonial bonds, and he sees this above all in the decreasing role of religion within school education. The other Maghrebi interviewees even talk about their education systems as built on French models due to colonialism but without relating it to religion. The other Tunisian student, instead, relates the impossibility of freely discussing and negotiating national identity inside the classroom to the regime:

> *"I did it when there was Ben Ali; he was a dictator, so everything was filtered […]. The professors do not talk about politics, but one thing I keep repeating... The year before graduation, our professors, who had studied at the university in Tunis, because the big universities are in the capital, told us to be careful of the party [Ennahda]... of these extremists"* (Int.15).

Both Tunisians are 28 years old and study at Italian universities but have very different opinions on the topic. This difference in judgment could depend on the places where they grew up and studied. The first one lived in the capital, where the influence of the French cultural model and

secularisation are more substantial and conflicting than in the southern village where the second lived. In these marginal realities, affected more by economic problems, people seem to live their identity and religion more peacefully.

Gender is another issue strictly affected by politics and in particular by secularisation policy in education:

> *"The teacher at school never allowed us to... she never allowed a girl to have a girl as a neighbour in the desk, you have to be a boy […] maybe because when I was at school ... just a moment ... the President of the Republic was Ben Ali, for example, so... already Bourghiba before Ben Ali forbade the veil. So maybe, in my opinion, it could be an idea that they forced the teachers to make this choice […]. Because it has always worked like that"* (Int.15).

This strong secularism regarding religious curricula and gender issues only appears in the interviews with Tunisian people, although the French colonised many other Arab Mediterranean countries. It can be deduced that the secularisation of education by Tunisian politics after independence is the determining factor that has led to the actual situation and that it is not an inevitable consequence of French colonisation, as it is not a constant in all the countries colonised by the French. Indeed, moving to Morocco, one interviewee talks about colonial influence linking it to the value of Moroccan qualifications in Europe as they corresponds to the French system:

> *"The period of study in Morocco is always valid at the world level because there is the French model; there is the international baccalaureate, to pass, for people who want to go to France to finish their studies"* (Int.1).

Here the focus is on the possibility that the French model of education, a legacy of the colonial period, gives to pupils and students outside the country. Despite European influence, Moroccan education continues to attach great importance to religion, so the foreign education model coexists with local tradition. Rather than focus on religion, the awareness of the advantage coexists with the importance given to the fight against colonialism and the patriot's memory:

> *"It was a public and state school named after one of the martyrs of the... Let us say... revolution against the French, I remember it well because it is a name quite impressed in my mind, ** who was assassinated because he protested when King Mohammed V was exiled and... In Madagascar and so many structures are named after him because of this sense of patriotism"* (Int.10).

An Algerian student, in a more critical way, explains why they studied so many European authors:

> *"It is more for historical reasons e... That is, for example, France colonised Algeria and burnt many, many, many Algerian works e... The Algerian people acquired many French traditions and ... Therefore,*

even now e... Even now, you are very, France influences many until today, some say that France is still colonising us e... And so, the programme even for that cannot change" (Int.12).

Her statement is similar to those of the Tunisian students regarding the depth of the criticism and the understanding of the colonial influence on educational content. However, also she does not bind to religion in any way. Another reference to colonialism comes from an Egyptian student in Italy. He explained that, at school, they studied Ali Mubarak as the father of national education and that he was the minister of education under English occupation (Int.16). He set up the Egyptian education system on the English model, a model that is still maintained despite the changes in the contents that occurred during Nasser's regime. In the opinion of the interviewees, the different political ideologies in power after independence strongly influenced education systems:

"Happened completely radical changes from one president to another, that is, with Nasser, we went from a phase of pan Arabism […] a few years later, with Sadat, we passed to Camp David, to the peace treaties with Israel, so this also had very particular reflections on the educational system because... The ministry did not know what to teach anymore because before, they taught that all Israelis should be killed and thrown into the sea, as Nasser would have said. Then, Sadat and the peace agreements of 1979 changed this. So let us say the relationship with history, that is. So many historiographers defined what happened in the '52 as a revolution, while others say that it has nothing at all to do with revolution because, in reality, it was a military coup because people did not participate in order to overthrow King Faruk, you understand... So these very social differences and of studies really led to a deep-rooted and marked hesitation at the educational level. The teachers did not know what to teach and this generated a form of indecision and lack of clarity in the minds of children" (Int.16).

In this quote the Israel issue, a topic that interviewees often relate to colonialism and identity when talking about history and humanities, appears. Another important issue is the strong influence of post-independence politics on humanistic and history curricula, consistent with the analysed literature. What is important here is to emphasise students' awareness of these dynamics and the fact that, in their own experience, they have felt the weight of this influence and speak of it as a determining factor. Colonialism's influence is dramatically visible in foreign language teaching, and closely linked to migration routes:

"English was not a very interesting thing in Morocco. It was not the interest of the schools, more interested in French, because from Morocco most people go to France. Those who want to come to Italy most want to come just to work, not to study. Maybe going to England was one of the dreams of a few students because for us England was a bit far away like America, but the closest place was Spain, France and Italy, but most of them go to France to study or to Belgium" (Int.13).

People typically continue to migrate to the coloniser country because they already know the language spoken there as a colonial legacy that led to the predominance of that language among the foreign languages taught in schools. Someone directly links the importance given to foreign language teaching to colonialism and stresses that in colonised countries the coloniser's language is really learned as a second language that people have to speak, differently from non-colonized countries where foreign language learning has another meaning and weight (Int.1). Which foreign languages to study, and how much weight to give each, is seen as a political choice or consequence. Looking at the governments' choices about which foreign languages to teach, it is possible to see the changes in the relations between countries, identifying neo-colonial relationships of subjugation:

> *"I remember we have to learn, to start learning English in our 1st grade and French in our 6th grade. But now, last year, I have a friend in Syria, he told me, we start to learn the Russian language"* (Int.39).

Syrians never deal directly with colonialism when discussing the influence of politics on their education system. Colonial influence on the Syrian education system is not experienced as strongly as in the other Arab countries considered, probably due to the socialist and anti-colonialist ideology of the party that has ruled the country since its independence. In this ideology, Syrian culture and education need to be liberated and defended from European colonialism, hiding the dangers of neo-colonization coming from other powers. Nevertheless, it is possible to interpret the anti-colonial ideology and the Ba'th regime's influence on education as a consequence of colonialism itself:

> *"When I was studying, there was nothing else in Syria but the achievements of the President: the President has gone, the President has done ... what do we have to do with the President? As children, we should take care of our studies; and what did they teach us? The heroes of the 'corrective movement' and how they had liberated the country...and he had not liberated anything; on the contrary, he ruined a people, and when he came to power, his son did worse!"* (Int.44).

The regime propaganda used the struggle for independence against the colonial powers to build consensus around the leader, who must be seen as the only man capable of defending the country from Western interference. In most countries where the regime claims to have liberated the country from colonialism, it is possible to see an even more substantial influence of history on education, the form and content of which are imbued with colonialism and anti-colonialism. However, in some regions characterised by ethnic specificity, people perceive the Syrian government itself as the coloniser power that affects with its violence on pupils' education:

"It is a military scholastic system with green uniforms, in which it is forbidden to speak the Kurdish language. If you are not inside the Ba'th party's organisation, this impacts your marks. You have to forbid to be children" (Kurdish parent, Focus group 1).

Before the civil war, the regime tried to reproduce Arab nationalism through the imposition of its values and identity in the education system. All educational organisations aimed at instilling Arab belonging and loyalty to the party in pupils, presenting it as the only way to be united against the enemy, the colonising West. Minorities and opponents have been naturally the ones who have experienced such a situation with the greatest difficulty, feeling forced to adapt to a militarily structured education system that they have perceived as a continuous training of the new cadets of the regime's army. Of course, the situation inside school became worst after the war began, with some differences from one city to another:

"In Syria, when the conflict started, it did not start in all of Syria; it started in one city and went from one city to another. In Aleppo in that time, at the beginning of the revolution, there was nothing. They do not... pupils did not talk about, maybe they talked to each other, but later they have... they were afraid and... If someone talked, I think that the father or the mother told him every time to do not say anything or to speak about the Assad regime because if they heard anyone talk of them, they would take him and nobody will know where he or she is" (Int.6).

In cities like Aleppo, at the beginning of the revolution, schools continued to work regularly, but the atmosphere became even heavier, with more censorship and an inability to discuss current events. The civil war impacted education, in the beginning, especially in the atmosphere inside the classrooms, a fearful atmosphere in which all people were afraid of other people's denunciation of conspiracy against the regime at the first word of criticism or even for a question about the current situation:

"After the revolution started, I stopped teaching, I do not... but I heard my colleagues, my teacher colleagues, they said about school conflicts in class: some pupils with the revolution, some pupils with the government, many, many problems happened in the classes" (Int.41).

Pupils belonging to families connected with the regime continued to go to school with pupils belonging to families opposing it, acting as if nothing had happened and not talking about the events, with the fear of being arrested or that some relative would be arrested. Obviously, children had difficulties in concentrating and following an educational program which instead proceeded quickly as if nothing was happening (Int.37). Only in places directly interested in the fighting were schools forced to close:

"For the civil war, we stayed home for 1 or 2 years because the schools were closed and I left the school in the village and I came to another school in my neighbourhood because I cannot travel there and... there will be a lot of bombs" (Int.37, city of Homs).

There, teachers left schools but not all pupils could move to other cities or schools. The civil war caused many pupils to drop out of school: these pupils are called *the generation of the war*, a generation that could not study:

"After the war, I had to stop school for two years, two years and a half, yes, even three, because two years during the war I could not continue my study, neither me nor my brothers... not everybody could enrol in school. Because we had to leave the place and go to another place where... it was not so much possible to enrol in a school because we did not even have a place where... a place where we are just there, no, every 10, 15 minutes we have to run away to another place" (Int.20).

Many people lived for years without a safe home and moved from one place to another thus being unable to enrol in any educational institution. Some of them continued to stay out of education also in Lebanon until they arrived in Europe and tried to start again with their education after missing between 1 and 4 years of school:

"I: and in Lebanon, did you try to return to school instead?
R: At the beginning, no, because we were in such a condition that we could not enter the school, neither my brothers nor I. Because after we escaped from the war, we did not have a house, nothing, we had to organise first, arrange things a bit, then see about the school... and I lost 4 years..." (Int.20).

It is interesting to report the discussion that took place at the end of the second focus group activities. A student said that he had forgotten to say that the Syrian education system was utter rubbish. This provoked amusement in some, condescension in others and anger in one participant. This latter pointed out that this was not the case: Syria has a political regime that negatively influences education in terms of freedom of thought, opinion and discussion in the classroom, but it cannot be said that the whole system is rubbish because, on the contrary, it has positive aspects in terms of learning and socialisation. Between the two arguers, there is a generational difference. One, the defender of positive aspects, is a father who attended school in the past century. The other is a young boy who attended school during the 2011 revolution when there was probably more impatience towards the repressive aspects of education, aspects that were even stronger than before since the government had to ensure that destabilising and revolutionary discourse did not spread within schools (Focus Group 2). This contradiction between a functioning education system in regard to enrolment rates and learning outcomes and the repression within it regarding freedom of expression was also expressed in focus group 1. All the participants agreed that their educational experience in Syria was good in regards to friendship and success in study and that the level of

instruction in the country, in general, was good, but the political situation, poverty and war are problems that ultimately affect education (Focus Group1).

As also shown by the discussion in focus group 1, university students are those who most critically relate to colonialism and politics when speaking about their education system of origin:

> *"This process I did then at university, especially at university, even if it has nothing to do with my study, but since it is... in the 1st year of university, I was 21 years old, so I was realising things... I started comparing. […] I understood that politics decide what they teach to children and… I do not have to trust everything I was taught, everything; on the contrary, I have to think well if I liked it or not like it. I did not consider these things, but I started to give the right consideration because I understood that it is what I have in my head"* (Int.30).

The comparison between home and host education systems in university age is the one that most leads people to understand the influence of politics on their education and the influence of education on their own identity. University students (Int.12; 13; 14; 15, 16; 19; 30; 39), rather than people of other ages or educational statuses, begin to reinterpret their experience and to reflect on their knowledge and ideas as a product voluntarily built by political power throughout the education system they attended.

In recent times, education policies have led to transformations inside all the education systems mainly regarding foreign languages and pre-schooling, and the focalisation on maths, science and technology for the country's economic development. These transformations reflect the changes in society from an economic and political point of view, namely liberalisation and globalisation, and the changes in international relations. People's experiences in this regard are directly connected to the chapter named *Globalization, Scientist breakthrough and Radicalisation*[46], and are collected mostly inside the codes of *generational differences* and *maths, science and technology*.

> *"I: and what about the education for a new era program? Bashar decided to make the school technological with the internet, computers, more applied sciences, and laboratories. He said this, and I would like to know if he does something in this regard…*
>
> *R: […] So many people thought that for our world this would be a real change, that this guy, he studied in Britain and Europe and he will bring many changes to the Country, but he did not. The internet would have spread to Syria anyway, he could not close the sky, so you have access to satellite, so it will come anyway, and if you look at what he did with the technology...he gave all to his cousins and relatives: the contracts for the big telecommunication companies and so on. And they went rich; they became rich because of this technology. So computers in school, I did not see any, my children did but only in the last period... in High School a little bit. Yeah, it is not... it is not something he achieved"* (Int.36).

[46] Religious radicalization and changes in religious teaching are analysed separately.

The *Education for a New Era Program*, launched by the new President Bashar al-Assad at the dawn of the new millennium, summarises the educational challenges of the new millennium in Syria. This program theoretically combines democratic, technological and economic development and represents the challenge played out in all Arab countries considered. As the previous quote points out, people experienced it mainly as a fraud. People hoped for a young man that *"studied in Britain and Europe"* and this helps to understand the meaning that international education has for these people because they consider it capable of creating free identities that can bring about changes. The new president promised democracy, which people were more interested in than technology, and pushed people to feel free to speak out to understand whom to arrest. The promised technological development occurred by favouring only the regime's family and clients, and the results achieved in school modernisation are considered rather disappointing. What has certainly not undergone any change are humanities, through which the regime reproduces its ideology (Int.36). This is not the case for other Arab countries, in which political changes have also led to changes in these disciplines and policies on linguistic minorities, as explained in the dedicated chapter.

As regards gender, generational differences are found especially in Tunisia, with the total abolition of gender segregation (Int.14) due to the particular policy of its government since independence. In Morocco, the norm is gender-mixed public schools, without significant differences in the last decade (Int.01). Mixed schools and separate schools coexist in the Syrian public education system, whereas in Libya and Jordan, there are segregated public schools and mixed private ones without any significant change in the last decades.

A transformation that has taken place in the entire area considered, thus a general trend in Arab Mediterranean education, regards pre-schooling. It is something recent, but despite the current diffusion of private institutes due to economic liberalisation, the price of private kindergartens and private schools, in general, has paradoxically grown within a generation (Int.20).

As far as foreign languages are concerned, countries traditionally linked to France and that usually teach French in schools are trying to detach themselves by expanding their curriculum, such as Tunisia (Int.15) and Syria. In all countries, there has been a focalisation on the English language since the beginning of primary school:

> *"When I was a child, we did not have English courses until I was in 6th grade. When I was a teacher, my first class was a year one, so it has been chances, they want children to speak English, to have English from year 1, so I think it is a big change"* (Int.32).

It is a general trend since English is the language of science and technology, and it is necessary to develop international relationships. The introduction of the study of the Russian language in Syria is the latest change in this regard, and it is a peculiarity only in Syria:

> *"The biggest difference was that we have in Syria more private schools and more international schools. Moreover, we started to learn many languages and it became a very important thing. English, French and... Russian... and what can I say... However, the same way of thinking or learning, still Tarbiyya Wataniya [nationalist education] is the most important, yes. The same, the same, it does not change, yes. However, we became more capable of going to another land... to speak other languages... it became more important"* (Int.38).

In Syria, at the turn of the century, Bashar al-Assad took the place of his father, declaring that he wanted to modernise the country and the education system to rise to the challenges of the new millennium and open them to the world. The introduction of technologies is a goal for all countries, and the results obtained in Syria are illustrative of those obtained in other countries as well.

> *"Things were changing but not as fast as the world is changing... so the world is changing so fast, and we did not, for example, have internet, we do not have computers enough so that we could not use the digital equipment so"* (Int.33).

The government's promises have not turned into reality, failing to meet the needs and expectations of teachers and pupils. Sometimes, school administrations themselves hinder the modernisation process and schools seem to meet neither teachers' needs nor pupils' wishes, although the tools would be available in theory (Int.32/33). Teachers that work using technology found themselves alone and opposed by the school administration:

> *"We had a big... class, laboratory, many things of chemistry and these things... I studied for 3 years there, and not even one day we entered there, not even one day. I do not know why we did not do it. […] the professor says, he says... ah... for this, there is the school director, he is the one who decides... but I do not know why he says that he does not leave me, I do not know why, he says so, the professor, but I do not know why… I think they leave it like that only if a person from the government comes and sees that there is this place to study, to explain more chemistry"* (Int.19).

This young boy tells about his teacher, who was not allowed to use the new chemistry lab by the headmaster. In his opinion, the teachers and the headmaster are interested only in the school's image before the government. The class of computer sciences seems to be not so severe:

> *"There were those old computers that are really... I remember that not everybody used the computer, almost, let us say that there were 24 of us, only 3 used the computer, the others did not know, but for this, you have to use the computer, it was let us say one day a week, we went and used the computer"* (Int.19).

They have computers, but they do not have qualified teachers (Int.14), therefore they go to computer class and play whatever they want (Int.9). The process started everywhere, but it is very slow (Int.41), and proceeds with significant differences between big cities and the countryside:

> *"When I started to teach, I did not start in that city. I started in a small village, and there, in small villages, maybe there are one or 2 or 3 computers, there are not in every classroom computer, or monitor, or smart board..."* (Int.37).

The technological gap between cities and small villages strengthens the reproduction of a city elite increasingly distant from the rural population but in the end, the results of this modernization are generally not comparable with what they found in their European host countries (Int.33). Despite governments declaration of intent towards the entire population and public institutions, the modernisation goal seems fully achieved only in private schools:

> *"We use computers; we use the internet, especially in private schools. This is normal, and all people can use it, and the school was very, very good, expensive but very very good. At that time, when I was a child or pupil, these things were never used nor existed in our country. Now yes"* (Int.38, Syria).

It was also the case for the special schools of the United Nations, but they, differently from private schools, were not spared during the war:

> *"R: they renew these schools with big buildings with very, very good laboratories, there is... You can go to the school; you think you are in a European country*
> *R2: especially in the science lesson*
> *R: yeah, it is very, very ... very good school and very high level, but when the war began, the first bombs went on these schools"* (Int.34/35).

The modernisation process in public schools totally stopped during the war:

> *"I feel, after the war, we were in 1000... You said, in 2000, started technology in schools, and computers and the internet and then... In one minute, these things go back and back, and we are now in the southern, and the war problems were strong, gas, and so and these things. It is difficult the balance and the people think about ok <<What is the most important: to pay for my kids to go to school and pay for what they need or to pay for fuel and gas>>. That is why I said we are now 1000"* (Int.39).

The differences between public and private schools on technology can also be seen in other countries. In general, public schools in all countries found themselves unprepared to use distance learning during the pandemic:

> *"In the period of the coronavirus... In the middle of the year, they did not go to school anymore, that is, they did not study anything at all. Neither teachers explain to them nor do they study. Then they came to do the exam directly"* (Int.7).

It is possible to conclude that technological development expands confirming the fundamental difference between public and private schools, which the next chapter deals with.

11.2 Structures and models of education systems: public/private dichotomy

Focusing on the structures and models of the education system, the most prominent topic is the existence of different parallel types of education. There is indeed a public education, in which it is possible to distinguish religious institutions such as Al-Azhar schools and schools for specific ethnic groups, and a private one, in which it is possible to distinguish religious and international schools. The focus of the discussion is on the dichotomy between public and private schools, and, closely related to it, selectivity and early channelling, where private education, in almost all countries and regardless of whether it is secular or religious, is seen as the best way to succeed in the selection. Wealthy families use private education to avoid the public education system's strictness and selectivity:

> *"Now the idea of a free, private high school is widespread, and this is also an idea that adopts the system because... […] it is important to have a high school diploma, whether it raises your rank to any job and to go in national competitions, both of Carabineers, police, other things, other competitions. Thus, now is widespread the thing of free high school, so a percentage that does not study go to private high school, because with the money they make them get to that point, they do not study, but they pay money and get to maturity there..."* (Int.14).

Most interviewees have experienced the dichotomy between public and private education systems in almost all countries, mainly based on economic and social status. In Morocco (Int.13), or Libya (Int.7; 27), it depends only on it: there are no ethnic or religious differences between public and private education, all the population is Sunni Muslim and there is scarcity of resources in the public system. In Syria, instead, private education was not so widespread until the last generation (Int.37). This delay depends on the Arab socialist ideology of the Ba'th party, which consider it a priority that all children of the nation attend the same school with the same curricula, growing as Syrian citizens without any differences in education nor based on ethnic belonging or class differences. Private schools existed previously only for religious minorities, like Christian schools:

> *"I started to have schoolmates who also spoke Arabic, but they were still Christian. No, in my school, there were no Muslims since it was a catholic school, a Christian school"* (Int.11).

The interviewee is talking about an ethnic school of the Armenian community, and her words show how in Syria, ethnic differences have to disappear under a supposed Arab homogeneity; therefore, what allows these schools to exist is a choice determined by religious affiliation. Indeed, Christians

Arab attended it, and their choice, beyond ethnic and religious belonging, is supported by the school's better reputation for the quality of teaching:

> *"It is a private school that is the school of the church. There was a church, and education was better for primary school, better of the public school. That is the idea for the family"* (Int.41).

If religious belonging appears more important than ethnic one, teaching quality sometimes appears more important also than religious belonging:

> *"It was like a Christian school. We are not Christian, but it is open for everybody if you pay and it was for the same reason as ***, it is a little more qualified education"* (Int.32).

Christian private schools also allow Muslim pupils to enrol, and some Muslim families prefer to send their children to schools well run by the church rather than schools run by the government in a way that they do not approve of. Anyway, someone pointed out that:

> *"For politics the same, you cannot say your opinion, you cannot say... speak freely, you can only say the things that you repeat every day at school, so... it was... dictatorship"* (Int.33).

Although private religious schools have a good reputation and avoid some excesses in the indoctrination of pupils, the difference with public schools is not so marked concerning freedom of expression and subjects content, imposed by the government on all private schools (the latter feature is common in all Arab countries).

The private educational sector in Syria is new and unstructured compared to North Africa with its well-established French or English international schools. On the other hand, other peculiarities make the education system fragmented compared to homogeneous contexts such as Morocco or Libya. In addition to the aforementioned Christian schools, people studying in Syria experienced studying in parallel systems for refugees, such as the United Nations schools for Palestinian refugees and the government's special schools for refugees coming from Golan Heights. The difference between these two is that the last one is of low quality:

> *"We have special schools for children that are like refugees' schools and they were not the best schools. I do not know if they were in all Damascus, I guess there are... and we are like 43 in one class and... Yeh, 40 kids in one class and we have about 4 classes for each year..."* (Int.40).

Although the government wants to promote a homogeneous education that supports the creation of a shared national spirit, there are refugees' historical minorities, such as people from Golan, who attend separate schools and, therefore, are subject to discrimination that makes them second-class citizens. However, subjects and curricula are the same and Arab nationalism spreads in the same way as in the public school system. Another minority living and studying in Syria is the

Palestinian one, whose basic education is guaranteed by United Nations schools. They experienced separate paths in comparison with their Syrian peers, but, on the other hand, these schools were similar to the private ones in terms of quality (Int.35). War and corruption by the government have contributed to diminishing their quality, with a significant generational difference in the educational paths of Palestinian refugees in the previous century and today:

> *"R2: When I studied, it was better (Laugh). When I was a child, our teachers were very highly certificated, but when I worked, I noticed that not all the teachers there could teach. No, they do not have a strategy; they cannot plan a lesson; they cannot use the material for the students…*
> *R: Because the United Nations began to take those people who are not highly educated but have good relationships with the government. This is on the war, and... Yes, it has now become worse.*
> *I: is it worse than the public schools?*
> *R: no, the same"* (Int.34/35).

While in Syria people experienced different educational paths due to religious, ethnic and political reasons, in most other countries differences depend more on social and economic status. In Egypt, there are also private Christian schools but, as in Syria, Christians often attend public schools, even though Egypt also has a well-developed private education system. Therefore, Christian pupils choose to attend private schools based on their religious affiliation for reasons related to economic status, since Christian families that cannot afford private school costs send their children to public ones. Everywhere, people do not experience competition between a national secular education system and a private religious one. Instead, the competition is between a national free-of-charge education system (in which religion has a different weight depending on the country), attended by most interviewees, and private schools for pupils from high–ranking families of different ethnicities and religions. This dichotomy is evident in Lebanon, a country not analysed in general since none of the interviewees was born or studied there for many years. What matters here about Lebanese education is what Syrian people experienced when they moved there to escape war:

> *"In Lebanon, yes, in Lebanon there is not a free one, we always have hospitals and schools for free, in Lebanon no, there is not something called free"* (Int.29).

They moved from a socialist and nationalist country with a strong pan-Arab ideology and a generally well-functioning public education system, mostly considered of good quality in terms of learning achievements, to a liberal country with a widespread system of private schools, especially for migrants. People who arrived in Lebanon from Syria often experienced this difference with disorientation and produced a significant comparison between the Syrian public education system, attended by most of the population, and the Lebanese one, attended only by people who cannot afford to enrol in private ones:

"I went to that school thinking that it was better, but it was always bad, because in Lebanon the schools that you do not have to pay for, that are the free ones, are not very good" (Int.5).

This boy had a negative experience in a school, but after moving to a new school, he realized that there were no differences and that all public schools in Lebanon were like the first one he attended. In Lebanon, private education seems to be the rule for those who want to have a good education:

"They paid a lot and we did not have... That is, we could not […] and then public schools could not be seen, and mum, that is, my parents did not want to put us in public schools" (Int.11).

In this case, this young girl's parents did not have the resources to send her to a private school and decided to prevent her from the suffering and humiliation that so many Syrian pupils experienced in Lebanese public schools. An experience of discrimination inside the classroom and often of separation from their Lebanese peers since Lebanese parents and teachers often consider Syrian pupils as a threat that can undermine Lebanese pupils' education.

"Yes, the Lebanese kids go to school in the morning and when they finish the Syrians go; they do not study together; the Syrians study alone" (Int.17).

The topic is explored in the paragraph on minority and language issues. Here, it is important to note that the difference between the two countries and the two education systems leads the Syrians interviewed to feel like foreigners even though Lebanon is an Arab country like Syria:

"Lebanon, for this thing, I had difficulties the first year, as always when you go to a new place, you have to have difficulties, or you have to have that... it is not your culture, also if both are Arabs, there is a new culture" (Int.21).

An important cultural difference is the role of European languages and cultures in society, especially French and British. This cultural difference reflects the principal difference inside education: the role of language teaching. If Syrian education focus on the Arabic language as a tool for national unification, Lebanese education focuses on foreign languages, with scientific disciplines taught in English:

"There, in Lebanon, you study science, maths, and many things with English, because... I do not know how the school is there, because you study in English. For this thing, I had difficulty because also in Syria we do not study English well, because I did only up to the 6th and what... boo, I can read, I can speak a little, only like this" (Int.21).

English and French have not the same importance in Syrian pupils' education as they do in the Lebanese one, and this is one more reason for discrimination against Syrian:

"The French teacher gets pissed off a bit and starts saying many things, because I do not study. All my classmates are Lebanese and can speak French because when they are young, they start studying it, I am the only one who does not know French and the teacher does not like it" (Int.5).

The difference between Lebanese private and public schools, in the opinion of Syrian pupils, is the behaviour of teachers and the quality of foreign language teaching, as experienced by a pupil who moved from public to private:

"Even there, I started to study French because the teacher was very kind to me; she called me, told me <<come, stay close to me at the table, I will help you, and we will do it together>>; this made me a bit happy. However, in 3 years there everything went well. I started to speak French a little bit, small things, even English I started to speak a little bit because there it is a very good school where when you study you study well" (Int.5).

In private Lebanese schools, teachers try to help pupils in learning foreign languages. These differences in teachers' behaviour and teaching quality between Lebanese public and private schools are the same differences found in all the interviews, in all the countries, between public and private education. Only Lebanese public education gives so much importance to foreign languages, whereas this is a common feature of private schools in all Arab countries:

"It was a good experience because, in Egypt, we have two types of schools, public and private, where the private school is the one where they teach you more language" (Int.09).

Private schools allow elite families' children to take an educational path that could help them to find a job in the international labour market and to relate with the West and the rest of the world through the importance given to foreign languages.

"I teach here and here, and the level of the student was different because the level of the students in public school... they do not have the base very good like these students.
I: but only in French or in all subjects?
R: no, no, in languages, only in languages" (Int.41).

Most Arab governments require private schools to follow national curricula, especially regarding humanities. Therefore, language teaching is often the only difference. Anyway, this distinction influences the formation of pupils' identity in the direction of a more cosmopolitan and open-to-the-world identity.

"But it is also nice, it is nice because English when you go out of a country you can speak it easily... you do not have the same difficulties that you have when you go out of a country where there is nobody who speaks English" (Int.21).

The difference between the nationalistic *habitus* transmitted in public schools and the cosmopolitan one transmitted in private ones contributes to elite reproduction, considering that numerous scientific university courses have French or English as the instruction language. Algeria and his relationship with the French language is the best example of this:

> *"They had studied the French programme all their life, and they did not know Arabic; they were very beginners in Arabic, in fact even that... I had chosen the advanced level in Arabic, but it was not advanced at all, because many of my classmates did not know Arabic... although they were Arab and had lived all their lives in Algeria! Nevertheless, they […] francophone parents, francophone in the sense that they spoke French at home, or occasionally Algerian"* (Int.12).

The role of foreign languages directly reflects the colonial influence on education and society. Algerian elite usually speaks French, attend university in this language and find jobs in which they have to relate with the rest of the world. In Maghreb, it is possible to see the differences between elite schools in the capital and rural schools in villages. The differences reflect colonialism's various grades of influence between the coast and the South:

> *"The teacher who teaches French did not have a degree in French […] I keep repeating because my village is small, so... Because if you ask these questions to someone who lives in Tunis... here there is the French school, there are people, for example, Tunisians, who do not know how to read and write in Arabic because they have done the French school […]. Actually, in the south of Tunisia, we are better in Arabic than in French because French is not well taught"* (Int.15).

In almost all interviews, there are similar complaints about the poor quality of foreign language teaching in public schools, also in Morocco (Int.23) and Syria:

> *"In English, I had a teacher who was too serious; it was that he... Always, he was good, he wants us to learn, but in my opinion, it was his way of teaching that was not good, because most of us do not speak English for this reason, they do not want to come to class"* (Int.29).

Some interviewees attended only one of the two systems and others attended both. Someone only attended private primary schools because their families wanted a safe environment and a good base for their children's education but did not have the resources to let them attend all education in private institutions (Int.9). Anyway, parent's motivation to choose private schools is often that, in this way, children can learn foreign languages well:

> *"They explained the choice not to enrol us directly in public school several times because private one gave you more opportunities above all from a languages point of view, and therefore with English. However, according to them, it was a more adequate preparation than the one in public schools. That is why they chose to let all four children continue to primary school and then, at secondary school, we were placed in state schools"* (Int.4).

It is common to start in private schools, which are safer, smaller and thus give a better basis for life, and then move on to public ones for financial reasons since families cannot afford to send all their children to private schools for their entire educational path. Instead, people who start in public school and move to private ones are rare and can feel discriminated against by their classmates:

> *"At the beginning, obviously, you feel not accepted at school since you were in a public school and then moved to a private one, everybody says <<the guy from the public has arrived>> so... I do not know, some look at you as you were ignorant and then slowly getting to know other people"* (Int.9).

Whichever path they take, in general, the themes of the comparison concern the weakness of public education. The most discussed topic is classrooms overcrowding, with about half of the respondents reporting this problem regarding all the countries involved:

> *"I changed the school, and I went from the private to the public one, from a class with 20 students to a class with 50-60 students of a different mentality, maybe it was... At the private, maybe we were all of the same age, of the same year, [...] I go to the public, and you find a class where there is a radius of 5-6 years from '95 to 2000 […]. Because in public, the professor has a class of 50 students, few are interested in studying, and some teachers are committed to helping all students, but at a certain moment, a professor gets tired"* (Int.13).

Classrooms overcrowding is identified as the primary cause of teachers' impossibility of doing their work well and, consequently, as the primary cause of pupils' failure and repetition of school years. In the focus group in Sweden, parents and teachers from several Arab countries talk about classes with 40-60 pupils. In their opinion, that causes:

> *"The impossibility of individual work and teacher's impossibility to know children's problems, the impossibility to have discipline and to reach the objectives fixed by the government and cause the wide use of memorisation with no space for creativity"* (Focus group 1).

Pupils cannot choose which public school to enrol in because public schools are distributed according to the population of each neighbourhood in both Morocco and Syria:

> *"You have to enrol with the families who live in your same neighbourhood, the state has counted the families, and they make the schools based on these numbers, and there is no problem, even if there are more in the class, even older ones, but there is no problem..."* (Int.1).

Private schools have the smallest number of pupils per class; however, it is not only a matter of pupils' number but also of their background, which influences their behaviour in the classroom. In public schools, there are all local children, especially the ones of poor or maybe problematic families; instead, in private schools, the composition of the class is very different:

"Since it is a private school, it also had the school bus that went around from different neighbourhoods […] and brought the pupils from any part of the city. Therefore, from my neighbourhood maybe there were 1 or 2... Because the school bus took us from this neighbourhood and then went to another and another and took us to school. So let us say we were from, I will not say all Casablanca because it is so big, but a good part of Casablanca" (Int.13).

In this regard, it is interesting to know what a young Arab pupil, who attended primary school in Verona (Italy) in a small class, felt when he moved to an overcrowded Arab school in Israel, his "home country":

"First, to notice is the number of children in the class. From 13 typically calm Veronese boys to 35/40 (laughs)... Madmen (laughs) who jump around you, there is a big difference because also the teacher is not able… to do his best with 30 hotheads and there then the whole environment […] Takes a dichotomy, sometimes more joking, sometimes they get pissed… they get angry [...]. There, the emotional load is more felt, that is, the school becomes a bit of a theatre also... there are the... a bit mini-gang, more groups, more emotionality, more maybe things that happen behind the teachers' back, that obviously being so many that how do you follow them all..." (Int.8).

Someone sees classrooms overcrowding in public schools as the main reason for the separation of males and females in different classes:

"In the public one, there were... I do not know, like there is a class only for boys, and then there is a class only for girls, because, in the public one, they were afraid to make us... Influence boys with girls, because problems occurred, so they made a class like this and one like that. Instead in the private one, since as I told you there is less number, so there is more control, they made the 2 together" (Int. 9).

This difference in gender segregation between public and private schools is found in many countries. It is worth saying that not only Christian and international private schools are mixed, but also most Muslims (Int.7; 4). This is not the case for Al-Azhar school, which divides pupils according to gender, starting from the first year of middle school (Int.28). In Syria, pupils and their families can choose between mixed public schools and segregated public ones (Int.20). Most of the interviewees are not so interested in the matter and simply choose the one closest to their home:

"I: how do you live this change between primary and middle school when you are in the primary also with males and then only with females? Do you prefer to study mixed or separated?
R: mh... for me, it is not a big problem. I can stay in this school or stay in that school, it is not a big problem for me, and I feel comfortable with this. If I wanted to go to another, also it was not a problem. The school is good, and near my house, that is" (Int.38).

The problem of the significant numbers of pupils is often managed by organising double shifts in Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. In this situation, the attention given to each pupil is

very poor, so it mostly depends on the family's background and attitude toward education whether pupils study and succeed (Int.14). The other significant difference between public and private schools is the teachers' competence:

> *"Also there is the teacher who... a teacher has a degree in computer science, she taught us science, because there is the lack of teachers, and sometimes while... that is during the year they leave us because they are not paid... and this is the situation"* (Int.7).

The lack of teachers leads to hiring non-specialised teachers; in addition, low salaries make them unmotivated to work. Instead, both in Syria and in Morocco, in countryside villages, one of the most discussed weaknesses of the public system is the multi-age class:

> *"I started school there with a very, very simple school, 2 rooms with outside a garden, in the room there are 2 classrooms, for example, the 3rd and the 6th degrade, the teacher gives the lessons to the 3rd degrade and then go to the 6th grade. We are in the same classrooms; we must be silent all this time, when she gives the others, and then come to us and give us"* (Int.34).

This reality is even worst in particular areas, like the Syrian Kurdish region, where there is often only one class for all 6 grades with only one teacher (Focus Group 1). The same situation occurs in Morocco, particularly marked by the scarcity of resources within the school in rural areas:

> *"There was no water in school, there were only these wells to get the water and they brought it to him […] here there was no water in these villages... these are the countryside, there was no water of the municipality […]. They brought it to the teacher, because at home each one saw it by himself, the parents, but they brought the water to the teacher"* (Int.25).

This topic never appears as central in other interviews, and the educational experience of other people from rural and poor areas is not so marked by it. People from Syria or Libya never spoke about these problems before the war, when the scarcity of resources inside schools became central in public institutions but not in private ones:

> *"I changed school because the school where I studied before was public, and then the other one is better because it is a school... private. It was better, let us say, because sometimes books do not arrive at all, that is, sometimes we study without books, only the teacher with her book and she makes photocopies or she makes us write, but in private schools, they do not do that because they just bring it... that is... I do not know how to tell you, eh... because streets are closed, so they find difficulty, but when the school is private, it becomes easier"* (Int.7).

Public education systems collapsed during the civil war; private schools, on the other hand, continued to work without problems, marking another important class difference in the experience of pupils from these countries.

"Now my sister has a daughter, and she is in the 1st class and, in her class, there are 50 pupils in one class and the class is very cold, and there are no... stones. No electricity in schools, but my other sister teaches in a private school, and there, there is electricity, tools... everything there is perfect" (Int.37).

11.2.1 Channelling, selectiveness and classification of sciences

Numerous witnesses of the selectivity and competitiveness of all Arab education systems emerge. They relate to parental social roles inside society, with poorer pupils often facing the impossibility of studying and wealthier ones often experiencing parental pressure to succeed in attending a high school that allows them to go to university. The first selection occurs with pupils' dropout in every school grade, without anyone from the school or institutions caring about them. It is the case in Morocco, primarily for economic reasons (Int.23):

"You have to bring a permit, if you miss only one day, it is trouble, and if you miss a month, they will remove you from the list" (Int.2).

If pupils do not attend school, teachers and school institutions do not ask for them, call the family or advise social service; they simply delete pupils from the class list and forgive them. It happens especially for lower-class pupils who do not have the economic possibility to study and need to work to help their families. The same is in Lebanon for Syrian pupils:

"I: nobody came to tell you <<why this boy does not go to school>>, nobody was interested?
R: yes, my father and my mother, they always told me
I: nobody from outside, from the state, from the UN, from humanitarian associations?
R: no" (Int.17).

If dropout selection in Morocco links to socio-economic conditions, in Lebanon, nobody cares about Syrian pupils' schooling. This selection depends on refugees' national belonging and political status, but, in any case, is characterised by low socio-economic conditions in the host countries, despite the socio-economic status that people had in their home countries. Syrians' experiences in Lebanon, and the situation in Morocco, are different from the norm in Syria.

"I: is education not mandatory?
R2: it is mandatory, but in villages, you can... they are alone, but many children, for example, if you have a farm and you should be there for one month, you can go from school. It is more important than school. So… in Syria, you (the teachers) can tell the police, the police maybe can ask once or twice, and (the parents) can pay them to keep silent so the...
R: In this case, it is more in villages, in big cities, everybody went to school […]. My dad always told us that as Kurds, you should be educated, and having an education was our goal that I should study. Because if I do not study, I do not know what will happen in the future" (Int. 32, 33).

Unlike Morocco and Lebanon, in Syria, there is a State interested in pupils' school attendance, as reflected in the country's high schooling rate before the war. Education is compulsory, and the state can control why parents do not send their children to school. Nevertheless, due to corruption, it depends on parents' motivation and social status. This quote shows the difference in the attitude towards school between peasant parents from a small village and city parents, where everybody attends school. In addition, it shows the concerns of a Kurdish parent from a wealthy family. In this family, economic status, life in the city, and belonging to an ethnic minority who has to strive for a place in Arab society, contribute to their interest in schooling.
In all Arab countries, dropout also relates to the early selection caused by severe examinations since primary schools, in which there are many failures.

> *"Here at the end of each year, you have to do an exam, and whoever does not pass this exam fails and does the same year again, and here this thing does not exist"* (Int.11).

In general, a common feature of all the analysed experiences is the severity and frequency of pupil's assessment and the consequent higher frequency of failures since primary school, something that does not have any correspondence in Europe at an early age[47]. The overcrowded classrooms have fewer and fewer students every year due to pupils' failure (Int.19).

> *"So in Syria, you go to primary school for 6 years and […] at the end of each class there is an exam to pass the year and go to another class... it is something that I think here is not done every year, but there are specific years, for example, 3rd middle and 5th high school. Not there, it is every year from the 1st grade"* (Int.20).

All the interviewees perceived their home country's education system as stricter than the European ones that they experienced, and, in many cases, they consider their teachers good and capable of preparing pupils for this strict assessment and selection. The Syrian education system is experienced as more severe than the Italian, German and Swedish ones; in addition, it turns out to be one of the strictest among the Arab ones, overall, more than the Lebanese one:

> *"Lebanon, for example, you are a teacher, everybody passes the exams even if they do not study. It is a thing that is not always good. I do not know if you have seen it, I do not want to say because it is my country, but this is the truth: always, there are famous people in the world who are scientists, and doctors. They are very good. Because they study things seriously, not like in Lebanon. It is for this reason because it is a very, very serious thing that when you want to do something to study, it is not easy anyway"* (Int.29).

[47] It is worth to say that in Egypt, in the latest year, exams have been abolished until the 3rd class of primary school *"to avoid pressure on pupils in early age"* Educative egyptian platform – Eduhub (moe.gov.eg)

The Syrian impression of the Lebanese education system is that if your family pays for private schools, you will succeed in education and that Lebanese pupils in public schools pass exams without the teacher caring about their preparation. Egyptian and Tunisian education systems appear more similar to the Syrian one regarding severity and selectiveness, two features that became even more evident in middle school. Some interviewees (Int. 14, 28, 29) stress the role of middle school as more critical and challenging than primary and high schools because it is the school through which pupils' future is decided since it determines whether they will go to university or not:

> *"The 8th grade according to the grade that the student has, then afterwards he does not choose, in the sense or you go to high school, or you go to the school... I do not know if you say vocational school. If you get a high grade, you can attend high school, scientific or literary... […] through this literary or scientific lyceum, you can go to university instead of the other one where you finish the diploma in three years and you have finished"* (Int.28).

Many interviewees talk about the different types of high schools and the way to access them thus showing how the education systems are selective and deterministic, channelling pupils from a very young age.

> *"You have to choose between classical or scientific, we only have two. And... It is not like here, if there is a scientific study, I cannot study after the law or something..."* (Int.07).

The choice of high school mainly depends on pupils' grades and not on their desires, and the high school attended directly determines university studies.

> *"You already have to choose in secondary school whether to go to scientific high school because you have to study science at university, or classical because you want to study history... You already have to choose in secondary school because if you study classical high school, you cannot, even if you get 100 out of 100, study medicine. […] It is very selective, if you decide that you want to be a doctor, you have to go back to school and do 2 years of scientific high school"* (Int.4, Jordan).

Interviewees attending schools in Italy are surprised by the fact that students can access all university faculties with any high school diploma. Interviewees living in Germany have not experienced this difference since the German pupils' channelling system is stricter than the Italian one and more similar to the Arab one. The difference, in this case, lies in the breadth of high school curriculum that appears extremely limited and limiting in Arab countries compared to all of Europe and above all to Germany:

"There was no music and... There was no drawing, art... and these are ... That is, they were subjects I liked a lot. In Italy, in middle school, I did the piano, and I loved the subject... In fact, I wanted to do the artistic then... So, there were not these subjects..." (Int.12, Algeria).

This poverty in curricula appears most evident to those who started school in Europe and then returned to their "motherland". The best option available is a scientific or literary high school, where only specialist subjects are studied without, however, allowing the young teenagers to acquire a general culture. In scientific high school, nothing about philosophy, history or geography is taught. The worst option is to attend vocational schools that do not allow access to university. Even in Syria, high school is decided on middle school grades and there is a limited choice:

"Who had fewer marks in exams must go to the industrial or commercial one. Those with more marks can go to scientific school, and study scientific things like physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc. […]. You cannot do middle school again to get more marks. […] For us, the exam in the 3rd middle school is more difficult than the one in high school because it decides what you have to do. If I like to do commercials but my grade is not for commercial but for industrial, I cannot say no, I do not like it. […] If you have the highest grade, you can also decide if you want to do commercial or industrial, but you cannot do something more" (Int.29).

The Middle school exam determines pupils' future in all Arab countries. It seems particularly deterministic and a too-early selection in the eyes of those accustomed to the Italian education system but it seems normal to people accustomed to the German education system. This feature continues in the selection policy for the university. Many interviewees also talk about university admission being determined by a vote rather than by a personal choice based on interest.

"The system there... it can be that you are very good in science, you are a genius... But you are not good at Arabic grammar, for example, and... What happens, when you do the exams, you get 30 cum laude in the other subjects and 18 in Arabic. This 18 lowers your average, automatically it does not allow you to go to the medical faculty, even though you are very good. This is a bad thing because it occurs to many students, that maybe they are very good at something else or on the contrary, one is good at that and not good in maths, this is the problem. Here [in Italy], the nice thing is that you finish high school and there is an admission test for the faculty you want to attend... Can you pass it? You get into the faculty you want. This gives a lot of opportunity to student to choose what he wants to study" (Int.28).

In most countries, the government decides each year the average score that pupils must have to access each university degree so that only the best pupils can access the course that requires the highest average. Best pupils are those with high grades in all subjects and not those with high grades only in the subject they would like to study at university. This relates to a classification of

sciences, in which the most prestigious are those for which students must get the highest grades in high school exams to study them at university.

> *"The highest faculty in absolute is medicine, this is always 98, 99% and the faculty of engineering is always 97-96%, and the faculty of languages is always 94-95, these are the 3 highest faculties and... At the high school, if one does the literary high school, he cannot access the faculty of medicine and engineering, if he does the scientific one, he can access everything and instead, the literary one can access only the faculty of languages, education..."* (Int.28).

Scientific studies are considered superior because students can access all faculties with a scientific high school diploma. On the contrary, with a literary high school diploma, people cannot access the two more prestigious faculties, medicine and engineering, which are, of course, scientific faculties. If these two are the first scientific disciplines in the ranking of Arab universities, all the humanities are at the lowest levels:

> *"The one that takes 50% is social service […] Exactly (laughing), I do not know why, but it is so, social service is the lowest, lowest, lowest one, and then in the middle, there are all the others, like… letters, also, it is not high; like 72-3%, always..."* (Int.28).

The faculty at the lowest level is Social Service, a reality that also brings discredit to the related profession since essentially the worst students study it. Social work is therefore considered a job for losers, for people who failed in their studies.

> *"Everybody aims at the highest faculties because this is the problem in our country […]. If you do Social Service, society looks at you as if you were a failed person who has not found a faculty and then found the last one and enrolled and then usually, families stress students in high school a lot. Why? To be able to have high grades, even some students commit suicide at high school, not many but every year it happens at least two or three students commit suicide because their families spend much money on private lessons at high school and... Waiting that the student can enrol to in a high faculty then maybe, the student comes out with a shallow grade and so it is as the student had destroyed whole family's dream. Always this speech of society. It is the society, if there is a doctor in the family it is always seen as a well-educated family, well settled"* (Int.28).

The ranking of subjects is closely related to the socio-economic status of families that can or cannot afford to pay for private lessons during high school in order to allow their children to obtain the highest grade. To fulfil their expectations towards their daughters and sons, families put significant pressure on them because their success or failure is the success or the failure of the entire family in front of society. All this has a substantial impact on pupils' lives and schools experience, pushing them to strive to achieve their family's social aspirations rather than their desires.

Between the most prestigious scientific subjects and the less prestigious humanistic ones, it is important to note the position and social role of foreign languages:

> *"Languages are among the highest ones because, unfortunately, the language teaching system in our country is more or less like here. In the sense that students study, for example, English for 20 years, but in the end, they cannot make a conversation [...] When they enrol in the faculty of languages, they still find themselves in difficulty because in our country, in order to travel, it is very complicated to get a VISA and so on. Therefore, you do not have the possibility, for example, an Italian student who decides to study Spanish can easily spend two or three months in Spain. Not for us, it is difficult; it is difficult to travel and therefore difficult to find someone with whom to practice the language you are studying, and therefore it becomes a difficult faculty. In addition, if you graduate in languages, it is one of the faculties that as soon as you graduate if you are good, you find a job the next day"* (Int.28).

The position and prestige of foreign languages in universities depend on various issues. The first is a strictly educational problem, i.e., the poor quality of this teaching in schools, so that few pupils are able to use the foreign language studied at the end of high school. The second issue is the demand in the labour market for people who know foreign languages to relate to foreigners in tourism, economy, etc. The last issue relates to the possibility of practising the language. Due to the difficulty of travelling for ordinary people, those who can afford academic trips abroad are usually people from families with high socio-economic status.

11.2.2 Pre-schooling

Pre-schooling is an interesting field to research on the relationship between education and identity since, in most countries, public nurseries and kindergartens are not widespread. Therefore, families have to choose between different types of private institutions. These can be standard, religious (*kuttāb*) and international, and, in the parental choice, it is possible to see the parental economic and social status and the ethnic and religious belonging.

> *"We have from 0, very very special kindergarten, nursery for people who work in governments or like in the bank, in schools, we little bit people go to this kindergarten"* (Int.38, Syria).

For most people, until the end of the last century, preschool was something reserved for elite families and children of people who worked for the state. The idea is that kindergartens are services for working parents rather than educational opportunities for children. Slowly this perception is changing with differences from one place to another:

"I am talking about the years 2000, 2001 that was, let us say, a new thing, not everyone went to kindergarten, so... They were still new, recent in Morocco, and not everybody sent their children to the nursery school" (Int.13).

People are not used to the idea of kindergarten. Culturally, parents are not used to leaving young children with strangers for a trust problem, and if they have to work or for other reasons, they prefer to leave them with some relatives. As preschool is mainly a private service, the interviewees often related it to economic problems:

"The families had to pay for kindergarten. So not all families had the economic possibility to send all children and so... because if all children study it is a problem and so sometimes they sent the child, sometimes they did not send him, sometimes they sent him for a month because at the end it was just something... something ... at pleasure" (Int.28).

Since it is not compulsory, poorer families do not send their children. Instead, those of average wealth opt for flexible solutions, such as sending them for a short period before primary school. The most expensive and exclusive are international kindergartens, especially English or French:

"My institute, instead, was an institute always relatively for well-off families, so from the point of view of social condition, they were all well-off economically and socially, and therefore... In short, they were all sons of magistrates, judges, or notaries... all sons of..." (Int.16).

In this kind of institution, the social composition of the class is very homogenous, composed of elite families' children. The reproduction of the elite through education begins in these kindergartens where young pupils start learning foreign languages, which are so important in the labour market and to have a high social position. In addition, children meet only people of their social status from an early age, rather than neighbourhood children, as is the case for public municipal kindergartens. On the other hand, since it is facultative, private and expensive, most of the children do not attend it, especially those belonging to the poorest families and those living in the countryside:

"In my village, there is no kindergarten because they are not famous... because they are private and the school is free, so few people enrol their children in kindergarten" (Int.29).

In this example, kindergarten did not exist at all in the countryside village where the interviewee was born. She almost justifies herself with a defensive attitude, as she is aware of the importance attributed to preschool education in her host country (Sweden), saying that public schools are free in their home countries, so they do not consider it useful and normal to pay for education at an early age. The problem of the price of early education appears continuously. In Syria, in particular,

prices have risen rather than fallen, and today it seems more difficult than before to attend preschools:

> *"Before, it was something that everyone could afford, even people who did not have much income could put their children there and paid every month, not at the end of the year, for example, there are choices that depend on the parent and their possibilities […]. I have cousins in Syria and yes; it is expensive compared to before, a lot"* (Int.20).

This 20-year-old girl talks about the first decade of the century when kindergarten started spreading with government support. The liberalisation policy and the economic difficulties caused by the war led to a narrowing of the target group of children economically able to access kindergarten. Until the beginning of this century (and in the subsequent years to the present outside capital cities), religious institutions were the only ones available:

> *"There was only one nursery school before, now there are many, but not before. Not the kindergarten, a school... religious, in which we studied Arabic language, so we learned the alphabet and everything, then we also learned a bit of Quran's Sure"* (Int.15).

This student stressed that her family had not chosen, that religious preschool education was the only available, and in a defensive attitude, she first talked about the Arabic language teaching and only afterwards about religious teaching, being careful to emphasise that it was a study suitable for children. Religious pre-schooling institutions are very common and, usually, they are the cheapest:

> *"They are always on payment, but... one pays little because it is usually the Imam who does it, the Imam of the mosque, so he does it as a good for God, here, and then he takes the money but always little and... So, most of the families manage to send their son quietly, because they pay little, moreover, the religion is still present here, so always if you are a child who knows the Quran... Teachers at school look at you with... certain eyes of love, in the sense... you are a child who knows the Quran, which means that you are intelligent because if you can already memorise it when you are little, it means that you are intelligent"* (Int.28).

Families also have other reasons to choose religious preschool education. One of these is the trust in the Imam of the mosque, whom they already know and of whom they know the educational contents. Another one is that religion still has a vital role in society and schools, so primary school teachers appreciate pupils who came from religious education. It is possible to see the anticipation of the issue of teachers' methods and attitudes in the sentence where the interviewee states that a child who can memorise the Quran is intelligent. For primary school teachers, it is not only the knowledge of the Quran that is important but also memory skills that they interpret as a sign of

intelligence. *Kuttāb* mainly teaches the Quran memorisation, but this is also present in the education provided by standard kindergartens and often by international ones. It turns out, in practical experience, as an advantage to learning Arabic well:

> *"They have an advantage. They have a gift that already at 6, 7 years old they know all the Quran by heart and... […] If you can read the whole Quran in the right way, even if you do not know Arabic grammar, you already have the ears to know whether this sentence sounds good or bad, and so yes, usually those who memorise the Quran are better in Arabic as a result"* (Int.28).

The Quran is considered the perfect expression of the Arabic language, so knowing it is considered the best way to learn grammar later. This is an idea that parents and teachers of primary schools share, thus there is no contraposition between religious pre-schooling and public school. The evaluation regarding educational preparation for primary school is, therefore, positive. As for other aspects of education, only one interviewee reported about violence in this school:

> *"He was... it depends, each time, how he feels about it, sometimes he even beat us"* (Int.24).

However, most of the people that attended it have good memories and show a defensive attitude when asked about it, mainly when the question on religion dealt with gender:

> *"I: and you were both male and female attending this?*
> *R: yes, yes, we do not have problems... then we did not study anything about religion, except the Sūra, the small Sura, so… […] we had a break in which we played and... Ate a sandwich, then... every Friday the teacher gave us, for example, candies, chocolates"* (Int.15).

The attitude of this female Muslim student engaged in the feminist field is interesting. She showed a defensive attitude towards her early childhood experience, aiming at explaining the "normality" of her educational experience in the religious kindergarten, talking about plays, sandwiches and candies. After this defence against the prejudices, which she has evidently often encountered in her experience, she goes into detail about generational changes regarding families' trust in these institutes and the approach she has experienced regarding the women's issue:

> *"I am talking about my experience because now there is the fear that these teachers can inculcate in children wrong ideas about our religion, which is a religion of peace. However, before, they never taught us anything about religion, except the little Sūra and the values, and therefore the principles of the Islamic religion: helping others, respecting them... That is all […] he had never spoken for example about the veil, or the woman's body, absolutely"* (Int.15).

Her defensive argument is based on the fact that the teaching is based on Islam as a religion of peace, that only short sūra are taught, focusing on the values of peaceful coexistence, such as respecting and helping others. Therefore, it was not a rigorist approach, as can also be deduced

from the attitude shown towards gender issues, never addressed in her school experience in terms of repression or mortification of the body. This defence develops into pride for the Muslim tradition when the discussion moves to economic and social issues such as equality in educational chances:

> *"I: you went there all the children of the village then?*
> *R: yes, all of them, poor or rich, they go there"* (Int.15).

She emphasises that boys and girls, but overall poor and rich, attended the same basic educational institution, as it is the norm in Islamic tradition and stands as a criticism of the current differentiations between schools for the riches and schools for the poor. Nevertheless, the spread of other types of preschools has also led to changes in *kuttāb* over time:

> *"The difference between religious kindergartens before and now is that now you pay like in a normal private kindergarten"* (Int. 28).

The free market has also affected religious education, where competition between different institutions has led to higher prices. However, the economic one is not the only difference found between kindergartens of before and today:

> *"Nowadays, the religious kindergarten, the kuttāb, has gone from memorising only the Quran to learning the alphabet and the letters' pronunciation. […] That is, they do two things at the same time, they teach you the alphabet and the reading, but, at the same time, you read the Quran and so this thing, for me, is very nice because before it was a little bit difficult, now not. This is an advantage of today's religious kindergarten. […] At a time, there was a method, and it is called ṭarīqa al-bayam, a way to... To study more the alphabet, the accents, the things. It spread automatically by itself, that is, that there was not a minister or a famous person who said, let us do that... It is that all families preferred this method, and so they tried to send children only to kindergartens where this is done because, in this way, the child studies both that and that. […] All Imams have seen that families have started to send their children only to kindergartens where this method is used, therefore, in order to have children from them, they have adopted the same system, and therefore now all religious kindergartens follow the same system"* (Int.28).

Free competition between different kinds of kindergarten led Imams to update themselves to follow the method preferred by families, a more modern and useful method of learning the language and preparing for studies. This was made possible by the broadening of the academic plan, allowing parents to choose from various methods and styles, without a political decision or imposition but simply by disseminating the best method. Thus, religious preschool institutions share with standard and international preschools the goal of teaching pre-writing and pre-reading in Arabic languages, as parents expect from all types of preschool.

"They are looking for giving us special education like making people, or kids, very qualitative in writing... we start early in writing vocabulary or something like that" (Int.38).

Standard kindergartens focus mainly on language teaching, but due to the strong presence of religion in society and the relationship that families and teachers see between learning Arabic and learning the Quran, they usually teach religion as well:

"We learn like 1 hour in a week or 2 hours, but it is not a kuttāb, but in our lessons, we learn how to read Quran but not all the day and not every day" (Int.38).

Their religious teaching is limited to one religion and they never explain religious differences (Int.30). The point is that most kindergartens convey the Islamic identity and belonging to pupils, be it religious, standard or international (but not all international).

The other feature that influences identity formation from an early age is the role played by foreign languages. Most interviewees who attended standard kindergartens said that they started learning English during this period (Int.38) as foreign languages are considered the key to success in study and work. It can be argued that people attending standard kindergarten belong to wealthy families, not elite families, and they consider learning foreign languages at an early age important for their children's careers. Those who attended special kindergartens, such as the Christian-Armenian one, have the opportunity to learn the Armenian alphabet as well (Int.11). It is the only example found of a minority language taught in preschool. It is worth mentioning that it disappears at primary school, leaving room for the study of Arabic and English language, considered more important to succeed in Syrian and world society. The institutions where foreign languages have more importance and influence on identity building are, of course, international kindergartens. People who experienced international preschool confirmed that the effort required to children in learning foreign languages is greater than in Europe:

"Because I have seen the experience of my brother... I think that in kindergarten here, they do not give real things to study. I remember that... the first day of kindergarten, my French teacher introduced us directly to the alphabet" (Int.16).

Young children are required to learn two or more languages simultaneously, which also means two alphabets, Arabic and Latin, before going to primary school, at an age when children in Europe usually learn by playing. Family pressure on elite children sent to international kindergartens is high, as they have to learn an international habitus early on, starting studying instead of playing. In general, teaching methods and attitudes in all types of kindergartens are often perceived as too demanding by people who have attended them:

"The only disadvantage […] they strain the children to memorise so much... However, it is not strained in the sense that they beat them; they strain them, come on, do this, do that, you have to do that, and this sometimes prevents the child from living his childhood. In this sense, the child always plays, but he will never be like a child who is taken only to the playground, and so already from that age, also the mothers use it as... As an excuse in the sense that... If you can memorise this chapter, I will make you play, and therefore, the child already makes an effort to be able to go and play... in my opinion, children need to study after, sometimes it is a nice thing, but sometimes it is not so nice because a child has to live his childhood. This is the case of the religious kindergarten" (Int. 28).

If international kindergartens require young children a great effort to learn foreign languages, religious kindergartens require the same effort to memorise the Quran. In this quote, the defensive attitude emerges in specifying that the problem is not violence, as it is often thought, but the burden of the study itself, which does not allow children to live their childhood. The problem is the same in standard kindergartens:

"A private institute. Reading and writing, playing no, we studied" (Int.2, Morocco).

The summary sentence of this 13-year-old pupil gives the sense that most preschool experiences are lived as a fierce commitment rather than a game. It also leads to the beginning of the early selection already at this level:

"Sometimes I think they are... strict in learning people or kids to write in a very, very good way and that is very... sometimes I think not all the children at the same level, some children have... what can I say, difficulties in this way, that is... I think it is a little bit hard for that child, but the other was very, very, very, good, the other kids" (Int.38).

Some children find it difficult to follow kindergarten programs and introject academic failure before they have even started schooling. Children and pupils' opinions are not the same as those of most parents who appreciate preschools and choose them precisely because they could prepare children for the severe selection they will have to face during their educational paths:

"It was not compulsory, but the parents prefer that the children do it because instead of entering school and they do not know anything, they know at least something" (Int.20).

Since schools select from the first year of primary school, many parents prefer that their children already know reading and writing when they enter first grade. Therefore, competition and selectivity act on pupils' training as early as kindergarten. Usually, indeed, pupils who have the economic opportunity to attend preschools already know letters and numbers when they enter primary school (Int.4). It is so typical to know numbers and letters both in Arabic and in English before entering primary school, that pupils who did not attend pre-school study them at home:

"No, because if I have to do the kindergarten, I do not need to do it because you have to do kindergarten at 4 or 5 years old, I did not enter because I had already learned the alphabet, and for this reason, I quickly entered the first grade […]. Because my father studied in English and so he made me from when I was little the alphabet in English and Arabic, and so it came easy to me also for study" (Int.22).

In all the previous statements, especially the latter, it is possible to see that the perceived aim of kindergarten is exclusively a didactic purpose, without any reference to peer socialisation, autonomy outside the family and other aims typically considered in European pre-schooling.

11.3 Religion in Arab schools

The interviewees often show a defensive attitude when talking about religious education, religious preschools or the Islamic education class in public and private schools. They seem to expect criticism or attacks and to have to defend themselves. They are hesitant to give answers and minimise issues such as gender, trying to show that there were no problems for them concerning this education.

"And religion was a lesson like another lesson, we have exams, and we have points" (Int.38).

This attitude appears to be a result of their migratory experience in Europe, in which they have had to cope with widespread Islamophobia. Indeed, the topic of religion has the highest interrelation with the codes of *Experience in Europe*, overall the subcode of *Religious differences and tolerance* directly relates to *Minority and language issues* and with *Identity and belonging*. This subcode is the richest even regarding *Religion in home countries*, allowing for a detailed comparison. The other sub-codes deal with *Contents of the religious class*, overall in H*ome countries*, from where this chapter starts, with the *Type of religious interpretations* in schools even outside of the religion class, treated immediately afterwards, and with religion's influence on scientific approaches and theories (*Science and Religion*).

The reference point for religious education is Al-Azhar with its parallel education system, which is unique in the Arab world with its public (therefore without fees) religious schools. The quality of these schools is higher and the study load required is heavier than in Egyptian public schools. They are open to all, regardless of wealth and gender, and provide direct access to college:

"The difference between al-Azhar school and state school is that in our school, after middle school, everyone goes to college because we do not have a vocational school in al-Azhar. It means that once you have passed your exams, they do not ask for grades, and you go directly to college, but not in the state school, as I told you before. This is the only difference" (Int.28).

Despite the different religious schools and interpretations existing in Arab countries considered, the contents of Islamic religious classes at school are very homogenous.

"We studied the Quran, the indications given by Mohammed, and that is...it ended there, so... I do not know; how to pray […] how to wash oneself before praying, like that at the beginning. Shortly, when you are a child, what is said during the prayer because it is not a free interpretation; let us say this is just when you are a child. Then there are little prayers before eating, before going to sleep, before doing anything and then, well, going on, we started to read the parables, the smallest ones, to learn their explanations, but let us say set more or less on this line, not... there was not a really deep study" (Int.04).

The interviewees explain that they studied the Quran, stressing that it is not an in-depth study but one suitable for children (Int.15). This study aims mainly at teaching the basics of religion, how to pray, fast, and make the pilgrimage (Int.23), the life of the prophet Muhammad (Int.02) and at explaining complex and challenging terms and phrases in the text (Int.07; 19). Often the interviewees appeared engaged in refuting the idea that they supposed the European researcher have, i.e., that of a fundamentalist and oppressive religious teaching. In Tunisia, some respondents openly complained about the contrary, i.e. the inconsistency of today's religious class (Int.14).

"It was one hour a week. Usually, there was not a religion professor, but it was always the one of Arabic... Let us say during these hours, verses of the Quran were taught and, as much as possible, part of the Hadith... the verses transmitted by Muhammad, and then yes, there were really many competitions for memorisation, even at a national level that we did, and so... Yes, basically it was divided into these two parts, a part in which we explained the Quran interpretation and the hadith and then the part of the question in which the teacher could ask what he had explained last time" (Int.16).

In this case, such as in many others, at the primary level, there is not a specific teacher for religion, instead, it is taught by the teacher of Arabic and humanities, thus with a deep intermingling of language, humanities, social sciences, and religion. The relation between knowing the Quran and learning the Arabic language is confirmed by the method used for both, that is, memorisation.

"He gave them a page to learn by heart, then on the second or third day they came to school to read it and then he explained the meaning, all this is Islamic education" (Int.26).

In the words of this young Moroccan woman, memorisation is the only task required of pupils in Islamic education classes, so the question is whether space is reserved for discussion and questioning:

"I cannot even call it a discussion because we were very young, so obviously, there were very innocent questions asked by children to which the teacher tried to give the explanation most in line with the theological interpretation. [...] They talked a lot about collective imagination, there are things that, let us say, are dogmas for the community, and as dogmas, they had to be quoted. Obviously, a child of 8, 9, 7 years could not know these dogmas that instead the teacher knew and so here... but I know that in

a more mature phase, they obviously went into more detail […] it was the phase of the explanation of the five pillars and the bases of the religion" (Int.16).

Most of the people interviewed did not consider discussion within religion class to be a problem. Some of them claimed that they do not remember many discussions because they were very young and did not have a real understanding of complex issues regarding religious interpretation. However, if pupils had a question, they could freely ask, and teachers did not hesitate to answer. It seemed to be a relaxed atmosphere (Int. 02). Even if children asked about dogmas, teachers answered in a relaxed way because they were children who were learning.

"When we were bigger, we asked the meaning of this aya, what do they mean, we have a question and the teachers give us answers but not... It was not a big problem, we did not have much fear of discussion about this, sometimes some boys ask about something they eared or read from lessons or others, and the teacher gives us the answer, but there is no big problem" (Int. 38).

In middle and high schools, where pupils are older and have more critical curiosities and questions, the atmosphere of Islamic class seems to be relaxed and open to questions and discussion. This is the same for Syrian pupils and teachers even if there is no freedom of expression on political issues; a freedom that seems to exist regarding religion.

"They always teach us Islamic values, so I have studied all this. Then the year before university, for those who do classical high school, this subject changes, it becomes... Islamic thought. We study Islamic philosophy in which we reasoned on the Quranic verses. It was a beautiful subject, which I adore because we study the real principles of Islam, not, for example, how... because all that I studied... I can interpret it, therefore... respecting also the current society's changes, because what the extremists say now does not exist in Islam" (Int.15).

In literary high school, pupils study Islamic philosophy, deepening their understanding of contemporary issues through discussion. This Tunisian student, who criticises the Tunisian school system for being under government censorship regarding political issues, appreciated the freedom of debate in the Islamic philosophy class, confirming the dichotomy experienced in Syria. In none of the interviews, however, did the opposite emerge, namely free political debate and censored religious debate. The role of memorisation and discussion seems to be the same when religion is a separate subject taught by a specific teacher (Int.9; 10) and in private or special schools (Int.34-35). Some interviewees also attended religious institutions simultaneously with the public school (Int.10) or in summer (Int.14), and their experiences were quite similar: they memorized and discussed.

"He remembers that they read the Quran and did the translation and explained the meanings
I: was it the same at the Quranic and the primary school?

R: yes, only that you wrote with a pen, instead you wrote it with a cane" (Int.25).

Therefore, the teaching of religion appears to be homogenous not only in all the countries surveyed but also in all the types of educational institutions attended by the interviewees, without significant differences. The exception appears to be Al-Azhar schools in which religious studies are deeply explored, yet still with the same approach and moderate values.

"In al-Azhar, it is little that you find among boys the students bullying... quarrels... all these things because... Since the 1st year of primary school, they teach you religious things like piety, respect... love towards others and... All these religious teachings both in Islam and in Christianity, and so, let us say that boys who do religious school are calmer and instead boys of the state school are more active" (Int.28).

The values transmitted in Al-Azhar schools are shared values between Islam and Christianity, aiming at promoting peace between people. In the opinion of this student, the focus on religion greatly influences pupils' behaviour and personality, as religion assumes a fundamental role for them. On the other hand, in public schools, many people consider religion as an unimportant subject for scholastic success:

"In the Islamic education exam, when I did it, if I do or not, it is a normal thing. It does not make a big difference in the final grade. That is why I say this, but in the class, everybody studied it; I did not see one who did not want to study it, but generally, it is a subject like any other; there is one who likes it and one who does not like it, it is normal" (Int. 19).

The word *normal* appears again, and, as in other interviews, expresses that it is not a fundamentalist teaching or something different from the Catholic or Protestant religion classes inside Italian or German schools (Int.21). Inside the strict Syrian education system, the Islamic religious class is not considered oppressive, also because in high school it was not compulsory, meaning that the grade in this subject does not count in the grade's general average (Int. 41).

"The teacher was talking, and they were playing, and I was sorry for the teacher who came and talked alone, I was very sorry for him. The same thing obviously in the middle school in Egypt, it was more or less the same thing as this" (Int. 09).

Despite the widespread idea that religion is taught oppressively in Arab countries, this young Egyptian does not see significant differences between religious classes in Italy and Egypt, both characterised by pupils' disinterest and poorly regarded teachers. The main differences regard contents, as narrated by a Syrian Christian pupil:

"In Italy, we talk about our things, problems, bullying, diversity, more personal. There you do religion religion, here we talk about something else; I guessed they talk about commandments, but no, they talked

about personal experiences. Nevertheless, the teacher always manages to link it in a certain way. It is not a useless class because it makes you think a lot, I like it" (Int.11).

If in Arab countries, both Muslim and Christian religions are taught focusing on sacred texts, in Italy, there is a focus on the pupil's personal experience and the relationship between life and religion. The values of religion and their application in today's life are disseminated in different ways, but ultimately, are at the heart of the teaching in both European and Arabic countries. Great importance is even attributed to Islamic education in teaching how to behave with others in order to be at peace with themselves and others (Int.39), highlighting that, in their memory, Islam is explained as a religion of peace (Int. 15). In addition to memorisation of the Quran and the learning of Muslims' duties, stories and fable were used to transmit the Islamic values and moral:

"There are these children with their teacher... interesting this thing... he gives them some birds to be killed, and he tells them to go and kill them where nobody can see you. Therefore, they all go and come back, and one of them comes back with the dove, which is still alive. So the teacher asks this child why he did not do his homework, and he replies << because I have not found a place where no one can see me, wherever I go, there is God who sees me>>. And more or less this, the Islamic education moral was a kind of these stories here, where there was always a moral at the story's bottom that gave you something; in fact, I still remember this story" (Int.10).

It is interesting that the story, told to Moroccan pupils at an early age, in a country where teachers' authority is so strong, is based on the cultural heritage of the traditional relationship between religious master and disciple. It is interesting because it teaches pupils to obey the teacher (all the children in the story go to carry out the task assigned) to the extent that this obedience does not conflict with one's personal knowledge of God. Stories like this teach children that even disobedience to the teachers' will could be necessary to be a good believer. Behind daily religious classes, and stories and moral tales told, there are different interpretations and religious schools, sometimes imperceptible and sometimes evident. These religious schools of thought influence not only the official teaching of religion, which is mostly homogenous in all countries considered and in all types of schools but also subjects' contents and teachers' behaviours and speeches outside the well-defined field of official Islamic education. Regular teachers of Islamic education generally oppose fundamentalism and work to prevent it:

"I got the baccalaureate in 2011, the Tunisian Revolution year. At that time, they started to talk about the Ennahda party, but my teachers were good teachers who talked about the past, about this party, these extremists who used religion to reach their goals, not to respect religion. For example, they told us about massacres they had carried out before, so they also told us <<when you go to university, you have to be careful>>. At that moment, we started to talk about how they would like to close clubs and

places that sell wine. He was a professor of Islamic religion but against the idea of closing, he said that we have to sensitise people on the importance of respecting others. Who want to drink, drinks, who does not want, not drink" (Int.15).

This religious teacher is against fundamentalism, and his speeches and teaching aim to form tolerant and open Muslim identities in his pupils. He openly questioned the religious interpretation of the radical party Ennahda, which was gaining success during the period of the revolution against Ben Ali's secular regime, even offering private tuition free of charge:

"There was a professor, […] I took a few courses from him, and he did it free of charge because, at that time, there was an election with the Muslim brothers, and he was part of this group. So what did they do, they just found a structure like a private school, and they asked people to go there to study, for example, to do repetitions for high school exams. Then, these people follow the Muslim brothers' party and you feel that the professor is too polite... in a sense you feel... religion in this professor. Both in educational and analytical parts, in many things […] They ask you to come on Saturday or Sunday to study, you choose the course you want to do, maths, physics, you do it and they do not force you to follow anything or be a party member. No, but something arrives. […] You think <<look, how good they are; they teach free of charge, so I will go>>. Since you go there, you see things, the logo, then your, let us say... curiosity, attracts you to know what kind of party it is, what kind of ideas they have, what they think to do" (Int.14).

After Ben Ali's regime defeat, for the first time, Muslim parties like Ennahda were able to participate in the election. The regime has not allowed them to spread their vision in schools, so they work outside of it through volunteerism providing private, free-of-charge lessons, for which pupils usually have to pay a lot. The teacher in question does not do propaganda directly; instead, he let his contents leak out indirectly in speeches and explanations in a less noticeable way. Therefore, pupils become convinced of their goodness as they offer help freely and gradually approach the party without feeling forced. Between secular authoritarian regimes and rebel radical Islamist parties, both bearers of repression and censorship in their own way, religious institutional teaching spread a moderate Muslim identity, in which respecting other people's choices is an essential value. It is not only a teacher's choice but also a shared policy between Arab countries, some of which have chosen to cooperate and live in peace with the West:

"I: In Islamic education or other subjects, were current issues dealt with? Did they talk about current issues, like the twin towers attack or the question of women? There were no debates?
R: no, there were not because, in Morocco, there is a ban. At the beginning not with us, because I studied in the 90s, so something was explained to us... They explained to us some things maybe for other religions, they explained to us also the wars between Romans and Muslims in old times, let us say. But

after I think that law came out, it was not even discussed because they talked badly about the Jews, let us say... They explained things, as they were, that there was a problem with Palestine, but not now, things have changed; now they do fewer hours on Islamic education and talk about some particular topics, and that is it, for this problem of extremism. [They removed] the arguments that can create hatred towards others let us say […]. This is a world policy, which we do not even know, rightly so... You have to be in the world, you have to follow the rules, and among these rules, there is peace, practically speaking" (Int.24).

Unlike Tunisia, Morocco does not have a secular regime. Instead, it is a traditional Muslim country, with the king serving as both the political and religious leader. In this quote, it is possible to read the opinion of the Moroccan cultural mediator who translated an interview conducted in Arabic. Usually, the mediators do not have to express their opinion, but he did since the young girl had no memory of the changes that had taken place. It is interesting because, in order to answer a question concerning the existence of debate on current issues in the Islamic religious class, this man considered it important to compare today's reality with his educational experience in the '80s and '90s, resuming in a personal way the critical topic of the history of education in Arab countries. He clearly stresses this historical development in political and international relationships as the cause of how religion is taught today. When he was a pupil at the end of the century, extremism was spreading in Morocco also through religious teaching. In particular, there were some sensitive topics through which animosity between Muslims and other peoples spread, such as the Roman Empire, the Jews' history and the Palestinian issue. As described in the following chapter, these topics are still central in the humanities and contribute to creating an Arab conflicting identity in pupils. However, at that time, they were treated in religious classes with a religious connotation. The mediator experienced the educational policy on religious teaching, inaugurated in the new century and influenced by the Sufi brotherhood Būdshīshiyya, as a removal of "*the arguments that can create hatred towards the other"*. Morocco attempted to be a country peacefully connected to the rest of the world by joining, in his opinion, a "*world policy"* in which every country has to *"follow the rules, and among these rules, there is peace, practically speaking".* Morocco has changed its position toward Israel and spread a tolerant and homogenous interpretation of Sunni Islam. As inferred from this testimony, sometimes this is experienced negatively as a censoring debate on sensitive topics. Therefore, while there may be satisfaction with the possibility of debating topics specifically related to the Muslim religion, there is not with those religious topics directly, and conflictingly, related to current politics.

"The change at the political level, the arrival of political parties for the first time, Islamic parties that governed with the king. There is a change because they are always in the parliament, there is always

the king's government, but also there is the parliament and the prime minister who are Islamic, really Islamists; it is not like with communists" (Int.01).

This quote refers to the period at the end of the century when the socialist pro-independence spirit was waning, giving way to fundamentalism in most Arab countries. Both men remember their experience of religion in school as determined by this historical-political phase of changes. Every younger Moroccan student, who did not experience that period, talked about it, recognising its influence on their own experience:

"There was not anymore that problem of extremists because there was a little bit years ago, but in our generation, there is not anymore. It is treated a little bit, not officially, in education […]. We had some professors who were a bit... I would say a bit extremist, strange, you want to talk to him, and he says <<no, this is said in the Quran, and that is>>. This is something that you should never say to an adolescent because all of us have had as an adolescent that idea <<but is what I believe correct? >>. An idea certainly comes to you, to every teenager, and to say that to someone who is in that moment, you can make him go another way" (Int.13).

In his experience, there is only one extremist teacher representing a minority who acted as numerous teachers did in the '80s and '90s. The new generation of Moroccan pupils is not used to teachers who give answers that cannot be discussed, so this is no longer the *habitus* that schools transmit today. It is worth saying that the extremist teacher was not that of religion, with which the young Moroccan in question has had a very good relationship until today. Even a young Egyptian student talks about this historical turning point, arguing about his own experience with religion in schools:

"Egypt since the '80s and '90s has had these flows of many people who migrated, then returned, i.e., Egyptians who went to be teachers, professors, in Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and then returned. This has also brought ideology, such as the entry of Wahhabism, which was not there before. These currents have led to obvious differences in the education system. That is, there were those teachers who believed that the teacher's task is to form the good Muslim" (Int.16).

In this quote, the reference is to the whole education system and teachers of all subjects, not only to religious teaching. After Egypt's independence, Nasser's socialist educational policy led to an educational boom, creating an army of unemployed graduates. These graduates were then enrolled in the new-born education systems of the Arabian Peninsula, where the oil boom had suddenly brought wealth and where mass education systems developed decades after Egypt. These teachers returned to Egypt imbued with Wahhabi pedagogy and argued the necessity of forming the Muslim identity firstly and in open conflict with Nasser's pan-Arab ideology, which instead aims to build the Arab identity. Pupils attending Egyptian schools today still strongly felt this dichotomy.

"There was an interview with a boy on the television that they brought him as he memorised... As he recites the Quran very well, in a competent way that he knows well the grammar and so on. He [the president Al-Sisi] made a call, and he said <<I am very happy for this boy, congratulations, best wishes to you, for your family, but please teach… I want to say also to the Egyptian people that I recommend you to be careful to understand it more than to memorise it... so take into account also the fact to understand it more than to memorise it because how people interpret religion changes a lot the things>>. And therefore, I know that his thought is this one, to leave religion alone, to put it aside, it is time to work, let us do physic, let us do this and that, there are Christians and Muslims, and everyone does the thing for himself..." (Int.30).

The current government aims to give more importance to understanding than to memorising religion; however, this student felt that the President wanted to focus on scientific development, leaving religion in citizens' private lives. Even pupils attending schools in Syria strongly felt the distance between the Wahhabi pedagogy, to which many fundamentalist teachers aspire, and their experiences of religion in religious classes and life.

"It is different because Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country and has different rules. I do not know which the rules are, or what people are doing there because I was not in this land, but I think it is hard sometimes, and I cannot stay in this land or live there. I think it is not mine" (Int.39).

Although she is Muslim, this young student states that she cannot identify with Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi ideology and identity. The reason for this is that the reality she experienced in Syria was very different in terms of pluralism of ethnicities and religious interpretations, and even gender issues, to the point that she defines Saudi Arabia as a Muslim country, implying that Syria is not. Although Syrian politics and society are not modelled entirely on a single interpretation of Islam, as is the case in Saudi Arabia, the social reality of pluralism is not reflected in religious teaching:

"All Muslims take the same Islamic courses together. […] We do not discuss the difference between Islamic groups, we more or less study Islamic history and the prophet's history, before that, there was a separation, and many sayings about the prophet, from the prophet, and then the Umayyad and Abbasid period. And, of course, even Husain and Hassan's death, so they would tell us OK, there is this worship, they have a special history, but we would not talk about the difference... in the Teachings. But, outside school, every religious group teach their own children at the mosque or with the Shaikh about their particular group's history" (Int.36).

In Syrian schools, a moderate Sunni interpretation of Islam is taught, even if the Muslim pupils belong to different traditions and schools. They study the events that led to the separation between Sunni and Shi'a without studying the doctrinal differences between them, even though the president himself belongs to a religious minority, as does the teacher interviewed. This reflects the

regime's pan-Arab ideology, in which Arab and national identity is more important than particular religious belongings, which are instead viewed as "*something against national unity*" (Int. 29). Sunni Islam is presented as the truly Arab tradition that every Syrian pupil must know to complete his or her Arab identity. The interesting evidence is that, following very different evolutions, religious teaching in Morocco, Syria, and all the other countries considered arrives at the same result: one homogenous Sunni teaching that contributes to national unity and the reproduction of the national identity beyond particularistic belongings; a moderate form of Sunni Islam, which does not allow for more extreme and controversial interpretations. How institutional religious teaching deals with the gender issue is a demonstration of this moderation, as shown by the veils' issue, a topic more controversial in Europe than in Arab countries, as pointed out by a Moroccan student:

> *"The teachers, maybe in the whole school, there were two veiled and the others not, they were not veiled […] But the issue was never faced, in the sense that, now that I remember, there was not some lesson where they talked about hijab or something. At least in my memories, there is not this thing here […] In the West, there is, let us say, quite a fury because let us say it is a diversity with which we cannot have peace, especially nowadays"* (Int.10).

The fierce debate on women's veil does not exist in the school memories of Moroccan, Tunisian and Syrian pupils. It is seen as a personal choice mostly of adult women, some teachers wore it and others did not without any discussion about it (Int.18). As a female Tunisian student states, there was no discussion on women's bodies, on headscarves or other issues (Int.15), and none of the interviewees reports this kind of discussion. On the contrary, a male Tunisian student states that now female pupils can dress as they wish. If teachers complain about it, they are accused of being religious extremists against women's rights. In contrast, boys cannot go in shorts or large rapper-style pants because those are not considered school-appropriate clothing (Int.14) and teachers cannot wear the burqa during the lesson because pupils need to see the teachers' faces (Int.30). Nevertheless, there are not only positive aspects to that standardised religious teaching:

> *"When one learns religion, however, he feels an emptiness, then it means that there is a lack, so the philosophical and spiritual side was missing, but the classical, scriptural, theological one, scriptures and so on... legal, yes, it was very much Sharī'a /Quran remembrance"* (Int.08).

This Palestinian educator feels that the religious teaching he has received in school is inadequate and insufficient to deal with the world's diversity. What is missing is the philosophical and spiritual component. In most countries considered, the philosophical side of religious studies is only addressed in the last year of literary high school; thus, people attending scientific or vocational school never deal with it. Instead, what he calls the spiritual side is never dealt with. He is referring

to the Sufi approach that, in most countries, is considered controversial, as there are rigid currents of thought that oppose it. Therefore, in school teaching, there are only the basic elements of the Islamic religion, the fundamentals that no one could question.

11.3.1 Sciences and Religion

> *"Until now, I am always in contact with a professor of Islamic education; I always talk with him about everything, science or Islamic education. I asked him <<the other time I was talking with a friend of another religion and he asked me this question, I could not answer because I have no scientific justification>>. He says <<very well that you have to answer logically, do not say it from the Quran, because there I ask the question and immediately find the justification, but for another person, it is not convenient>>... So I always stay in contact with him, we talk, he also grew up outside, in Europe, so he knows a little bit… he is very open to dialogue"* (Int.13).

In this quote, a teacher of Islamic education recommends to a young student to search for a way to be understood through the tools offered by the scientific method, reminding him that the justification found in the Quran is not enough for non-Muslim people with whom he interacts in Europe. In this case, that teacher is beneficial in the student's migratory experience in Europe, contributing to avoiding his radicalisation on positions incomprehensible for his new friends.

> *"In the Quran, it is explained how the child starts from zero until it grows. It explains all things. The Quran talk not only about religion but about everything, let us say, all things"* (Int. 19).

This sentence presents one of the reasons for examining the relationship between science and Islam, as well as how Muslim identity affects pupils' approach to learning. This young boy, who is studying to enter the Italian faculty of medicine and is therefore well educated in science, believes that the Quran provides scientific guidance since it explains many natural phenomena, such as children's conception and birth. For this reason, in Arab-Muslim culture, there is no dichotomy between science and faith:

> *"In the Arab culture, there is the myth of the scientist Ibn Sina; he is really a myth that you have to follow, that if you obtain you are another great, and there it gives a good charge to the boys to become scientists"* (Int.08).

Influential scientists like Ibn Sīnā (also known as Avicenna, X-XI century) are considered examples for Muslim scientists to emulate, as they were faithful to both the scientific method and religion. Therefore, students do not feel any contradiction between their Muslim identity and aspirations for a career in the scientific field. The Islamic religion has never fought science, as was the case with Catholicism in the Middle Ages; on the contrary, it has constantly stimulated it. To

what extent is this still true in today's schools? A good topic through which it is possible to investigate this question is the theory of Evolution, which openly contradicts Creationism.

> *"They tell you that this is the actual theory, and biology was studied in all fields, from the cell, the organisms, maybe less voice is given to the evolution because anyway there is favouritism towards some parts of the science […]. More space and time were given to the cell, to physiology, to more pragmatic things, and less to the theoretical sides. […] Who comes from the Arab culture is a bit more believable, he cares about atheism, while if a professor arrives to give me a speech on evolution with that atheistic air, then maybe you clash"* (Int. 08).

The answer provided by this aspiring doctor believer lets us know that the evolution theory is mentioned among the other existing theories, but that science classes generally do not focus on theories but more on pragmatic things. This is a common methodological approach to sciences, which avoids conflicts in the classrooms over controversial theories that are not always accepted by teachers and pupils. The Palestinian educator mentions Arab culture as the source of this scepticism toward the evolutionary theory.

> *"They said all these are theories and by the time we can know what the truth is, or it is correct, or it is wrong, we do not know, we are always learning, and every day it becomes a new theory or something like that. […] When they teach us about the theory, she sometimes says <<I think it is not the right one because God created this world and this land and... I think it is not the right way to say from where we are coming that the first creatures were monkeys or something like that; our God said that we are born like this>>. But she said one time this, and we do not discuss very, very, very ... some pupils say you are right, some pupils say we are talking about the thing I do not think, or it is correct. We can have this discussion, no problem"* (Int.38).

In this case, the evolution theory is not censored, even though the teacher herself does not believe in it because it contradicts the religious idea of Man's Creation. The teacher explained the theory and said that her personal opinion was based on religious belief, and pupils freely expressed their opinions without any problems. The interviewee also stressed that this discussion had taken place only once, meaning that it was not something to which students and teachers gave too much importance. In Syria, a contradiction exists, but it does not lead to significant problems in the classrooms between different opinions, and overall, there is no censorship. If there is a clash between current theory and Islam, it does not prevent discussions on these topics in schools, even if a science teacher's opinion can certainly influence pupils' opinions. Some interviewees studied evolution without any particular teachers' comments or discussions in the class and did not study the Big Bang Theory (Int.41) instead. There are many differences in the interviewees' personal

experiences, based on science teachers' beliefs and attitudes and even on pupils' personal attitudes and knowledge.

> *"I do not think evolution... I do not think so because it is incomplete; it is a theory, something for... it is a theory, I like to read and to know, yes, but to believe, it is a theory, it is not 100% certain, but it is nice to study it, yes […]. In science, yes, they study all the theories, even if they are against the Quran and against what it says, it does not say yes or no, like a theory... If someone wants to study medicine in Syria and does not study, for example, let us say theories like evolution and these things, you cannot. You have to know the theories"* (Int.19).

This description of the current situation does not differ from the situation at the end of the last century (Int. 38; 41). All theories are studied in schools, regardless of their alignment with religion, and knowledge of these theories is essential to enter the top faculties. The point is that pupils are required to know them not to believe in them. The controversial theory is not censored, as the fundamentalists of all religions wish, but neither is it imposed, as the atheist fundamentalists would, since, as this student states, they are theories and not proven realities. His faith in science and Muslim identity does not conflict even when speaking about the Big Bang theory:

> *"It is studied, for example, in two classes, the Islamic class and the science class. In science class, it is one of these theories taught in all schools. In the Quran it is written, it talks about the big bang in the Quran also, the Quran explains the Big Bang that, for example, the universe was nothing, and it started, for example, from something too small, like the theory of the Big Bang, almost the same in the Quran it explains it […]. I personally read many, many books […] But the difference, let us say, between science and Quran, I have not seen even one thing. [...] There are many things that we say are true and other things that we do not know, for now, there are no theories that talk about those things, nobody understands for now"* (Int.19).

In this statement, he explains how the Big Bang theory finds correspondence in the Quran and that he has yet to find any scientific proof that contradicts it. Rather, there are both scientific theories and Quranic revelations that have yet to be proven or disproved. Therefore, only future studies can reveal how things really are. Finally, it is possible to conclude that his Muslim identity does not prevent him from having an open scientific spirit.

> *"As I told you, in the Arab world, religion is still very present and... The result of these scientists, philosophers, if we can call them that, sometimes they go against the religion and... And so... the professors explain it quickly, in a fleeting way, in a sense I do not know... the human being was a monkey, then evolution happened and so on. Religion does not say that and... But we study, we studied it, yes, but not in an intensive way; the professor does not get there and commits himself to convince you that the human being was a monkey and then the evolution happened; he tells you for information only that*

someone said that, only […]. But to tell you that the students there... they think, I do not know, that he is crazy, and he said this theory..." (Int.28).

A similar situation can be found in all the countries considered. In Egypt, the teacher rapidly explained the evolution theory, but in this case, as well, the interviewee stressed that this theory contradicts religion. In addition, in the opinion of this young student, the cause of this behaviour is in the Arab culture, imbued with religion. The information on these theories is provided without attempting to convince pupils that the theory is correct. The pupils, however, are not likely to believe in these theories, as they believe in Creationism. Their reaction is described in this statement, which accurately conveys what other interviewees said about the pupils' reactions to ideas that contrast with the prevalent Arab-Islamic culture, even in other fields such as philosophy. It is possible to say that Muslim culture influences how pupils view science. Although there is no identity clash and many quietly combine faith and science, for other students, religion and cultural tradition are limitations that prevent them from considering theories that do not fit within their mental horizon.

11.3.2 Religious differences and tolerance

This chapter deals with how teachers and educational institutions manage religious differences, looking at the religious composition of the classrooms (pupils' different religions), the alternatives offered to pupils belonging to minority religions during religion class, and how religious differences are treated in religious teaching and daily school life. It is necessary to divide the Arab countries taken into consideration between countries with a mostly homogenous Sunni population, like Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, and countries with significant Christian communities, such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Syria, in particular, not only has a Christian minority but also many other minority religious groups, some of whom are non-Sunni Muslims. This distinction is essential since pupils' experiences of religious differences depend firstly on the religious composition of their classes. For example, an Algerian student (Int.12) only met a Christian companion at university, while attending school only with other Sunni Muslims. It is easy to understand the differences between pupils that studied in some Syrian areas:

"When I was in Kafrun, there were mostly Christians. My parents were teachers, and we are the only Muslim family" (Focus group 1).

This is a particular case in which Muslims were the minority, as often occurs in Lebanon. This extreme example shows that it is typically the norm for Syrian pupils to attend school together with Christian pupils. Muslim and Christian pupils' school experiences only differ in the religion class that they attended, during which they split up to follow the class of their confession, as is the case in Egypt and Lebanon.

"In the public school sometimes you could find a racist who, I do not know, makes the difference between a Christian and a Muslim, but it was rare. Instead, in the other school, they really taught us to love each other and be together" (Int.09).

This Egyptian boy experienced the normality of daily life in school with Christians, stressing that school taught them to love each other and to live together. He highlights that also in this regard, private schools are better than public ones as sometimes it is possible to find teachers with discriminatory behaviours in public schools. However, even in public schools, it is an exception to the normality of coexistence without discrimination. Discrimination against Christians is officially prohibited and is not typically practiced in public schools. Some Muslim teachers take advantage of private lessons with only a few Muslim pupils to spread their ideas against the Coptic Church (Int.30). In daily coexistence, Muslim and Christian pupils typically relate with Muslim and Christian teachers in the same way, regardless of their religion (Int.16).

"You really did not ask that to anyone because you really did not see if that one was Muslim or Christian, so you did not ask this question. Maybe this was the last question you could ask. Anyway, you find in every school and class maybe, out of 20 people, you could find maybe 5 Christians, you understand, even maybe less, so the school really did not ask what religion you are. After enrolment, maybe, they could ask it, maybe, so they could see if there is a big number of Christians, they could send a professor for the Christian religion, who could agree with the other professor, and when there is Islamic religion, he will take these students also explaining the Christianity's history in Egypt" (Int.09).

Egyptian pupils are accustomed to not asking about the religious belonging of their classmates and the norm is to have some Christian pupils in each class. The only difference between them is that Christian pupils attend a separate religious class in which Christianity rather than Islam is taught. There is no possibility to opt out of religious education by engaging in any alternative activity.

"If you were Christian, you can abstain from participating... That is, there was no the concept according to which if you are Muslim but if you want not to participate, you cannot participate... no, no, this concept was not even contemplated […]. Nobody conceived the fact that a Muslim says <<no, I do not want to participate>>. That is... it was not understandable" (Int.16).

Christian pupils can leave the class or the school during religious classes in those cases where the school does not offer a Christian class due to a lack of teachers (Int.09, 16). They can also remain in the classroom to listen, but most of them live it as early as possible. Only pupils belonging to recognised non-Muslim families are allowed to not attend Islamic religious classes; for others, not participating is not even an option. In Syria, no one is exempt from religious class, as pupils are required to participate in it, though they can choose to not study for it. This is also the case for Christian pupils in schools that do not offer their own religious teaching, according to a pupil of

Aleppo (Int. 19). In this impossibility to abstain entirely from religion, it is possible to see the general, most substantial religious identity of Arab school, regarding both Muslim and Christian pupils, compared to the European one, where local pupils can choose not to attend religious classes. Lebanon is a unique case. It is a country with a majority Christian population, where in theory schools offer classes of both Christianity and Islam depending on pupils' religion. In reality, some Syrian interviewees speak about specific areas with a majority Muslim population in which Christian classes were not guaranteed. In such cases, they are allowed to abstain from Muslim religious class and participate in other classes (Int. 20). On the contrary, in other areas in which few Muslim people live, only the Christian religious class is offered and Muslim pupils, mostly Syrian refugees, could remain in the classroom or abstain from it and stay in the courtyard, without nothing offered as an alternative (Int.18; 05). In countries where there is a local Christian community, there is the possibility to attend alternative activities even only for recognised non-Muslim pupils, but the only available possibility is the Muslim religion:

> *"In the classes, there were both Christians and Muslims […]. When we did religion, they went out of the class. They did other things, who decided to do activities, who maybe did homework […]. Then there was a kind of catechism, and then they did that. However, not within public schools, also because, anyway, being declared a non-secular country, you know, they are Muslims […] About the Christian religion... there were many interactions, in the sense that, however, while Islam is... the rule walk in a certain way, the Christians, in short, do different things, Christmas, Easter. Instead, we can say absolute silence on Judaism"* (Int. 04).

Unlike Syria and Egypt, despite the presence of a significant Christian community, Jordan does not allow Christian religious classes in public schools, considering itself a confessional Muslim country. Despite this selectivity towards what religion is taught in school, the idea of not discriminating against religion and living in peace, particularly with Christians, is taught in all countries, even in Jordan, since many Christian prophets and characters are also found in the Islamic religion. Christian pupils can avoid religious classes and take part in other activities, just as pupils who choose not to attend Christian religious classes do in Italy or Germany. Despite sharing prophets and values with Islam, there are greater difficulties in discussing Judaism. The other religions of the world are not even named. This is similar to countries where classrooms are typically composed of only Muslim pupils:

> *"I do not remember exactly, but it was necessary... I have to see a book on education... I do not know, if I have that book then I can answer you exactly, if not I do not remember exactly what it said... but in practice that you should not... as they say, attack others, then if I find the book I will tell you exactly what... because I would not like to say something wrong"* (Int.12).

In this answer discussing how religious teaching deals with other religions, it is possible to sense the anxiety of Muslim people to be labelled as the ones teaching children to hate people of other religions. This Algerian student answers defensively, saying that they had been taught not to attack others, but she would have preferred to look to her schoolbooks to not give a wrong answer to this question. The Tunisian student was more relaxed in her answer.

> *"They transmitted to us the values of Islam, the respect of the other, to respect the other and to help him, also to respect other religions, because our religion obliges us to respect other religions and to believe also in all the prophets that came before our prophet"* (Int.15).

The difference between these two students is that the first attended only high school in Algeria, after having studied in Italy, so she does not have the knowledge acquired since childhood as the second one, who attended *kuttāb* and primary school in Tunisia. If the first answer is very defensive and general, the second provides information regarding which other religions are considered during the Islamic religious class, namely the Jewish and Christian. Many interviewees narrated a relaxed manner of talking about and relating to Christianity both in countries with significant communities and in those without. Many others said that during the Islamic religious classes, they never talked about other religions, not even Christianity. However, there are also conflicts:

> *"If you speak badly of Jews or Catholics, so you tell me that they are not good, so I already have a form of hatred towards them. Do you understand what I want to tell you? So, we avoid these speeches, talk about religious differences, maybe to the utmost we say that everyone has his religion, and that is the end of the debate..."* (Int.24).

In Morocco, teachers speak about other religions but it appears to be a limited debate that cannot go into detail in order to avoid spreading hatred. The interviewee thought that teaching religious tolerance and freedom was good, but he also felt there was some censorship. Apart from this critical opinion, this quote summarise the other Moroccan interviewees' views on the topic:

> *"Most of us have grown up in an environment of respect, that is, we are also Muslim, because in Islam, discrimination, racism there should not be. There is no difference between a coloured person, a yellow one, or a blond one; never there is a difference; we are all human beings, all the same. Also the religious difference, we have never had these problems. […]It is in the ministry's programme that makes us do it, and also parents' education do it because being a Muslim country, to respect others, the parents, is a fundamental thing for us; there is no difference if you are Christian, Muslim, atheist"* (Int.13).

In this statement, racial and religious differences are considered to be of equal importance, and schools teach to accept and respect them. Respect and tolerance toward others in Moroccan schools appear to be taught together with information about all the religions of the world, and Islam is

presented as the most inclusive religion capable of understanding and incorporating the other ones. Muslim pupils thus learn not to be confined to their own religion (Int.01). Some interviewees linked how education dealt with other religions to their country's specific political situation:

> *"In my opinion, one of the countries that really live together excellently is Egypt. […] a confirmation of what I said was the revolution of 2011. Because in that revolution in one day, all the country's police decided to leave all the police offices and there was not a policeman in the whole country [...] Inside the city there were Christians and Muslims, if, in my opinion, there was a hatred underneath, someone would have blown up the other and... However, in reality, nothing happened; in a sense, always young Muslims and Christians, even in Tahrir Square, when they made the revolution; while Muslim boys were praying, Christian boys were... To guard around... and on the contrary, the churches, but unfortunately, sometimes religion is used for politics, and there are problems. […] They do not do it [treated this topic at school] because in general life we live together, so we do not have that problem, and maybe teachers do not put so much effort into that thing"* (Int. 28).

This Egyptian student states that the fact that Muslim and Christian people conducted the 2011 revolution together without religious conflicts and defended each other demonstrates their friendly relationship. He considers religious disputes as something used by someone who manipulates reality to achieve their political goal. In his opinion, the peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian people is so solid and typical that there is no need to teach it in school, as people already relate in a tolerant way. Most of the interviews address Christianity without particular problems. However, non-Sunni Muslim currents and the Jewish religion are dealt with in conflicting or ambiguous ways, if not totally avoided, and it overall depends upon specific political situations.

> *"They never enter into the discourse of other thoughts, no, it was a filo-Sunni […] they talked about it but from the Sunni point of view, not bad [....]. The Palestinian does not really go to point the finger at others, especially those of the same religion […]. When they were teaching or in the mosques, it was not that they were doing, there was flexibility... yes, and that I later found in myself when I met people of other Islamic cultures, of other Islamic perspectives. [A concept of tolerance] was... not proposed like <<look that the world is more beautiful if you open>>... I had that in Italy, very, very strong […] but the school... it was pretty tolerant, also the Islamic vision was quite open-minded"* (Int.08).

It is possible to understand that the topic of the differences within Islam is avoided. Teachers explain the differences within Islam in the quickest way, from a Sunni point of view, without discriminating against people belonging to other currents and without teaching hatred, but also avoiding going into detail. The interviewee links this attitude to the complex political situation in which teachers try to avoid provoking additional conflicts. Schools do not formally propose tolerance as a topic, as he experienced in Italy, but, in his opinion, it is lived and shared.

"We were Muslims, but not all Sunni, and if we deem something will make a mistake or misunderstanding, we do not speak about it. In primary school, we would know everything, but the teacher did not answer, or they changed the topic or answered differently, but we did not have a direct answer. I think because we are in this geography point, different, and we have this cultural difference. They did not want to make a hit or a problem between us. Because they are living very near to us, we are neighbourhoods. In the family, for example, my mum's name is Aslebi Hunt, which means Crosse, and they explained to us that her grandmother was Christian. Moreover, my dad, his father was a Druze, not Sunni... But we are Sunni now, and I love this mix because we can live without this thinking, it makes no sense when we talk about it" (Int.39).

In Syria, only Sunni Islam is taught, and the issue of the different Muslim currents is completely avoided in schools. This young student explains this lack of explanation and discussion as a way to promote peaceful coexistence between people with different religious belonging in a problematical geographical area. She lived this coexistence even within her family, which is a good example of normality in Syria, where it is typical to share daily life with people of different religions. She believes that is useless and harmful to engage in discourse about different belongings. In the classrooms, the curiosity of young pupils leads them to ask about these differences, but their questions go unanswered as teachers avoid the discussion. It is possible to see teachers worrying about spreading hatred or saying something inappropriate on religious currents to which they do not belong. Many other Syrians said that they attended school in a multicultural environment where they never discussed differences in religion (Int. 29; 32; 39; 41). In reality, beyond these fierce and appreciable values and *habitus* of intercultural and interreligious coexistence, the censorship in Syrian schools has other causes and meanings:

"It is somehow taboo, as no one talks about it, even when I was in my school because, you know, for example, both these religions, the Alawi and Druze, are secret, so people themselves do not talk about it. My school was about Circassia children, who were Sunni, then there were Alawi children, and we did not... We knew they were Alawi, but we never, never, never talked about religion item but parents, my parents did not, but some parents said like <<they are different; they do not believe in God>> and bla, bla, bla. However, we do not talk about this at school, even if some teachers are Alawi; they use the schoolbooks and do not say anything about their religion. […] The system is not so open to asking questions that are, more or less, new or controversial... Maybe it came up if someone asked and I did not notice, and the teacher did not answer or said like <<stay with the script of the book>> or something; there were sometimes questions where the teacher said something like <<do not ask unnecessary questions>>" (Int.40).

It is not only a teacher's choice to avoid conflicts; it is a social taboo, here related to the configuration of the Alawi religion - the religion of the president's family - considered a secret

religion. Consistent with the historical reconstruction, the regime is trying to build a solid homogenous Syrian identity, in which the numerous differing belongings have to take a backseat in favour of a unified Arab identity. To this end, the most esoteric religions, such as the Alawi and the Druze, and especially the one to which the president belongs, should not be discussed in order not to make the majority of the Sunni population perceive a difference between it and the political power. If in some families there are speeches against this religion, pupils never report these discourses in schools.

> *"It was a zone with a Christian majority and the religion called Alawite... I say <<why do you go there? >><<No, because we have another religion teacher! >><<Ah ok... >> But as a child, I always ask my family, I say why... They say <<no, you do not ask this thing. You do not have to ask your friends why you go, why you are from where you are, what; because this thing is not good, you do not have to talk about this>>... You understand, yes... but my friends leave me to go to other... yes, yes, yes, normal because they study other subjects of religion. […] They said, my family <<do not ask your friends about this thing, like why you study this>>"* (Int.29).

As can be read in this quote, parents prohibited pupils from asking about their classmates' religious classes. The censorship seems stricter if it concerns the Alawite religion that this Muslim pupil associated with the Christian faith. In other interviews, people state that Alawites do not have their own religious class and attend the Sunni Muslim class. In the end, the educational policy concerning the Alawite religion is unclear, as there are contradictions between the few interviews that deal with it, and none of the respondents attended an Alawi religious class. Very few respondents explain this situation, entrenching themselves in a defensive attitude as in the previous quotes, talking more about multiculturalism than censorship.

> *"In Syria, it has never happened that before spending time with someone, we would ask them <<what religion are you from? >> We love people, not their religious faith"* (Int.44).

Indeed, they seem to genuinely believe in multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence among people of different backgrounds and religions, with whom they feel a bond. It is even essential for them to emphasise this point to deconstruct the imaginary that equates all Syrians with Isis fundamentalists. However, they find it difficult to admit that the government itself expressly forbids speaking about religious differences in school. Pupils talked about a system closed to new or controversial questions (Int.40) without saying that these are prohibited questions.

> *"Like we cannot ask a boy <<what do you believe, what? >>. No, no, that is not a good thing. Like, ask <<what you believe? >>No, it is a private thing anyway; we are normal"* (Int.29).

Even this student did not explain why it is not prudent to ask about beliefs, despite precise questions. Instead, he said that it was a private thing and that they were "normal", like in Europe, showing a defensive attitude to avoid admitting the peculiarity of the Syrian taboo concerning religious differences, disguising it as secularism. Instead, it is essential to understand whether the government's choices on how schools have to relate to religious differences have contributed to the reproduction of traditional Syrian tolerance, or on the contrary, have weakened it.

> *"In our society there are Christians, Druze, Shiites, we live all together, everyone lives their own culture and religion...we are all part of society, and we all live together. There is no religious or doctrinal clash in Syria at all. The corrupt regime caused our conflict. It manipulated all the people"* (Int.44).

This Syrian parent thinks that the government has manipulated religious differences causing the conflict. It has created an atmosphere of fear and silence around these topics so that people cannot speak to each other, and therefore, unresolved misunderstandings have grown, becoming conflicts that divide the population, according to the famous political power's strategy *"dividi et impera"*.

> *"There are Christians, Jews... but what does it mean? What do they do? We do not know, we also have churches in my country, but we do not know what they do here, what it means, nothing […] there are also Muslims called Sunni and Shi'ite, this is a very dangerous thing if we... Just about these things, you see that when a Christian is with a Muslim, it is a normal thing in the country, you can know, but the other part of Sunni and Shi'ite is a very dangerous thing. If I, for example, ask a person are you Sunni or Shi'ite... This can be that... they can arrest me […]. We have an article in the constitution that if you ask a person what you believe, that is one thing... if he denounces or for example if... because we have police, secret police, no? If they know that someone asks these things, that he is talking about this subject, it is something they do not want, so they arrest him. They arrest him in the worst way. They kill people; they say that this is something against national unity […]. When you are a child, you grow up with society. If I see that my father does not speak about this subject, then, I do not get interested, because I do not hear him, I do not know what it means... But, if I see that everybody asks, and speaks about this subject, also I must hear, ask, what does it mean? Why do you say? So, I have to know, but if I do not hear it, I do not see this thing, I cannot ask"* (Int.29).

Only in one of the latest interviews, stressing significantly on the point, the interviewee admitted that not asking about religious belonging is not only a custom due to daily life coexistence but depends on a strict national law. He too, like other interviewees, started saying that they do not care about the differences between them and the Christian people, but, turning to the differences between Muslims, with great difficulty, he finally said that people could not ask about these differences because speaking about it is a crime against national unity, which is the essential thing in Syrian politics. At the beginning of this quote, it is possible to read another admission: people

know nothing about others despite the coexistence of different faiths. Indeed, he began to learn about the various religions in Italy, where he could openly discuss this subject with other people. Even if this in no way questions the profound tolerance of Syrian people, demonstrated in this work by all their statements in which it is impossible to find some racist or discriminatory attitudes, pluralism and tolerance cannot be fully lived in the multicultural Syrian society, where other religions cannot be really known. This law and the resulting social taboo against asking about other religions and traditions forces pupils to suppress their curiosity and genuine desire for knowledge at an early age (Int.20), teaching them to remain silent on controversial issues rather than to talk about them in an open and tolerant manner. It is possible to conclude that in the Syrian case, regarding this topic, schools teach more fear than tolerance, which families continue to teach in their privacy. Relating to the other Abrahamic religions is less complicated:

> *"The Palestinian culture knows that there is the Christian Palestinian, knows that there are the Jews with whom you work the day after. So even if maybe inside himself holds back that <<no, but we are better, no, we know more, we are the right ones>> but he does not show it, and it does not make it heavy because you would not survive without that tolerance. It is also a way of going forward; maybe in another context they would be more extremist, but in that context, they cannot be, they cannot, you cannot be extremist when you live in Israel"* (Int.08).

This boy clarifies the relationship with Christian people in one sentence, expressing the awareness of their historical presence and its acceptance by Muslim living in the Middle East. Concerning other Muslim currents, it is not as simple and it is even more complicated for the Jewish religion due to the political situation. Tolerance toward Jews is taught overall as a survival tool. All the interviewees who attended school in Syria confirmed this reality concerning the Christian religion and pupils. They attended separate religious classes without any ambiguity or problems with their Muslim classmates, fundamentally because Christianity has existed within Arab tradition before Islam, so it is considered part of the Arab identity (Int.29; 38; 39). People state that they studied in the Islamic class Mariam and Jesus and the Christian version of history peacefully (Int.37).

> *"They were talking about other religions […] most of the time about when the prophet lived with other religions, that is, you have to apply the same thing because they taught us that... You do not have to persuade a person to convert to Islam […]. That is, if God did not give him the will to change his religion, you have to live with him without bothering him. In the sense that we were taught how the prophet Muhammad escaped from the people who are atheists, not Christians, who were in Mecca before, who do not believe in anything... they escaped to Medina and were the first Muslim believers […]. In Medina, they found the Christians, so the Christians opened the door and told them that if they came in, nobody would touch them. From that time, Mohammed said that if you live with the Christians, the evil that touches those touches us, the good that touches them touches all of us, and you must live*

with the whole world peacefully, without war. [...] There has always been the idea of being at war not with other people who have other religions, but with people who hurt people, for example, Muslims or touch their land, property, and things, not with Christians themselves or Jews themselves" (Int.14).

In this quote, there is the Quranic base on which Muslim schools teach tolerance and peaceful coexistence, especially with Christian people, described as the Prophet's friends in his exile from Mecca, hosting people who open the door and allies who fight together against the infidel. From this statement, it is possible to understand that this tolerance is not equally extended to non-believers, which is what extremists accuse Westerners to be[48], and that war is allowed against people who threaten Muslim land, such as Christian powers during colonialism and Israel today in Palestine. The student interviewed is aware that this hostility is not against Christianity or Judaism as religions, but against specific political powers. However, the overlap between religion and politics often leads to preaching hatred against the entire Jewish religion and culture in countries such as Egypt and Syria.

"It is studied quickly because they concentrate more on Islam and Christianity... Maybe because we do not have Jewish students in Egypt, or maybe very few, they do not show up, I do not know. Maybe because in the Quran Christians are closer to Muslims than Jews are, and maybe for this reason. I do not know, maybe…Because in general life, we always have Christian people around us, so there is not that hatred towards Christians, like towards Jews but not for the Jewish religion but for Israel, because for an Arab brain, Jewish=Israel, Israel=Jewish, Israel=Palestinian issue, it is all connected" (Int.28).

Like the Palestinian and Tunisian students, this Egyptian student distinguished between how Christianity and Judaism were treated in school, a friendly way for Christianity and a conflicting one for Judaism, emphasizing different causes. He said that one cause could be the absence of Hebrew pupils in schools, but this is not a reason, as Christianity is dealt with in a friendly way also in those countries where there are no Christian pupils. The second reason is more reasonable, based on the Quranic description of the Christian religion as closer to Islam than Judaism. Finally, he arrives to talk about the political and material reasons, saying that the problem, in reality, is not the Jewish religion but the Israeli state and its occupation of Palestinian lands.

Some interviewees from Syria said that in their Islamic religious class, they never spoke about other religions apart from Islam, not even about Christianity, even though their relationship in school with Christian people was good and without any discrimination (Int. 11; 34; 35; 38; 39). This absence of explanation about other religions confirms the general attitude in religious educational policy: that it is better not to talk about different religious belonging, even if it is not

[48] It is worth remembering that it is only one singular experience, whereas the other Tunisian student interviewed said that tolerance is also taught towards non-believers (Int.15)

a taboo, like the prohibition of speaking about differences within Islam. Only a student said that in his Islamic class, the teacher spoke about Christianity and Judaism, saying that all people are the same and that a good Muslim must know and believe in all the prophets. It is worth noting that he studied in the Kurdish region (Int.19). Differently from Egyptian and Palestinian students, Syrian pupils did not experience a different way to relate to Christianity or Judaism in the Islamic class, as their religious teachers mainly relate to neither of them. Thus, religion is not involved in transmitting specific thoughts and attitudes toward Israel and Jews, which occurs invariably in the humanities, as will be shown in the following chapter. The proclaimed secularism of the Syrian regime is reflected in the distinction at school between religion and politics, as is the case in Tunisia. In these countries, the transmission of the Arab identity overcame that of the Muslim one. This secularism is not found in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Libya, which have declared themselves Muslim countries and provide education following religion. Whilst in Morocco and Jordan this does not mean discrimination towards other religions, the situation is different in Libya:

> *"[The belonging that the school tried to transmit is] Muslims, in my opinion, because we find it in all subjects. In Arabic, in history, in geography, we find it... in all things, in all subjects"* (Int.07).

Libyan education appears imbued with religion, without a clear distinction between humanities and religion, and religion as a school subject has more importance in pupils' educational path. If in other Muslim countries being a Christian does not seem to be a problem, here it is:

> *"In Libya, 100% are Muslims; they are equal, all are Muslims, even those who come to work and study there all are Muslims, they do not have Christian people or so, no [...] A Christian in Syria lives easier than in Libya. To be a Christian in Libya is too difficult, very difficult. […]But if your religion is a religion that you do not believe in Jesus or Mohammed, it is much more difficult. When he was there, he did not say that he was Yazidi; he said that he was Muslim, so not to make problems, just to live and do his things and leave afterwards, like that"* (Int.19).

The religious homogeneity of the population is reflected in the homogeneity of people who migrated to Libya to work when it was the wealthiest African country during the Gaddafi regime. Now, after the civil war, the wealth has disappeared, but the climate of terror is even worse for the few non-Muslim people in the country. Syrian people who migrated to Libya hide their religious identity, trying to live quietly without problems. If Christians could face problems with their religious belonging, those who believe in non-Abrahamic religions, such as Yazidi, are at the greatest risk. In this Muslim country, there is not any educational effort to spread a tolerant attitude towards other religions, in contrast to Morocco and Jordan, whose stable monarchies attempt to display their modern and tolerant nature to the world also facilitating a tolerant attitude towards other religions.

11.4 Humanities in Arab schools

The contents of the humanities are based on what political power and society consider to be the legitimate culture that has to be transmitted as authentic and universal, imposing it on dominated groups or classes (Bourdieu& Passeron 1990). This chapter addresses the interviewees' experiences regarding the selection of humanities' contents and social reproduction in the classrooms, looking at how pupils have perceived it, how it has influenced their identity formation and their awareness of this influence, and their reaction to the difference between the legitimate culture and their own. The presentation of the results follows the educational path and the importance of each subject. It begins with Arabic language and literature, as it started in the first year of primary school and continued to the last year. Therefore, it is the subject most studied by all pupils in all countries and types of high school. Then, history and geography are addressed, as they usually start together in most Arab countries in the second part of primary school. The third subject is citizenship, sometimes studied together with Arabic, history and geography (Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia), and at times separated from them (Jordan, Syria). The last subject is philosophy, as it is exclusively studied in the final years of literary high schools, and therefore, only attended by few interviewees. Despite this, it is a significant subject to discuss.

In primary school, in many countries, a single teacher teaches all the humanities subjects, with a primary focus on Arabic language and literature. Beginning with the Arabic text, the teacher talks about religion, history, geography and citizenship. Subject divisions and specializations occur at different stages, either starting from the third year of primary school or middle school.

> *"He did Arabic, citizenship, Islamic education, let us say.[…] History was not well defined, that is to say, in a sense, there was not the subject, you made history while you did Arabic, it was always the same teacher, maybe there were not dedicated hours... also the texts, there is not a text dedicated to that stuff and... However, the teacher arrived, and you knew that maybe that day you did Arabic, the day after you did citizenship, Islamic education"* (Int. 10).

In Moroccan primary schools, there is an integration of Arabic language and literature, history, geography, citizenship and Islamic education within a unified teaching framework, where being Arab, Muslim and a Moroccan citizen are considered equivalent. History is occasionally taught by reading texts suitable for children about Arab, Islamic or national history. This overlapping is also evident in the more secular Tunisian education system at the primary school level:

> *"In primary school, it has always been based on the Quran. In the sense that they study, for example, the Arabic language, right? The study of the Quran is made with the Arabic language, understand? Because, practically, the Quran itself is very rich in many meanings, from the point of view of grammar, linguistics, and culture, the historians are in the Quran, many things, that is, it is very complex and*

dense with information, linguistic information and...Also the sense of life's philosophy, political philosophy, in the economy, that is, the Quran contains many things" (Int.14).

In Arabic language teaching, teachers use the Quran as a model of the perfect language from the point of view of grammar and style. It is also full of stories related to Arab and Muslim history, morals, culture and philosophy, economy and politics. Consequently, even in Tunisia, the legitimate culture transmitted in primary school through the humanities is largely based on the Muslim tradition, albeit largely reliant on the individual teacher:

"It also depends on the teacher, maybe a teacher who is more... that is, he has that inclination, so he starts from the Quran with the grammar and everything. Some are more secular-historical and start from literature, that is, from pre-Islamic poems and make their own way" (Int.08).

A similar situation is experienced in Egypt, where pupils can move from a secular teaching based on pre-Islamic poetry and tales for children to a religious teacher who bases all the teaching on religious texts (Int.16; 30). The Moroccan and Tunisian interviewees do not seem to question the relationship between religion and language, considering it to be natural rather than a teacher's choice. However, some criticism arise on the type of language itself that they are required to study:

"Arabic language […] the subject a bit difficult that everyone hates it because it is difficult because you do not study daily Arabic, you study many other things" (Int.14).

The emphasis on Quranic contents makes the study of the language considerably challenging, detached from the language spoken in children's daily life outside of school. An Egyptian student points out that the spoken Egyptian is different from the language they studied in school and that Christian pupils occasionally attend Islamic education classes to gain a better understanding of official Arabic, to listen to the finest expressions in the Arabic language and enhance their skills in the discipline (Int.9).

"Who succeeds in reciting the poetry of the classical era by heart, this is something they boasted about and that parents gave much importance to, teachers; that is to say, even if you wrote like... A chicken, but you managed to recite the poetry; they raised their hands […]. You had to know; you had to know why... If you were among those boys who cared about it, you felt the weight, I cared about it, and I felt the weight... To be good, you really have to know everything... Moreover, the more you can carry that baggage together, the story, what the prophet said in that year, what it is said, and now, I will also make the grammatical analysis of that verse of the poem, it is... the top let us say, for Arab education" (Int.08).

In this statement, the criticism focuses on the method employed, which shows a cultural aspect linked to the content. Memorisation is the principal methodology used in Arab schools, however, it is also important what pupils are required to memorise, namely the poetry from the classical era.

These poems are grammatically complex and convey specific values such as family and honour. Furthermore, the ability to memorise and recite was a traditional value in classical Arab society because it meant the capability to disseminate the cultural heritage. This approach is a way to reproduce the *habitus* of the classical era. An Algerian student observes that cultural heritage is also transmitted through the study of ancient philosophers, like Ibn Sina, but merely memorising their biography and actions, without engaging in critical reflections (Int. 12). The Arabic language teaching appears to perpetuate a classical *habitus* that is difficult for most children to embrace. Despite this prevailing approach, there are some contrasting experiences:

> *"At interrogations, you had to repeat not from the book. Not the things written in the book, but the things you understood... It was a very beautiful thing that she taught us. In the homework, for example, when we did the essay and... She has to read your thought; she does not have to read that something is copied [...]. I wrote many things about myself, unlike the other general themes, about friendship and... family, arguments that were... that I remember until now... about Syria, for example, how we see our country, how we can describe it, and so... these were the topics that I remember well […] she wanted us to learn to write what we think not in general"* (Int. 20).

In this particular instance, the Arabic language teacher places greater emphasis on the development of production skills rather than memorisation, encouraging pupils to reflect and think about themselves. It is noteworthy that the theme of the nation remains a constant presence, even in this scenario. A part of this exception that depends on the individual teacher's attitude, also in Syria, they generally studied ancient poets relying on memorization (Int.17). Nevertheless, significant attention is also dedicated to contemporary authors:

> *"There are old and modern; we have two types... There is old type poetry, like al-Mutanabbi, Abu Firas al-Hamdani, and there is modern, Ahmad Shawqi and... There is a Palestinian scientific author and [...] Ahmad Shawqi however Egyptian, Nizar Qabbani, and a famous Syrian however... These modern, like after the '900, 950 and more maybe […].Always poetry for the mother, for love... for these things, for the nation it can be, it is like that, these poems"* (Int.29).

Contemporary authors play a crucial role in instilling a sense of national pride, as their works were produced during the colonialism and the struggle for independence. In Syrian curricula, as well as in the curricula of all the countries considered, there are not only national authors but also influential personalities from across the Arab world. For instance, a Moroccan boy does not remember any Moroccan author, but he does remember the Egyptian Ahmed Shawqi (Int.02), famous for his pan-Arabism and the poems in which he sings his love for the motherland. Consequently, Arab nationalism holds significant prominence within literature curricula, featuring authors from various countries who write about their love for the Arab motherland:

"We studied romanticism, the romantic Arab poets like Nizar Al-Qabbani, who is always called Sha'ir al-aimra'a, the woman's poet. We also studied… the classic poets, so…Abu Nawas... what else... We studied for example, at high school, Nagib Mahfud, the Egyptian one, Mahmud Darwish... but one thing that comes to my mind now, we did not study works written by Arab women authors anyway" (Int.15).

Even in Tunisia, the curriculum proposes Arabic authors from different Arab countries, promoting the idea of a unified Arab culture that transcends national boundaries. However, a female student studying women's literature points out that there are only male authors, conveying the idea that Arab culture belongs the male gender. Another Tunisian student raises the concern that Tunisian authors are only introduced at a specific period of the literary timeline:

"Because before they were Berbers, then, when the language mixed and they became good in Arabic, they wrote so many things" (Int.14).

As women are not considered within national curricula, even Tunisian authors prior to Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) are not, as they could not write in Arabic. The emphasis on Arab culture disregard any previous form of literary expression that may have existed before. Nevertheless, Tunisian students, like Moroccan's, receive education about the populations living in their countries before the arrival of the Arabs, even if this knowledge does not form part of language and literature curricula, which strictly focuses on the Arabic language.

"In the language, you start from pre-Islamic Arabs, so you get passionate about pre-Islamic poets like Antara Ibn Shaddad, famous... then you talk, you go towards the poets of the Islamic era and... Al-Ghazali, obviously, poems of that era that are remembered and then... There is a gap there, because non-Arabic speakers have conquered the Islamic world... A gap that finishes, if I remember correctly, in the pre-modern era" (Int.08).

The most important topics are Ancient Arab and Islamic texts and then, directly, the modern authors from the Arab Renaissance. Nothing is studied about the long period in which the Ottoman Empire ruled on Arab lands, completely deleting that period from the Arab identity and cultural heritage. Many Syrian interviewees have raised concerns about this selective content, especially those who have delved deeper into their studies:

"There is only one book of literature for children, and I understand how much it is unsuitable at the university when I studied literature for children and saw how many authors wrote on this with different meanings" (Focus group 1).

This Syrian teacher, now residing in Sweden, has become aware of the restricted nature of primary school literature curricula while studying literature for children, recognizing how the contents used were focused on the Arab and the Nation. Other interviewees (Int.34; 35; 38; 40) stress the

predominant role of Arabic language and literature throughout the entire educational path, reinforcing the idea of a system whose primary aim is to transmit the Arab identity.

> *"Arabic too, yes, even if it is difficult because... even the alphabet, I do not know if you have ever seen it, it is a bit complicated... but it is as our language is"* (Int.11).

This focus on the Arabic language as the primary subject and the difficulty of learning it through complex texts far from everyday life have had an even greater impact on non-Arab pupils. This Armenian pupil maintains that she had to study it as if it were her native language, but it was not. A Kurdish student explains in detail how non-Arab pupils experience the imposition of the Arabic language as the most crucial subject in Syrian schools:

> *"It was not a problem for me but for those Kurdish students who were studying well, but not in Arabic because... Mathematics does not require strong Arabic language knowledge, just like that, normal. However, in the Arabic language, some students do not do it. Because it is not to only speak, write, and read; students manage to do those things but they teach you things too hard that a student has to study Arabic more than other subjects do […]. Before university they teach you all the Arabic language's grammar... it is too much for pupils […] it is a bit difficult to study Arabic because they give you, for example, a story, something [...] you have to have it in mind like your name, 100% by heart. In the exam, they tell you to tell the story, but this thing is difficult for students; almost 60% of students do not manage to do it, it is difficult. Moreover, in the Arabic language, you have to; it is compulsory to pass it; if you do not pass it, they do not let you go to the other year or study at another class; you have to stay here another year. Because a friend of mine, I had a friend who studied, then I think he did mathematics for example 95%, Arabic 48%, and he stayed 2 years like that until he did Arabic at 60%, a bad thing [...]. For the Kurds, 50% of those who leave school it is not because they cannot study, no, for the Arabic language, 50%cannot continue due to the Arabic language. Maybe he studies well in mathematics or other things, but Arabic language he cannot... maybe his family does not speak Arabic"* (Int.19).

The contents and methods of language and literature have a significant impact on pupils' overall educational achievement with regards to their ethnic belonging and parental status. Pupils from economically disadvantaged Kurdish families, in which parents did not study and whose job did not require them to know Arabic, do not understand and speak Arabic, and, consequently, fail. Their results in other subjects are overshadowed by the fact that Arabic is not their mother tongue.

11.4.1 History and Geography

These two subjects serve as the primary conveyors of national identity, and the language in which they are taught in educational institutions confirms their role. In Lebanon, scientific subjects are mostly though in English and French, as they are viewed as subjects crucial for economic development and globalisation; instead, history and geography, which contribute to the formation

of identity, are taught in Arabic. As a result, they are the subjects studied more by Syrian pupils in Lebanon since they did not know English and French enough (Int.18). Even in private or minority schools, these subjects are taught in Arabic in accordance with the National curricula:

> *"The 3rd, 4th, and 5th year we study a little bit Morocco's history [...] In addition to Arabic, you study some history, geography [...] it depends, you can study things about the Arab world, Islam, Morocco, national things, let us say […] Something also of Europe or Asia, but just something"* (Int.01).

In several countries, such as Morocco history and geography are taught together with Arabic languages at the primary level, and they focus mainly on national history (Int.13) incorporating certain aspects of Arabic and Islamic history. When directly asked, this Moroccan man states that some information about European or Asian history and geography is also mentioned. European history, geography, and culture are considered part of the official culture that young pupils have to grasp in order to succeed in their studies. Therefore, with a defensive attitude, he affirms that they did learn something about Europe and Asia, although he may have been prompted to say this by the interview questions. Instead, a more spontaneous and detailed description of Morocco's history and geography contents is provided by this Ghanaian man working in the educational field with African pupils and students in Morocco:

> *"The Moroccan curriculum is based on the East and the West but nothing about African, sub-Saharan Africa, nothing about why there are problems in Africa... […] There is nothing special about South Saharan territory here […]. This is what is missing here in the system. It is missing giving an idea to children to think about something in Ghana, in Nigeria, and sports and arts, and learn about... there is nowhere in the curricula, no way for them to learn about people, about southern Africa. This is most of the issues that you do not learn about, South Africa, about the person […] so when we come here they do not know about us, and we know that we know much about them"* (Int.31).

Moroccan national curricula include both the East, which covers Arab-Islamic history and geography on a horizontal line extending as far as the Arabian Peninsula, and the West, covering Northern European history and geography. What is missed, in the opinion of this educator, is Africa itself, to which Morocco belongs geographically, but the identity conveyed in its schools is that of an Arab-Islamic country facing towards Europe, in which there is no space for teaching African history, geography and culture. All the countries considered, such as Morocco, focus on their national history and geography, but looking at the space reserved for other countries' history and geography and at how national issues are linked with them, it is possible to understand something about the identity that these subjects help to build in pupils. For example, the perception of Egyptian pupils about the geography that they studied is very different. Although the primary emphasis is on Egypt (Int.09), a student states that in geography they started from the African

continent, despite Egypt being an eastern country compared to Morocco, (Int.16). The Arab-Islamic belonging is not at the base of the geography curricula that focus more on tangible elements, such as the river Nile (Int. 30):

> *"Egypt is an Afro-Asian country but more in Africa. In the sense that it is considered as an African country, not as an Asian country, so no, you start from Africa […] also for the Nile because […].Because the Nile for us is life... Thus, the Nile is part of several African countries, so you already start with the Nile and then go with all the African countries from where the Nile arrives, where it passes, so you always study... To tell you about us in Aswan, a city in the south, there is the Nile museum; there is the museum that shows the Nile. ... Where it comes from, what it does... and so it starts from this and the Arab countries... I do not remember that we studied it; it was something like... Which the Gulf countries are... That is, there was not really, it was not dedicated much to Arab countries […]. The first sentence they say <<The Nile is the life's vein, if the vein comes out, it is the end of life>>, the first sentence you learn at school in the first year of primary school"* (Int.28).

In this case, the Nile, as the fundamental resource for sustaining life, holds greater significance than the religious and cultural belonging to the Arab-Islamic world. The teaching of geography in Egypt helps to propagate the ancient Egyptian tradition and belonging, linking Egyptian identity to the Nile and the other African countries through which it flows. The student of this quote considers Arab countries only the countries in the Arabian Peninsula, highlighting a distinction between a geographical categorisation and the cultural and political one of the 22 Arab countries of the Arab League. Conversely, a focalisation on the geography of these 22 Arab countries is evident in all the other countries, except for Libya:

> *"In Syria, they explain the Middle East area; in Libya, they explain Africa and more about the world"* (Int.19).

Indeed, the student who moved from Syria to Libya noted the differences between one of the countries that places greater emphasis on the Arab region in its geography curriculum and Libya, which, akin to Egypt, projects a sense of belonging to Africa. Nasser and Gaddafi's politics played a crucial role in shaping these two exceptions, as they aspired to establish their countries as leaders on the continent, serving as models for other African nations to emulate. In addition, this student states that Libyan curricula exhibit a more inclusive outlook towards the entire world than Syrian ones. It is noteworthy to mention that this boy studied in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi's regime and the resulting transformation in the education system.

> *"Generally, the most important thing in geography is the Arab countries. You must know all Arab countries, all 100% necessarily, compulsory. You have to know the map, every country, all Arab countries and the Arab countries' general big map altogether because every exam in geography from*

when you are studying in middle school, from the first year until graduation every exam every year of geography you have to draw this thing. Syria and the Arab countries, yes, you have to do it, every exam, always, always, you have to... something that you have to do, really. It is simpler in primary school, of course, but also geography; when you start to study geography, the first thing they teach you is how to draw Syria and the Arab countries, the capitals, the first thing, more than anything else... […] they tell you that Syria is in Asia, yes, but the most important thing they teach you is Syria and Arab countries; this is the most important thing of all" (Int.19).

In this statement, the focalisation of Syrian geography curricula on Arab countries is described as obsessive and hard to endure for this Kurdish pupil. The first thing pupils have to learn and show at exams every year is the Arab countries' map and where is Syria within it. The basic geographical fact that Syria is located in Asia is merely presented as a brief piece of information, allowing significant emphasis on categorizing the country as an Arabic nation. As for Morocco, the cultural and overall political categorisation outweighs the geographic collocation so that the continental identity, such as African and Asiatic, is not conveyed to Moroccan and Syrian pupils, to whom exclusively the Arab identity has to be conveyed. Assuming that Kurdish belonging has influenced the criticism of this boy, it is essential to compare his experiences to that of Arab pupils' memories:

"Geography, for example, to know the borders of Syria and each country what... what it is famous for, the capital, for example, but more about Arab countries... I did not study Italy, for example, or Europe... Europe in general, yes, but... for example, Germany, no […]. Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, these countries on the border with Syria I remember well that we studied these" (Int.20).

As evident from this statement, the primary focus is on Syria, which is the only thing that many other interviewees remember (Int. 18, 37, 40, 41). The neighbouring countries, including Jordan, Egypt and Palestine, are also remembered, whereas more distant countries like Morocco or Saudi Arabia do not come to mind. The subject's contents are not so different from that illustrated by the Kurdish boy, although the girl interviewed is not as exasperated by them as he is. It is noteworthy that she refers to Palestine as a country and does not mention Israel. Similarly, two Syrian teachers who studied in Syria several decades ago express similar views, showing that nothing has changed over time. They add that the rest of the world is studied more during high school (Int. 29; 34-35, 38; 40). Other interviewees have different experiences:

"We have to learn about petroleum, in which land there is more, we have to paint a map and put where there is more petroleum or aluminium... and so on. We do not learn about Europe, Europe's map, or lands in America. Only Arab lands. I mean Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan. We spoke more about Syria, Palestine or Israel, Jordanian, Lebanon, Yemen. I mean about the near lands around

us […] They spoke about how Syria, Palestine or Israel, and Jordan were a land, one land and Egypt and Kuwait, and Yemen also, but Saudi Arabia not because it is a new land also for us Arabs" (Int.39).

This student remembers that one of the significant topics is the mapping of natural resources in Arab lands, highlighting that they do not relate to other countries or continents at all. Similar to the previous interviewee, the focus primarily lies on studying the nearest and neighbouring Arab countries. However, there are a few differences; the first concerns the importance of knowledge about petroleum-rich regions (also mentioned as an important topic in Int.36). The second concerns the fact that she remembers studying the *Bilad al-Sham* as one unified land, in which Saudi Arabia is not considered, due to its recent formation, alien to this traditional identity. The third difference is that she mentions either Palestine or Israel, unlike the previous interviewee, who only mentions Palestine. This divergence could be attributed to the influence of host countries, since many interviews reported on the importance of acknowledging Israel's existence, particularly in Germany. The name used to refer to the territory currently belonging to the Israeli state is an important detail. In many of the interviews, the Palestinian-Israeli issue is cited as one of the most crucial topics in geography:

"There is an occupation; Israel occupied the Palestinian land. This is what we study; we studied the map of Palestine, not Gaza and the West Bank, but all...all the country, all the boundaries... We study about all the Arab countries, but especially Palestine, it is a sensitive issue" (Int.34).

In the geography schoolbooks, all Syrian pupils are presented with a map of the Arab countries, wherein only Palestine is designated as a recognised state. Generally, Israel is not acknowledged as an existing country within the region. When studying the boundaries between countries, they are taught based on pre-Israeli occupation era. The same is found in the interviews with people who studied in Egypt (Int. 28; 30).

In Moroccan primary schools, history teaching is remembered as focusing on national history (Int.02; 13), a trend that persists across different educational levels. However, in middle school, there are additional topics related to world history, such as the discovery of America and the world wars (Int.01), linked to European history (Int.13). Nevertheless, national history appears to play the most crucial role:

"Moroccan history like... the... things, let us say, the history of Morocco, the history of those who ruled Morocco, for example. Those who started, those who came first, those who came later, because many, many, many different groups ruled Morocco, let us say different… the various yes... origins, practically because they are not all from the same origin, because rightly every time, it worked that whoever won the war was in charge […]

I: did they also talk about the history of other Arab countries, of Europe, of Africa?

R: little, not much, yes" (Int.23).

This 19-year-old boy, who is out of education, attended a Moroccan school following the reforms implemented at the beginning of the century. He studied only since middle school and has not studied any further in his life; therefore, his memories of primary school remain clear and unconfused with experiences from other educational levels in Morocco or other countries. In addition, he said he was not very interested in studying, so what he remembers are the topics that were extensively covered and that he repeated so many times to remain in his mind. As can be seen, the main topic he remembers is national history, which was traditionally taught through a memorization-based approach focused on ruling dynasties (Int.13). Interestingly, he remembers and cares to emphasise the diverse origins of the various dynasties that ruled Morocco throughout its national history. As in other interviews, the reference is also to the Imazighen population, who inhabited the country during the Arab conquest and even ruled it in specific periods after it (Int.13). Conversely, the memories of Arab, European and African histories receive equal little emphasis, without significant differentiation. The importance for the legitimate Moroccan culture of having a thorough knowledge of its national history is evident even in this statement:

"Before the colonisation, in the 20s, the colonisation it was maybe in the 40s-50s… I do not know. If some... my father or my brother hears me, he will kill me because I do not know the history of my country" (Int.13).

This student of sciences in Italy was trying to answer a question about history, a subject that he holds little interest in and does not remember well. He is embarrassed for not remembering his country's history and thinks about what his family might think if they heard him. It is possible to understand the vital role attributed to history teaching by society and schools, whose principal aim is to transmit national history. It is considered a citizen's duty to know it, especially regarding colonisation and the sense of pride associated with the struggle for independence. Colonialism constituted a fundamental section within history curricula across all countries and significantly influenced pupils' identity formation, especially among those who then move to European countries, where the topic does not hold the same importance in schools. Hence, a specific chapter is devoted to its specificity. Returning to Morocco, all the interviews with young people confirm the same central topic:

"The history of Morocco and then the French colonisation, they also talked about the world war, first and second, and then the... royal family that there is now, they talked about his grandparents, about themselves. […] They talked about some Arab countries like that, but not so much […]. There is some comparison between one country and another.

I: instead, they spoke to you about Berbers? About Amazigh. *R: yes, yes"* (Int.24).

Compared to the experiences of older people (Int.1; 3, 25), the importance of colonisation remains unchanged, whereas the importance given to Arab countries has decreased. While the history of Arab countries continues to provide the framework for national history, as indicated by the young woman's comparison, there is a declining emphasis on Arab identity, through the declining focus on Arab history, accompanied by the increasing integration of the Imazighen people's role in shaping national history. This shift in emphasis gives rise to a history curriculum that devotes less attention to Arab history and places greater emphasis on presenting a multi-ethnic nation that is held together and united by the monarchy, which emerges as the guardian of national identity. The monarchy is ultimately the real protagonist of the history program, often experienced as repetitive in the various grades of school (Int.23) and too focused on celebrating the royal. The issue of the Amazigh people within Maghrebi countries also arises in an interview with an Algerian student when she talks about history teaching contents:

> *"How Algeria was many, many centuries ago before it was called Algeria, it was called Numidia... so at the time there were Berbers, things like that, then how the borders were formed... Who there were, the... [...] the Arabs who were here and then at the high school instead the history is more concentrated on the... period of the French colonisation and then... ah also in secondary school yes, the last year of secondary school, French colonisation and then the liberation from France. Then in high school, there was international history, the cold war, Russia and America, and that is all I remember. [Berbers] were mentioned, but I did not know they were... I did not know they were still living with us; I mean that it was something important, so... I did not know that part of history when to speak Berber was forbidden; we did not study it; I do not remember. We studied them by saying that before the Turks etc., there were Berbers here, then the Arabs arrived, and then they spread Islam. We studied this, and, instead, until today, some people say Algeria is Berber, it is not Arab"* (Int.12).

Within this context, Arab history, along with the history of colonisation and independence, remains central to the history curriculum, with a primary focus on the nation. The issue of the original Berber population is dealt with, but according to this student's experience, as a topic only pertaining to ancient times rather than the present. The identitarian choice of Arabization following independence is not extensively explored and discussed, unlike the case of Morocco.

> *"Yes, of course, we had always studied in history how they were before the Arabs arrived and... They say that they are the people and... They are the original people of Africa that the Arabs came and colonised them; they say that we colonised them"* (Int.13).

Among the other countries considered, Jordan is the only other country to have a monarchy. However, it is important to note that there are no precise parallels in how history is perceived by

students in Jordan compared to Morocco. Here the monarchy seems to operate more as a protector of the Islamic identity of the nation, resulting in a history curriculum that consistently intertwines history with religion.

> *"I cannot even distinguish them, also because, as I told you, thinking then about many dynasties, but also the Arab ones, really treated very little [...] I do not know, the thing about Andalusia; maybe I remember it more; maybe we studied it more because it was a conquest in reverse. While it was always us, as the Arab world, fought, subjugated, colonised; Andalusia is almost a revenge, when the Arab world colonised a part of Europe"* (Int.04).

In her experience, the distinction between history and religion is not clearly delineated, an opinion never expressed by the Moroccan interviewees. Muslim history appears here as even more important than Arab and national history. Paradoxically, one of the events regarded as highly significant is the conquest of Andalusia. The unusual thing is that none of the Moroccan pupils remembers it as one of the key topics, despite it being the Moroccan dynasty that achieved it. The difference lies in the relationship between Morocco and Europe, and the Christianity that the country seeks to foster, for which it is not in its interest to emphasise past conflicts between Muslims and Christians. Instead, the interest remains on the national struggle for independence, taught from a political perspective devoid of religious references. Conversely, the topics that Jordan's history curriculum focused on at the time in which the interviewee attended school were Jesus, Mohammed, the Crusades, Palestine and Israeli occupation. She states that she experienced considerable confusion when later, in Italy, she approached these topics again, because her education had not clearly distinguished between Christians and the Roman Empire, nor had it provided a clear explanation of what occurred on Palestinian land in the long period between Jesus and the creation of the Israeli state. Young Libyan pupils currently studying in Italy report experiencing similar confusion due to the intertwining of history and religion in their school experience:

> *"We started with... with the wars that happened before... and nothing. I mean we do not study like here. I mean, in general... sometimes there is... like we did not study the Second or the First world war, I mean until I studied there, we did not study it, I do not know if in high school there is or not, but until the 8th grade, there was not.*
>
> *I: but not even the Arab empires, the Ottoman or Chinese empire, did you study them or not?*
>
> *R: the second one you said, that one, yes, we studied it because it is also part of our religion […] the first year that I studied history was about Mohammed and, anyway, our religion's history. Then the whole year continued like that; then they made it more... how can I say? Like in the first year, they said when he was born, where, which city he comes from, like that, that is from which family comes his father,*

his mother, what he did, what are his works, and what happened, to be a prophet. Anyway, then they added more difficult things, but it is always the same thing" (Int.07).

According to this young Libyan pupil, history and religion completely intertwined, as stated by the older Jordanian woman. This brilliant pupil, currently studying in Italy, shows significant confusion about what she had learned in history in Libya, since the Libyan history curriculum is not clear, mixing religion and history in a way that makes history incomprehensible. Both countries prioritize the transmission of Muslim histories as an integral part of their official culture, thereby emphasizing Muslim identity above all else; an identity also transmitted in Moroccan history but in accordance with a more secular national identity, without the same confusion between the two levels. By contrast, there is the predominantly secular Arab country:

"In Tunisia, we studied, for example, Tunisia's Independence, French colonialism in Tunisia and... what else... for example, you have the European Union, in Maghreb's countries there is the Maghreb union that includes 5 countries […] We have also studied some things related to Tunisian constitution. However, all this will be studied in depth in secondary school, and then those who will do classical high school like me, will study all these things. Then we studied the Roman Empire, the First and Second World War, the Soviet Union, Napoleon Bonaparte [...] at high school we studied in detail French colonialism, Tunisian independence, the Palestinian issue" (Int.15).

Here, as in Morocco, colonialism and national independence seem to be experienced as the most important topic, even if, afterwards, they studied many other issues of world history, with a focus on the Maghreb and Palestine. In this statement, Muslim history does not appear at all, while it appears in another interview containing a more detailed explanation:

"In primary school, we did something on Islamic history and the history of the country's liberation, and that was. It was very little because we were very young, because then in middle school... it was too much in high school. And also, Tunisia, if you know Tunisia well, has 3,000 years of history, it is a strategic point from which everyone passed […] We started to study the history before Christ until after, let us say from the... I do not know how it is called... Al-Jairi, when they find fossils, archaeology, how human being's life started, evolution, and then let us say, we studied the Romans, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, then the Byzantines, I do not know, everyone that came and then Islam. We started Islam since it started in the Arab Gulf. Anyway, we also studied the Egyptians, the pharaohs, all of them. The kings, the names, what they did. We have studied Arab Gulf's history and then how Islam moved. How Islam arrived in Kairouan, where I was born, which would be the first Muslim city in North Africa" (Int.14).

Colonialism and the struggle for national liberation have always been at the core of history curriculum, however many other issues are mentioned in this statement. Firstly, in secular Tunisia, Islamic history also has a role but never confused with the knowledge of Mediterranean

civilisations, Christians and Pagans, that have shaped Tunisian culture. The divergence in experiences may depend on their teachers, but generally, the Tunisian history curriculum contributes to the development of rich and complex identities aware of the intertwined history of peoples and cultures. It is a Maghrebi identity rooted in the Mediterranean culture, in which, for example, African belonging does not have a recognised place.

In Egyptian history teaching, they start with prehistory and deal with the ancient civilisations, particularly the Pharaonic one, and then move directly to 19th century Egypt (Int.30). From some experience, it seems that the Arab-Islamic history and the Ottoman period have been completely omitted from the syllabus. Another student states:

> *"In middle school, we started to study pharaonic families and history etc., then Roman history. Then we also start the world wars, the wars between Egypt and Israel in 1973 and... Presidents... Who have already passed in Egypt […]. You also study the monarchy period; then you pass to the Republic period. Passing from monarchy to republic, the '52 revolution occurred, and you study this revolution too and... Then you pass for each president, then the '73, then you also study what happened to Sadat, who was killed and... You do a general picture between international and national history, maybe they also make more national history because you study pharaonic things, and modern history and this as far as history is concerned. […] Also, Islamic history in a sense... starting from the prophet and then all periods after, all wars […]. They make periods, so the Pharaonic period, Islamic, Roman... Greek"* (Int.28).

In this statement, Islamic history appears as one of the distinct sections, or periods, within the history curriculum. According to this student, there is a notable gap between the study of ancient civilisations and the contemporary age, which begins in this case from the world wars of the 20th century. Throughout the curriculum, the emphasis remains on the nation, and national pride is built upon the ancient Mediterranean civilisations, free from religious discrimination, while embodying Islamic identity. The so-called period of decline under the Ottoman Empire is not addressed in the curriculum. Conversely, within contemporary history, significant attention is given to the conflict against Israel, linked to the role of the Palestinian issue in the history curriculum, as observed in the study of other countries' history programs.

> *"We passed also through that thing of Hitler with the Israelis, so yes, but it is a very complicated subject, I do not say for me but for the Arabs in a sense... [...] In that period, you were studying that, but you saw with your own eyes what the same people that you are complaining about are doing to others... I am not justifying them; I am just telling you the thoughts as they are. That is, a pupil that is studying that fact that occurred... I am trying to use terms so as not to... You do not feel, you are sorry, you feel sorrow but not so much, you know, because […] I have hurt you, then someone else has hurt me, one day your son or your daughter when you will have him, will not feel sorry for me. Even though I had great pain from someone else because he would tell me that you deserved it because you did it to my*

mother, do you understand? That is the problem with Hitler's issue, the Israelis, the Jews, that are connected still today, in the sense that until last year there was still problems between Gaza, Hamas and Israel, and this is the fact of... Hitler. I do not know if I explain myself" (Int. 28).

With the defensive attitude of those who are familiar with Italian culture and fears to be considered anti-Semite, this student attempts to explain why he and his classmates struggled to empathise with Hitler's Jewish victims. While they were studying this topic, they could see the Israel's Palestinian victims with their own eyes and empathised with them in their daily lives. Thus, the official curriculum provides them with the same contents as the European history curricula, but the way teachers and pupils deal with them and their feelings towards them differ significantly:

"We really saw what was occurring in Palestine, and we saw it every day in newspapers, and obviously, our teachers were sorry for what was happening to Palestinian people, so they taught us why this happened, because of whom, etc... They told us of course about the world war, the second one, the first one, and how Hitler killed those who did not... the Jewish ones, right? Then... they taught us how they had just the possibility to build their own country in Palestine. This they taught us. Moreover, they taught us, of course, that the Palestinian revolution continues until they will regain their country again, so... If you talk to any Arab, you ask him <<Whom do you choose? >> Of course, he tells you Palestine […] It was not really religious; it was just about people, about these people who... cannot do anything anymore, and then you really saw people losing their homes and children dying, so it was a thing just... It was already touching your heart; teachers were already talking about it, crying so... this" (Int.09).

Teachers provided explanation to pupils about the ongoing conflict in Palestine, consequently placing Hitler's persecution of Jews within the context of the present-day situation rather than addressing it in isolation. Teachers and pupils approached it from the perspective of the Palestinian occupation with a strong emotional burden, perceiving it as a continuation of colonialism. It is worth saying that, according to this student's , the perspective on the Palestinian issue does not concern religion but an Arab feeling of belonging and solidarity that pupils learn at school:

"I: Do you think more importance was given to Egyptian, Arab or Muslim identity?
R: e... (Laughs) The Arab one. I would say because… Or maybe the Muslim one, it is not... Arab and Islam are linked because if you look at Egypt, let us forget the pharaonic history and all these things. However, if you start to look, I do not know, in the history of Egypt, Egypt was not an Islamic country. In fact, when Umar Ibn al-Khattab came to enter Egypt, he said to Egyptian people who wanted to be Muslim could be, who did not want to be Muslim would not have done any evil to him, so he could also live in peace […]. In fact, even at school, they did not... teach us only Islamic history but also Christian history that also had more than one war against others who wanted to take Egypt, so they taught us this too. Obviously, everything concerns Egypt, not a religion" (Int.09).

Christian Arabs have a place in the Egyptian history taught in school, with a particular emphasis on the unity between Christians and Muslims in the defence of their country against an enemy seeking to conquer it. Therefore, it is a national Arab history focused on the ancient common roots (Int.16) of Muslim and Christian people and on their common struggle in the contemporary age to build their own independent country. The experiences and viewpoints of the interviewees reveal the outcomes of the efforts by Egyptian Coptic and Muslim nationalists to withstand external and internal forces that seek to divide the Muslim and Christian communities. In the following quotes, the Arab influence is reaffirmed, although Nasser's historical figure has been questioned:

> *"History had a completely Arab imprint, that is to say, the Arab conquests [...] surely it was more focused on what were the caliphate's conquests [...]. From the 3rd grade, however, we started to do modern history, by the way, arriving much more to other countries maybe... let us say as a flash on... the British domination, the 1919 revolution in Egypt [...]. I feel like I have also studied the revolution, the coup d'état, so to speak, of 1952 of Nasser; therefore, we arrived at the very modern age"* (Int.16).

The Arab influence on history seems to be separated from the Nasser's political current that gave rise to it. Arab history is conveyed in accordance with the framework established by Arab socialism, as well as the official culture that must contribute to the formation of Arab identity in pupils. On the other hand, the crucial events of the liberation from colonialism, the change from monarchy to Republic and the instauration of Nasser's socialist regime that led to this historical approach in schools are questioned.

> *"Many historiographers defined what happened in the '52 as a revolution, while others say that it has nothing at all to do with the revolution and that, in reality, it is a military coup. Because, in reality, people did not participate to overthrow King Faruk. These very social differences and studies really led to a deep-rooted and marked hesitation at the educational level. Teachers did not know what to teach, and this generated a form of indecision and lack of clarity in children's minds"* (Int.16).

The result is, in the experience of this student, a history programme that does not go into details and avoids as much as possible direct questions on sensitive topics such as the instauration of the Nasser regime and the 1956 defeat against Israel. He felt that both teachers and the ministry of education tried in every way to hide this particular period. Thus far, the figure of Nasser has been idealised, generating two distinct currents among the younger generation. Some idealise him, identifying themselves as Nasserists, socialists and Pan-Arab, while others profoundly detest him, considering him as someone who brought Egypt to ruin. In the interviewee's opinion, the prevailing trend is the second, , and, despite the radical recent changes, the government's approach continues to be to draw a veil over it rather than stimulating discussion and debate in schools in

order to allow pupils to understand. Notwithstanding this, the Nasserist influence on history as Arab history resisted the radical changes in politics, particularly in relation to the Golden Age. Instead, the focus on colonialism, independence and the struggle against Israel is diminishing in contemporary times. The Israeli issue plays a fundamental role in the identity conveyed by history, i.e., an Arab identity focused on a glorious past tradition rather than current conflicts. However, this official position does not reflect the feelings of most teachers and pupils interviewed, who feel a strong connection between their Arab belonging and the Palestinian issue. From this perspective, the situation in Syria differs significantly, as the Arabism conveyed in schools has remained unchanged over the past 50 years following the educational system modelled after Egypt. The youngest pupils interviewed remember that they studied ancient civilisations without specifications or emphasis (Int.11). The older pupils, who attended more years of school in Syria, provide some additional information:

> *"World history, not only of Syria, in general, we also study the First World War and the Second one. As I remember, in the 7th year, the last year, when I did the exam, there were questions from the school... About the First and Second Wars, the cold war also […]. The ancient civilisations, yes, for sure, but the religious things we studied more in the religious class because we had an hour of religion that we studied... we spoke more about Islamic things"* (Int.20).

This 20 years pupil defines the history programme they studied as a programme of world history, as they studied the world wars and the cold war and something about other countries and their ancient civilisations. As for the relationship between history and religion, she experienced a clear distinction between the two. She studied only until the first year of middle school; however, as far as basic education is concerned, history teaching is experienced as secular and inclusive of diverse issue. Other pupils confirm that they studied contemporary international history as early as primary school but provide further context regarding the framework in which it is taught:

> *"We studied Arab culture, like here, that the first thing we studied is Italian culture. Then we studied the Second World War, and the First one, and these things"* (Int.21).

He compares Syrian and Italian history teaching, aiming to demonstrate the *normality* of the Syrian one. In doing so, in a simple sentence, he conveys the essence of the Arab nationalism present in Syrian history teaching, in which the nation to which the contents refer is the Arab one more than the Syrian one.

> *"We said all the time that we [Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan] were one country, and because of politics and wars, many problems have developed for these people, and we felt sad for all people, not only our country, for Iraq, for what happened in Palestine and also in Europe... We learn that all the time, wars are the worst thing in the world, and it makes other people sad, and the country has problems,*

and these problems maybe take a long time to go back to health.[…] They speak about it [the Palestinian issue] and tell us that the problem began in England with Balfour. That is the beginning, and it began more and more difficulties to find how we can solve this problem" (Int.38).

The conveyed Arab identity refers to the ancient *Bilad as-shams*, so people living in the other countries mentioned in the interviews are considered compatriots. The proposed identity is an identity mutilated by the division of the common homeland into different states, a division operated by foreign powers. The symbol of this identity threatened by foreigners is Palestine. Concerning the Palestinian issues, what in Egypt is experienced as unofficial feelings among teachers and pupils in Syria is presented as official truth since primary school. The interviewee did not perceive this history teaching as promoting hostility; on the contrary, the teacher told how she, as a pupil, understood through it how bad war is in all its forms.

"In our country, they speak about Arab and Muslim region's history and Islam's history and the history before Islam, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Empire before Islam and before the Greeks in the Middle East and all Arabic countries. They speak especially of what happened in Egypt, what happened in North Africa because we are 22 Arab countries and Syria is part of these countries, and they give us all of the information on other countries" (Int.41).

This teacher seems to consider the history teaching he received as comprehensive and varied, encompassing pre-Islamic history, overall Greek and Syrian, as well as Islamic history and Arab history, in which also the country outside the *Bilad as-Sham* have their importance. This history teaching follows a pan-Arab approach to history, with only Greek history being included alongside Arab-Islamic history as a fundamental component of Mediterranean culture. In Syria, pupils felt pan-Arabism more than in the other 22 Arab countries, as evident from a comparison of the interviews. The curriculum also acknowledges the influence of all three Abrahamic religions on Arab history and culture. It is important to note that other religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism are not studied (Int.41), as they do not hold an official role in the selected and conveyed official Arab culture. Moving beyond the basic level of history education, it is interesting to consider the perspective of a 28-year-old student in Italy:

"I remember we did the Ottoman Empire and then... Because they say Ottomans conquered our country, they changed the language, they did things. Then we had the revolution against the Ottomans, the Ottomans left, and the French came. The French did the same thing; we made war with the Frenchs, so they came out. Then there is Israeli; they came to take, they took a land, a city of ours until today. Then the same thing, we went to war with Egypt in '66 […] in secondary school we do, we start like this, we started in this way" (Int.29).

As evident, during middle school, the curriculum places significant emphasis on colonialism, which is considered as the central theme around which the whole modern and contemporary Syrian history has developed up to the present day (from the Ottoman and French conquests to the Israeli occupation). Many other interviews, especially those conducted with people who also attended high school in Syria (Int.36; 38), confirm that these are the main topics taught in history. Arabism and anti-colonialism are closely related to each other within the legitimate culture transmitted by Syrian history teaching. As some Syrian teachers in Sweden point out (Int.32; 33), these very sensitive topics, declined in such a strong interpretation key, are primarily conveyed through memorisation and without free discussions in class. Consequently, even in adulthood, people who have migrated to Europe find it difficult to face these issues and feel compelled to re-evaluate what they were taught as unquestionable truths. Another interviewee states that Arab culture, the Ba'th party and the president, and colonialism are the foundation of history teaching in primary schools (Int.37), and that these topic are instilled, rather than presented, as closely related to each other. Someone else emphasizes a particular focus on the Umayyad period as a key component of classical Arab history, with a sense of pride in Damascus as capital of the empire, alongside an emphasis on the Corrective movement of 1973 in the context of contemporary history (Int.40). However, the outcome is a teaching approach aimed at perpetuating Arab identity as loyalty to the regime in its struggle against imperialism, leaving little room for questioning this correlation. The external enemy through which the regime tries to build the Syrian identity and loyalty is Israel (Int. 39). Consequently, the historical figure of Hitler is not accorded significant importance:

> *"In 12th grade, there was only one page about... the Second World War and Germany and... Like they did not really criticise his dictatorship, for example. They did not...a... put like... just like this and this, that occurred, but it was not like a big description or like saying that, for example, Hitler is a bad person. He came up as a historical figure, but they did not... judge..."* (Int.40).

It is easy to understand how Syrian pupils may experience a sense of disorientation in the transition to European schools, as they have to confront with this topic in deep as one of the most important events of the 20th century, namely the Holocaust, which carries an emotional burden that is foreign to them. While history plays a central role in shaping a distinct identity through the construction of Israel as an external enemy, a similar dynamic emerges in relation to the internal enemy, represented by the Kurdish people. The experiences of Syrian pupils with history teaching (Int. 32; 37) in this regard are particularly marked by conflict:

> *"They do not teach you European history, no one thing, European history we learned nothing, zero, of America nothing, zero, of Asia a little, of the Arab history or middle east everything, yes so. You have to know everything, and they teach you the history of North Africa where there are Arabs, they are all*

Arabs and the Middle East, all Arabs and... A little of... let us say... Spain, Andalus, because the Arabs were been there... 600-700 years ago... These things teach the Arab history and... Not only Arab, before the Arabs, Syria, let us say 2000 years ago, but Arabs also were not there, Syrians are not Arabs, Arabic language and these things came with Islam, with these things, it came. In North Africa, the same thing happened; they are not Arabs, they were not, now yes, half, but they are mixed Arab and Amazigh. For example in Syria, Arabs and Syrians, there are in Syria a group of people who are called Syrians, they are originally Syrians, but they are few, 100,000 let us say […]. They tell you many stories but always in one area, the Middle East and North African area, 85%. They explain, they teach you, they tell you things about this area, the Middle East and North Africa, just these things. In addition, they teach you simple things, for example, let us say the world wars, the First and Second world war"(Int.19).

In this statement, a Kurdish Syrian student residing in Italy confirms what the other Syrian interviewees have said about the focus on Arab history, albeit with a distinct negative emphasis. His frustration is palpable, evident from his initial focus on topics that are not covered in the curriculum and his critique of how the teaching portrays Arab countries as exclusively Arab, disregarding the presence of Amazigh and historical Syrian populations. He highlights the omission of the original Syrian people who inhabited the region before the arrival of Arabs, emphasizing their subsequent disappearance from historical accounts. The last critique regards the cursory treatment of significant international events, such as the world wars, as well as the overall narrowness of the curriculum that never deals with other continents and countries. He mentions the absence of references to Iran and Russia despite their historical connection to Syria. What he says is not so different from what the other interviewees said, but the discomfort he shows is much deeper since this obsession with Arab identity challenges his own Kurdish identity:

"They do not say anything about Kurdish people because, in Syria, Kurdish people do not have any rights" (Int.37).

If the history curriculum acknowledges the presence of the Syrian original inhabitants, it completely neglects the Kurdish people, providing no information about them whatsoever.

"They speak, for example, they say... of people who are called Medi, these are the Kurds, but... They do not say these things; they do not explain these things, just generally; in Syria, generally, they want everybody to be Arabs, everybody, one thing... why do not they let me study Kurdish? I cannot speak Kurdish in school, not even in the last 20 years, nobody, even a Kurdish person, gives a Kurdish name to his son, to his daughter" (Int.19).

The student point out that ancient history fails to establish a connection with the present because it deliberately omits the Kurdish people's lineage from the ancient Medes population. The regime's intention is to sever the link between the past, in which ethnic groups coexisted, and the present,

where the entire population is expected to be Arab. In line with this purpose, Kurdish people are prohibited from using their language in schools and are deprived of knowledge about their own history, while Syrian pupils are kept unaware of it. Other Arab people confirmed this reality. A teacher states that she has never studied the Kurdish people in Syria and was not informed about them, except when the Kurdish issues in Turkey were discussed (Int.38).

> *"They were allowed to learn Arab history and not their own history, and we did not learn at school that there were Kurdish people in the North. It was not taught. It is not a topic in school. The Kurdish question is complicated because the region where they live is divided between countries like Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and so on... Wherever they want to find a State, nobody got… None of those countries would give them the right to have their own state, and so nothing like this is taught in schools"* (Int.36).

She shares Kurdish criticism of the Syrian education system expressing her frustration that Kurdish history is not taught and that fellow students remain oblivious to their existence. She directly links this educational policy to the political situation of the Kurdish people's, namely the fact that they do not have their own state, and none of the four countries in which they inhabit shows any interest in establishing a Kurdish autonomous political entity. Granting them the right to education or even acknowledging their history is seen as a dangerous step towards political recognition, therefore the regime prefers that they do not appear at all within the legitimate culture transmitted at school.

The political role of history in shaping a national collective identity reappears in Syrian pupils' experiences in Lebanon. They felt the difference more in Lebanon, a neighbouring Arab country that aims to convey a very different Arab identity compared to what is transmitted in Syria, than in Italy, where there is *"one thing more, one thing less"* (Int.29). This paradox could be explained by the fact that in Lebanon and Syria, the main topics are the same, but with a significantly different perspective and ideology. In Italy, they do not find sensitive topics on which one could feel the difference in the general approach, and instead find other topics related to European and Italian history.

11.4.1.1 Colonialism

The interviewees at times discuss colonialism in relation to religion or emphasise its role in shaping the overall structure of the educational systems but primarily associate it with humanistic subjects. Colonialism emerges as the most sensitive topic in terms of identity formation of Arabic-speaking pupils, especially within the subjects of history and geography.

> *"Most Western history and Arab history is imperialism's history, so first the Ottoman Empire and we had the English and the French and also the German later, so we study more or less how we were affected by imperialism.*
>
> *I: So, in school, they study imperialism as the major topic of history?*

R: Yes, of course, because we are still also living under the condition of imperialism, starting with the end of the Abbasid Empire and lasting until today" (Int.36).

It is essential to grasp the meaning attributed to colonialism, or imperialism, within various educational systems and history curricula. This Syrian pupil reports imperialism as the central topic of the entire history program, since the period between the end of the Abbasid Empire (1258) and today, with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, is taught as imperialism. The marked differences with Europe become evident. In European textbooks, imperialism and colonialism receive minimal attention and are occasionally omitted by teachers if they fall behind schedule. In comparison, the study of colonialism holds far greater importance in the education systems of Arab countries than in Europe. Among the diverse Arab education systems, the Syrian system places the utmost emphasis on this topic.

"In history, we study overall French occupation and of other people… The Ottoman Empire, this is the most important: Syria, Lebanon and Palestine […] Sometimes we feel sad about what happened in our country and one day talk about some people or heroes who take action, about this also we are proud of our people who struggle for our freedom" (Int.38).

In Syria, colonialism, or imperialism, is the central topic in the study of history, in which the vast majority of modern historical events converges. The first difference between the Arab and the European concept of colonialism is the Ottoman Empire, studied as the first colonisation of the Middle East, or Arab lands, by Syrian pupils. When the woman in the last quote speaks about "our country", she is referring to Syria, Lebanon and Palestine as a political-cultural unity that shares a common identity. This perception is not limited to her alone, but it is the sense of the identity conveyed in schools, which highlights the stories of heroic figures who have resided in the various regions at different times and fought for the liberation of Arab lands.

"There were Ottomans in Syria or Arab lands, and they always say they want to delete our culture... I do not know, but this topic came more often in different classes. For example, in primary and secondary school, 7th, 8th and 9th classes. And how Syrian made a deal with the French to make the Othman go out from our country. [The school transmit the idea that the Ottomans are enemies] indirectly and until now. Now, because of the war, it is directly, but in my dates, was indirectly" (Int. 39).

The history of the Ottoman Empire is conveyed not as a glorious period in which a multicultural Islamic empire successfully reigned from west to east, enabling meaningful global cultural exchanges, but as the first colonisation of *Great Syria* (Syria, Lebanon and Palestine). In this student's educational experience, the topic of Ottoman domination is obsessively reiterated at all levels of education, with a focus on the Ottoman purpose to eradicate Arab culture. Furthermore, it is possible to infer how the ever-changing political situation influences the teaching of history.

This negative description of the Ottoman Empire serves to maintain hostility among the population toward Turkey, shaping the perception of Sunni citizens to view Turkey as a foreign power hostile towards Arabs rather than as a Muslim ally. Not all of the other Arab countries share this interpretation. For example in Algeria, the Ottoman Empire is not studied as an occupying enemy but rather as a glorious chapter of national history:

> *"Algeria was colonised by France, and France burnt many, many, many Algerian works…The Algerian people acquired many French traditions and... so even now... even now you are very, many are influenced by France until today, some say that France is still colonising us... and so even for that the programme cannot change. […] At high school instead, history is more concentrated on the... period of French colonisation and then... ah also in secondary school yes, the last year of secondary school, French colonisation and then liberation"* (Int.12).

In Algeria, a country colonised longer than any other did, the influence of colonialism is strongly felt as a determining factor in school's contents, in this case, philosophy. This student talks about the assimilation of many French traditions by the Algerian people. They include education and its methods and contents, which contribute to reproducing French traditions and influence the formation of the Algerian people's identity across generations. This influence is not hidden; rather, it is made explicit in the teaching of history, experienced as highly focused on colonisation and its consequence. Algerian pupils seem to be strongly influenced by colonialism in their school experience and in the related identity building, and they seem to be very aware of it. In their school experience, colonialism primarily refers to French colonialism, studied at all school levels. The conflict that this theme brings forth is primarily an inner conflict in people who have to manage a mixture of tradition, language and culture within themselves, rather than in the relationship with present-day France. An Egyptian student showed a similar awareness of colonialism's influence on his education by speaking about the establishment of the current Egyptian education system during the period of British colonisation, a topic that was taught to him at school. He did not experience the same clarity regarding the anti-colonial movement, national liberation, and the foundation of the Republic. Instead, he believes the governments have long attempted to hide these aspects (Int. 16). These observations reinforce the idea that, in most Arab schools, the influence of colonialism on the education system is openly declared, and colonialism is extensively studied. However, the way colonisation and, especially, anti-colonisation are treated strongly depends on the identity that government want to build in new generations. Egypt appears as a country where colonialism is taught to transmit the pride of liberation but in a softened manner, avoiding transmitting antagonism against the West and Israel.

"Because they say in history that we have the Ottomans who conquered our country, they changed the language, they did things, then, we had the revolution against the Ottomans, the Ottomans left, and the French came. The French did the same thing; we made war with the French, so they came out. Then there is Israel, they came to take, they took a land, a city of ours until today. Then the same thing, we went to war with Egypt in '66" (Int.29).

In Syria, the French or European colonisation represents the transitional phase between the Ottoman occupation and the current Israeli occupation of the broader Arab homeland. While European colonisation is the most extensively studied topic in most Arab countries considered, the second historical event categorised as colonialism across all Arab education systems is the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine. This differs from Europe, where it is studied in relation to Nazism and never in relation to colonialism. In the analysed experiences, it is not the study of European colonialism that makes a difference in identity formation, but rather the examination of earlier and subsequent historical events conveyed as imperialism or colonialism. Syrian identity seems to be built on the idea that Syrian people have been colonised for nearly a millennium, albeit by different powers. Therefore, it becomes imperative to transmit the regime's anti-colonial ideology and the willingness to fight against colonialism and Israel to new generations, as if in the hostility against Israel people had to embody centuries of struggles fought by their ancestors to preserve their own identity. An antagonistic identity toward the West and especially toward neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Israel that the Syrian government tried to build in pupils through this historical narration. The Ottoman Empire is also described negatively in Egypt, albeit with a distinct emphasis:

"The Ottoman government, I will explain now, was not an important subject because I remember it was not underlined. But they told us in an implicit way that Mohammed Ali came to Egypt […].He was under the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman Empire was an empire, they did this, they did many taxes on Egypt... We had to pay much money for them and [...] they made people pay a lot of money. People who were also peasants could not do anymore because especially those who were very exploited by the Ottoman Empire […] the government tells you that things are like this, that they are like that, from what I understood, that then the politicians decide what we study, what we know..." (Int.30).

Furthermore, in in this student's experience, the Ottoman Empire is portrayed as a foreign entity that took control of the region, with negative outcomes. However, significant differences can be observed. The first concerns the cultural dynamics between the Ottoman Empire and the conquered territories. The student does not mention cultural subjugation by the Ottoman Empire, but rather focuses on economic exploitation. The eradication of the cultural identity of conquered regions is a specific feature of colonialism, typically not used by large multicultural empires. The other

difference lies in the limited emphasis placed on the Ottoman Empire within the curriculum. Its discussion primarily revolves around the local governor Muhammad 'Ali, who detached both himself and the country from the Empire. The last thing to note is the interviewee's scepticism on the reliability of the official version of history provided by schools. According to him, this version is deeply influenced by contingent political reasons rather than a love for study and the pursuit of historical truth. This confirms how pupils keenly perceive the political influence on the contents they study at school, shaping their identities based on a particular ideology rather than another.

The colonial period begins very early also in the Moroccan narrative, but with a distinct variation:

> *"When we were young and did this part of the Uthman monarchy history, we were always proud of Morocco […]. They also wanted to enter Morocco, and, at that time, we were colonised by Portugal... At that time, Portugal was, let us say, like America now, very strong, like America or Russia, so there was one of the Moroccan commands, that was in the war against Portugal, and he had said to his… This is very well known because they were much more advanced in weapons than Morocco… He said the enemy is in front of you and the sea behind you, so you will die anyway, or you fight and return your country and take your freedom or go to the sea and die... And they went to fight and won against Portugal, which was very strong. Moreover, when they were about to enter at that time and heard that Morocco won against Portugal, the Uthman monarchy was afraid that it would lose completely and went back and did not enter Morocco. So the Uthman monarchy arrived only in Algeria and Morocco was not taken, and always this part of our history when we studied it every year, the whole class started to shout <<yes we won against Portugal, the others were afraid, they did not want to enter>>"* (Int.13).

The first point to consider is that the Ottoman Empire is classified within the context of Islamic history. Even they were Turks and did not ultimately conquer Morocco, their history is studied as part of the broader Muslim history. This already diminishes the potential conflicts between "us" (Arabs) and "them" (Turks). The second important aspect related to identity formation through history is that the Ottoman and Portuguese Empires are described as great empires, without any sense of contempt towards them. On the contrary, the power and strength of these enemies transmit a sense of pride in the Moroccan people who fought against them. Similar to the case of Mohammed 'Ali in Egypt, what matters is the independence achieved by national fighters, whose qualities are to be emulated, rather than fostering contempt and hatred towards nations that were once adversaries. The approach to building identity typically depends on political decisions, whether it involves the construction of enemies or commemorating heroes as role models. However, individual teaching methods and attitudes can sometimes diverge from the general national approach.

> *"I do not know, we always talk about it, but when Italy went to Libya is not like a proper topic... but sometimes the teacher gives an example of when...to make us understand"* (Int.07).

In Libyan primary schools, it appears that the topic of colonialism is not included in the official curricula, which instead focuses on religion as the cornerstone of national identity. However, this young pupil attended primary school after Gaddafi's death. During his regime, on the contrary, colonialism played a crucial role in citizens' formation. Although not officially included in the curricula, teachers often choose to add it to official content. In contrast, in secondary school, the topic is officially introduced:

> *"They teach you a lot about Italy in Libya, the language, history, many things, the relationship between Italy and Libya, how it was and how it is now, that now is better than before"* (Int.19).

It is evident that, following Gaddafi's era, politicians have chosen to approach colonialism as a bygone phenomenon, and relate to it even the positive attributes of the colonising country', and providing explanations of its history, culture and language. Schools do not aim to convey a conflicting stance towards Italy; on the contrary, the aim seems to be fostering an appreciation for Italy and promoting the current good relationships between the two countries. Conversely, in relation to Israel and Palestine, this student had a similar experience in Syrian primary and middle schools and Libyan high school, witnessing the same official discourse and teachers' attitude observed in Syria (Int.19). Egypt is, instead, the country in which there is a discrepancy between national education policy and teachers' attitudes regarding the Palestinian issue:

> *"It was not really an official discourse, you understand... You obviously talked about how these Arab countries have made revolutions, and, obviously, you made, for example, the Palestinian revolution against Jews. You made maybe; I do not know, the revolution in Algeria against France that had conquered it for a long time and Morocco and Sudan that is divided in two"* (Int.09).

Colonialism is studied as a shared historical phenomenon among Arab countries, and through this collective past, schools aim to build a sense of shared identity that finds its symbolic representation in the Palestinian issue, even though it may be not officially included in the syllabus. The expression of this identification varies across different school contexts. In some cases, like in Syria, it is the legitimate culture's cornerstone, while in others, like Egypt, it may not be part of the official curricula but still persists in everyday life and teachers' attitude. There exist an internal difference among Arab countries, where some treat colonialism as a past event, e.g. Egypt, while others view it as an ongoing phenomenon, e.g. Syria. This difference is reflected in the role assigned to Palestinian issue within history and geography lessons, as well as in the official recognition or non-recognition of the connection between past movements for national independence and the current movement for the liberation of Palestine.

"They teach you the people who fought against them, the English, what they did, how they organised themselves. No, they tell you everything of that period [...]. Like the glory of the Egyptians who managed to expel them all in a sense... The only problem... I do not want to say this... With a bit of hatred and... No, because these passed between Egypt and Israel because we say that the only thing that young people, students, for example, we were small so when they say <<the English came, they did, they killed; the French did>>, I do not know <<the Italians went to Libya, they did; there was Omar Mukhtar who did>>. For you, it is like a study of that period, yes, it is a story, but you do not see it now, so it is not that we hate the French or the English, no. Instead, with the Israelis, the question is different because when the story is told, we were young, and every 2 or 3 years, a fight broke out between Palestinians and Israelis, and so you study the things, and you see it live, you see it more... maybe children who are killed and... All these things you know. So, in my opinion, the only story that when you study it, you get angry is this [...]. They share with us religion, language and they are really attached to Egypt" (Int.28).

This Egyptian student in Italy draws a comparison between the Egyptian liberation movement against colonialism and the Italian one against fascism. This comparison helps to understand that colonialism and anti-colonialism, as portrayed in the legitimate culture transmitted in Egyptian schools, refer to a specific and limited historical period - the European colonisation of Arab countries that began with the French colonisation of Algeria and ended with the liberation of Arab countries and the establishment of independent national states. From the student's perspective, it can be inferred that the official historical narrative aims to present national heroes as models to follow in order to foster national development more rather than to instigate hatred towards past colonisers. Colonisation is depicted as a concluded phenomenon, which does not require nurturing feelings of revenge and an antagonist identity among pupils, but rather instils a sense of pride in national heroes. However, the student hesitate to admit that the study of the 1967 war against Israel differs. Although its proximity in time to the struggle against European colonialism, the difference is that pupils and teachers continue to experience the ongoing repercussions of the conflict in their present life. They study events that occurred 50 years ago while simultaneously witnessing the current situation first hand. Consequently, the Palestinian issue in Egypt does not have a direct and official connection to European colonialism nor does it serve as a cornerstone of history education as it does in Syria. Nevertheless, it remains a significant factor in informal identity formation within the school community because, outside the formal curricular activities, teachers and pupils cultivate a sense of shared belonging with the Palestinian people, who have their same language, religion and culture.

"There were the French, and there was Morocco's independence, yes. There were some dedicated days and there were some days when the flag of Morocco was raised, and you had to be all in line, and there was the school director who passed and saw all the sections in line for... For this event, I remember...

many pieces in primary school books tell about the Independence Feast and the Feast of the Throne; these were quite numerous. […]. The feeling is that it is a distant thing. In fact, over the years, one discovers that maybe members of one's family were part of the resistance and died or even have a memory of those days, and one understands that, in reality, it is very close. It is still a fairly recent event, while in the books it is actually seen as a distant thing, it is also told as something past here" (Int.10).

In Morocco, the study of European colonisation is studied since primary school, serving as a crucial aspect of citizens' formation, particularly with regards to loyalty towards the Monarchy. The monarchy serves as the bridge between colonialism as a historical event and the present, playing a central role in history teaching, and symbolising the unity of Moroccan identity.

"We also did the dates of what occurred; when our king was kicked out of Morocco, they made him go into exile... We studied a bit of everything, Morocco, the people did, I do not know how to say... let us say they united to make the king come back, they fought with France and Spain, it is a beautiful story. It is a sin that I do not know it (laughs)" (Int.13).

The phrase "*People always made demonstrations to make the exiled king come back*" (Int.01) is the recurring theme in history teaching, regarded as the most significant phrase throughout the entire educational experience. This strong identification with the monarchy transcends Arab identity, and when discussing colonialism, Moroccans does not delve into the issue of Palestine. Relegating colonialism to the past serves to build in pupils peaceful identities toward European and Jewish people who are welcomed into the country by the Moroccan ruler. However, the past of colonialism is transmitted as an integral part of Moroccan identity, as it is showed by the unity between Arab, Amazigh Moroccans, and the monarchy against a common adversary; therefore, it serves to strengthen national unity under the king's leadership without cultivating negative feelings toward other peoples. Additionally, another peculiarity is the recognition of Arab conquests as a form of colonialism.

"Yes, of course, we had always studied in history how they were before when the Arabs arrived and... they say that they are the people and... they are the original people of Africa and that the Arabs came and colonised them, they say that we colonised them" (Int.13).

If in Moroccan schools the idea that Arabs have colonised the Imazighen is at least tolerated, accompanied by recognition of their cultural identity as a part of the Moroccan identity, the Arab colonisation of *Great Syria* is not even remotely considered. This lack of acknowledgement of the cultural colonisation of local population, such as the Kurds, is indicative of their present status as colonised people, whose cultural identity and rights are not recognised (Int.19). Furthermore, in contrast to Egypt, Syria sees a convergence between official teaching and popular sentiment on

the Palestinian issue. It is a central topic in history and geography programs, and teachers strongly feel it and speak about it with pupils even outside the regular lessons dedicated to the topic.

> *"Palestine is a country that is a part of our country; we have to be ready to take it again"* (Int.29).

This student summarizes the fundamental message transmitted throughout Syrian history. It is not solidarity with people of another country, but rather the identification with the Palestinian people, since Palestine is considered a part of Syria. Therefore, the Syrian people are themselves colonized by Israel in this perspective and must be ready to fight to regain Palestine.

> *"Of course, we study a lot about Arab countries. How they were one country before, and they were speaking all the same language, and they were more or less the same, and then they were divided into several countries; there was also the Sykes-Picot treaty, which was about the division of the Middle East and how Israel was founded too"* (Int.36).

Colonialism and Israel are identified as the primary factors that have disrupted a mythical, unified, and homogeneous identity that never actually existed. Jordan is the country where the school's stance on the Palestinian issue resembles that of Syria and holds even greater significance than colonialism and Jordan's independence itself:

> *"I remember that there was also something in the Arab book, that there has always been a section dedicated to Palestine in order to feel that it is a part of us, a part of the Arabs, it is not a part... It has been colonised by the Israelis, so Palestine has been treated always differently from everything else. Then you grow up and discover... you see that it is not only Palestine that has been colonised, indeed, we discover that Jordan was also colonised in its time by the British, but that came later. Instead, I remember the discussion on Palestine from a very young age... from the war in Palestine... We began studying certain topics, such as Jordan's colonization itself, during middle school, whereas the colonization of Palestine had already been discussed earlier"* (Int.04).

Colonization is taught in middle school in Jordan. However, the Palestinian issue is already introduced in primary schools as part of general Arabic language education, providing fundamental knowledge to shape new Arab citizens and instill a sense of Arab belonging. The sense of belonging to the Arab Nation is also linked to the Palestinian issue in Tunisia, but it is studied in detail only in high school. In primary and middle school, the focus is on French colonization and national liberation. The geographical distance between Tunisia and Palestine may contribute to this difference, but it is not the sole factor. Tunisia, like Algeria, has experienced the strong influence of French colonization, which has significantly impacted its culture and resulted in cultural and linguistic imposition. Therefore, discussing colonialism in Tunisia primarily refers to French colonization and the subsequent formation of a bi-cultural society. Even after gaining

independence, French culture continued to have a significant presence in Tunisian society. Consequently, starting from primary school, there is a significant emphasis on French colonization to help students navigate their own identities and facilitate a dialogue between the two cultures they belong to: French and Arab. Secular nationalism has played a role in shaping a national identity that emerges from this blending of cultures. Additionally, Tunisia seeks to cultivate a peaceful relationship with the West, in contrast to the approach of the Syrian government. Nonetheless, when Tunisian students study the Palestinian issue in high school, they follow a similar pattern to other Arab countries, as described by a Jordanian woman discussing geography textbooks:

> *"Arab countries, even Jordan, which has made the peace agreement with Israel anyway, no, it does not declare that there is Israel there, Palestine, full stop. All Arab countries do not recognise Israel as a country and that is one of the reasons for the ongoing conflict, no... Because […] Palestine, it was born as Palestine, OK, even if in the past the Israelis who were in Egypt moved to... Palestine and... That does not give you the right as a population moved to another to declare that country Israel, i.e. to say no, like the British who at one point colonised Jordan; ok, let us change the name it is no longer Jordan, and it becomes England 2, that is, nobody gives you the right to do that. It is Palestine. So, it is fine, do you want to live here because you think that, from a religious point of view, it was the promised land? Live, but do not force me to declare you a country because it is not correct; it is the same as saying that all Christian Arabs have to leave Palestine because, at a certain point, Palestine was declared Muslim; it was not like that"* (Int.04).

There are two significant points in this quotation. The first point concerns the comparison between English colonization in Jordan and Israeli colonization in Palestine, with the Israeli colonization appearing more aggressive as they seek to alter even the name of the conquered land, effectively erasing its entire identity. This is why schools in Jordan emphasize the issue starting from primary school, strongly linking it to Arab identity. The second point relates to religion and challenges the Israeli, and often Western, narrative about extremist Muslims opposing Israel. Jordanian students learn at school that Muslim conquerors of Palestine did not force the Christian population residing there to leave the country; instead, this displacement affected Muslims residing in Palestine during the establishment of the Israeli state.

11.4.2 Civic, national or nationalistic education

The significance of this topic in the formation of pupils' identities is evident: it is the subject explicitly tasked with shaping the new citizens of the country, imparting its values and principles. It is the most politically oriented subject and closely intertwined with identity construction. In Lebanese schools, it is taught as history in Arabic, while other disciplines are taught in English or

French. A young student who studied in Lebanon refers to history and civics as the "Arab things" (Int.11), indicating that they are not only taught in the Arabic language but also identify themselves as Arabs, belonging to the Arab world, and entrusted with the mission of preserving Arab culture. The name of this subject varies across the considered countries, and even through its denomination, one can begin to grasp the differences between each country. Many interviewees proficient in Italian or English struggle to translate its name and therefore refer to it by its original Arabic name. The significance of these names, as well as the meaning of the subject itself, often does not precisely align with that of civic education. The closest designation to civic education is "*tarbiyya madania*", as it is referred to in Algeria (Int.12), or "*tarbiyya al-mouwatana*" which translates to citizenship education and is used in Morocco (Int.13). On the other hand, *"Tarbiya Wataniya"* denotes national or nationalistic education and is the term used in Syria, where the subject differs from European civic education. It is also the name employed in Libya, where it is an independent subject solely taught in private schools:

> *"We study a book more... there are things in general, let us say. There is an extra subject. I do not know the name in Italian. It is Tarbiyya wataniya. […] We study how we have to do, how we have to treat people. [...] I mean... When my dad, for example, goes to buy petrol for his car... We were standing in the queue, then another came just in front, and he bought the petrol without... That is, without queuing... We study that we cannot do that; that is not right that other people wait for hours because sometimes we do not have petrol... that is. I know that Libya is rich in oil, but we have many problems"* (Int.07).

Despite its name, this young pupil rejects the translation as national education, stating that they learned how to interact with others in a civil manner, such as managing resources. Therefore, it aligns more with civic education, albeit under a different name. As previously mentioned, the Tunisian education system is regarded as the most secular among Arab countries and shares similarities with European systems. The inclusion of civic education in the curriculum further supports this perspective.

> *"We also learn the way of life... the respect, also personal education, not only the education in a civic way. Then every... let us say, every period they do some celebration of... both there are national holidays for... to enter into the... in child's soul, that feeling of being... let us say... to know the country's historical data, also to memorise the country's anthem, many other things"* (Int.14).

In Tunisia, civic education is a distinct subject that emphasizes proper conduct towards others and adherence to the state's regulations. It encompasses patriotic elements associated with national identity. This education is conveyed through various means, including the national anthem, holidays, and historical information, often evoking emotional responses. As students mature, the instruction gradually incorporates more political aspects:

"In the 5th or 6th year of primary school, we started to study politics. Not politics, however... the Constitution, yes. We bought the country's constitution, started reading it, law by law [...]. We learned about having duties in the country: what you have to do and what not, respect the law and so on […]. It always makes us feel that there is a single party in the country because before we were with... the president. So, when we were children, they made us understand those things but, from that moment, I already felt that there is something wrong because they talked to us about things in the book that are not there on the ground, that is to say, what did we study? The right to have... The right to political plurality is not there; they talk about... We studied about... The freedom of judgment, that is... [...] We talked about the division of power; the judicial power; the presidential power and... However, these things... as well elections' rules" (Int.14).

The content of civic education in Tunisia bears similarities to its European counterpart (Int.15). From a young age, detailed attention is given to the constitution, democratic principles, and the functioning of democracy. However, students face a significant dichotomy between theory and practice. While they study pluralism, elections, the constitution, and the separation of powers, they confront a political reality that differs from what they learn. Prior to 2011, Tunisia was under a regime, rendering the civic education imparted to pupils disconnected from the existing reality. Pupils often shared this realization with their teachers, some of whom were appreciated for encouraging discussions on the contradiction between the legitimate French-influenced culture taught in schools and the socio-political situation they experienced:

"I remember we had a professor against the state, but he always shows us that thing... He was always angry when he talked about politics, you know... but a beautiful thing, one who studies in the 6th year of primary school with a teacher like that, that makes you more… advanced, one who studies in the 6th year is talking about politics... Do you know? I feel one thing... It is an honour [...]. He explains the laws there and shows us what is going on now, and he says <<look, this is what is supposed to happen>>. He tells us that this was changed this year, and this part here of this law here was changed this year because this president wants to do something in the country, he wants to change the constitutional text […]. Honestly, they show the reality, but not everyone. Not everyone at my age because before 2011, no one spoke... they cannot speak. This professor instead, I remember that he was also imprisoned for this reason that he speaks with this anger" (Int.14).

Pupils appreciated teachers who treated them as individuals capable of comprehending the realities of their environment and encouraged open discussions within the classroom. However, prior to the 2011 revolution, freely discussing politics in school was not easy based on this student's experience. Nevertheless, from the interviews conducted, it can be inferred that civic education in Tunisia served as a platform for fostering critical thinking rather than being a subject through which the regime's ideology was unquestioningly transmitted. Syria is the only other country

where civic education is a distinct subject, but it serves a contrasting purpose. In most countries, it is integrated within the comprehensive Arabic language curriculum, encompassing subjects such as history, geography, and religion. Consequently, it does not possess the same level of specificity and significance as in Tunisia and Syria. In Morocco, it is referred to as "tarbiyya al-mouwatana," which translates to citizenship education.

> *"I do not know how to translate it... tarbiyya al-mouwatana مواطنة […] Education, not national […]. Civic should be, citizenship education […]. Maybe we did some definitions, some... What is racism; how to behave with people; what does our religion say. Even an ethical thing we did, maybe you are on the bus, you find an old person, you leave your seat; you find a person in difficulty, you help her. Maybe a lady is waiting, you leave her your seat; you bring her things […]. We were taught these things as children, always at school and in the family; we have grown up like this"* (Int.13).

This pupil rejects the translation of "national education" for Moroccan civic education, as it appears to prioritize good manners and appropriate behavior with others to cultivate polite and responsible individuals. There is no inherent conflict between politics, religion, and family, as many Moroccans attest that they learned at school the shared values and behaviors upheld by these three entities, which they agree with. It is noteworthy that the pupil's earliest memory of this subject is related to racism, indicating that the curriculum aims to foster citizens with open minds and without prejudiced attitudes, aligning with the dominant religious interpretation in Morocco.

> *"There are practically these moral tales, then they used many nursery rhymes where a child sings or says what you should do and what not do [….] I remember some pretty patriotic rhymes about my country: <<my dear country, I love my country>> [...]. There were few images in the books but accompanied by rhymes. They put on some comics and you have to repeat them, maybe they made us repeat them all together […]. Civic education means how one should behave, as I remember some rhymes, where they say <<I am a polite child, I clean my hands, I greet my parents, I listen to what adults tell me>>"* (Int.10, Morocco).

This student employs the translation "civic" and refers to a subject centered around moral values and good behavior, teaching simple concepts in a manner suitable for young children. The curriculum incorporates nursery rhymes, songs, pictures, and comics, creating a learning environment that is engaging and accessible. While there is room for patriotic elements, they are presented in a gentle manner. This approach bears a resemblance to the Italian civic education, leading the interviewees to refer to the Arab subject as "civic" without any hesitation, drawing from their experience in Italy.

> *"They did theatres, religious songs, normal songs; there were many things, many activities. For example, the king's celebration, like when he took the king's chair, let us say, and started to rule. This*

is new because since '98, the new king started, so his father died [...] they did school plays. They would take pictures. Then the liberation celebration, the hajj celebration, there are many things" (Int.26).

Various art forms enable pupils to learn while enjoying themselves, delving into the foundations of the state, national history, and civil coexistence. This woman highlights the use of theater plays, pictures, and songs that emphasize the monarchy, fostering identification through theatrical performances and other artistic means. Alongside the emphasis on monarchy, the subject covers religious and national celebrations such as the country's independence and Islamic pilgrimage. None of the interviewees express any complaints about this subject, and conflicts or contradictions never arise. Consequently, this discipline effectively serves as a transmitter of Moroccan identity and culture, fulfilling its designated role without causing resentment, feelings of oppression, or protest among pupils and teachers. In Egypt, civic education was taught alongside the Arabic language and religion, but the presence of the Christian community complicates the identification between being a good citizen and being a good Muslim. Consequently, pupils' experience with this subject is more multifaceted and subject to questioning.

"In the ministry's book itself, there are several Quranic texts, even in the Arab book […] Christian boys had to memorise these verses too, the fact is that these verses did not say... It is not that it was a religion part where, for example, it says rules […]. It says, for example, a religion part where it talks about... Removing bad things from the streets, for maybe one who is blind and does not see well, you have to help them to pass the street and these things... Maybe that kind of verse was in the Arab book but not religious verses <<you have to pray 5 times a day, you have to do this thing>>" (Int.30).

This student, displaying a defensive attitude that indicates his awareness of civic education being a secular discipline in Italy, explains that in the Arab book, there are numerous Quranic texts used to teach civic education. It is important to note, according to him, that these verses do not pertain to the religious obligations of believers, but rather emphasize the importance of exhibiting good behavior to promote peaceful and respectful coexistence with others, fostering mutual assistance. As a result, even Christian students are required to learn these verses, as they are the sources of civic education that applies to all citizens regardless of their religious affiliation. In the subsequent quote, another student, adopting a less defensive stance, elucidates the political origins of this educational approach:

"We conceive religion in a completely different way. For example, one of the first lessons gave the definition that I later found out was by Bernand Lewis, that of "Islam as a lifestyle" and then, in fact, you cannot imagine a form of community or Muslim society without Islamic rules. So simple civic was made on the base of the Egyptian Constitution's Article 2, which provides that the source of law is the

Islamic religion. It is the Islamic Sharī'a, article 2, so let us say that we do not have a clear separation between what can be called civic and religious education because they are overlapping things" (Int.16).

After the Muslim Brotherhood's defeat, the new government under Al-Sisi introduced a separate subject of civic education (Int.30) in the name of secularism and equality between Muslims and Christians. This allowed students to study civic education without religious influence. The emphasis shifted from being a good Muslim to being a good citizen.

In Syria, the subject is called Tarbiya Wataniya, which can be translated as national education or nationalistic education, and it is taught as a separate subject:

"We just learn Arabic and Tarbiya Wataniya, very important (laugh) and also mathematic, physic and chemistry and what... scientific like that" (Int.38).

The significance of this subject for the school system is evident from this brief statement. It holds such importance that it is a distinct subject right from the beginning of primary school. The grades obtained in this subject contribute to the overall academic average of pupils, unlike religion (Int.40). The interviewee's nervous laughter while discussing it suggests that she does not perceive its importance and has had a negative experience with it.

"There is a book on national education, which I did not like at all. […] It only talks about the president, his family, and how they made Syria became a great country. That is not... In reality, they have not done anything. However, it is a book that everybody must study, an important book... That talks about the family of President Bashar and his father, the president, who has been there for 35 years. It is not a Republic; it is a Kingdom. It is not a Republic in reality… What they are and what they have done for us, they have done a lot, everything […]. Only this book is important in school, as it tells you about the war between Syria and Israel, how we made the war with Egypt against Israel and... It does not talk about the wars that Iraq, which is an Arab country, made against Iran, which is not an Arab country, because the Syrian government and Iraqi one are not friends, so it does not tell anything, 0%. He only tells the things that they and their friends did" (Int.19).

This Kurdish student expresses his anger while describing the content of the subject, which he perceive as a continuous praise of the ruling family's achievements and accomplishments. The subject also covers foreign policy topics that are deemed important in shaping Syrian identities, such as the war against Israel. Unlike the other countries examined, typical civic education topics like good behavior, racism, and others are not studied. In contrast to the Maghreb region, there are no songs or plays, but a significant amount of information to memorize. Pupils are taught that they reside in a Socialist Republic, but they experience a contradiction, feeling as though they are living in an authoritarian kingdom. Syrian pupils face a dilemma similar to the contradiction experienced by Tunisian pupils before the 2011 revolution, However, unlike in Tunisia where the regime fell,

in Syria, the regime has remained in power, and as a result, national education has increasingly become a tool for regime indoctrination. It focuses on promoting the nation's building narrative centered around the Assad family and highlighting national enemies. Pupils, parents, and teachers of all ages and ethnicities share the anger and sense of misrecognition of the values expressed by this Kurdish student regarding the subject. The experience of the subject is so different from the Italian civic education that some young Syrian pupils in Italy respond negatively when asked if they studied civic, as they do not associate *tarbiya wataniya* with civic education (Int.20; 21). It is also possible that they prefer to avoid the topic altogether. Emphasizing this point, one student responds with a defensive attitude, stating, *"We studied the state and these things more or less, I remember it like this, I don't remember more than that"* (Int.21). Another student refers to the subject as "nation," which is a literal translation of the term:

> *"There is a subject called NATION [...] a book always speaks for the president [...] it also speaks about the history and the future because there was the same president for 40 years so there is no problem (laughs) if is it history or future. They always say what the president has done, what he says, how is our party; how we are; the parties toward us; how should we be [...]. Because there are problems with Israel, so other countries want to be against us, we have to be awake, we have to be ready to make... If there is a country that wants to do war against us, we are ready [...] Nationalism is always like that; they always said the good thing in the country's history. In primary school was not too much because we were children, so they were the easy things like the president made schools for children, he likes sports for children, these things. However, when we were in secondary school, no, it was too much... here we took the bigger things, like what the world means, politics in general, Israel, Palestine... the most dangerous things"* (Int.29).

This student highlights how the narrative presented in this subject portrays a continuity between the past and future, both of which are dominated by the Ba'th Party and the Assad family. The emphasis on nationalistic formation is to shape citizens who are prepared to serve as soldiers for the nation, with the goal of fighting against Israel and reclaiming Palestine. While primary school focuses on highlighting the positive actions of the President for children, middle school introduces more complex indoctrination on various issues.

> *"Religion was a subject that they do 1 hour every 2 or 3 days, 2 hours a week, but it was not always a thing... In my opinion, our regime does not... Because it is socialist, our socialist party so... They do not look too much in religion, always religion class speaks for the always useful thing in society that we have to be good, respect others..."* (Int.29).

Comparing Syria to other Arab countries, it can be observed that Syrian nationalistic education is perceived as more secular than even the Tunisian one, which still incorporates some religious

celebrations within its civic teaching. What stands out in the previous quote is that the interviewee, along with many others, values religious education as a means to promote peaceful coexistence within society, in contrast to "civic" education, which they perceive as a form of nationalism that aims to prepare pupils for warfare against internal and external national enemies. This subject holds such significance for the regime that it is compulsory in all private and minority schools, serving as a tool to transmit the regime's cultural values and shape a citizenry loyal to the state:

> *"It is obligatory in all schools, but almost tarbiyya wataniya is of the party Ba'th, the Syrian governor. Almost this topic was from the Ba'th. They speak about... how is the relationship between the government and the people in the Ba'th's view. The teacher should be a Ba'th party member because many of our teachers are members of the Ba'th party, but it is especially in tarbiyya wataniya; we do not have something like Tarbiyya wataniya at university. However, its teacher has to be from the party Ba'th, its member, a good party member […]. They try to seem nice to people for... Yes, for say <<tarbiyya wataniya is very good, it is a very good topic, we should take it seriously, it is very important; after your primary school you could be a member of the Ba'th and you can get a good job when you finish your university or your studies>>, they said something like this. They said for attracting people, yea, they started for attracting people, the child, they said Ba'th is a good Party"* (Int.41).

This young man attended private Christian schools and had an overall positive educational experience, except for the subject of *tarbiyya wataniya*. He found this subject to be dull and uninteresting because he and his family were not affiliated with the Ba'ath Party. Despite his lack of enthusiasm, he had to study it because it carried weight in the final evaluation. The teachers assigned to teach this subject do not necessarily require a specific degree, but they are chosen by the Party based on their loyalty (Int.38). As a result, these teachers are seen as intruders in the minority private schools, as they essentially arrive to promote the Party's ideology and recruit new members among the young pupils. In order to attract pupils and make them enjoy the subject, these teachers exhibit excellent behavior. However, they are aware that anyone within the school has the potential to challenge them.

> *"Kids have to copy this information without thinking. It is political but... we start in school to learn no thinking, not form opinions and personality and we grow up with these things […] We learn what he did, what the father did, what the government did for us as people, Syrian people, and we have to say the right things about him. He does not make a mistake, he is our leader, and you cannot... I ask <<everyone makes mistakes, every one of us has a negative and positive side and I want to know his negative said>>. <<NO! You cannot ask me so; he is ta ta ta>>. It was a problem, and he wanted to speak with my parents (Laugh). I was in my 7th class, and the teacher said <<ok, bring your parents tomorrow>>. I brought my father and he spoke with him about the situation. It was like... <<She is a kind kid and she wants to ask, to know the reality, the truth>>, and then he said to me << do not ask*

the teacher, come and ask me and I will answer you but do not speak about it in the street or at school because they do not have humanity>>" (Int.39).

This 21-year-old student in Berlin shares her experience regarding an incident she had while trying to engage in a discussion with her nationalistic education teacher during her first year of middle school. She emphasizes that pupils are expected to learn and repeat information without questioning or discussing it. If someone attempts to ask questions or express their thoughts, the teacher would contact the child's parents to complain about their behavior. This experience stands in stark contrast to the Tunisian education system, where the civic education teacher encourages discussions and critical thinking. In the case of nationalistic education, however, the teacher is viewed as an agent of the State within the school, primarily focused on instilling the party's ideology. Following her father's advice, the girl refrained from asking any further questions, as she anticipated potential consequences from the teacher, extending beyond contacting her parents.

"They are not educated, they only have the mission to teach us about what the leader wants to say and what he does, that he is a perfect person and he is always on the right, and he knows everything and all the lessons began about... for me, it is not good
I: you can ask or discuss something
R: NO! At all! Just listening and saying yes and learning, and we must learn all this information […]. This person is a person not... we can say... he is not a teacher, he belongs to his party, like from the army, he most... we must learn and say all he said
I: Are you and your classmates scared of him?
R: sometimes, I do not like him; I just feel he is not a teacher, for me not good (laugh)" (Int.38).

Pupils hold a negative perception of nationalistic education teachers, as they are seen as unqualified individuals with whom it is impossible to have a meaningful dialogue. Their regard for these teachers is even worse than that of religious teachers, who have undergone formal training and allow for discussions and personal connections. Regarding the subject's content, the concept of Arab identity is emphasized, which does not necessarily align entirely with the Muslim identity as seen in Morocco. Instead, ethnicity takes precedence over religion. A phrase that pupils are required to memorize is *"All Arab countries are one nation"* promoting belief in the Ba'ath party's narrative and emphasizing values of brotherhood and generosity among Arabs, without much concern for the outside world or other individuals (Focus group 1).

"Nobody tells nor speaks about politics, but you understand me, as a Kurd, do not speak of politics in school. Moreover, politics is something you learn by heart in the school, things that they said that you... you cannot think freely. In that subject, there was just about Ba'th party and his principles; you should learn that by heart. I never get a good grade in it" (Int.32).

Kurdish pupils are among those that hate the most nationalism subject, as their advocacy for cultural rights is viewed as a threat to the nation, and they are considered among the internal enemies of the state. As a result, Kurdish pupils are subjected to heightened surveillance, leading to a climate of silence where discussions about politics are nearly nonexistent. Even the most outstanding pupils cannot achieve the highest grades in this subject because excelling would require them to deny their own identity. Few Kurdish women choose to discuss the topic of military education (Int.32; 37), which has been abolished by the new president Bashar al-Assad. However, there has been no significant change regarding nationalist education, as confirmed by individuals who were students before 2000 and have since become teachers in the new century (Int.36; 38). It is important to note that the formation of good citizens does not solely rely on civic or national education, but also involves other subjects and the overall school environment:

> *"When we did our art class, they sometimes ask us <<ok now you have to draw the soldier, the Syrian soldier on the top of the Golan Highs>>. There was this issue of the Golan a lot, and the Palestinian issue is a big one […]. There is this pan-Arabist mentality in school education, very strong, so when they talk about other Arab countries, they always talk like we are the same"* (Int.40).

As evident from the statement, the mythification of the Syrian soldier as the defender of the Arab people is not limited to nationalist education but also extends to other subjects, including art, which promotes the idea of the ideal citizen who fights for the Arab motherland. The nationalist and warmongering ideology, which is directly transmitted through nationalist education, permeates the entire school environment and influences everyday school life:

> *"In everyday life, everything was named after the president himself and his sons, like schools, bridges, institutes and so on. And so, you were from your very first childhood, you were brought up in this idea that this is the one who will take care of everything, and he will also take care of your dignity"* (Int.36).

The impact of national education goes beyond the curriculum and infiltrates various aspects of daily school life in Syria. Not only is the president constantly glorified in national education, but school buildings, bridges, and other elements in the surroundings are also named after him. This creates a strong association between being Syrian and being a loyal follower of Assad. This identification between the nation, the ruling party, and the individual has a significant impact on personal dignity and self-esteem. Pupils feel the pressure to meet the party's expectations in every aspect of their lives, and failing to do so is seen as a betrayal of the homeland and one's own identity. These circumstances shed light on the challenges faced by young pupils who leave Syria due to their disagreement with the party. They must navigate a new context where they strive to express and make their identity understood, even though their education has taught them that such

actions constitute betrayal. Teachers who have worked in Syria confirm that little has changed in the daily school routine, which includes collective moments at the beginning of the day where pupils line up like soldiers and sing the national anthem together.

> *"In the morning, when we went to school, we waited for all the teachers who came and did... let us say a national song... We do it all together every day. In the morning, before entering the school. After when the teachers come, check all the students. If one is not... Generally, the hair... you cannot do the hair like this (gesture of the crest) or do style or these things, the clothes you have to have the uniform, all the same, clothes you cannot come with a dress that is not of the school uniform, these things... yes like this, and after they enter in the classes"* (Int.19).

This Kurdish student had a distinct sense of discomfort during the collective moments. He expressed his dislike for participating in this daily ritual, as he did not feel represented by singing a national anthem that did not resonate with him. Additionally, he found the regular scrutiny of his attire and hairstyle to be burdensome. Among the Syrian interviewees, it is noteworthy that only one individual (Int.18) embraced these moments as a normal and enjoyable part of her experience (Int.20), instead, most of the Arab pupil interviewees do not appreciate these rituals:

> *"Then you know it is a military dictatorship, so there are harsh rules, and everyone is like doing the class... doing some militarist and similar stuff like... do the national anthem aloud and saying things about the government, like praising the leader and stuff like this"* (Int.40).

The collective rituals during the beginning of each school day are perceived primarily as military exercises in discipline, emphasizing loyalty to the ruling party. While the subject of military education was abolished by the new president, the imposition of daily collective rituals extended to private minority schools since 2011 (Int.41). Interestingly, pupils in private schools, even more so than those in public schools, viewed these rituals as centered not only on the nation but specifically on the ruling party itself. While similar collective rituals exist in other Arab countries examined, none of the interviewees from those countries described them as equally oppressive.

> *"There were some days dedicated, and there were some days when the flag of Morocco was raised, and you had to be all in line, and there was the director of the school who passed and saw all the sections in line for... for this event, this I remember"* (Int.10).

In Morocco, collective rituals are typically observed on specific occasions such as national or religious celebrations. These rituals are perceived as a normal and non-conflictual activity.

> *"The anthem they do every morning at 8, and whoever does not arrive is punished or has to bring his parents, has to do things. Because for us the anthem is a sacred thing, you have to participate"* (Int.14).

In Tunisia, the national anthem is sung every morning, and participation in this ritual is highly significant. It serves as a moment when everyone in schools directs their attention towards national identity. While there are similarities to Syria in terms of the importance placed on national rituals, Tunisia lacks the component tied to a single party and the military perspective.

> *"When we arrived at school, there was always the queue from 7 am before entering, and there was just a series of practices, of exercises in the morning that had to be done. There was a big courtyard, let us say, and there were various exercises before entering […] After that, there was a form of... I do not know how to say... morning radio made by boys with the microphone, and they made various performances... divided into parts, maybe a bulletin, or naturally reciting the Quran, there was also in the morning... and then, in addition to the exercises, they did the national anthem. The national anthem was the last stage before entering the classroom. Then, of course, there was also the school band, which, of course, played the national anthem and then accompanied the classes as they entered"* (Int.16).

Egypt is the country most similar to Syria when it comes to everyday rituals. In all schools, there are elaborate rituals that involve physical exercise, news updates, and the national anthem. However, there is a difference in Egypt, as religion also has a place within these rituals, binding the nation and Islam together. Unlike Syria, there is no specific political party or politician emphasized during these rituals. Instead, the focus is on the motherland and God. The similarity can be understood because the Syrian system was built based on the Egyptian model. While nationalism in Egypt has been replaced in other areas of education by liberalism and scientism, it still remains in these rituals, perhaps in a purer and less instrumentalized form compared to Syria. Interestingly, none of the interviewees expressed the same complaints or suffered in the same way about these rituals in Egypt. Although they may prefer a school without these rituals, they recall them with cheerfulness, without the same resentment, indicating a more peaceful relationship with their home country. Anyway, in Italy, Germany, or Sweden, pupils often experience relief when they do not encounter the same rituals they are accustomed to. They do not express any regrets about the absence of such identity transmission through rituals.

11.4.3 Philosophy

Philosophy is generally studied to a lesser extent compared to other human and social sciences. In most countries, it is typically taught in-depth only during the final years of literary high school, and to a lesser extent in scientific high school. As a result, not all the interviewees have had the opportunity to study philosophy. However, among those who did attend philosophy classes, they have shared interesting experiences worth noting.

"It is not a philosophy based on religion, because philosophy from my point of view is never based on religion, it is based on thinking. [The most important authors] are Socrates, Descartes... and Kant, all these. Arabs, I do not remember exactly. Even in philosophy, I had my point of view... Some students learnt it by heart, I cannot understand how they did it, but for me, philosophy is to analyse what they told because in the state exams that we did, at the national exam in the last year of high school, it is treated as a scientific subject. In that examination of philosophy, we had maybe a text, a sentence, or a question, one of the three. We have to choose and analyse one of the three, and then we had the scheme to analyse made by the ministry. […] We study our programs of Western philosophy. A little bit Arab is also there, but western more because the important philosophers are those" (Int.13).

This Moroccan student, who attended a scientific high school, had the opportunity to study philosophy. The quote highlights a couple of important aspects concerning cultural identity. Firstly, the student perceived the teaching of philosophy as entirely separate from religion and based on a scientific method of analysis. Secondly, the focus of the curriculum was predominantly on Western philosophy, with little emphasis given to Arab philosophy. Philosophy was viewed as a rational and Western-centric subject, in which religion, particularly Islam, did not have a role. Indeed, this approach excludes religious philosophy, including both Christian and Muslim perspectives, thereby narrowing philosophy to rationalism and enlightenment following a French tradition, which finds its foundations in Greek philosophy. A similar approach can be observed in Algeria, where the connection between the academic study of philosophy and cultural identity is clearly evident:

"At the maturity year, you study philosophy, and it is a subject that almost everybody hates, but I liked it […]. It is too difficult, too long, too... Too unknown, maybe, because now that I think about it, in Algeria, you do not study philosophy until that year if you are not in the literature and philosophy course, of course, but for the scientific ones, you do not study philosophy until that year. So that year you arrive […] with all these new notions, and so it is obvious that the student gets lost in my opinion [...]. The topics covered are Aristotle, the different methodologies, including the scientific one [...] Arab philosophers are not studied, they are studied perhaps in the Arab subject but not... as they should be. Philosophy is Western philosophy in Arabic, so Descartes, Aristotle. Ibn Sina is studied, it is studied in secondary school but in Arab subject, there is no specific subject, not in philosophy and not... in my opinion, not as one should study, without many details. […] It is more for historical reasons... That is, for example, Algeria was colonised by France and France burnt many, many, many Algerian works and... The Algerian people acquired many French traditions and... so, even now... many are influenced by France until today, some say that France is still colonising us... and so the programme even for that cannot change" (Int.12).

Philosophy is introduced only in the final year of scientific high school, leading to difficulties for most students in engaging with the subject. Economic factors further complicate the relationship with philosophy, as the student in this quote shares her experience of developing an appreciation for philosophy through the help of a private tutor arranged by her mother. For those unable to afford private tuition, many find themselves struggling with this new and unfamiliar subject. A notable aspect highlighted by the student is the predominantly Western orientation of the curriculum, following the French tradition. This exclusion of non-Western perspectives is seen as a consequence of colonialism, which has marginalized Algerian and Arab intellectual contributions. While important figures like Ibn Sina are briefly touched upon in the context of Arabic language and culture, they are not given substantial attention within the philosophical curriculum. The neglect of Arab philosophy reflects a misrecognition that perpetuates the notion of Western rational superiority, allowing it to dominate the philosophy program. This marginalization reinforces the perception of Arab thought as irrational, reinforcing a hierarchy that favours Western philosophical perspectives. Similar dynamics are observed in Tunisia:

> *"We studied the diversity, we studied a lot, we studied how the other helps to fill, to understand, my identity, so to enrich it, to fill my gaps, we studied Descartes anyway, I think so I am, we studied Spinoza … We also studied Michel Foucault and many others I cannot think about now. We have... I remember well we have done a chapter on the State, a chapter on work […] Arabs... no. But I keep repeating: the high school, I did it when there was Ben Ali, he was a dictator, so everything was filtered"* (Int.15).

In the Tunisian Western curriculum, the inclusion of Arab philosophers is notably absent, including renowned figures like Ibn Khaldun. According to this student's perspective, the selection of topics within the curriculum is directly influenced by the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali and the ideology and cultural identity he sought to promote among pupils.

> *"I did it too, at the scientific […]. [Philosophers] were mostly westerners. […] there are al-Giabr who did algebra, then Ibn Nuattam who did optics, geometric optics; another one called Abu Farnes who did the aeronautics' mechanics, so there are many. Then, we studied this thing in history, as they are... In the Christian wars, who went afterwards to burn the libraries in Baghdad, right? They said that all things were lost, but no, they were not lost. They translated them into Latin and some things discovered later are of oriental origin. They did not want to show them, because, if the people's powers let us say, the technological advancement's power, so for this reason, this was burned. They translated it and pretend that it does not go back to that country"* (Int.14).

In the experience of this Tunisian student in scientific high school, they studied various types of philosophy, including classical, metaphysics, modernism, and even philosophy of communication related to advertising. However, the student perceived a notable issue: all the authors studied were

of Western origin. This absence of important Arab philosophers who made contributions to fields like algebra and others was particularly felt. The student provided an interesting explanation for this selection. They mentioned the historical context of the Crusades, during which Europeans came into contact with the vast cultural heritage of the Arab world, essentially appropriating it and claiming it as their own. The philosophical and scientific progress of the West, the student argued, was built upon the knowledge acquired from Arabs and translated into Latin, while the Arabs themselves were deprived of this recognition. This misrecognition of the Arab contribution to the field of philosophy, according to the student, has deep historical roots and significant contemporary political implications. It perpetuates a state of subordination in which Arab identity is portrayed as lacking pride and seen as backward and irrational in comparison to the West. This observation highlights the ongoing impact of historical dynamics and power imbalances in shaping the curricula and perceptions of different intellectual traditions

> *"It was the first time we studied philosophy, psychology, and so at the beginning, it was a little tricky and... Well, I do not know, like in our culture there is the culture that if you go to the psychologist, it means that you are crazy. Therefore, they connect the same thing with the teachers who... What I thought at that time, now it is not... like, the connection is usually that the professors who do philosophy and psychology have the head everywhere […] Sometimes we joked, we said, this professor is crazy, studying this subject [...]. You do one-year logic, one-year philosophy, one year, psychoanalysis. We do not make the history of philosophy; we do not do it in that way; one year, every year, you study something. Freud was the most famous one […] there were other things... but I do not remember them, but about Freud, yes. Sometimes they quote Ibn Khaldun... but not something like Freud, for example, but they quote him because they say that philosophy was born from Muslim scientists, from Muslim intellectuals like Ibn Khaldun who made his book. So, we also pass from that but something not so engaged as psychoanalysis, like personality, personality studies, and these things"* (Int.28).

Even in Egypt, the study of philosophy primarily focuses on Western philosophy rather than exploring it from a historical perspective spanning from Ancient philosophy to the contemporary era. It is divided into three main topics: logic, philosophy, and psychology, with a significant emphasis on Freud, who is the most widely remembered author. While this approach predominantly revolves around Western philosophy, there is recognition of Ibn Khaldun as one of the Muslim pioneers of philosophy, thus acknowledging non-Western contributions to the field. However, the emphasis is more on Muslim scholars rather than Arab identity. This conveys the message that even Muslim individuals have made significant contributions, as Islam is a rational religion with a mentality that is not inferior to the Western tradition. Despite this inclusion, there is an intriguing aspect regarding how pupils perceive philosophy and psychology. The student mentioned that in popular culture, seeking the help of a psychologist is often associated with being

considered "crazy," and even the professor of this subject is viewed as somewhat eccentric. It is worth emphasizing that the subject is seen as something foreign, exotic, and detached from popular culture and the students' own identity. Those who attended scientific high schools in Syria expressed similar sentiments of foreignness:

> *"I do not remember too much because this thing was general, one year only, the last one. I studied the Greek philosophers, then society. I was not too good at this subject, I do not remember everything because... even when I study something that I do not like, I cannot understand, who is Greece? I do not know"* (Int.29).

Even in his personal experience, the study of philosophy arrived at the end of high school as an alien element in the lives and thoughts of the pipils. The interviewee recalls studying Greek philosophy, such as Plato, but found it difficult to grasp the content. One of the reasons for this difficulty was the lack of knowledge about Greek culture and language, which made it challenging to contextualize and understand the philosophical concepts. The Greeks were perceived as the unknown other, and the discipline of philosophy itself appeared incomprehensible to the students. As a result, a sense of hostility developed towards the subject and the Greeks. It is important to note that the situation differs in the literary lyceum, where philosophy is typically studied more extensively and in greater depth:

> *"I think at first it was just mantiq... without a lot of... but I think there is a mix of Greek and Arabic and European a little bit, but I think there is after more Arabic, but at first it was just <<mantiq>> that is like logic, something like this, which is more Greek I guess"* (Int. 40).

After delving into Greek logic as the foundation of philosophy, pupils in Syrian literary high schools proceed to study a range of European and Arab authors, with a particular emphasis on Arab contributions. This curriculum choice aligns with Syrian Arab nationalism and aims to provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of the historical interconnections among Greek, Arab, and European philosophy. By highlighting the Arab philosophical tradition, the education system seeks to prevent the marginalization or subordination of Arab culture to its European counterpart.

> *"Averroes, Ibn Khaldun… How they called him in English, Ibn Rushd, Averroes, he was the one who brought the philosophy to Europe, because in Europe, you know, there were the middle ages, he was in Baghdad, and they burned the libraries, and he saved a part of the books, and he brought them to the west, and there we found it. The teaching of the old philosophers from there, so the Western philosophies are based on Averroes' work as much as it is based on the former. We also read this in the school, not only in university […] Everybody who studies philosophy in schools and university has been taught about this information on East and West and about how different philosophers are connected"* (Int.36).

In contrast to the general warmongering ideology pervasive in other humanities subjects in Syria, philosophy education appears to take a different approach. It does not solely blame the West for appropriating Arab philosophy, as expressed by the Tunisian student who criticized the absence of Arab authors in his own philosophy curriculum. Instead, the Syrian philosophy curriculum values contributions from diverse cultures and highlights the role of certain authors as cultural connectors. For instance, figures like Averroes are exalted for their ability to bridge different philosophical traditions. In an education system heavily influenced by the ruling party, characterized by discipline, censorship, and the propagation of a specific ideology, philosophy stands out as a more intercultural subject. It is the only subject where a message of equality and cooperation among peoples, irrespective of their backgrounds, is conveyed. Examining the content of the subject reveals a wide range of diverse philosophical perspectives being taught and explored:

> *"Philosophy was Arabic philosophy, if you heard about Ibn Khaldun... Ibn Sina... Razi... you know? Have you heard about these? Yes! The way for the group after Islam... they make Sufi, they make zāwiye for religion, for teaching people about morals and we have a matter in philosophy that is named moral, philosophy and moral. That topic was philosophy and morals. In general, we study all, they speak about Sigmund Freud; a little bit Kant, but not a lot. After, if you make a literature baccalaureate, you study Ibn Khaldun and Arab philosophy and morals. In the 1st year of high school, you study about all. A little bit Kant, Descartes, Pascal and after the majority of studies was about Arab"* (Int.41).

As it is possible to read, important European authors find a place in a program that also teaches Arab philosophy, as it should be in an Arab country that wants to transmit the pride of its ancient culture to pupils. This is the only case in which someone affirms that something is taught about Sufism in Syria, which does not exist in history or religion. The official religious interpretation transmitted in the Syrian school system does not acknowledge this diversity and plurality:

> *"We do not have high respect for this philosophy as a subject; even they say to people who studied philosophy you are a bit crazy, and you are also like... You do not believe in God if you study philosophy, so you are an atheist and... that is why they do not have a high reputation as a subject"* (Int.36).

The subject that seems to be the most effective in fostering a strong and peaceful cultural identity, while recognizing the contributions of other cultures, is ironically the subject with the worst reputation within the Syrian school system. This subject is often associated with atheism and being considered as a subject for "crazy" individuals. In this regard, the perspective of an Egyptian student sheds light on the relationship between philosophy, religion, and madness:

> *"This is not in the books, in the sense that professors link it; for example, they say that the human being is made of two parts, material and spiritual and... The material, the food, the sex, all these things and the soul's spiritual nourishment. Practically if you care about a side and leave the other side... Here*

psychological problems occurred. […] In fact, they say, in Islam it is forbidden... To do as priests do here. In a sense, the nuns, it is forbidden to dedicate your whole life to God, and you go away... Here in the Quran, this is forbidden. It is written clearly. It is forbidden to avoid women and life; the same occurs if one leaves religion and goes to the material side in life in general... They connect this, and this is usually why personality disorders happen" (Int.28).

Pupils are taught that there is no inherent contradiction between material and spiritual aspects, as well as between psychoanalysis and religion. Unlike Christian countries where psychoanalysis was viewed as heretical due to the emphasis on chastity, in Islamic countries, it is presented as a validation of the Islamic perspective on sexuality. Therefore, there is no cultural clash between psychoanalysis and Islam, as explained by a student from Al-Azhar. Instead, there is a sense of complementarity in attending the psyche in relation to the body and in to the spirit. This may be why psychoanalysis is studied more extensively in Arab high schools compared to European ones. However, it should be noted that a conflict between religion and philosophy does exist on a different level:

"According to Islamic studies, I do not know if you have read it, we have things in life and things beyond... the things beyond, our brain cannot imagine them in a sense... The brain cannot imagine life after death. We imagine there is life after death, paradise, hell, sinners, who will go there, and all this history. Here, this is a thing that teachers connect with religion because, with philosophy, philosophy goes everywhere, and then philosophy pushes you to think about everything, and religion tells you no. Islam tells you there are things you have to think about; for example, if we look at the world, the universe around us, obviously, there is someone who created it, if we have the computer, there is the engineer who created it, if we have the universe there is who created it. Philosophy brings you to a question to which Islam says "no, stop". Philosophy says then, is there somebody who created the world? Who created who created the world? Philosophy takes you there; Islam tells you no, stop, you get there... certain things are beyond the human being's brain" (Int.28).

The contraposition exists on the limits of human thought, specifically regarding whether one can delve into contemplating the creation of the world and the creation of God, or if there are certain aspects that surpass rational understanding and necessitate faith in God. Attempting to surpass these limits is viewed as an endeavor that may ultimately result in madness.

11.5 Educational experience in Europe

This chapter presents the more significant aspects of educational experiences in Europe, focusing on the topics already discussed in the previous chapter regarding Arab education systems, such as the structure and models of education systems, religion, and humanities, and further exploring the

comparison between Italy, Germany, and Sweden. In the interviews, it is possible to find cases in which the host education system has contributed alienation and marginalization, and others in which it has contributed to the negotiation of identities between newly migrated pupils and society. The only historical reference to colonial influence regards learning the host country's language. For this Libyan family, learning Italian is more accessible than it is for people coming from other Arab countries:

> *"The little one speaks well, she learned immediately. The others had no difficulty learning the language either; it would have been more difficult if I had been in France. The Italian language is easier because there are Italian words in the Libyan dialect"* (Int.46).

Due to Italian colonialism in Libya, these people are already familiar with the Italian language and culture. This is a particular case in this research, as most of the other countries considered were colonized by France and Britain; therefore, people who migrated to Italy, Germany, and Sweden did not have the knowledge of the host country's language and culture as a colonial legacy.

11.5.1 The structures of the education system

> *"In Germany, there is like a system of a... not such a hard system and the kindergarten is just like a time to stay when your parents are at work, so we do the same activities, but we did not... Like, we did not learn already like signs and letters. In Syria, the children already know how to read and write when they go to first grade"* (Int.40).

A student comparing German and Syrian pre-schooling highlights the difference between preschool focuses on studying or on playing. The need for families to leave their children somewhere when parents work emerges; something that is never adduced as a motivation for preschool in Arab countries, where the motivation to send children to kindergarten is always for their scholastic success or, at most, their moral and intellectual formation. The difference between kindergartens focusing on playing or studying exists between all Arab and European countries, and some people see it as a weakness of European pre-schooling:

> *"And another thing, I wish them to start in kindergarten teaching children numbers and letters. I find it very difficult for a child to go to first grade directly when he cannot write any words. I mean, I wonder why they do not teach the child to read and write; they just let him play there"* (Int.50).

This mother is worried that her children are only playing in kindergarten without learning to read and write, as is usually the case in Arab kindergartens. Furthermore, she fears that her children will not learn German to the level needed to succeed in the German education system. Not all of

the adults interviewed shared this opinion. On the contrary, someone else saw the German model of pre-schooling as a liberation for children:

> *"About the school system, I look out of the window and see all those little children from the kindergarten, you know, like even if it is raining outside, they would be dressed with something is preventing them from the rain, and they would go for a walk with their teachers. They would go to explore something in the water, and I was crying because I remember how we brought up our children like in a prison, like everything was very rude, and they were locked up more or less, and this was very impressive"* (Int.36).

The difference between Syrian and German kindergarten is, in her words, impressive. There are numerous differences between all types of kindergartens in the three European countries. For example, in Italian kindergartens, it is not as widespread to let the children play outside in the rain, as reported in this quote about Germany. It is also the case in Sweden. Despite these and other differences, there is still a significant difference between pre-schooling in European and Arab countries; in Europe, it focuses on playing, while in Arab countries, there is pressure on children to succeed in educational selection. Another similarity between Italian, German, and Swedish schools in comparison with Arab schools is that, generally, classes are quieter with fewer pupils. Professional and technical Italian high schools are exceptions, as they have numerous and noisy classes similar to those to which pupils are accustomed (Int.9; 30; 5; 6).

> *"The Industrial school, as you know the system... [...] Her character was not too strong until she attracted the attention of these boys who did not care to study; she was unable to do it really, but on the other hand, she was a person who, if you wanted to learn, would help you so much. One thing to consider is that a teacher must have a strong character in the classroom. If she wants to teach, then she must have a particularly strong character, as it is especially important in that type of school"* (Int.30).

Pupils placed in situations similar to those they experienced at school in their countries of origin note overall the teachers' different attitudes; that is, the different authority they have and the difference in the respect towards them. Additionally, in Sweden, parents speak about this lack of respect for the teachers' role in comparison with the relationship they are accustomed to. Conversely, in Germany, the perception is different:

> *"I have tried to collect more information about the German education system, but I have found that it is such a big topic, that there is no end, when I read about it then, I scatter because every school has a different system.*
> *I: By the way, German parents have the same problem (laughing)*
> *S: Really! (Laughing), I feel like I am in an endless loop; I cannot understand where I am, and every teacher has rules, and only he can control his class. You cannot argue with them because they are the ones who control the rules"* (Int.50).

German teachers seem to have full authority in their classrooms. Parents used to highly centralised education systems, in which schools and teachers are executors of the Education Ministry, have difficulty understanding a system like the German one, in which each lander and each school has broad decision-making and organisational autonomy and in which teachers have great freedom, both in a positive and negative sense:

> *"There was not the headmaster every day to tell them what they have to do; on the contrary, I felt that they have all the freedom to work, so they work well with a very good relationship with pupils, etcetera, so they did not have anyone who said you have to do, you have to, blah, blah, blah. And they were working anyway, so that was a really good thing"* (Int.30).

Even in Italy, Arab pupils are surprised by the teachers' freedom of teaching. An element that is common to all three countries is that pupils and parents appreciate an education that attempts to develop critical thinking rather than simply inculcating content. Despite this similarity, an important difference between the three countries is that, in Germany, newly migrated pupils and parents complain about exams stress, group pressure, and adherence to schedules, whereas Italy and Sweden are seen as having a much more relaxed educational system compared to what they are used to (Focus group 2). Unlike Germany, they view studying in Italy as a simple thing:

> *"Honestly, I see the Italian school as a game! It is a game compared to studying as in Syria. However, here there is freedom. It is a free country […]. Here, of course, it is good, but in Syria, the teaching is more in-depth. If you have to study, you have to study. You cannot get your diploma like that! Here, honestly, it is easier. The only obstacle is the language. If you speak the language, you get the diploma. Not at our place in Syria, studying is difficult"* (Int.43).

This mother states that the only difficulty in the Italian school system is the language; therefore, if you learn it, it is not so difficult to succeed. Her opinion represents a common judgement on the Italian school system in general, which is easy to enter and to succeed in, and is a free system in which teachers do not expect too much from pupils. Of course, pupils may fail, but it is mainly due to language problems. Both in Italy (Int.16) and in Germany (36; 40; 50), parents and pupils are surprised that in kindergarten, children only play without studying to prepare for primary school. The difference is that, in Italy, there is no selection process for admission to primary school, as is the case in Germany:

> *"She said: <<He does not have enough words to express himself. His language is not good enough>>. We said: <<If he had not, they would not have him enter the first grade>> You know there are examinations before they approve a child to enter the first grade"* (Int.48).

This conversation between the teacher and the mother of a pupil in the 1st year of primary school explains why some parents in Germany complain about the fact that children do not study in kindergartens (Int.50). This conversation could never happen in Italy, where there is not a proficiency level required to enter first grade (Int.16). Interviewees consider it complicated to enter, understand, and succeed in the German education system.

> *"We came to Berlin in June, and my children were not allowed to school until October. We filled out the necessary application 3 times. The first 2 times, the desk officer received the papers but did not follow up on the issue nor give us a confirmation that she had received the papers. She only gave us confirmation after the third application and started to work on it. Then they told us <<Look for a school. Whenever you find a school, we will send your daughter's papers there>>. But we were new in Berlin! Without the help of Diakonie [a charity organisation], we would have never found a school. We did not know where the schools were or how we could apply"* (Int.48).

In Italy, refugees' reception centres helped them to enroll in school, and even migrants outside the reception system never discussed difficulties in admission and enrollment. Pupils and parents in Italy do not share the confusion and feeling of inadequacy of those who entered German schools because they experienced fewer difficulties and obstacles. This difference emerges at all educational levels, even because in Italy the first separation of career paths occurs at the end of middle school, in the 8th grade, so newly migrated pupils can enter common school until they are 13-14 years old without any selection for admission. In Germany, however, selectivity and channelling begin very early, at the end of primary school. It means that newly migrated pupils who enter German primary schools have much less time than those who enter Italian primary schools to learn the language and adapt to the system before choosing, or being chosen, to attend a lyceum or a vocational school.

> *"The topic of Gymnasium and Realschule is very stressful for parents, from 3rd grade starts the parents think what if my child does not go to Gymnasium. I hope this system did not exist"* (Int.50).

Newly arrived parents and pupils find this selection process very stressful at such an early age when pupils should be thinking about socializing with their peers and integrating into society; instead, they have to think about going to university already before adolescence. The perception of newly migrated pupils in Italy is the opposite:

> *"I went to a school with Italian boys even if I did not understand anything. It is something like... with the labour word, not studying something, just learning something. The professional, electronics.*
> *I: without having a middle school diploma? Without having done middle school?*
> *R: yes"* (Int. 17).

This refugee, like many others who have lost years of schooling due to the war and who have never attended middle school, can enter high school directly without any certificate from middle school or any preparatory language course. The idea is that they can learn the language while socializing with Italian peers, learning the subjects simultaneously. This system, of course, sometimes causes some problems:

> *"It was a bit... complicated because in scientific subjects I went quite badly. This is because when we studied from the 4th year of primary school until the 3rd year of middle school, we had more hours... that is, the class of mathematics and other subjects maybe we did a bit less to go to Italian class, to strengthen the language, the linguistic aspect. This, let us say, has marked a little bit the approach with the mathematics that today, only today, I am trying to catch up"* (Int.10).

Many pupils take additional classes in Italian during regular school, so they miss classes in other subjects and arrive unprepared for high school. Therefore, despite the official openness and non-selectivity of the Italian educational system, selection occurs informally during the educational path instead of officially at its beginning, as is the case in Germany:

> *"In middle school, I remember very well, I was in a very particular class where there were... we were really... there were many foreigners, and there were many Italians... it was between 40-60% […] there were many foreigners. In high school then, this thing changed radically because, having gone to a classical high school, there was not even a foreigner in my class, so I was the only foreigner"* (Int.16).

In most cases, even in Italy, migrant pupils attended vocational or professional school, as they hardly along the pathway succeed in acquiring the skills needed to cope with classical or scientific lyceum. In addition, for economic reasons, most of them need to go to work as soon as possible, so even brilliant pupils prefer vocational or technical school:

> *"I chose it for one reason […] you do not have to go to university; you can find a job with only the high school diploma. My goal is this, to finish with a diploma and find a job, especially for the period in which my brothers and I and my family are because now our project is finished, and we have to find a house, a job, everything. We stay here, maybe the study we do not know because first I have to find a job, to be sure that my family is safe, that they do not have to leave and go everywhere, I am in a precise house, then, I try to continue my study, because I do not want to stop"* (Int.20).

This pupil chose the touristic professional high school intending to find a job soon, even though she is a brilliant pupil interested in continuing to study at university. Therefore, her social and economic conditions influence her choice more than ethnicity or religion, as seen before concerning the brilliant Egyptian pupil from a well-off family who entered a classical high school:

"Here, the nice thing is that you finish high school, and there is an entrance test for the faculty you want to attend ... can you pass it? You get into the faculty you want. This gives much opportunity to the student to choose what he wants to study afterwards" (Int.28).

There is joint education until the 8th grade and then five years of high school separated into lyceum, technical, and vocational schools. However, in the end, everyone can try to enter any university faculty. Therefore, after the touristic high school, the girl can find work in this field and enroll in the faculty she wants, regardless of the grade obtained and the high school attended. Regarding high schools, a commonality among all three countries is the wide range of educational offerings:

"The high schools, it is complicated. Ours is much simpler. However, maybe it also creates more chances and choices […]. The positive remarks are that there are schools with a focus on certain subjects. The potential of children is different, and you can spare children much trouble if you do not force them to study subjects they do not want. I like that" (Int.48).

In this case, the mother in Germany appreciated the early selection. This way, children could study what they were interested in without wasting time on things that were useless for them. In addition, both parents and pupils appreciated an interactive teaching method in which technology was used effectively:

"They want every day to go to school, they do not say <<oh mum, I do not want to go to school>>, no, they love school, and they always want to go there, and I made 2 months this practical in this school, I notice that everything here in schools is different compared to Syria and... Yes, I hope everything in Syria became as here in Germany because the school are excellent with tools, tablet, and computer. In the classrooms, they make everything different from Syria, for example, my son, he made a presentation, he goes to the class and spoke" (Int.37).

If the interviewees said the same about Sweden, it is not the same in Italy:

"I like electronics, and, from what I heard of, Italy was a very developed country, compared to Egypt, it should be like this... so I chose to come here because there is my uncle who was... he knew about the things that... He works at the embassy […] but he did not know about the schools as they are, he teaches at the university, but he does not know about the things... He is in Naples, but he does not know how... that is, the study in schools, he does not know how things go" (Int.30).

Like many others, this Egyptian pupil in Italy expresses his disappointment with an education that he imagined would be advanced and technologically equipped, as one would expect in a European country, but instead discovers to be backward and lacking in tools.

11.5.2 Religion

There have been many debates in Europe regarding the role of religion in public schools and, on the other hand, the possibility of Muslim people integrating into European secular society. Despite their definition as secular, most European schools provide a Christian religion class, with the option to abstain but rarely with that to have a class of another religion. Nevertheless, this is an essential contradiction, it is not the main problem of Muslim refugees and migrants, who are more interested in the way they are treated as Muslims in their school life and in the way teachers and other pupils speak about Islam, rather than in the right to have their own religious class:

> *"I want them to know that we are Muslims. It always happened at school that they would ask me: <<Do you wear the hijab at home? Do you wear it in front of your husband and your children? >> That was the question they asked me the most. Then the teachers ask much information to the children about us, about how we live at home. We wanted to make them understand how we are and that, at home, we are the same as them! Are you free at home? The same we are! Then, little by little, they began to get to know us. Also because here, they know nothing about Arab and Islamic culture. They watch something on TV or meet a person and think that they are all the same. They do not think that we have a great culture or important families. My children at school were exposed to so many questions"* (Int.43).

This Syrian mother living in Italy explains how religious belonging influences the relationship between teachers and pupils, who continuously ask her and her children about their religion and customs. She would like them to recognize their Muslim identity and answer the school's questions in order to counter the prejudices toward Muslims spread by television in a society, such as that of the small Calabrian town where she is located, where people are not used to dealing with Muslims. Teachers' and pupils' ignorance and curiosity do not offend her; instead, they push her to work to be known and understood. Most of the interviewees in Italy do not feel discriminated against in school for their religious belonging:

> *"I do not remember to have been treated as a foreigner particularly […] one day when in class we were studying or talking about Islam, they called me, and I said... it is true, I saw that people cannot eat pork, ah it is so, it is right... I do not know those few things... Now I do not remember exactly, I had some information, and I remember to have given it on that occasion"* (Int.08).

This pupil affirms that, in his experience, schools have transmitted a strong concept of tolerance to pupils through content and teachers' behaviors, so he never felt discriminated against. Teachers asked Muslim pupils directly to explain their religion and customs, so they could feel like protagonists and not be subjected to others' narratives and descriptions of their own culture and identity. This is something that is very much appreciated by pupils in every context:

"The English teacher, for example, she... she likes so much to know about religions, about different cultures, she always asks, if she has some question in her head, immediately she comes to us, both from my religion and from the religion of my companions that is Hindu" (Int.20).

In Germany, pupils speak about a more contentious dialogue regarding their religious belonging:

"These 2 girls told the teacher <<we have war in Syria because of this topic>> and I was... mad of... I said <<no, not about religion, we have war in Syria because we wanted to become free, to get our freedom, and he is a dictator, he do not give us that>> and then she said... <<No, because of religion>>. Then the teacher said <<ok, a free think is ok, we had this problem in our Middle Ages in Europe>>, and then I ... <<what is happening to you? Do you mean we are right now like you in Middle age? Are you serious? >> And then I said ok, he is racist" (Int.39).

The teacher of this Syrian girl is convinced that the problem in Syria is religion and that Muslims are now facing the same problems that Europe faced in the Middle Ages, implying that they are a backward people, a century behind Europe. It is easy to understand how, on this basis, it can be difficult to build a dialogue between equals, between people with different faiths and cultures but still with the same intellectual dignity.

Concerning the religious class, there are few cases in Italy in which pupils abstain from it. In only one case, pupils remain in the classroom because the school does not offer any alternative and they cannot leave the school. This situation is lived without particular discomfort since they can listen, do their homework or even slip if they want (Int.09). Someone else who chooses not to attend can do other activities (Int.12; 08). Even if schools offer only Catholic religion, a dialogue between equals appears to happen in most of the experiences in which Muslim pupils attend this class:

"I like it, yes, even... it is beautiful. It is not that it is a sin to look at it or to see it, or listen to it... You learn a new culture, new things, everything, they talk about all religions, Christians, Muslims, all religions, everything.

I: Sometimes you have some debate, some discussion

R: more or less, yes, from religion to religion, from one person to another different person" (Int.21).

Many pupils who initially abstained from the Catholic religious class eventually began attending it, establishing a good relationship with the teachers (Int. 22). Some of them would decide from time to time whether to listen or not, and would go to study in other classrooms when deciding not to listen (Int. 27). It demonstrates a very free relationship between Muslim pupils and this subject, in which neither the school nor the family seem to impose anything on them:

"I have to be honest; luckily, I have never had... That is, my parents have never interfered with my choices, never. They let me do absolutely what I want to do and what I believe, that is, no one has ever told me to do or not to do anything, but also at the level of choices" (Int.16).

Most pupils decide for themselves whether they want to attend the religious class or not, based on their interests and the alternative proposals rather than on their parents' will, showing independence of thought and the ability to go beyond their belongings by following their curiosity.

> *"I also do the class on your religion, let us say because I like to know the things, I mean... how they work and how you do... that is, to understand more the things that are different, from other people. I do not know how I have to tell you about, the different civilisations and religions"* (Int.7).

This Libyan pupil found an opportunity to learn about the culture of the country hosting her in the Catholic religion class. She believes that knowing its religion is a good way to understand people and integrate into a different society, without having to change her religion, but rather to gain a better understanding of the culture of the country.

> *"Then Islam is spoken about a lot, but it is a subject... never explained badly because... in the religion's subject they spoke about Islam, it is necessary because everybody must know all the religions, I did not hear anything bad, everything right they said"* (Int.27).

Often the Catholic religious class is also a space in which pupils can better understand their classmates' religions, since teachers also discuss other world religions. In this example, Muslim pupils hear the Catholic religious class, especially when the topic is the Muslim religion, and appreciate how it is treated. In cases like this, despite the name of the teaching being the Catholic religion, teachers realise it as a class of interreligious dialogue. Of course, Muslim pupils do not appreciate all religious teachers:

> *"She explained about the Islamic religion... I wanted to stay there because it is my religion and I want to listen to what she says. She said 2 or 3 things... not true. And there, I said, Prof. Excuse me, I have to say what... I think, this, this and that, you did not say it in the right way, there is something wrong. She got angry... she goes saying <<it is my subject, I am more expert, you are not the teacher, etc>>. Then I said OK, it is your subject but I want to explain these 3 points, and that is because, in the end, you are talking about my religion. […] I explained it to her, for example, she talked about the Hijab, Ramadan and the Christian religion, that we do not believe in another religion. It is not true at all. In our Quran, there is written about the Christian religion, it is something that is known, not as she said […]. After that discussion, she remained convinced that she knew the truth. I said ok if you believe that it is true, I cannot say anything else, but I have some things that show that they are not true, and I can bring them to school, I have no problems, and she said <<no, no, ok, let us close this speech>> (laughs)"* (Int. 20).

In this situation, the religious teacher did not accept her explanation of Islam being questioned, even though her knowledge about it was superficial and ultimately wrong. This pupil tried to dialogue with the teacher to explain her point of view and demonstrate it, proposing to bring the Quran to school, but the teacher did not accept this interference. The pupil experienced this conflict

as a conflict with this particular teacher and not as a cultural or religious conflict. The positive attitude of other teachers, such as Italian and English teachers, and of her classmates towards her religious beliefs likely helped her not to generalize the conflict:

> *"From that day, my classmates, if they have some question about my religion, some doubt, they have heard something, for example, they come immediately to ask... and so it is right […] Sometimes they ask me, especially now that I am doing Ramadan, they ask me <<how do you bear it without water>> (Laughs). For example, one of my classmates asked me today <<can you smoke? >> (laughs) <<But I do not smoke! >>. And she said <<well, it was a question... If I wanted to one day, can I smoke? >> And I said <<no, you cannot>> and she said <<ah, then I do not>> (Laughs)"* (Int.20).

Her classmates, who assisted in the discussion with the religion teacher, chose to believe in her version and explanation, as she is Muslim and has more credibility in their eyes than the teacher, who is probably not held in high esteem by them. If, before this event, they had never spoken about religion, after they started to ask her when they heard something about the Muslim religion. The conversation about smoking during Ramadan showed a relaxed atmosphere between her and her classmates when they discussed religious issues. As demonstrated by the relationship established with their classmates and by their voluntary participation in the Catholic religious class, most interviewees attending school in Italy show an open mentality towards religious differences:

> *"Maybe with a person of another religion or who does not believe in any religion, I cannot tell him <<look it is said in the Quran, this is the verse of the Quran>>. He tells me <<go away, what are you saying? I do not believe in these things>>. Therefore, with other people of other beliefs, I have to give them maybe a scientific justification. This logic is what I try to do with everybody who asks me questions about religion. Even my father, we grew up like this in our family that we must not be extremist, never extremist, if somebody comes to ask us a question, maybe he says <<no your God is false>> maybe I do not get offended, or I fight him, no..."* (Int.13).

This young Moroccan attending an Italian university seems to have accepted that his companion does not have his mentality and beliefs. He is aware that the justification based on the Quranic text is not attractive to them, and thus makes an effort to explain his thoughts without using it, preferring scientific theories and justifications. His words show what is explained in the chapter about the influence of specific religious interpretation on the education of pupils who migrated to Europe, as he tells about his father's teaching against extremism. It reflects in the relationship he established between religion and sciences, in which science is a tool to support religion. These elements contribute to his religious identity, a tolerant and flexible identity capable of dealing with people of other religions and with atheism, which is often the biggest challenges for Muslims in Europe. Other Muslims live differently the relationship between religion and science:

"The Homo Habilis, these things here... the initial man as an ape, these things here, for me, honestly, I do not believe so much in this thing, I mean I do not... I know, I found it strange, I said, is it possible that man was like that, and then evolution took place? […] In Egypt, I have never done this thing that man was an ape, not absolutely. […] In the Creation theory for us, Adam and Eve found themselves on the earth, and they started to make families; Noah went on his boat, and the problem occurred. These processes, but the man before Adam there had been no one so... for us so, Adam was created by God and therefore the idea that... as they say, that man was an ape, then evolved, we have not even studied it. Because we, however, our belief... All the people believe in another thing" (Int.30).

This student, who had arrived in Italy during high school, had not studied evolution and the Big Bang theory in primary school in Egypt. When he studied them in Europe, he found it difficult to believe in them due to his beliefs. As already seen in the previous chapter, in reality, pupils in Arab countries study them without too many problems; maybe they do not believe, or maybe they find a way to believe both in science and in the Quran, but they do not express the same discomfort expressed by this student. The first difference is that in Europe, they are taught not as theories between theories, all of which are still unproven and therefore fallible as in the Arab countries, but as the correct theories in which pupils must believe. This difference causes an identity clash: teachers and classmates may label newly migrated pupils who question the validity of these theories as backward or as Islamic fundamentalists; or, even if teachers and classmates do not enact this labelling, the student themselves may feel backward and feel a deep discomfort in the classroom. A discomfort that is not easy to cope with for believing parents who wish to see their children integrated into the new society:

"Yesterday, she told me this ape theory. I told her: <<What do you think? Is that right? >> Then she told me what she thought, and I said: <<tell them what you think>>" (Int.48).

This child needs to speak with her mother about the theories she has learned at school because they contrast with the family tradition. In Syria, pupils quietly study this theory and choose whether to believe in it or not, so it is possible to argue that part of the problem for newly arrived pupils regarding these issues is the environment, which seems to decide if they are backward. This enviromental pressure pushes pupils to react also on gender issues treated in schools:

"Then she gave the lessons in biology on the relationships between men and women. The girl did not want this, so she got up and said she did not want lessons like this, leaving the classroom. Her father told her: <<Well done>> which was not a good idea in my opinion" (Int.48).

No one of the interviewees has experienced problems in their home countries concerning religion and gender. Nobody spoke about discomfort with gender relations or lessons on this. The problem,

however, arises in Europe, where the relationship is different, and the issues are treated differently during the lesson, as experienced by the daughter of one of the interviewees. She cannot tolerate the way the teachers handle male-female relationships, and her father agrees with her. However, her mother believes she should try to cope with this unease, perhaps by discussing it in the classroom without shying away from the topic. Anyway, this discomfort felt by pupils in European schools depends on how European teachers manage the religious differences within the classrooms. Pupils mostly avoid showing teachers their idea due to the fear of being considered backward. In the confusion that young Muslims may feel in their first years in Europe, in some cases, the religious class appears to be a safe reference point:

> *"I have never taken anything for granted... that is, I did not like the model according to which I have to believe in something because I found myself in... So, I remember very well my adolescence, the more... More shocking, let us say, is between the ages of 12 and 16. I did research on all religions within the limits of my faculties and competencies, obviously; so, no, I never closed the door. I always followed, so much so that the religion teacher in high school, however, is a Greek Church's deacon... We even became friends, we always go for coffee, we talk about... doctrine, theology, ideological philosophy and then... yes, between Agostino, Tommaso, St. Anselmo, William of Hokam so yes absolutely"* (Int.16).

This student managed the typical confusion of adolescence, often more deeply felt by migrants who have to relate to another culture, through the study of religion. The Catholic religion teacher helped him in his research, never trying to convince him of something, but rather creating a strong relationship with him. In this teacher, he found a reference point to rely on and openly confront; therefore, religious teaching helps young newly migrated pupils in managing their developing identity during a sensitive period such as adolescence. In this regard, it is interesting to hear the testimony of a Syrian Armenian Christian pupil:

> *"We study commandments and festivities, but in Italy, we also talk about "our" things: problems, bullying, diversity and more personal things. There, in Libya, you do religion, real religion. Here we also talk about other things. I expected them to talk about commandments, but no, they talked about personal experiences. However, the teacher always manages to link it in a certain way. It is not a useless hour because it makes you think a lot; I like it"* (Int.11).

As this Christian pupil states, the religious class deals with pupils' everyday problems, on which Muslim pupils could feel more understood by a Catholic teacher than by an atheist one. Indeed, the conflict between Christian teachers and Muslim pupils appears in all the interviews as less problematic than that with atheist teachers. Younger pupils have expressed the attitude toward religious class in Italy with a simplicity that restores to us the sense of a non-conflicting everydayness:

"I stay in class; I study it. I would like to know about the religions of the world […]
I: Have you had the opportunity to talk?
R: Yes, we talked about Muhammad" (Int.02).

This young pupil in middle school affirms that he would like to know the world's religions and that he does not find significant differences in how religion is taught in Morocco and Italy. It is a confirmation that religious teaching in Morocco has less censorship than in countries such as Syria since any Syrian in Italy affirms that the religious teaching is similar to that in their country. The Moroccan pupil specified that he had discussed Muhammad with his Italian religious teachers in front of the whole class, and he appeared satisfied.

Only one school had experimented with organizing Islamic religious classes for Muslim pupils.

"A very good experiment, very interesting, it adds many things, even if they did not bring a teacher who speaks only of the Muslim religion, but at least a teacher who speaks in general of religions, already a very good thing because it makes you grow... It opens your eyes. Maybe it is more important that you do only one religion; that you teach me the Muslim religion. It is good also for that period to teach us the different religions, the world's different ideas: how they think there, how here, how they practice there, how here. This already gives you ideas very clear; it makes you choose even better your idea, it makes you create your ideas from a better point of view" (Int.30).

This experimentation was positively judged by the interviewees, who had a good opinion of the teachers chosen by the school to teach Islamic religion and appreciated the different methods used compared to those used in Egypt. In Egypt, they studied only the Sunni Muslim religion following the Egyptian tradition, without ever mentioning the Islamic plural reality, whereas this Senegalese teacher explained to Egyptian pupils the different African Islamic traditions and then, also, the other religions of the world. It allows pupils to clarify their idea, understanding that they know only a tiny part of the immense wealth of knowledge related to religion. This experimentation demonstrates Muslim pupils' appreciation of an open religious teaching, even if this single testimony does not represent the totality of pupils. Indeed, many of them are not interested (Int.09) and, since they are not obligated to attend religious classes as they would be in their home country, they prefer to have a free hour. In Germany, most of the Muslim students interviewed do not attend either mosques or religion classes and often feel the need to explore religion further in order to gain a better understanding of themselves and others:

"She sees other children who pray, who read Quran and even memorise Quran and so on. So she wants to learn that as well. It is not wrong. On the contrary, I did her memorise Quran verses so she does not feel she lacks something. In the end, we are Muslims. Let us acknowledge this and be positive about it but within borders. There is no bullying, but she feels there is something she needs to know. So I decided

to give them some religious education. Now she is more self-confident. She has this knowledge but without developing prejudices against others" (Int.48).

This mother sees her daughter's desire to belong to the Muslim community in her German city clashing with the desire to learn what school taught as true. None of the interviewees narrated positive experiences concerning religion at school; instead, they spoke about cultural clashes:

"During Christmas, he went to school and said there is no such thing as Santa Claus, and everything is a lie. Unfortunately, he said what I told him about that in school. This has led to a problem between him and a child in school; the child wanted to hit my son. I thought a lot about it; if I told my son to insist on his opinion, he would become aggressive, and, in the end, I told him that everyone has the freedom of his religion. I made gifts for them to take to their friends at school so they could learn to respect the feast of others and accept others no matter who they are. However, I feel that my son does not accept these things. And he is ready to say to someone you are an infidel, for example, even though I taught him not to say that word to anybody […] I feel like he wants to show off his personality in front of his friends[…] Because the kids ask him why he did not go somewhere. Did Santa Claus come to you? He came to us and brought us gifts. This topic affected him negatively, and he got angry about it" (Int.50).

In this quote, it is possible to see the effort of this Muslim mother to make her son accept the Christmas holiday and her worries about his possible radicalisation in the relationship with his classmates. What is missing in this experience is school mediation. No teachers were mentioned that have tried to explain the Christian festivity to her son, nor explain the Muslim perspective to his German classmates. The clash appears exacerbated by material things, with a correlation between religion and a social and economic dimension. The fundamental problem of the young Muslim pupil in question is that he does not make trips during the Christmas vacation and does not receive gifts, so when pupils return to school after the holidays, all the classmates have new experiences and toys except for him. The family does not make trips for economic reasons, since they are refugees without many economic resources, and not for religious reasons, since Islam does not prevent people from making trips during holidays. The two levels, religious and economic, overlapped in the young boy's head, transforming an economic privation into a religious conflict. It is possible to argue that, in the small reality of the Calabria region in which most of the interviews in Italy are been carried out, most people are not used to taking trips during the Christmas holidays. Instead, it is more common to celebrate in the village, involving minorities with gifts in the spirit of Christmas. It is not possible to claim with certainty that this is the explanation, but it is a fact that none of the respondents in Italy reported such problems. A Syrian mother living in Italy has spoken about the effort she has to make to explain the Muslim culture to teachers who were previously unfamiliar with it. She also said that her children have been asked

many questions about their religion, tradition, daily life, and habits. Through these questions, she states, *"Little by little, they began to get to know us"* (Int.43). It is possible to note two things: the first is how dialogue plays an essential role in resolving misunderstandings caused by ignorance, and the second is that the resolution also depends on the non-overlapping of religious differences with economic differences, which was never cited by this mother living in a small village in Calabria. Economic and social differences appear even in interviews conducted in Italy overall regarding clothes and selectiveness (Int.11; 20; 27; see paragraph 11.7.4), from which it is possible to understand the discomfort of many migrants and refugees who cannot conform to the high clothing standard of Italian people. The difference is that in their speech about socio-economic discomfort, there is no place for religion, so the two levels do not overlap, thus not leading to identity resentments based on religion. Anyway, not all Arab pupils in Germany suffer from their religious identity with German classmates and teachers:

> *"She is beautiful and knows it, and always says everybody likes her. There is no mobbing in her school. It is a Gymnasium. All pupils are German; only in her class, there are foreigners. […] If she suffered any bullying, it was from other Arab pupils who asked her why she did not wear a headscarf"* (Int.48).

In this case, on the opposite side of the other cited experience in Germany, the other Muslim pupils represent the major problem of this young girl concerning her Muslim identity. She does not have problems with teachers, German classmates, or parents, but with other Muslim pupils, who do not accept her distancing from a model of femininity. In Syrian schools, it is normal to have some female pupils who wear the hijab and others who do not, as it is considered a personal choice. In a European context, something has changed in the mind of young Arabs that may consider this personal choice as having succumbed to the influence of Western culture. It should be noted that migrant pupils attend only one class, while only Germans populate the rest of the school is; this scholastic choice produces ghettoization and radicalization. Furthermore, it is possible to observe, even in this case, the absence of dialogue between pupils, teachers, and families on religious issues, leaving pupils to face complex and controversial problems alone. Anyway, parents' attitude appears open and tolerant:

> *"The children began to talk about religion among themselves. Even if God exists at all. They discuss. They say God does not exist. We cannot see him. Children tell her we were apes or chickens or… Anyhow, they discuss these things. Is there a devil? In their school, there are people from all backgrounds. There are Muslims, there are atheists and so on. They want answers to their questions. And here we get into some trouble sometimes. But you cannot avoid that. These questions will be asked. And you will have to answer them. And I try to answer them without driving them in a direction which*

pleases me. I need to answer her questions without having her believe what I believe in. I want her to think free" (Int.48).

This mother tries to help her child understand what she thinks without imposing her vision, even if it is not simple for her to relate to different ideas. It is possible to note that the main problem is not Christianity; indeed, Catholic or Protestant pupils and teachers do not appear in this statement. Syrians are used to attending school with Christian classmates and speaking about Christianity as a similar religion. What is channelling to manage for Muslim families is the relationship and the confrontation their sons and daughter have with atheist pupils. In this statement, the two main topics that arose from their confrontation are the existence of God and the evolutionary theory. These two topics question the Muslim identity more than Christian religion, as the same fundamentals of monotheistic Abrahamic belief are the same in both religions. The families' attitude appears, in any case, to be tolerant; therefore, it is necessary to understand what role teachers play in this confrontation. As already seen, most of the interviewees do not participate at all in religious education in Germany. The only pupil who attended it narrated about a quite multiconfessional and discussion-based teaching:

"The religion class was very different because they are like... we talk about all religions. We talk about Muslim religion, Christian religion, Jewish religion... all the different kinds of religion. […] They try to make it very flexible and... Sometimes there were discussions about topics, for example... circumcising, and like freedom... circumcising and different religions like and if it should be allowed in Germany or not... it is freedom of religion or not... yes" (Int.40).

It is worth saying that the only pupil attending a German religious class among the people interviewed in Germany is the one with a German mother. Therefore, she is not a foreigner in a strict sense, even though she is Muslim and felt like a stranger in Germany, having attended all schooling until high school in Syria. She stresses the differences between religious classes in Syria and Germany, pointing out that, in Germany, they speak about all religions and discuss sensitive topics, which is not allowed in Syria. Finally, no interviews conducted in Sweden directly addressed the topic, as the interviewees are all teachers and parents who focus on other problems and do not live their religion as a conflictual factor in their relationship with schools.

11.5.3 Humanities

Many pupils with a migratory background appreciate humanities teaching without encountering topics that contradict their previous knowledge or that question or offend their identity or culture:

"We have studied in history Islam and also Libya, in geography we have also studied Pakistan, but we have never found strange things... No, no, they were the same as what we know" (Int.27).

This Pakistani pupil in Italy, who had previously attended school in Libya, states that they studied Islam in history, and Pakistan and Libya in geography. He never felt offended by how these topics were treated, nor does he think that there is incorrect information. The same happened to pupils who moved from Morocco and Libya to Italy, where they did not experience studying something they already knew with a very different meaning. The history of their countries of origin is little and generally treated, and no mistakes or differences are found. The only exceptions regard the Israeli and Palestinian issues and the history of Islam:

> *"History, we talked about the... Turks and the Muslim religion, of Islam. I remember we were studying history, and there was a chapter on Islam... it was written, I still remember that page <<Maometto created religion>>. Being a little girl, I did not understand because, for me, first, his name was not Maometto. Secondly, he did not create religion for me; he did not create the religion at all... he was a prophet, like Jesus, Moses, Abraham, and so forth, and so this created some confusion in my head [...]. Then, because the Turks were enemies, this created some confusion, but not so much confusion, eh... After, nothing happened, I continued to study, and then when I grew up, I understood"* (Int.12).

Muslim pupils in European schools experience a lack of knowledge from teachers and books about Islam. The other element of this quote regards the description of the Ottoman Empire as enemies. Typically, the Ottoman Empire is so little studied in Italy that pupils quickly forget about it and its contradiction without asking for an explanation. Of course, stimulating the class discussion on this topic would be a better solution. Pupils point out that the most significant difference is the focus on Europe rather than Arab countries (Int.20) and local issues, such as gentrification in Berlin (Int.40). They consider it normal, as every country has to transmit overall information about its history and geography. However, the interesting thing is how other countries' history and geography are treated:

> *"They also made me study in class the Syrian culture and the fact that I am Syrian, so the history teacher said let us do a little on his country, tomorrow you have to bring this and this. So in middle school, I studied very well let us say"* (Int.05).

This geography teacher decided to include in the programme the countries from which newly migrated pupils in the classrooms had come. In such a way, she valued the interviewee's knowledge by asking him to speak to the class about his country, allowing him to show his culture and identity positively, both for him and his classmates, who were thus able to learn notions about his country of origin. Many pupils in Italy said that humanities teachers give them the possibility to speak as a protagonist on topics releted to their own culture. For example, a teacher asked an Egyptian pupil to explain to the classroom what he knew about the Arab conquest (Int.16). This

involvement in the lesson and the enhancement of the history and culture of origin emerge in this research only in the interviews conducted in Italy. Both in Italy and Germany, instead, pupils state that they studied more or less the same big topic as in their home country, such as the world wars. There are also conflictual and negative experiences; the first one is dealing with teachers' total ignorance of pupil's background:

> *"About Syria, when I entered the school, they do not know where it is, they do not know really where it is (laughs). I remember that the geography teacher when I entered and said Syria, said <<ah you are from Africa>> (laughs) and Syria is not in Africa. And she said <<oh maybe I made a mistake with another place... ok, ok>> (laughs). No, only that memory I remember, well. Oh my God, Syria in Africa, we are in a good situation. Then she said to me, another day << I made a mistake between Syria and Morocco because you are both wearing the veil>>... ok (laughing)... but it does not matter"* (Int.20).

This quote highlights the generalizations and superficiality that pupils sometimes face regarding their country and culture of origin. The first consequence may be a loss of interest and trust in such an uninformed teacher, but the most significant part of this event is that the teacher justified herself by saying that the error was due to the fact that both Moroccans and Syrians wear the veil. South-Italian teachers often are used to relating only with Moroccan pupils and they tend to flatten the entire Muslim world into the only context they know. She based her wrong categorisation on a religious symbol, the veil, which has more relevance in her eyes than national belonging. In fact, the most contentious experiences in the humanities are precisely about how they relate to Islam rather than to a particular Arab nation, except in the case of Syria and Palestine. In Italy, some examples of conflict relating to religion can be found in each humanistic subject:

> *"The Italian teacher told me that Damascus is a very important city for the Christians too, I said <<yes, I know because it is written in the Quran>> and she stopped there... <<How is it written in the Quran? >> And I said <<yes, it is written... There is something else that you might not know, but it is in our Quran>>, or at least she did not know it, and she said, tell me, and I said that at the end of the world, Jesus would come down there in Damascus. And she said: <<no, that is not possible>>, and I said yes, it is possible, it is written in the Quran, and she said <<find that piece that is written and bring it>> […] In the end, I convinced her, thank goodness"* (Int.20).

In this case, the Italian teacher has a good attitude; she spoke about Damascus as an important city even before discussing it with the Syrian pupil; therefore, she aimed to value Syrian belonging and not belittle her. She was open to dialogue and changing opinions. Apart from her attitude, the point is that most teachers, even those with the best intentions toward pupils with a migratory background, have very little knowledge of Islam, based chiefly on clichés and prejudices. Therefore, pupils must dialectically struggle to make their culture, underlying their identity,

understood. Another example deals with philosophy. Very few interviewees attend classical or scientific high schools in Europe, the only high school in which philosophy is taught; one exception is this Egyptian pupil in Italy:

> *"He was very, very anti-clerical; this bothered me particularly, I must admit, because, in my opinion, it was not the teacher's role to give implicit or explicit judgments on what they did, then there are appropriate forms to discuss certain... I still remember this particular event where a boy insisted on calling Saint Agostino; he got angry, saying that we are in the philosophy class and, therefore, we should not call him Saint Agostino but Aurelio [...]. We had a very conflicting relationship, but really, me and him because I could not accept what he said [...]. I do not think that the philosophy teacher's problem was a matter of cultural differences, but just his approach […]. In short, the conflict was created not for questions of cultural conflict but just on diverse Western perspectives. That is, the fact that he does not respect, that he has to, every time he talks about Christian philosophy, launch some jokes on the church or the clerical apparatus; this bothered me. Not so much as a matter of belief, but as a matter of respect for the cult"* (Int.16).

In this statement, it emerges that the problem of many European Muslim pupils is not with Christian teachers, but with atheist ones, especially those who mock religions without showing any respect for religious traditions and claim to impose their way of thinking as the right and progressive one. The clash between an atheist and a religious culture is more significant than between a Christian culture and a Muslim one, and this conflict finds its natural battleground in the philosophy class rather than in the religious one. While religion teachers, in most cases, promote a dialogue that respects others' identities, philosophy teachers characterised by aggressive atheism belittle and offend them, making it difficult for pupils with a different cultural background to defend their identity. Finally, the biggest clash in humanities regards not religion, but politics and colonialism, and is about Palestine:

> *"Palestine, yes, yes, and they wrote Israel with "ahtilal", which would be the occupation, the occupier, that is, they wrote "al-ahtilal al-Israel", and therefore, it would be the Israeli occupier, yes... In our country, it is still written "al-ahtilal al-Israel", that is, Palestine, and on the other side al-ahtilal al-Israel and... That is the difference"* (Int.28).

This student arrived in Italy at university, already well-versed in Italian culture and educational content; therefore, he was able to quietly explain the difference between Italian and Egyptian geography, where Israel is officially taught as Palestine's occupier and not as a legitimate nation. This difference and the reasons behind it are not so clear to pupils who arrive in Europe at an earlier age. In most cases, they are worried about expressing their discomfort in the classroom:

"When I came to high school [in Italy] I saw in fact that it was written Israel but, in Arabic, it is Palestine […] I thought it was strange, a strange thing. I mean, why do they do this thing? Why do they try to write this thing here... it should be Palestine, not Israel, but then... I did not know; I did not... just for me, it was a strange thing; I mean, why this thing, let us say... you do this change for what reason? I did not ask the teacher really, I did not ask, because I said maybe... I do not remember, but anyway for me, it was a strange thing, and I said to me <<forget it>>" (Int.30).

This university student felt confused when he saw, for the first time, the Palestinian land named Israel in the schoolbook. He considered it very strange and wrong and did not understand why Italian geography teaching accepted Israeli colonialism and changed the name of the Palestinian land in the book. Maybe to avoid causing problems, or to avoid having problems in his new school, he did not ask for clarification from the teacher; on the contrary, he decided that the better thing to do was to forget about it. It is possible to see a lack of dialogue and the fear of being considered terrorists, which led to hiding one's thoughts and that is a bit like forgetting a part of their own identity in order to integrate into the new context. The astonishment of studying geography in Europe is the same for pupils from Syria who arrive in Germany, where it may even be worse:

"When they talk about Israel and Palestine, there are very different... opinions. I remember the first time I opened a geography book, and there was a map where they... set which countries are like... terrorist and dangerous countries, and, for example, Syria was marked but... Israel is not marked as this, so I was very surprised like... ok, way? (Laugh)... yeah, then later I have understood the mentality in Germany is very different about this topic" (Int.40).

In this case, not only is Israel reported as the official and legitimate name of the Palestinian land, but Syria is also marked as a dangerous and terrorist country. These categorizations in geography are difficult to understand for pupils who have always studied that Israel is a terrorist and illegitimate country and could lead to deep confusion in pupils. The one interviewed, in particular, said that, with time, she has come to understand the different mentality of German people, but this is not the case for everyone, especially those who cannot count on the support of Europeans willing to engage in dialogue to help them understand. The map of terrorist and dangerous countries transmits to pupils a political view of the world that is difficult to define as neutral. It is something that pupils with a migratory background could live with discomfort or from which they may feel offended, but ultimately, it coincides with the civic education provided by the school:

"I would say not religious at all because founded by the church there are schools by the... so it was founded by the church by they did not any... they just have to do what... nothing to do with religion, so religion no. German, I also say not so much like more I think European and the citizen of the world in Germany" (Int.40).

In the opinion of this pupil, the identity that civic and German schools in general try to transmit is that of the European citizen, interpreted as the "citizen of the world", therefore a citizen committed to European democratic values that must be spread throughout the world. It is worth noting that most pupils do not give great importance to civic education and do not remember or comment much on it. It is likely also the soft method and content of this discipline in Europe compared to its gravity in the home country that is the cause. There is only one testimony in Italy on that subject:

> *"When I arrived in Italy, one of the first things they told us, and I still remember it, my Italian teacher, who was an ideal person for me, the first thing she told us in the 1st year of secondary school was that the school's role is to form the citizen. Therefore, all teachers converged on this very clear aim"* (Int.16).

Although pupils do not experience civic education in Italy with the same intensity as in Syria, it permeates all teaching and school life beyond the few topics studied in the discipline, inducing newly migrated pupils to perceive themselves as Italian citizens. Therefore, civic education does not cause problems or identity clashes in pupils. Instead, the differences in the historical narration and interpretation emerge on the Palestinian issue, which continues to be an important identitarian point of reference and on which often the Arab and European scholastic official cultures clash.

> *"Against Israel, not only the professors, but all of Egypt. The majority of people, wherever you go, in transports, the people, in general, are really against it. I mean against, they tell you it is ok, anyway, what they are doing now... is wrong, they are killing children, you should not kill children, children are valuable, you cannot do that, they cannot do that, every day they steal another piece of land, etc…. But all of Egypt is talking about this thing... because it is not ... how do you say, everybody has the freedom to talk about this thing, nobody tells you <<you cannot talk about Israel, you cannot do it>>"* (Int.30).

From this statement, it is possible to understand that Arab pupils often experience the widespread culture against anti-Semitism in Italy (and Europe) as a form of censorship of Israeli policy. They are accustomed to living in a society and in a school environment where they can widely and openly criticize the Israeli government. Instead, in Europe, they found a society and school environment in which, generally, expressing opposition to Israel would be labeled as anti-Semitic. Avoiding shifting the discussion to my or others' opinions on the issue, the problem is the ability or inability of European educational institutions to understand a feeling widespread among pupils and to allow a free and open dialogue. Of course, being against the policies of a government is not the same as being against the very existence of an ethnic group on Earth; therefore, equating young students who are worried about the fate of their Palestinian brothers and sisters with Nazis is a dangerous operation that certainly does not contribute to their harmonious identity development. On the contrary, it pushes them to entrench themselves in increasingly extreme positions, making

it easier for them to shift to extremist ideologies in which the political factor is linked to the religious one.

11.6 Teaching methods, attitudes and relationship with families

The interviewees discussed this topic extensively, although their testimonies were not always relevant to the research's focus. Many interviewees discussed the topic by speaking about their experiences in Europe, comparing the teaching methods in their home and host countries, and significant cultural differences emerged that impacted their personalities. Other interviewees spoke about teachers' attitudes and behaviors regarding religion and minorities, and, on this topic, the influence on the construction of pupils' identity in a more strict sense emerged. The most prominent topic regards the difference between the method generally used by Arab teachers, which is based on individual memorization, and the one based on discussion or cooperation (Int.16), which is generally used by European teachers:

> *"In Syria, we do not have the... this education that we are in the classroom, and ok, you can tell us your opinion, and everyone can tell his opinion or her opinion"* (Int.37).

The teaching method based on memorization is reflected in the method of pupils' evaluation, which is based on written exams, and tends to create personalities that are unaccustomed to expressing themselves in public:

> *"It is based on the written, not oral, so many students, even those who arrive at university, cannot speak in front of many people; they are not used to it because there are no oral exams. They are not used to it, they are used to learning by heart, in fact, many learn the lessons by heart to pass the exams"* (Int.12).

In this regard, the Arab countries considered appear homogenous, with a method based on memorization of school texts (Int. 10; 28), especially in the humanities (Int. 08; 19) and, in particular, in history (Int.13; 14; 16; 30; 32; 33):

> *"My father has a big library at home, I started to read when I was 10 years old and when she [the teacher] spoke about something in history, sometimes I said more things, I did not say no, I said more, and she said <<no! You do not have to say more because it is enough, the information here>>. I say <<no, I read that in a book of my father>>. Yes, but she was not bad, she was good, but we had a lot of discussions between us"* (Int.41).

Of course, there are some exceptions (Int. 14; 20; 30), but the interviewees themselves talked about these teachers as exceptions, confirming a dominant model based on book memorization that does not stimulate pupils to ask, question, or add their own ideas. On the contrary, it represses them, giving the message that all one needs to know is what is written in the book, inducing unreflective

personalities and conformist behaviors, and thus a personal identity built only on what is transmitted and not also on personal re-elaboration:

> *"[The teachers] cannot say what the book does not say; I think the book, the government make this book and teachers have to teach us what is in this book and to affect us with it. For example, our government want to say something and... We will bring these kids, and the kids have to copy this information without thinking. It is political, but... We start in school to learn not to think, not to form opinions or personalities, and we grow up with these things...."* (Int.39).

When pupils move to a European education system, they often appreciate the differences in the method. Nevertheless, they need time to adapt to a new approach that gives the responsibility of the content learned to the pupils themselves:

> *"In Syria, there was this school book that there are like... Questions, and at the end of the lesson, when we come back home and answer the questions, you learn by heart what the lesson is, and that is. Here you have to be creative, you have to write an essay, you have to research … Even when you got the exam you have like 3 questions, which are all longer answers and not... just like one, yes, these for me are the biggest differences. They are positive in my opinion, but it needs time to adapt to them […]. We had a discussion, and they said ok, would to like to read something about this or research this, and it was very much... Like there is a lot of responsibility, something I also did not always have because it is very new to me, it was very difficult to adapt"* (Int.40).

In sciences, people experienced the difference already in primary school (Int.08). The difference is between a method in which the notion is given and pupils are only required to learn it, and a method in which the pupils have to build their knowledge through observation and discovery:

> *"I am learning a lot about the school system, also about teaching methods, and we find out that things in Germany are more or less taught by trying out things, exploring things on your own, while in our school system, it is more like lecturing and memorising"* (Int.36).

The difference is between a scientific teaching that discusses diverse theories and one that does not, which means the teachers' effort in developing a critical way of thinking and the skill of questioning official truths or the teachers' effort to transmit existing knowledge without building the skill to create new knowledge. Despite most people preferring the European one, someone also complains about the fact that pupils could also learn something by heart, for example, the chemical elements table (Int.48). This shows us the distance between a mindset that views learning as knowing and one that views learning as knowing how to apply knowledge. Also, the method of teaching foreign languages plays a role in this regard. The method of teaching foreign languages in public schools is often of poor quality:

"In French, I remember well that my teacher used a traditional method […]he did not start from the alphabet, for example, he gave us a text, then he read, and then he told us to read. So, it was really difficult for us" (Int.15).

This method presumes that people already know the language and that children are bilingual, creating a sense of inadequacy in Arab children who are not bilingual. For this antiquated and discriminatory method, French is often still experienced today as the most difficult subject (Int.23) and the one that creates the most discomfort, as it is for Syrian refugees in Lebanon (Int.05). The same is sometimes true for the English language (Int. 29). In all subjects, the method based on individual memorization and the strict and continuous evaluation of learning results creates a competitive environment, of which parents become very aware when they compare it with the environment in European schools:

"There is no competition here. I also agree that the education system here is much better than the one we had at home. But, according to the lack of competition, I think this is more positive. Of course, I was a teacher there, and now I get to know the system here. In Syria, everybody was supposed to be good at school. It was forbidden to be bad at school. And we were putting a lot of pressure on weak students because they had to improve and succeed. Here they acknowledge that there are people who just do not have more capabilities. So the lack of competition is positive because every child works on himself as well as he can" (Int.48).

The method contributes to the strict channeling and selectivity of Arab schools, and the last contributing factor is the attitude and behavior of teachers. The following quote paints a good picture of the "classical" Arab teacher:

"Professors were a bit old fashioned at the time; they tried to maintain that role of... professor, detached. […] a semi-imam in the Arab vision. Thus, put this together with the fact that we were undisciplined and many resources were lacking, and therefore tension was created. Professors are always tense, on alert... maybe ready to... get angry, to shout, it created a tension... also because they cared about their prestige, their honour, the honour code always entered there... in everything they did" (Int.08).

The teacher's figure is more authoritarian and traditional than in the Italian school, as people note:

"Here there is one thing that struck me, for example, I see my brother who goes to school here now and calls the teacher "you", something that was not even conceivable with us, no. The teacher had always to be called "sir". The form of "sir" was given from the beginning […] There was really a... by the way, obviously... a terror regime from this point of view, that is, when the teacher came into the classroom, regardless of anything, he was the teacher" (Int.16).

This difference in teacher habits leads some interviewees to speak about the Italian teachers' weaknesses of character, even if they are considered good teachers (Int.30), or to speak about the

lack of respect for teachers compared to the respect they have in their countries, which also leads to perceiving school as simpler (Int.43). Someone also perceives Syrian teachers as more prepared than the Italian ones (Int.20). Many other interviewees appreciated the attitudes and behaviours of the European teachers they met.

> *"One thing that struck me in comparison with here in Italy is the teacher's role. That is, the teacher's role is radically different in the sense that the teacher really marks you, that is... There was a teacher-disciple relationship very different. In the sense that they have a relationship of... Much more trust that at certain points comes to a paternal relationship. That is... They are much more... teach you a lot and demand also a lot, therefore... yes, also, for example, the physical contact here, in Italy, is not too much contemplated, there, instead, it is more probable that maybe if you make a mistake with the teacher you get a reprimand, or even act with hands"* (Int.16).

The Arab teachers' attitude in some of the interviews is characterized by patriotism and pride for Arab identity and history (Int.04). However, in most of the interviews, it is linked with offensive, aggressive, and violent behaviour (Int. 02, 05, 06, 10, 17, 19, 23-25, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 39, 44, 45, Focus group1). Even in positive descriptions and good memories, this trait is present:

> *"One who particularly marked me was my Arabic and Islamic education teacher. He was my mentor, so to speak […]. He had a very, very friendly approach, and this helped us a lot. […] he made very serious lessons, he was a person who, however, when he explained it was very hard, he demanded a lot and raised his hands too much, but after the lesson, he was another person. We always played football together, that is, he was the type who, as soon as the lesson was over, went to play football together, and he made many trips but in a friendly way without school organisation. I remember this. He arranged things with us; we went out, we had cultural and sports competitions and he established a relationship with us like no other"* (Int.16).

Despite some exceptions (Int. 20-22, 29), this violent attitude is present in most experiences. There is only one case of violent teachers' attitudes in Italy (Int.17) without a corresponding case in Germany and Sweden, although interviewees highlighted many negative behaviors of other kinds in all three countries. Other pupils complain about teachers in Arab countries exhibiting materialistic behavior, emphasizing the imposition of private tuition, especially in Egypt:

> *"Unfortunately, we have this kind of professor, especially in the last years, who have become very material, very materialistic that you hate, when you see him, you hate him because he is not... He does not care so much about teaching children, about children, but more than anything else, he cares about money […]. Luckily, there is the family behind the boy […] we paid much money […] they forced you to take private tuitions […]. It was a bad experience because they said <<Oh, well... Are you with me in private lessons? >>. <<No, sir, I am not with you>> so << all right, let us see, see you next semester, let us see how it goes next semester>> and flunked you"* (Int.30).

The family's economic status appears to be a determining factor in pupils' school experience, having a significant impact on teachers' behavior with pupils in most countries (Int.9; 30). Some interviewees also underscored that it is a consequence of teachers' difficult working conditions, poorly paid (Int.14; 30; 32; 33) and scarcely supported by educational institutions and the State:

> *"It was the 1st year and the 1st class. It was very difficult for me. I still remember how difficult it was. The children were crying; they wanted to go home […] I have the book to be finished in some time; I have a schedule that it should be finished. And when I went to the principal and said <<I cannot, I need a supporter, just to look at the exercises it takes all hour>> they just laughed and said <<Cannot you handle a class? >>. I told him: <<it is not about handling a class, it is 50 new children in the school, they need care, and they need something else>>. But he and the support assistant were laughing at me a lot. So, I went to them 2 or 3 times, and they were just laughing and did not take me seriously, so I stopped seeking them"* (Int. 32; 33).

Often, social status appears to be more important than the wealth of a family in determining the behavior of teachers towards their pupils. Teachers are more cautious with European pupils (Focus Group 1) and with the children of people with political responsibility (Focus Group 2):

> *"So... all my teachers knew my dad... (Laugh) I had never been bitten in school, as never been punished, I never did something to be punished, but if there is something that everybody is punished for this, then I was an exception"* (Int.32).

Especially in small communities, where everyone knows each other, family affiliation strongly influences teachers' behavior, characterized by favoritism (Int.8). Particularly in Syria, parental social status means overall political affiliation:

> *"Most of the students, they are part of this Party [Ba'th], but we were not, my father was against this […] we have this teacher that is Arab, with the government, and she knew that I am not in this Party, I am not active in this Party so... we were discriminated by this"* (Int.33).

In general, beating pupils is forbidden, but parents hardly denounce teachers who have relationships with the government:

> *"You cannot in the rules; if one does, for example, and my father goes to the ministry or to a lawyer and does something, the teacher or the professor cannot work anymore. Nevertheless, nobody does and everybody... this example... this professor has a friend who works in the government... everybody among them works together like this, none against them, and the government does anything"* (Int.19).

It is the same in Libya (Int.07) and Lebanon (Int.5). This teacher's attitude, based on the pupils' family status, pushes them to consider their family belonging as more important than their effort in studying to succeed, promoting the formation of personalities who mistrust their abilities. In

Tunisia and Egypt, however, the theme of teachers' attitudes and behaviours relates more to religion. Some interviewees highlighted the attitude of certain teachers (not religious teachers) in promoting (Int.30) or preventing radicalism (Int. 15). In general, few people complained about religious teachers' behaviour; at most, they considered the lesson boring (Int.36): in most cases, teachers merely explains the Quran or the Gospel, without stimulating particular discussion. It is possible to resume their attitude in the phrase *"do not ask unnecessary questions"* (Int. 40), which reflects the general attitude of all subjects' teachers, especially in Syria. It is important to note that more critiques have been expressed toward teachers of civic education in Syria (Int.36-39).

The last topic related to teachers' attitudes is minority and language issues, treated in deep in the dedicated paragraph. Here it is essential to underline that most of the interviewees do not complain about direct discriminatory behaviours of teachers against some particular ethnic or religious groups, saying that they do not remember anything like this (Int.37). The two exceptions are Libya, where teachers exhibit a strong racist attitude (Int.7), and Lebanon, where Syrian refugee pupils experience more discriminatory behaviors and greater preferences based on family status compared to all teachers in all the countries involved, both Arab and European. The interviewees' defensive attitude emerges when they are asked a direct question about it, as they aim to demonstrate that they come from an education system that is not discriminatory. However, they describe situations and behaviors that are discriminatory in practice, even if teachers never explicitly said anything discriminatory. Many Kurdish pupils in Syrian schools experienced practical discrimination, which often manifests itself in the indirect form of non-recognition of Kurdish children's identity and rights issues (Int. 19; 39). No discrimination, either directly or indirectly, based on religion was reported regarding the educational experiences in the home countries; instead, the interviewees often emphasized that they found the same or a higher level of discrimination in Europe. The message they care about transmitting is that European professors are not less discriminatory than Arab ones in their attitudes and behaviours. Leaving aside the positive exceptions of particularly inclusive teachers and the negative extreme of particularly racist teachers, the typical European teacher's attitude toward newly migrated pupils is summarised in this statement:

> *"He is always a 'lacking' person, who must adapt himself, he alone, he is the one who must achieve something […] The child is labelled as the one who has to adapt, the one who is lacking and therefore at a disadvantage. The things he brings with him are not valued. His experience abroad is not valued […]. What I would like about all children of foreign origin is that teachers go beyond what is known, beyond prejudices, and beyond the stereotyped ideas they confront children with. I would like more openness, a different attitude, more welcoming"* (Int.42).

A part from some exception from Italy, in which pupils experience violence from teachers (Int. 43, 17), in all three European countries, there is a physical distance between pupils and teachers that is different from what they were used to (Int.11). Typically, in Europe, teachers are limited in their actions by the parents, who pretend to and are required to have a role in the school education of their children and often protect them from punishment, so much so that many parents speak about a lack of respect for teachers by local pupils, particularly in Italy and Sweden (Int.43). Even in Germany, pupils feel that they can have a freer relationship with teachers:

> *"This system that is freer basically, I had not to stand up all the time when the teacher comes, and I have not like answer a question"* (Int.40).

The type of relationship in this quote relates to the method used; in all three countries, parents and pupils appreciate the discussion and the effort in stimulating critical thinking. Writing freely is not so simple for people whom schools have always asked to memorize and repeat without personal elaboration. Pupils appreciate this method, but they need time to understand how to write and argue, especially in Germany, where so much importance is given to that. A German peculiarities that parents appreciate but also have difficulty dealing with is the focus on children's independence and autonomy:

> *"Here, the grade consists of the child´s behaviour in the class, his dealings with everyone, and his arrangement of his things. Unfortunately, my children depend on me. I mean, my son, if I do not prepare his bag, he does not do it. I am who collects his colour pens. He does not do it. I think his school grades will remain low because of his mess. I wish they did not care about this stuff. I mean, they do not give grades on the organisation or do not consider it, especially since they are still children. But when you look at the other children, you find them arranged, here I realise that the problem is in the behaviour of my children"* (Int.50).

In this difficulty, it is possible to see two different conceptions of what it means to be a good mother: a Nordic conception, which means teaching children to do things by themselves, and a Mediterranean one, which means doing things for them. Indeed, Arab parents and pupils have to face this concept even in Sweden; however, in Italy, this cultural clash does not happen. The other peculiarities of the German teaching method that are underlined are the absence of competition, despite the strict selectiveness and channelling, and the experimental approach (Int.36). From the interviews conducted in Italy, the peculiarities of the cooperative method emerge, which pupils appreciate and through which they can improve their language and establish relationships with classmates (Int.16). In comparison, German teachers are more often depicted as racists and strict than teachers in Italy. However, apart from discrimination, parents and pupils interviewed in Germany generally do not complain about how the teachers work. Instead, in Italy emerged both

extraordinary teachers with a very positive attitude in helping newly-arrived pupils and in managing cultural differences (Int. 08; 09; 16 and many others) or very bad, disorganised (Int.43) and disinterested teachers (Int.30), two extremes that do not emerge concerning German teachers.

11.6.1 School-family relationships

> *"For many parents in Syria, education is not essential, is not as important as in Sweden, for example. You cannot work in Sweden without education, but in Syria, you can work, you can work in a shop, and you can work without papers. Here you should have this paper; you should have to go to school. Therefore, this is bad because many parents do not care about the school […Education] is mandatory, but in villages, you can... […] if you have a farm and you should be there for one month, you can go from school. It is more important than school"* (Int. 32).

This quote compares the social and occupational importance of school in Syria and Sweden, stressing that, in Swedish culture, it is essential to send children to school. In contrast, this is not the case for Syrian families, where work is often more important than study. In reality, it is not generalizable for all Syrian or Arab families, but it is typical for the poorer families in the countryside. If there is this difference in how families view schools, there are also important differences in how teachers relate to families in Syria and Sweden:

> *"Teachers in Syria focused on the negative side of pupils in the relation between school and family, and it affected pupils who lose self-confidence and parents who feel shame. It was a negative relationship. Here teachers focused on the positive sides of the students, and this support pupils and encourages parents"* (Focus group 1).

It is possible to see how, on the Arab side, some families do not care about their children's schooling and schools often discourage families, whereas on the European side, there are families very interested in schooling and schools that encourage families to support pupils. This dichotomy reflected the more common idea about school-family relationships in European and Arab countries. Although it is possible to find it within the interviewees' experiences, it is also possible to find different experiences that question this dichotomy and deepen the topic beyond this reality that, if generalised, became a stereotype. A young boy from a well-off family (Int.30) speaks about how his family judged the school he attended and the teachers that taught him, giving him the trust to choose whether it was a good education or not. This middle-class family shares the Swedish families' idea that schooling is important for finding a good job, reflecting a habitus of the middle class rather than an approach influenced by ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Indeed, the same attitude was found in all the interviews conducted with people of this socio-economic group,

without differences between nationality, ethnicity, and religious belonging. The ethnic and linguistic position of families within society let them add other goal relating to education:

> *"My dad always told us "As Kurds, you should be educated, you should have an education". This was our goal that I should study because if I do not study, I do not know what will happen"* (Int.32).

Some families from ethnic minorities within Arab society think that education is a tool to survive in a society ruled by people of another ethnicity and language, similar to what Arab people said about the schooling of newly migrated children in Europe:

> *"The last difference is in the educational goal. When they were pupils in their home countries, their teacher and parents' main goal was to prepare children for a good job. Now, in Italy, they and their pupil's teachers consider an important educational goal also the integration into the host society"* (Focus group 3).

Regarding the influence of parental socio-economic status on school-family relationships, it is possible to summarize the point with this statement:

> *"In Syria, teachers follow only the children of high-level people, for example, an officer's children, of the rich. The poor, in Arab countries, nobody asks about him. He has studied or not; there is no difference. In Italy, instead, in school, there is no distinction between a rich family's child and a poor one; the important thing is that he studies and creates a future. In Syria, teachers distinguish children who are of someone who works in the government, secret service, army, police, administration... these children, even if they do not understand anything, are promoted anyway!"* (Int. 44).

The situation is similar in all the Arab countries considered, with the lack of relationships between schools and families seeming to be a constant, even if it is important to note the difference between public, private and special schools:

> *"In United Nations schools, there is a good relation, but when I study in high school, there is not any relation between my father and my parents and the school. Only when I take my marks, then maybe if I have low marks, they contact... they can come to school"* (Int.34).

In the countryside, the situation appears worse due to the families' disinterest in school attendance in favour of children's work. In reality, this generalisation does not coincide with the experience of some people living in the countryside who care about schooling:

> *"In the countryside, the teacher is one of us, so we talk often and know everything about the school life of our children. It is not the same that in the city"* (Focus Group 1).

In this statement, the problem of the lack of relationship and communication between school and family seems to be more significant in larger cities than in smaller centres, where everyone knows

each other. This is different from Europe, where establishing a functioning relationship with families is a formal duty of the schools.

> *"At primary school, parents bring us to school, but after the 6th degree is a shame for pupils when parents come to school because it happens only for big problems. We are requested to resolve our staff on our own and to tell ourselves what happened to our parents […] When I was a child, my parents did not know how teachers looked like. When my children go to school in Syria, we never go to school too. Parents go to school only if there is one problem. Instead, in Sweden, schools ask us to go to school often, to speak about what is better for our children"* (Focus Group 1).

Families coming from Arab countries are often not accustomed to having a relationship with schools, as in their home countries, it is not required (Int. 25). Parents' presence in school is only required when the child does something very serious; otherwise, pupils bring the results by themselves to their parents, and teachers and parents never speak during the entire school period. Many interviewees reported that the problems for which parents are required to go to school are behavioural (2, 05, 13, 17, 24, and 45). Conversely, no one reported that families are asking to go to school to speak in general about their children when there are no critical issues. Thus, families may need time to adapt to the European model of school-family relationships, even if they often prefer it to that of their country of origin, and all of them care about communicating with teachers about their children:

> *"Whatever concerns my children, I go immediately. On any occasion, even holidays. And when there was something to talk about with the teachers, even if I did not know the language well, I tried anyway; we tried to understand each other"* (Int.47).

In the countries from where parents came, they typically do not have relationships with schools and teachers unless something dire happens. Therefore, it is understandable that when schools in Sweden, Germany, or Italy asked parents to go to school, they were worried. It takes time for them to get used to a constant relationship. Despite the positive differences in relationships in Europe, even here the issue of parental socio-economic and educational level arises as a determining factor:

> *"If parents have not studied much and they come here after 2000 without studying, and they come here, with the technology, and the children can use the telephone, the computer, they also speak French, and the parents have not gone to school, how does it work with the European or let us say Italian system? […]. How can they communicate with schools here in Europe? This is the problem; this is the difficulty for the integration..."* (Int. 01).

Here the focus is on the new technologies used in schools for communicating with families, relating it to families without education, such as many Moroccan ones in Italy. In this case, the families' ability to engage with the school appears to be dependent on their skills and social-

economic position. The pandemic period of schools closures and distance learning has often meant a substantial decrease in communication, especially with newly migrated families who have fewer technological tools (Int.42). In Italy, it is one of the major topics discussed in interviews, showing a structural weakness of Italian schools regarding technology and the digital gap affecting newly arrived families. Instead, in Germany and Sweden, they do not experience this as a significant problem, both because schools in those countries have not worked online for such a long time and because refugees who are teachers, engineers, and doctors, such as many Syrians in Sweden and Germany, do not experience this kind of problems.

An interesting ambiguity in the relationship between schools and parents regarding gender issues exists. If, in their home country, the mother appears to be in charge of the children's education (Int. 03; 41), in Europe, teachers usually speak about the father's predominance in the relations with school, assuming that the motivation is the Arabs' or Muslims' patriarchal culture. However, this is not the motivation given by this Moroccan woman:

> *"It is because often in families the father works; he is in contact with the outside world and knows better the language. Therefore, they often want to meet the father because it is easier; there is not the same linguistic difficulty. The mother usually stays at home; therefore, most foreign mothers do not speak Italian. Therefore, there is difficulty to relate to mothers because often they are the ones who know less the language but also the culture. […] Then, often the woman does not have a car, so she cannot say <<I can accompany my son>>"* (Int. 42).

It is possible to see how a socio-economic condition, that of a woman who does not work and does not have a car, is misrepresented by the educational institution as a culturally motivated ideological choice. The socio-economic condition of newly migrated women relegates them to social isolation, and in cases such as this, the school cooperates by asking to speak to fathers since they know Italian better. Anyway, the major issue in the relationship between newly migrated families and schools in Europe is the language of communication itself.

In Italy, when scholastic institutions, or more often asylum seekers centres, offer families a linguistic and cultural mediation service, they appreciate it and the communication is positive and effective (Int. 42-47). In many cases, schools put efforts into building relationships with newly migrated parents, contacting them often, looking for cultural mediators, repeating information multiple times, and trying to learn about the culture and internal dynamics of the family. Regarding religion, most parents experienced respect in the way schools relate to them. In Germany, parents more often recount negative experiences of exclusion and discrimination, in which meeting with the teachers with the help of a mediator did not yield any results. In such cases, the only solution was to move the child to another class with a different teacher.

"The second teacher had some empathy for me, but the first one did not at all. The first one, she did not want me to attend parents' assemblies. She told me I would write to you about our discussion and the outcome. […] At the first time, I went there, and I did not understand everything. So, I asked her to explain some words [...] She told me, I will send you the contents of our discussion later. And she did. But after that, she would only write <<We had a meeting, and these are the points discussed and the outcome>>. So, she also excluded me, not only my son" (Int.48).

In such cases, it is not a communication failure, but rather a specific problem of discrimination that depends on the individual teacher, as demonstrated by the satisfactory relationship established with the second one. What should lead to reflection is that the educational institution has not activated any form of mediation in the relationship between teachers and parents, so it depends on the teacher, and has not sought a solution to prevent the teacher in question from perpetuating this behaviour, thus causing the problem to reoccur with other newly migrated pupils. The language remains to be the central issue in the relationship between schools and families in Germany, but in this country, more issues directly related to values emerge:

"I really had a situation related to values […] When I asked the teacher about my son, she said <<I want to complain about your son>>. I said <<Ok. What happened? >>, and she said <<Whenever somebody falls to the ground, he will go and help him get up. If somebody cries, he will go and ask what the matter is. If I come into the classroom with a lot of books in my arm, he will get up and ask if he can help>>. I said <<Is this really a complaint? Or is it something positive? In our country, it is very positive to help somebody who needs help. It is an attribute we like about people>>. She said <<No, no! This is called interference. If somebody falls down it is none of his business, and if somebody does not have a pen, it is his responsibility. Your son should not interfere>>" (Int.48).

This is an extreme example, with no other comparison, but it is helpful in showing the feelings of Arab parents when they encounter an educational system like the German one, in which pupils' autonomy and independence are highly valued and teachers strive to build their capacity to manage their daily questions independently. It is something often experienced by people from Arab culture as individualism in a negative sense, something that they do not agree to transmit to their children. This cultural difference is also reflected in this statement:

"It seems nobody has time. Everybody is busy with himself. It took me a great effort to ask for the way to the headmaster's office, but in the end, I got there" (Int.48).

This kind of cultural friction between the host society's more individualistic culture, characterised by haste, and the more relaxed Arab culture, based on community more than on individuals, clearly appears only in the interviews conducted in Germany. It never appears in those conducted in Italy

or Sweden. The experiences of school-family relationships in Sweden can be instead summarised in the following statement:

> *"The school in Sweden is different compared with the Syrian, but this has not meant any problems. Rather, it has given us, as parents, and our children a broader view of education – and to us, education is central! The civilizational task is an ongoing project for us, and this task is mutual in the school–home relation"* (Int.49).

The difference in the education system is not experienced as a problem; on the contrary, it stimulates parents and children to reflect on education and broaden their perspectives in trying to understand the pedagogical project of the host country's education. This interviewee shares the school's general civilizational task and lives it as a joint project shared with teachers. Despite this, not all parents are very satisfied with this relationship:

> *"The teacher said only at the end of the year that my son was not good at school. I asked why she said only at the end of the year. There is a lack of communication because it is ok to focus on the positive things, but parents used to more direct and explicit communication, would think that really all go well"* (Focus Group 1).

This Syrian teacher stressed a problem with communication style: teachers in Syria focus on negative aspects, whereas teachers in Sweden focus on positive ones. If many migrants have seen this as a positive change, some have experienced difficulties understanding that their children have learning problems. They are used to the Syrian teachers' way of communication, which is direct and explicit, and focuses all the communication on the child's problems. In Sweden, there is a polite communication style in which teachers focus on the child's positive features and only at the end, when discussing less important things, do they refer to learning problems. Due to a different communicative style, parents come home thinking there are no major issues because they cannot comprehend what problems their children are facing in school. Thus, what is considered a polite communication can be perceived as a lack of clarity. If this is related to a Swedish communicative style, the same lack of clarity emerges in Italy:

> *"They never called me; they told me he was good. Maybe they did it on purpose to flunk him because it was the first time he had arrived and therefore he should not go on immediately but do another year, to learn Italian better"* (Int.03).

This pupil's teachers never called his mother or informed her that her son had learning problems, and ultimately, they failed him without providing clear explanations, either during the school year or at its end. She has to discover the cause of his failure on her own, without the teachers attempting to find a solution during the year. The same situation can be found in Germany:

"I know that our girl does not do well at school. Moreover, whenever we ask them to motivate her, they tell us it is all fine. However, it clearly is not. There must be honesty in their feedback. Why do not they suggest extra lessons or tell us how we could probably support her, so she improves? How we can find a way to motivate her and not just leave her alone?" (Int.48).

Even in this case, teachers do not communicate with parents about their children's learning problems. Apart from the polite communication style, which is not an Italian peculiarity, there is also a prediction of failure by teachers behind this problem. They predict that the pupil will fail because they do not believe he knows the language well enough, so they consider it futile to engage with the parents in an attempt to help him improve. In addition, it must be considered that newly migrated families moved from a school system in which the norm is to trust teachers without discussing to a school system in which it is increasingly common to questioning teachers. As some Arab teachers in Sweden state:

"When I was in school, my parents trusted teachers so much; now, parents protect pupils and do not trust teachers so much. When you, as a teacher, do something here, you have to aspect a reaction <<What do you do with my children>>" (Focus group 1).

Migrant families experience two extremes: one in which they have a subordinate relationship with the school, where teachers have superior authority, and the opposite one, where teachers lose credibility and authority in the eyes of families who are overly attentive and ready to point out any deficiency or lack. Compared to these European families, Arab families appear to be not interested in their children's education, but this is more a perception held by European teachers than a reflection of the reality of parents' thoughts. They may not be used to having a dialogic relationship with teachers, but this does not mean that they are not interested in their children schooling. In fact, when teachers make an effort to establish a positive relationship, parents often appreciate:

"Here, I always ask the teachers how my daughters are doing, but even without asking, it is the teachers who inform me, they follow the children also at home, and they talk to the mother on the phone. This is what I liked the most. And if, for example, the children have problems with understanding, the mother and the teachers cooperate, they know what the problem is and try to find a solution" (Int.47).

More examples of teachers engaging newly migrated parents emerged in Italy compared with Germany and Sweden. In all three countries, there are cases of good relationships, but in Italy, parents often speak about a personal commitment from teachers that goes beyond their duties. Nevertheless, the main problem in the relationship is the language barrier everywhere:

*"The only problem that makes me uncomfortable is the language! I do not feel that I can make myself understood! The translator was only present at the beginning. […] And, then there were the ** operators. They were the ones who followed the relationships with the school. For example, if there*

*were a family meeting, ** would come with me. They helped us a lot with everything. Then, when we got out of the project, the schoolmates' mothers helped me ensure I understood correctly. I have a special relationship with some mothers. They became like friends […] also with some teachers, we develop at the end a special relationship"* (Int.43).

The best solution is the help of cultural mediators, but in south Italy, a big help seems to come also from other children's mothers. The interviewees in Germany never talk about this help, and many parents state they have a normal relationship with teachers, but rarely a very good or special relationship. The following quote summarises the most widespread feelings among newly migrated parents interviewed in Germany:

"Sometimes I feel they do not prefer to deal with us or do not accept our children in school. Most teachers are like that, I feel like there is a distance between us, maybe because of the language or maybe my feelings are wrong. Maybe because of that, I do not have German friends, and I do not know how to deal with them" (Int.50).

This mother complains about the distance between her and the teachers, even if they do not particularly offend, exclude or discriminate against her, linking this distance with teachers to the social distance with other parents and German people in general. This distance and lack of dialogue led many parents to feel inadequate to fulfil their role as parents in the host society, in which they cannot succeed in integrating:

"I think schools should offer courses on how parents should treat their children. Even if it is only a week or so, parents will be able to understand what they need to do" (Int.48).

From this statement emerges the sense of the inadequacy of this mother, who seems not to know what she has to do as a parent to help her children integrate into school and society. In addition, it shows how school communication is not enough for parents, who need clearer information.

11.7 Minorities' issues

This chapter analyzes the experiences of people belonging to a minority and discusses how scholastic institutions handle linguistic and ethnic minorities. Belonging to an ethnic-linguistic minority appears to cause more trouble than belonging to a religious one, as linguistic difficulties are one of the most commonly addressed. In both Arab and European contexts, belonging to a minority intersects with social roles and economic status, and seems to mainly impact selectiveness and channelling, school-family relationships, the relationships between pupils and the teaching attitude towards pupils.

"I experienced the same in Syria at the university when I moved from my region, Kurdistan. The other pupils asked me if we had cars, forks, etcetera. I was shocked because we are from the same country, but they asked me these questions" (Focus group1).

In this quote, a Kurdish woman comments on Syrian pupils' experience in Sweden, where local pupils interpret Syrian national belonging as economic poverty and backwardness in customs. She states that she experienced the same when she moved from Kurdistan to another Syrian region. It is essential to understand how belonging to a minority can be lived in the same way in countries that are very different from one another, such as Syria and Sweden. Therefore, how pupils, parents, and teachers live as members of a minority within the different contexts encountered in their experiences is analyzed here, focusing on different aspects of school life, such as relationships and selection. Attending an Arab school belonging to a minority, such as Kurds in Syria, is taken into consideration, as well as Arab pupils' experience inside European educational systems and in Arab countries different from their homeland, in which they are members of migrated national minorities, as well as in non-European and non-Arab countries like Israel and Turkey. In this way, it will be possible to compare the different experiences the interviewees have had in different contexts regarding ethnic and linguistic differences in school, beginning with the description of the classes' ethnic composition.

"We all came from the same village; there was nobody... they were all locals, all boys of the same... of the same religion and the same country, there were no foreigners either" (Int.23).

Moroccan pupils are accustomed to attending education in a homogenous context from the perspective of religious and national belonging (Int.25; 26) since their classmates are usually from the same small village as in Tunisia (Int.15). Similarly, in Egypt, Egyptian Muslim pupils do not consider Christians as foreigners or as a minority group, but as local people belonging to a different religion (Int.09).

"They were all Egyptians; yes, foreigners were mostly in Cairo. In my city, however, foreigners have really taken over recently; in the last 5 or 6 years, there was not the concept of a foreigner" (Int.16).

In the biggest Moroccan cities, the experience is a little different. Internal differences are essential in the construction of social identity between classmates, beyond nationalistic rhetoric. In Marrakesh, pupils who come from Casablanca are seen as somewhat foreign, as are the Berber children (Int. 10), even though they manage and live with these differences in a friendly way:

"Morocco is a country similar to America in many ways. It is very rich in culture. If you travel from the North to the South, you will find that they are all different: people in the South may be darker than those

in the North, and those in the North may have a different accent. Those in the North are close to Europe, and have exchanged genetic information with Europeans through emigration. Maybe you will find a person with blonde hair in the North and a person with dark skin and very curly hair in the South. It is different [...] Yes, there was an ethnic difference, not too much though and... We never thought about it, only now that you asked me the question, I am starting to remember some friends who were either dark-skinned or blonde-haired." (Int.13).

Ethnic differences are experienced as variations of the national identity, so that all the different kinds of pupils are considered Moroccan in the same way. Recently, in the classrooms, there have also been pupils from Africa (Int.31). Despite the recent arrival of African people and the different ethnicities pupils are used to in the biggest cities, most Moroccan interviewees at most attend classes with Amazigh pupils, who are Sunni Muslims. Therefore, it is possible to say that pupils in Morocco mainly experienced homogeneous classes in which all the pupils were of the same village and belonged to the same religious community. Moving to Italy, they found an essential difference in the class composition since they had classmates of various origins, nationalities, ethnicities, and religions (Focus Group 3). In Algeria, classrooms are also very homogeneous, partly because migrant African pupils mostly attend private schools, as families consider them to be safer. In Algerian public schools, pupils live in a homogenous environment with regards to religion, since they are all Sunni Muslims, and ethnicity, since the Imazighen component is present only in specific areas and is not taken into consideration in a system based on Arab identity (Int.12). Migrant pupils also prefer private schools in Libya, as the history of Pakistani pupils (Int. 27) and Kurdish Syrian pupils show. Therefore, in private schools there are different nationalities but always the same religion; in public schools, there are different ethnicities, Arab and Amazigh, but always the same religion. The situation in Syria is more complicated and multifaceted, with very different experiences depending on the city and school attended. In Damascus, pupils remember homogenous classes composed of all Arab pupils (Int.17; 18; 38), but through the following quote, it is possible to understand that they may not be aware of the actual ethnic composition of their class:

"I did not know that that girl is Kurdish. I knew when I was in Germany because she was coming to Germany too, and I understood she was Kurdish there. In Syria, they do not speak about it. Also, they do not speak about <<we are Kurdish>> when we are in school or in a football team or sport. Maybe they are scared of the government or so; I do not know" (Int.39)

The government's policy of banning speaking in Kurdish and suppressing debate about internal differences has been so successful in nullifying differences that many people mistakenly believe

they have attended ethnically and religiously homogeneous classes. If there are rarely any migrants, the fundamental thing for integration is that they speak Arabic:

> *"In my class, I remember a girl from Ethiopia, but she speaks Arabic perfectly, and there was not that... difference between us. It was not a problem, nothing"* (Int.20).

The situation is different in other cities, for example, in Homs:

> *"There were Armenians... there were Sharqazi [Circassians], it means a part of Russia... I do not know, if they had a war before and they came, I do not know, I do not remember well this thing, but there is a bigger part in our country, they are blond, so, always beautiful"* (Int.29).

The Circassian minority is evident for their distinct physical traits, but their history is also little known, and they should be considered Syrians without emphasizing the differences.

> *"I was a Kurdish, and there is another, but we have the same religion, not another religion, and in our class, I was Kurdish, and all of the others were Arab, and 2 or 3 were Alawi"* (Int.37).

This woman highlights that in Homs, a stronghold of Sunnism, religious identity is more important than ethnic one, so Muslim Kurdish are more integrated into the classroom than Arab Alawi. The classrooms in the north of Syria are more heterogeneous:

> *"When I was in Afrin, my friends were all Kurds, almost all Kurds. In Aleppo, 60% are Arabs and 30% Kurds... There were also foreigners, from outside, from Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon"* (Int.19).

If in Afrin, they are all Kurds, in Aleppo there is a majority of Arabs, a large group of Kurds, and even pupils of other nationalities. In some cities in Kurdish regions, people attend school with people of other ethnicities and origins:

> *"I was raised in a small city, and this city is an industrial city in Syria, in the northeast of Syria, and there everybody is working, and there is a lot of petroleum there and oils. So there are people from all over Syria, not just Kurdish, are now living there"* (Int.32).

The composition of classrooms in public schools varies greatly from one city to another. It is worth noting that some minorities have their own schools, such as Christian private schools or special schools for refugees. In private schools, pupils come from any background and do not experience any form of discrimination (Int.32). For example, Armenian Christian schools welcome Arab Christian pupils (Int.11; 41). Refugees do not attend national public schools, but rather have their own schools for the lower grades, such as the United Nations schools for Palestinians:

"There are mostly Palestinians, so when we came to the classroom in public school, we, most of the class, are the same we were in the United Nations school. Three or four in every class from the public, Syrian, came to study. The majority is Palestinian" (Int.34; 35).

Palestinian pupils live in the same neighbourhood and attended separate primary and middle schools; when the United Nations program ended, they enrolled in public high schools in which they are the majority. The situation is different for refugees from the Golan:

"Those who came from there, he was Circassian that was my ethnicity and Alawite... It is like a minority in Syria, and this minority is the minority in my schools, but there were no Palestinians or Kurdish people. […] Most of the children in this area have some family or partner from there, but it is a generation back, these children are... people fled this Golan in... '60. Moreover, children were born in the '90, so there are big generational differences, but somehow we have these schools there that still are schools for the children of these refugees. […]. We did not have art and sports classes, it was very much ignored; they were not a priority, art, sport, music and subject like these. Nothing, we did not have any stuff, sometimes there were teachers and sometimes not and I thought it was the case for everyone, but I learnt later that it is not the case for everyone. Other schools in Damascus were better, so... I think it was because it was for refugees, but I am not sure" (Int.40).

This particular refugee minority has been in Syria for 60 years, yet they continue to attend separate schools. In contrast to the excellent Palestinian schools, these schools are worse than regular public schools. Despite the heterogeneity of Syrian society, due to the government's desire to flatten differences and the existence of private and special schools for specific categories, most Syrian pupils only experience multi-ethnic and multicultural classrooms during migration:

"There are also different religions, cultures, that in Lebanon come from many places, it is not like in Syria, yes in Syria maybe you find one or two that are from outside, and that is […] We are Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese together" (Int.21).

This pupil experienced the Lebanese classroom as more intercultural than the Syrian one, and other pupils highlighted how in Lebanon they have met people from different places and with different looks (Int.20). It is interesting to compare their experience in Lebanon with that in the small Italian village in which they are now living. A pupil stated that Lebanese schools are a multicultural environment, whereas the Italian one is homogenous, as the only other foreigner in her class is her brother (Int. 20). This is the result of being welcomed in a small village in southern Italy, where at most there are some other refugee pupils from the same refugee center (Int. 21; 27). It is possible to understand the vast differences in the experiences of Arab pupils who attended school in Rome:

"At primary school, they told me there was this middle school very close then another school, much closer to my house. [...] I decided to go to the closest one, which, let us say, did not have a good reputation and then I learned later that it did not have a good reputation because of the presence... of foreigners... Then, after these 3 years, I discovered that this school had a wonderful teaching staff, impeccable […]. Well, the presence of foreigners obviously penalised in part, both from the point of view of reputation and from the didactic one. Because with a not uniform class, it is difficult to maintain a constant and fast didactic rhythm. So yes, on the one hand, it penalised but, on the other hand, I must say that it was an enrichment from the mental horizons' point of view (laughs)... this is undeniable. […]. I was the only Arab, yes... There were Chinese, Filipinos, Bengalis then... maybe Cape Verde... ah... yes, there were... there was really a variety" (Int.16).

Firstly, it is worth noting the ghettoization of pupils with a migrant background in the school with the bad reputation, while chiefly Italians attend other schools. The second point is that this pupil, coming from a homogenous school environment like the Egyptian one, strongly appreciates the possibilities that a so heterogeneous environment gives him to know other cultures. It was possible thanks to a good teaching staff capable of managing these cultural differences as a resource rather than a problem. The environment dramatically changed when he enrolled in the most prestigious type of high school in Italy, that is, the classical:

"In high school, then this thing changed radically because having gone to a classical high school, there was not even a foreigner in my class, so I was the only foreigner, let us say..." (Int.16).

Probably all of his classmates had enrolled in technical or vocational schools, and he found himself to be the only one with a migratory background. This relates to the selection that occurs during the educational path, in which newly arrived pupils are mostly channelled towards technical and vocational schools. This selection works strictly in Germany, where the composition of the classes attended by the interviewees is connoted in a way that correlates ethnicity and social role. In the *Wilkommenclass* that newly arrived pupils have to attend to learn the German language, there are, of course, only pupils with a migratory background:

"They are from... Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, not Israel people, Palestinian people. When they come from Israel, they are not flushing or refugees, but when they come as Palestinian, they became... they do not have documents... if you know what I mean... they are Arabs, and they were in my class and... I have three friends, and one of them is from Iraq. I think it is a mistake in the German education system because I came here to learn German, not Arabic, and if I stay with people who speak Arabic like me and do not know how to speak German, I do not learn German. I learn Iraqi, that is also Arabic, and it does not make sense" (Int.39).

In this welcoming class, there are only newly migrated pupils, but even of a particular kind. They are all not Europeans and come from Arab or Eastern countries such as Afghanistan, and overall they are refugees, not "normal" migrants like those who came from Israel. In the interviewee's opinion, this class composition does not help pupils who have recently arrived in Germany to learn the German language; that is why they are there. Indeed, to communicate with her classmates, she could use Arabic, which is the language they have in common, despite the national differences. Attending a multicultural and multilingual class, as in the case of the Egyptian pupil in Italy, helps pupils manage their inclusion in the host society, thanks to the confrontation with different people. Here, for her, it is like going to an Arab school. When she left the welcome class and enrolled in the Hauptschule, which is technical, she faced the same situation:

> *"There are German in schools, but, in my class, there were not. Only Syrian, or Turkish, or so, we have to speak in German naturally. We were 8 people. Yes, only 8 people in my class […] and nobody from Germany: Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Afghanistan 2, Kurdish people and... However, all of them speak Germany very well. It was not my goal, my point, to have German friends, I did not focus on where this one came from; I want to take this certificate"* (Int.39).

In this classroom, all people come from southeastern countries, which means they are refugees or migrants from poor countries. They speak the language well, as they succeeded in the welcome class' selection, but there is no inclusion or socialization with German peers. This woman states that she is not interested in having German friends, but in any case, it is a limitation regarding social life. The last environment is the Gymnasium:

> *"From Germany, one person from Iraq was a refugee like me, and the others were, all of them were German. Half German with a migrant background, for example from Egypt but he was born in Berlin, from Ukraine but she was born in Berlin and Turkish but born in Berlin"* (Int.39).

Here, all people except for her and one other are born in Germany, even though there is a representation of the multiculturalism of German society, with half of the students having a different cultural background. Nevertheless, the composition of the classrooms has clearly shown the results of the channelling and selection to which refugees and newly arrived migrants are subjected in both Italy and Germany.

11.7.1 Channelling and Selectiveness

This subchapter relates to how minorities experience selection and channelling in the various education systems they attend, first as members of local historical communities and then as migrants. Regarding local historical communities, the biggest discrimination emerges in Syria for the Kurdish minority. The first difference between them and other local communities is that in the

Kurdish region, there were no private schools (Int.32), so they had to be enrolled by force in the public schools, unlike the Armenians, who have the benefit of the Christian religion that allows them to have their own Armenian Christian school. Kurdish pupils have to attend public schools and pass through the strict selection process based primarily on the Arabic language:

> *"For those who are not Arabs, it is too difficult. Because of these students, where I was, the Kurds, 50% of those who leave school are not because they cannot study the Arabic language; 50% for Arabic language they cannot continue. Maybe he studies well in mathematics or other things, but Arabic language he cannot... maybe his family does not speak Arabic, or maybe he speaks Arabic, but the rules of Arabic grammar are difficult for him"* (Int.19).

As the Arabic language is an essential subject, Kurdish pupils who must learn it in primary school without speaking it at home are often failing, even if they are very good in other subjects, and they often leave school due to their continuous failure in the Arabic language. This early selection also depends on the family's status. The student in this quote came from a well-off family; his parents spoke Arabic and helped him. The poorer families with low educational levels do not have this possibility, so ethnic belonging is linked to a family's social and economic condition in determining Kurdish pupils' scholastic success or failure. In all the other Arab countries considered, the topic of scholastic selection based on ethnicity does not arise regarding historical communities, but it is worth noting that no Amazigh pupils in Morocco have been interviewed. Instead, Amazigh people who attended school in Libya do not report discrimination in terms of selection and channelling. A specific case is the Arab community in Israel, where university selection discriminates against Arabs:

> *"The quality is different. It is something that one can expect because it is the second-hand curriculum. The Jewish state has certain... it has a stronger interest in... You could see it also in universities; Jewish students' preparation and that of the Arab ones was different. It took me 2 years until I entered university to try again; there are admission tests that... That is, you struggle a little bit when you come out of the Arab school to catch up with those who came out of Hebrew high school"* (Int.08).

Arab people living in Israel have the right to attend Arab schools with their own curricula, which neither the Kurds in Syria nor the Amazighs in Maghreb enjoy. Unfortunately, however, this right turns out to be a tool for selection, becoming an obstacle when Arab pupils want to enroll in national universities, where students who have attended Arab schools have great difficulties entering. If these are the discriminations in selection experienced by pupils who belong to minorities in their home countries, far more numerous and multifaceted are those experienced by migrant pupils in both Arab and European countries. Regarding Morocco, only a Ganesian educator deals with this issue, explaining that the Moroccan school system does not recognize

African pupils' and students' degrees and marks, even if they are good students and pupils, so they cannot achieve the same results as Moroccans (Int.31). This is one of the biggest problems for migrant people in Lebanon, a country in which belonging to a migrant minority has a significant impact on school selectivity:

> *"They are outside school because they are new refugees. The government in Lebanon and the UN does not make a school for them. We started to give methods in Arabic; the alphabet in English; how you write your name in Arabic; writing your name in English; what is the tree and apple; we give in Arabic, simple sentences in Arabic, and simple sentences in English and after they go to school"* (Int.41).

This Syrian teacher is speaking about his experience as a volunteer in a refugee camp. He taught Arabic and English to children for years, some of them succeeded in entering Lebanese schools, other migrated to Europe. There are no special schools for them, and Lebanese schools are not ready to welcome them:

> *"When I went to Lebanon, I did not… I worked. In Lebanon, one important thing is that they are racist, especially against Syrians, in school and outside; that is why they are racist […]. The Lebanese kids go at school in the morning, and when they finish the Syrians go, they do not study together, the Syrians study alone"* (Int.17).

This 18-year-old boy stopped studying in Lebanon when he had to go to middle school due to the racism in Lebanese schools and society, which was visible even in the separation between Syrian and Lebanese pupils in morning and afternoon shifts.

> *"People in Lebanon said that they do not want Syrians to study at school with them, and so the 1st year... the first 2 years I did not study. Because they did no like that we study and they said that we are not good, and if we have to go to school with them it is bad [...]. I said <<make me go to school in the afternoon>> because there is an afternoon shift, and they said <<no, also the afternoon shift is for the Lebanese>>; I said ok. However, in the last 2 years, they let me enter, but in the other village that there is... there are not so many people there... and so, in the afternoon, it is not morning. Even there, when I was sitting, there were only... 3 Syrian girls, only 2 girls to study, but they do not want Syrians in the class, you understand, in the school exactly, so they said no. Then I moved to another place […] I went there, and the first teacher told me <<you cannot study because there were already 2 girls>> and I said OK because I tried many times to study but nothing. After 2-3 months, they said you can came but in the afternoon"* (Int.22).

This young pupil did not surrender to rejections and continued to persist until she was able to attend an afternoon shift; however, in the meantime, she lost 2 years of school. It is easy to understand how belonging to Syria in Lebanon is an obstacle to entering school and then succeeding in it, even because, as this girl states, teachers do not want them in the classrooms. As

in Morocco for African pupils, school certificates' non-recognition contributes to selection and does not allow children to attend the age-appropriate class (Int. 21). For pupils who have already lost years of school due to the war and then had to wait to enter Lebanese school, having to repeat a class they have already attended is a further loss of time, and is experienced as a lack of recognition of their abilities and skills, something that belittles and demotivates them. In Libya, discrimination based on nationality appears in the selection process at the university level:

> *"They did not let me choose because there was a university in Libya that teaches medicine, and there were almost only 1000 chairs, and they gave my chair to a Libyan student. I was a foreigner, they say, one gives that chair to a Libyan student, not to a foreigner, and there was no government to control. Everyone could do what they want; it is a country after the war, and so"* (Int.19).

After experiencing discrimination against his Kurdish ethnicity in Syria, his Syrian nationality constituted an obstacle for him to continue his education in Libya, despite it being an Arab country and despite him having attended Libyan scientific high school with good results. If this is how refugees from Arab countries are treated in other Arab countries, there are different ways of handling school admissions based on nationality and status in Europe. In Italy, there is no selection at the level of admission, so everyone has the right to enroll in public schools. On the other hand, often migrants attend the classroom corresponding to their age without any support, so discriminatory selection occurs during the subsequent years. For example, as her mother tells, no Italian course was offered to a Moroccan pupil either before they entered an Italian school or during the school year, so at the end of the year, teachers decided to fail them so that they could have more time to learn the language (Int.03). A lack of adequate school services results in pupils failing, unable to become equal to their classmates in one year. Other schools opted for better strategies:

> *"I did 4th and 5th in one year, first semester 4th and second-semester 5th, yes"* (Int.16).

This pupil arrived in Italy at the age at which typically pupils enroll in middle school. His school preferred to admit him immediately, but into the 4th grade of primary school, doing a semester in the 4th and one in the 5th. The result in years lost is the same as if they had admitted him in the 1st year of middle school and then failed him for a year, but the result in learning achievement and psychological behaviour is different. The boy in the previous quote left school after 2 years of failure; instead, this one enrolled in middle school and had a successful educational path up to enrolling in university. He did not feel that he had failed; on the contrary, he felt that he had been able to catch up two classes in one year and was ready to start the 1st year of middle school the

following year. The case of the failed student concerned a Moroccan migrant, not a refugee. There are some differences in the way migrants and refugees are selected after being admitted:

> *"The 2nd year of middle school was difficult because we did not understand anything of the language, because we arrived 4 months ago and we already went to the 2nd year of middle school, and to speak, to understand, everything is difficult. When we started the 3rd grade, it was a bit difficult because there were arguments to go to high school. After, there was the 3rd-grade final exam, and we found difficulties, but it went well in these 2 years. After we went to high school"* (Int.21).

This Syrian boy entered school directly in the 2nd year of middle school and was able to continue until high school without being failed even though he admitted that he did not understand most things and had great difficulties. In this way, he had the time to learn the language without losing years of school, and finally, in high school, he started to understand and study like his classmates. It is worth saying that the operators of the asylum seekers' centre that welcomed him worked on the relationship with the school and the teachers, and helped pupils to learn Italian through an Italian language course in the afternoon. This support is not guaranteed to newly migrated pupils who do not have refugee status. Another benefit for Syrian refugees who, in Lebanon, could not attend middle school and arrive in Italy between the ages of 14 and 18, is that school allows them to enroll in high school even without a middle school certificate (Int.17).

> *"I arrived here at 16, and they told me that you do not need the 3rd grade, you do not need it; you can enter immediately high school. I entered high school and the 1st year was too difficult because I entered almost in the middle of the year and did not know anything. I just sit at the desk; I do not do anything, the year has gone"* (Int.06).

In this way, the school allowed them to attend school before they reached 18 years of age, when the school's duty was finished. The boy in question became a discreet pupil in the three years of high school, thanks also to the Italian course provided by the asylum seeker centre, and now aims to go to university. However, this is not the same for all refugees:

> *"They said that I have to get the middle school diploma before entering high school because if not, you cannot enter without... and I thought they put me in the 3rd year, but they put me in the 2nd, for the age... I was 15. I was finishing 15 and entering 16, and they put me in the 2nd year of middle school with children 2 or 3 years younger than me"* (Int.20).

She is also a Syrian refugee welcomed at an asylum seeker center who could not attend school in Lebanon but did not receive the same benefits as others. The reason for this discrepancy does not emerge from the interviews. Instead, it is possible to understand from these experiences that newly migrated pupils' admission and selection in Italy do not have rigid rules, and each institution

decides how to manage them. A key factor is a positive relationship between schools and asylum seekers' centres. The situation in Germany is very different, as the rules are stricter:

> *"When I went to Germany, a year ago, to see what there is, if we can study, because a friend of my mother said that studies are better for us, life is better, but we went there and… It is not easy to learn the language, first thing; you cannot enter school if you have not learnt German. It was difficult, and I did not like it, I did not like Germany. I cried that I had to come here and so I made my parents come back just for me because I want Italy, I want to study in Italy, yes. Not because they do not like Syrians there, but to study is difficult, and if you have to ask a question, there is nobody who translate for you; you have to understand everything; you have to learn English first, then German, then you have to enter school"* (Int.22).

As this Syrian teenager stated, the main difference between Italy and Germany regards selection. In Germany, newly migrated pupils have to learn the language before entering regular classes, which means that the admission depends on linguistic discrimination, which is not present in Italy.

> *"At that time, I spoke English, and all the German people spoke German, and sometimes they refused to speak with us in English; they said here is Germany, and you have to speak in German. Ok, so I went to Caritas, and they helped me... to contact with the school, to find a contact with one school and there my daughter was in the 1st school, and she lost 2 years there"* (Int.37).

In Berlin, there are no asylum seekers' centers to manage the relationship with schools; therefore, many refugees find themselves alone and unable to undertake the bureaucratic process of school enrollment:

> *"The next year, I wanted to put my daughter in a welcome class. Unfortunately, there was no welcome class where I lived. I was forced to enrol her in another school 7 Kilometres away from my home so she could attend the welcome class. Finally, she was registered in the school"* (Int.50).

Newly migrated pupils must enroll in Welcome classes, where they must stay until they have learned German sufficiently to attend a regular class. In this quote, it is possible to read that these classes are not available everywhere and often parents do not know where they are or how to reach them. From the interviews, it emerges that parents can get lost in the German admission system, which can cause their children to lose years of study. Neverthless, the *Welcoming Class* system has provided some with the opportunity to enter regular classes with a good level of German, enabling them to understand lessons and succeed in their education:

> *"Luckily, it did not take my daughter much time to convince the school that her level was excellent. It took her only from October to February. So, in February, they enrolled her in the 4th grade with all the other children. So, it took her only 4 months. So, there was only the second half of the 4th grade left.*

Moreover, she proved that she was ready to be transferred to the 5th grade. Her teachers made some examinations and told me: <<It would be a pity to have her repeat the 4th grade>>. So, she continued and now thanks Gods she is on a good way" (Int.48).

For this primary school pupil, the selection mechanism worked well - after a semester, she entered the regular class and had good results - but for others, it was an insurmountable obstacle. Her sister, at a very different age, had a very different experience:

"Yesterday she brought her marks. Her reading skills in German are still at A2 level. She has been in this class for 2 years, and within these 2 years, I did not see her read for 5 minutes. Moreover, there is another problem. She has been in this class for 2 years. She only gets German lessons. She would also need English or other subjects. Sometimes I ask her a question in mathematics, like 3 - 4, and she thinks for 5 minutes until she answers. She is 14 years old. She is supposed to attend the 8th grade. Now we are still looking for a school. She is supposed to attend the 8th grade, but I think she would not even succeed in the 5th" (Int.48).

Failing to learn German means exclusion from regular classes, therefore not being able to study other subjects for years. This pupil has been in a welcome class between the ages of 12 and 14 years old, after having lost several school years in Syria. The result for her is that she has not learned either the German language or other subjects such as mathematics or art, for which language is not essential and can instead stimulate pupils to learn the language better, as is the case for the Syrian pupil in Italy (Int.06). Even in Sweden, there are preparatory classes, but the system seems to be a middle ground between the Italian and German ones, allowing for both special courses for newly migrated pupils and regular classes:

"When they came here, they go in this class, preparation class, before they came in the ordinary class so... For example, when they come, they can start with Swedish, only Swedish here at the beginning and... For example, art and practical subjects, they can go with the class, so they ear the language and study Swedish with us. Then when we see... we start maths because maths does not... we do not need much language, so they start practising maths, try to test their maths knowledge, and work with the maths teacher. So, they can be in the class after a while […] It depends; some children need 2 months, 3 months or 1 term, some children need 2 years, it depends on school background and their ability to learn the language, so this class is changing all the time. 2 years is the maximum, but if they do not learn after 2 years, they go to the class. We have classes every year of free language lessons supporting the language. The regular class had another language subject, such as German or Spanish; they did not need to learn more languages, so they came to us to study more Swedish. So, they continued with us to learn" (Int.32; 33).

Another important difference is that language support is offered even after the preparatory class and throughout the entire educational path, so this preparatory class is experienced more as a preparation than as a tool for selection. Language is, in any case and everywhere, the minorities' selection and channelling criteria, both local and migrated, and therefore it is pupils and parents' primary concern.

11.7.2 Language

> *"My Problem is the language. Language is identity. Moreover, I did not manage to master the language. That hurts our life. I do not make any progress, although I try hard. […] I have many excuses. Children and housekeeping, etc. But I should have learned it up to now. This makes me suffer a lot […] I had made my way in Syria, but I turned to less than zero when I came here. And I just do not manage to get back on my feet"* (Int.48).

This Syrian mother living in Germany perfectly expresses the point treated here. She states that language is identity; therefore, her low proficiency in German makes her feel inadequate for society, a failed housewife, whereas in her home country, she was a teacher, with her job, skills, and identity that she cannot rebuild in the new country due to her inability to use the local language. For members of minorities, the most important thing related to education and identity is to learn the official national language in order to be a part of society, that is, to work, communicate, socialize, and build a life. Parallel to this issue is the status accorded to the mother tongue within education and, thus, society, which strongly influences learning and identity construction.

> *"Unfortunately, no, we have not studied the Amazigh language because it has become official recently. Now there are individual courses to be done, but at school, I do not know if they will do it, maybe in the future, but when I studied there was not... Until now, it is not yet applied. Maybe in some schools, they do it individually, not in an official way; there is not"* (Int.13).

In Morocco, the Imazighen language has recently become official and all the Arab pupils interviewed approve of this change. Although the limited implementation of the law providing for Imazighen's use and teaching within schools is certainly criticisable, the essential things are that Arab pupils and teachers recognise this right. In this way, the Imazighen has gained legitimacy in schools, so teachers can use it as an instructional language and pupils who speak it can do so openly and without feeling ashamed. For Algeria, there are no testimonies about the use or recognition of Imazighen in schools. However, the interviewees point out that recently it has become *"also a national language alongside Arabic"* (Int.12). Such recognition is new in Libya:

"They started to study it when I entered the 1st middle school, I think. I do not remember, but I did not study it because they study it in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd, that is, from the 1st to the 6th grade. When I entered the 3rd, that is when I came here, they started to study it in middle school too. But only in my city, that is in Tripoli, and not in the others, we are all Amazigh" (Int.07).

The change in language policy occurred after the defeat of the Gaddafi regime. It is important to remember that many Amazigh pupils only learn Arabic in school and it is not their native language when considering their inclusion in European schools:

"They studied Arabic in school when we were in Libya. At home, we speak Amazigh, which is their mother tongue. Amazigh is only a subject of study at school in Libya, but the fundamental language is Arabic. So all my children can speak Arabic, but my youngest only went to school for two years in Libya. When he came here, he started speaking Italian and lost Arabic" (Int.45).

The pupils of whom this mother speaks are younger and have the opportunity to study their mother tongue in school. If European schools wished to offer mother-tongue language support to these children, they would have to engage a mediator who knows Imazighen, as Arabic is a foreign language for them. Anyway, the Imazighen's status in the Maghreb is different compared to that of the Kurdish language in Syria:

"They are not allowed to speak in Kurdish, they are not allowed to stay in the Kurdish area, and they are not allowed to go to Kurdish school or speak Kurdish in Arab schools. And maybe kids feel like mobbing or so because they cannot speak Arabs as well as the Arabian kids" (Int.39).

In Syria, it is forbidden to speak the Kurdish language (Focus Group 1). This ban is accompanied by a total denial of their cultural and community rights, to the point of denying their very existence. This causes Kurdish children discomfort, as they are often unable to speak Arabic and do not have any language support in their mother tongue. Instead, schools force them to conceal it and adopt the Arabic language and identity as the exclusive one. The Kurdish community has tried to build a different education system in the land they have liberated from Daesh:

"There is a city there called Afrin, my parents were from there, and we used to go there from Aleppo. But when I was studying there, in a Kurdish city, they are all Kurds, in the school, everybody speaks, these people who go to school, they only speak Kurdish" (Int.19).

This student attended both schools in Aleppo, where Arabic was spoken, and a Kurdish school in Afrin, where pupils and teachers could finally speak their mother tongue in school. This educational experiment, developed in the last decade, was brutally interrupted (Int.37). Unfortunately, Kurdish pupils cannot even access the rights granted to other minorities in Syria:

"We did Arabic, English and Armenian as the main languages. Like we made history in Arabic and civics in Arabic. Then, there was also Armenian on the other side, literature, poetry, also grammar, that is, we did both Armenian and Arabic literature, Armenian and Arabic grammar, and then English. Being in a country that speaks Arabic, we needed to learn it, so... we learned both" (Int.11).

Armenian pupils in their private schools are allowed to study their language and literature, building a complementary identity between the Arab and Armenian ones. This influences their relationship with Arabic language learning, which is less problematic than it is for Kurdish pupils.

"I remember, because I am Kurdish, the 1st year I entered the school, and the 1st day I spoke only Kurdish. The teacher spoke Arabic and wrote Arabic; I did not understand anything in the 1st year. I always remember this day, the 1st day and the 1st year, it was too difficult because I did not understand anything, I did not speak Arabic" (Int.19).

Kurdish pupils' experiences within the Syrian education system are dramatically similar to those of newly migrated pupils in Italy, even though the former are in their homeland and the latter in a different continent:

"The 1st day, I suffered a lot because I did not speak Italian. I remember the 1st year was a terrible year in which, among other things, I discovered to have headaches for how difficult it was. Because it was really... Well, I never wanted to wake up in the morning to go to school... The 1st year was really bad, yes, yes, I cannot forget it absolutely, also because I did not understand" (Int.16).

Both pupils are thrown into an unfamiliar situation in which they do not understand the language being spoken and must study without language support in their native language. In both situations, language deficiencies prevent them from demonstrating proficiency in other disciplines, such as math (Int. 19), and in both situations, the family's social role and educational level play an important role in pupils' success:

"My family speaks Arabic; my father is an engineer, yes... From the 2nd year, I was always the first of the class, even when I studied in Aleppo, I was Kurdish, and in school, I was always the first of the class, always the first, even with Arabs who speak Arabic and I speak Kurdish" (Int.19).

The family's possibilities to help this pupil learn Arabic have significantly influenced his academic success, as he states. Conversely, most pupils with parents without education cannot have this help. In the following quote, an Arab Syrian student compares the situation of Kurdish pupils in Syria with her own in Italy, confirming the similarity of the experience:

"We have to speak Arabic as official language, even if a person is Kurdish, he has to speak Arabic. It does not have to be the case that, because he is Kurdish, he has to speak in school [...]. Because he is

Syrian. For example, I am now in Italy. If I am Arab, I cannot come to school to speak Arabic [...]. We have to look at the majority. For this thing, they have to speak Arabic, because there are others, Armenians from Armenia who are refugees, they also have this language, they speak among them, but they do not have to speak... There are Turks, Turcomans, they are Syrians too, but of Turkish origin because they have been here since before the Ottomans, but they are always Syrians because they have citizenship. Even if a Kurdish was born here and has citizenship he can speak his language at home, with his family, but he cannot speak his language in school because... I do not know but so it was" (Int.29).

He justifies the Syrian linguistic policy, as he believes that within a common nation, minorities must accommodate the majority; therefore, Kurds, Armenians, and Turkomans have to study Arabic, just as newly migrated pupils in Italy have to study Italian. He does not take into account the possibility of studying both the official national language and one's mother tongue, as he has internalized the concept of citizenship as transmitted in Syrian schools, which is a unifying and flattening of differences factor. Since he has accepted the denial of Kurdish people's cultural rights in his homeland, he has renounced even claims for his own cultural rights as a minority in the host country. It is interesting to compare these experiences with that of an Arab student in Israel, where the Arab historical community, unlike the Kurdish community in Syria, have the right to have its own schools:

"Arab and public, yes, because in Israel practically, all Arab villages have the right to study in Arabic, they have their own curriculum, studied there... In cooperation with Arab teachers, and yes, there is the obligation of Hebrew; you have to finish high school with a knowledge of Hebrew that allows you to interact with the rest of society, with the rest of the country. But, since there are 20% of Arabs, they have the right to study Arabic, they do everything in Arabic. I did in Arabic science, history, and... How do you call it, civic in Arabic, everything except Hebrew, Hebrew you do in Hebrew as a second language" (Int.08).

It is possible to criticize this system, saying that it causes the ghettoization of the Arab minority, the members of whom only meet their Hebrew peers at university, coming from two different cultural universes. Nevertheless, they have more cultural rights than Kurdish pupils.

A particular case is Lebanon, where migrant pupils have to learn a foreign language such as English or French in order to successfully attend education, even though they are in an Arab country (Int.21). However, Arabic is not forbidden, and overall there is the possibility of having explanations in Arabic by teachers. Instead, in Turkey the situation is more similar to Italy since newly migrated pupils are typically placed in regular classes in which all people speak a language they do not understand, without any support in their mother tongue.

"It is very difficult to learn Turkish languages, and in Turkey, they did not have special ways to help children to learn their language. My daughter had big problems because she is in the 4th class, or 5th class, and she wants to learn at a Turkish school, and they said to us she must go to the 1st class and she has to stay with these little children to learn A B C in Turkish. It was a big problem for her because they did not like... my daughter is very big, and they are very little, and she had problems making friends and learning. That was one of the problems in Turkey… One of my children went to primary, and the other was bigger; she studied 7th class and 8th class. The bigger one learned fast, and she also had the certificate for her good experience, but the other was very difficult for her and had a bad experience" (Int.38).

This mother explains how her daughters have had different experiences in Turkey. The older one was placed in a classroom with her peers and was successful in learning the language and obtaining the certificate; however, the younger one had to start again from the beginning, with pupils who were 3 or 4 years younger than her. She probably saw this as a downgrade that caused her to lose motivation, self-confidence, and enthusiasm. She was not motivated to learn the language out of a desire to speak with her peers and make friends. The Italian and Turkish systems are very different from the German and Swedish ones, where there are dedicated classrooms to teach the instruction language to newly migrated children:

"There is a big difference here. The first thing I must say is that they have a good idea here... What is called Wilcommenclassen, where children can have a chance to learn the language in a good way and... they do not need to learn many, many subjects, the most important is language, and they learn some mathematics, some sciences and this way give children a chance to learn the language in a good way. Have good ways, and they do not put pressure, you need 1 year, ok, 2 or 3 years, no problem, when you learn good German then you can go to the class of your age. The biggest one needed about 6 months only, but the other stayed about 2 years in Wilkommenclassen, and then they continued their education in regular classes" (Int.38).

This mother prefers the German system to the Turkish one because pupils can focus on learning the new language before addressing the study of specific disciplines through that language. It is worth noting that many others do not appreciate this system of separation from German peers, as it is possible to read in the paragraph dedicated to the relationship between newly migrated and local pupils. In Germany, Italy, and Turkey, the mother tongue is not typically considered a tool for inclusion in school. The Swedish system is the most similar to the German one, but with this important distinction:

"The way schools have worked is just fine. Our children are now studying at upper secondary school and have taken up Swedish in such a way that it is impossible to hear – or, in writing, see – that their

mother tongue is another than Swedish. [...] Here it is worth mentioning that in the Swedish school, the children have the right to study their mother tongue" (Int.49).

This Syrian father greatly appreciates the work of Swedish schools on language, as his children have learned Swedish well, passing through preparatory classes quickly and then entering regular classes, while also improving their mother tongue. In Italy, courses such as Italian for Foreigners and Mother Tongue are not very common in schools; asylum seekers' centres or other associations sometimes provide them. A young student (Int.20) attended an Italian course for only three months at the asylum seekers' centre where she was staying before enrolling in a regular class in September. The school did not offer her any other options.

"When we came to Italy, we were failed due to our language difficulties, so to make up for it and to learn Italian we had to repeat the year. […] In middle school, we did a lot of after-school activities all day; we always did after-school activities or schoolwork, even in elementary school" (Int.27).

This school has failed these pupils for one year in order to improve their language before addressing other topics, instead of providing them with an Italian course. The asylum seekers centre provided the after-school course in Italian, not the school as in Sweden, and no one provided mother tongue courses as in Swedish schools. Even though the courses in reception centers often lead to good results, it is important to emphasize that they do not follow a national method and program, and their quality is difficult to assess. Mother tongue courses are even more rare, even in volunteer associations, and sometimes pupils quickly lose their familiarity with their language to learn that of the host country.

"I: Which language do you speak best? *R: Italian*
I: do you speak better in Italian than Arabic? *R: yes, yes, of course"* (Int.22).

This Syrian pupil has been very committed to learning European languages, first English and French in Lebanon and then Italian for some years, so much so that now she feels she knows Italian better than Arabic. Her Italian was excellent for having been in Italy for only 3 years, but not good enough to be the most known language for a 16-year-old. The loss of her mother tongue due to having stopped studying means that she does not handle both languages with total dexterity. Many pupils, after a while, speak mostly the language of the host country, using their native language only at home and sometimes even there, they speak Italian, German, or Swedish between brothers and sisters (Int.12; 42; 48). Italian and German schools typically do not offer courses in students' native languages and do not value them; in fact, many teachers promote the idea that using one's native language hinders the ability to learn the new language effectively. Some students have internalized this message:

"I am sorry that now I do not know how to write in Arabic and how to read well […]. They said there was a professor who teaches Arabic, but now they said no […]. If there is no Arabic, it is more beautiful. If you have to study Arabic, you forget Italian afterwards because it is difficult to learn Arabic again. It is ok if I can read and write; I do not forget Italian, French, and English. […] It is difficult for me, so if they put an Arabic teacher, I do not study. I do not want to do it. The first thing I already know is how to speak. I do not have to learn to read because my parents help me <<you have to write like this>>. The important thing now is Italian. I am sitting in Italy, and I have to do everything for Italian" (Int.22).

This pupil is sorry that she cannot speak Arabic, but at the same time, she does not wish to attend an Arabic course, as she is concerned that studying Arabic will cause her to forget Italian. Too much time has passed since she studied Arabic, so she would have to start from the beginning with the alphabet to read and write. Similarly, an Algerian pupil whose parents paid for a private Arabic course escaped from it, as it was too complex and advanced. She had already learned to write and read in Italian, which uses a different alphabet, so even though her mother tongue is Arabic and she can speak it, she cannot write. The alphabet she was familiar with was the Latin one (Int.12). This is similar to pupils studying in Germany:

"The big challenge is that most of them, they were in Syria when they were child, like 6 years, leave the school there, and they were in Turkey or Lebanon, no school and they came here as their family want. This child has Arabic writing and reading, and they do not have any information about Arabic; it is challenging to give now to 20-year-old, or 17 years, it is a challenge, and he does not have any information in Arabic before, and now he has information about German. Almost all of them can write in German, yes, but in Arabic, I see... In Arabic, have many problems because the family want to keep Arabic as their mother language, but […] the mother language is German now because it is the language in the school" (Int. 41).

This man teaches Arabic to Syrian pupils in Berlin at a cultural association. He believes it is important for them and that being proficient in two languages could be beneficial for their future. However, he acknowledged that the pupils now know German better than Arabic. It seems that the parents desire for their children to learn Arabic more than the pupils do, as it can be difficult for them at this age and stage in their education:

"Of course, at school, they speak German for several hours. So, with only some hours of Arabic at home, this will become their second language. However, I insist that my children speak Arabic because I will never reach their level in German, so, at some point, I will not be able to exchange views with them anymore" (Int. 48).

Parents are scared about the possibility of one day not being able to communicate with their sons and daughters, who are developing more fluency in the host country's language than they are. Learning the mother tongue is much more manageable when done in conjunction with learning the language of the host country at an early age (Int. 48). Young people are more motivated to speak in the language of the host country due to the desire to form relationships with friends, which could lead to the opposite result if all of their friends are Arab:

> *"My husband's daughter speaks Arabic at home. And at school as well. All her friends are Arabs. That also has some impact on her performance while learning German"* (Int.48).

Despite living in Berlin, this child continues to live in an exclusively Arab environment. Unlike other cases seen, she is not motivated to learn the German language. In this case, the language spoken by peers and friends has a strong influence on newly migrated pupils. In Italy, it is evident even in the role played by local dialects in education, as they often represent people's identity better than the national language they learn at school:

> *"With the pupils in my school at the agrarian, I found it a bit difficult just to practice Italian because they spoke dialect, and it was really something... complicated, to understand what the professor said and what my schoolmates said"* (Int.9, Egyptian in Italy).

The teachers told the newly migrated pupils that it was essential for them to speak Italian with other people. However, they found it challenging to speak in Italian with their classmates as they spoke in dialect, thus, it was like learning two languages at the same time:

> *"I am trying to speak more with Italian boys, these things... but they speak in dialect. This dialect I do not like it at all (laughs). It is not difficult; I can speak it and speak it as they speak, but I have difficulty with this dialect and Italian; when you speak with the professor, you speak half Italian and half dialect"* (Int.21).

This Syrian pupil finds difficulty in distinguishing Italian from dialect, as he has to speak with professors in a language different from what he continuously hears from his classmates in the classroom. In cases like this, nobody speaks the language that newly migrated pupils are required to learn, not their family who speak their mother tongue, nor their friends who speak dialect.

11.7.3 Relationship between pupils

> *"We never had those differences that one is dark and we excluded, we never had it, we were all the same. That is how we grew up, both in family and school. That was the education […]. Some debates, some stupid things among students, full stop. But an ethnic thing never. It never occurred because if one did it, everybody got up and shouted in his face or kicked him because we have grown up in an*

environment of respect; that is, we are also Muslim. Because if one does this, if you are Muslim, already in Islam discrimination and racism there should not be; there is no difference between a coloured person, a yellow or a blond one, never there is a difference; we are all human beings, all the same. Also religius differences, we have never had these problems" (Int.13).

Moroccan pupils have internalized a Muslim education against ethnic discrimination, taught by family and school, and representing the more universalistic and respectful interpretation of Islam spread throughout the country by the Sufi Arab and Amazigh brotherhoods. While little skirmishes between pupils are possible, most of the class judges them as wrong and collaborates to stop them immediately. This quote is the best one that explains the concept, and it is worth noting that no one contradicts it. Even the Ghanaian educator talks about administrative obstacles and institutional discrimination, but not about discrimination between pupils. Amazigh pupils' experience in Libya is very different:

"With the Arabs, we have this thing that I really do not like because we are not Arabs in reality, but not all of Libya; there are only 3 cities that are Berber; they are Amazigh... do you understand. So many people mistreat foreigners. In addition, there is between the Libyans themselves, not only with... those who have black skin or... those who do not come from Libya, if there is... even if one comes from Tripoli in Libya they mistreat him... that is not all people, but there are" (Int.07).

Here, Arab pupils are racist towards Amazigh, migrants, and people with black skin in general. In her opinion, the major cause for this racism is the Arabist ideology, which is more prevalent in Libya than in Morocco due to its specific history. The problem also affects Algerian pupils:

"We studied this, and instead, until today, there are people who say Algeria is Berber, it is not Arab. Therefore, in practice, I have lived in Italy, but I have experienced scenes of racism here, not in Italy... because of this reason" (Int.12).

Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan seem to be unaffected by these problems for the homogeneity of the classroom, as the interviewees have no experience attending classes with migrant pupils or minorities. Even in this case, a more multifaceted and contradictory situation emerges from Syria:

"I lived in Damascus. We do not have this conflict. Maybe in another province, another countryside, north of Syria, but in Damascus, no. In Damascus, all religions and nations live together; we do not know if he is Christian, Kurdish, or Muslim; we do not care. We are all together, all together, and peacefully! Maybe in the north of Syria, yes, sometimes conflicts, but we have not heard about this. After the war, the revolution, we heard there are many problems between people or something like this, but before the war no, in Damascus no" (Int. 41).

Pupils and teachers in Damascus schools did not experience conflicts due to ethnic or religious differences. This peaceful coexistence was achieved through a lack of interest and knowledge in pupils' belonging. Certainly, people were tolerant, but there was no dialogue aimed at fostering tolerance; rather, there was a total avoidance of the topic, as clearly shown in the following quote referring to a school in Homs:

> *"I cannot know this thing, also there are different names, there is a Christian boy, Ahmed, but I do not know, because we also have this name, there is Mikel, Angel, but I think... Michael, but I do not know this name. It is only for them, so... I swear nobody even thinks about what the name means because children, you know... children always have a limited mentality, always for one thing: what is he eating today? Sweet? In middle school, maybe yes; in middle school, you say, for example, I am Armenian, ok, what does it mean? I do not know, he says Syrio... because I speak another language, I can speak another language, yes but we are not interested, like not I say <<but you why? Where in particular? >> No, because we are used to seeing ourselves as a family. […] We have the same tradition, also Syrian Christians, Syrian Jews, they have the same tradition... because if you see a person like you in the tradition, you do not think that he is different from you, this is the thing maybe... for this reason, we do not know these things.*
> *I: I am interested in how the school managed this situation.*
> *R: school nothing"* (Int.29).

Relationships between pupils of different ethnicities and religions are good and there is no conflict between them, but they do not know about each other's backgrounds and histories. Thus, these good relationships are built on ignorance and government censorship of differences in the name of national unity, making them more vulnerable and prone to deterioration at the slightest political disturbance than those built on knowledge and understanding:

> *"We live together and also in university, we sit together and do everything together; we cannot say that you are Christian, I do not sit with you, and you are Yazida or other things, and I cannot sit with you, I cannot talk with you. [...]. But for our neighbourhood, at that time, I did not wear a hijab, so they said that this family are not Muslim... and we are... I am Kurdish, not Arab"* (Int.37).

Not wearing the hijab in Homs, unlike other parts of Syria, is seen as a sign that you are not Muslim, even though, in Kurdish Muslim tradition, women do not usually wear it. As can be understood, with the civil war, mistrust among citizens has grown, and ignorance about others' traditions and belonging has turned into prejudice and misunderstanding. Often pupils do not even know that one of their classmates is Kurdish since neither Kurdish pupils nor teachers disclose this, so they ignore their identity and have a normal relationship with them (Int.39), which was

tainted in the Homs case by a religious rather than an ethnic element. Kurdish pupils have a more significant experience in this regard, especially when they move from their city to another:

> *"I used to swim in my old city, to drive a bicycle, to be out and play with all my friends, there were girls and boys... When I moved to Qamishli, I should not go swimming; ride a bicycle, have friends... boys, like playing in the street […] In my first town, the one I have been there until the 8th grade, they were from all over Syria, they were Russian, they were… Because the city is very mixed, multicultural so... they were from everywhere, and I never thought about if they are Christian, Muslim, Arab or... I never had these thoughts, but when I moved to Qamishli there, I began to feel that my friends were more Kurdish and... Yeah, it was another experience for me; it was like moving to another country. I guess it is society; it was controlling who will be your friends, whom you should talk"* (Int.32).

This woman grew up in a multicultural environment. She then moved to another city where she lived in the ghettoization inside the Kurdish community. There is also the case of a pupil with a German mother. In this case, as she did not belong to a minority but to a foreign culture, pupils can show their curiosity and interest in her culture:

> *"I think the 1st year; they asked a lot at the beginning. <<Can you speak German? >> I think, in the beginning, I was like the German girl, my sister and me, but later it was not... It was a small neighbourhood, everyone knew everyone so... it quickly changed, it was not this way anymore"* (Int.40).

Local pupils ask her many questions, but quickly accept the two sisters into the school without any particular problem. It can be said that racism and discrimination in Syria do not greatly affect the relationships between pupils, unlike in Libya, where it is based on Arab ethnicity and Muslim religion, and in Lebanon, where it is based on nationality:

> *"The teachers and the girls, they were bad with us; I already said it because they do not like us. We also have our own teachers, but we had difficulties with that. We said that it would be better went back to Syria because they said us these things, it was not good for us. It was bad. Yes, because we were children, we did not understand this thing that... that they do not accept us because we are bad, I thought, really are we bad? And so it is not a good thing, we decided to go back to Syria, but we cannot"* (Int.22).

Lebanese pupils depicted Syrian pupils as bad due to discrimination and a refusal to accept their presence in classrooms. In most interviews, Syrian pupils stated that they were unable to make friends with their Lebanese classmates, and teachers were seen to be encouraging this behavior. The relationships were so strained that schools opted to divide the classrooms:

> *"When the school started, before they did that Syrians were together with other people, after 1 month... they divided us, for example... the Lebanese come in the morning, and the Syrians in the afternoon*

because there were always problems with the Lebanese. [It was] better as a class, for studying in the class because they are all friends, they are Syrians, so there were no problems for us" (Int.06).

Teachers did not try to resolve problems between pupils, create a dialogue capable of stimulating peacefully relationships; on the contrary, they preferred to separate Syrians from Lebanese, avoiding the establishment of any relationship or friendship. In the cases in which Syrian pupils attended schools with Lebanese, they had to accept bullying and arrogance by members of particular groups:

"A classmate of mine, who was from these parts, created a problem, he had a discussion with a girl, and the day after, he brought his father, who started to raise his voice against this 11-year-old girl, 12 years old, and the girl has no more... She could not do anything, only say sorry, and she left. In fact, with these people you do not make so many problems, because you start making problems of… They call their parents, their cousins [...] I had a problem with him, we discussed with words but we were in class, then he told me, I want to see you outside, I said, why?, he said, no, we just want to be friends, we want to finish with this. Like a little boy, I said ok, I am stupid, I went out and then we fought. […] There is a bit of racism, let us say, and there are also people who hurt you, but you cannot say anything because it is like that, even if you want to tell someone else, they cannot help you, even if they are afraid" (Int.05).

In Lebanon, compared to Syria, particular belonging strongly affects relationships between pupils, and refugee pupils are not very welcomed. The following quote compares instead the relationships experienced in Syria and those experienced in Germany:

"Not all of them were Arabs, there were people from Africa, I remember, and not all of them was Muslim […]. We were not the same, but I was happy, and I did not have problems like mobbing or fighting or <<you are from Africa and you are...>>. I feel sorry I have this situation in Germany. I was born in Damascus, and in Damascus, in all the streets there were friends people from other land and another religion, and we live together, and we go to the same school" (Int.39).

As is possible to read, she did not experience discrimination in Syria, where she had a good relationship with pupils of other ethnicities and religions, but in Germany, as many other refugees:

"My son did not want to stay in the kindergarten […] He was suffering from exclusion. My son's hair is black like mine. He would come back from kindergarten and say: <<My hair is black, but all of them, their hair is yellow>> He was only 4 years then. They did not want to play with him" (Int.48).

Pupils begin to experience discrimination in kindergarten, where children are unaware of different religions, ethnicities, or nationalities, but instead focus on aesthetic differences. When speaking about such young children, the relationship between pupils also depends on their parents' attitudes:

*"One of my son's classmates is living opposite our house. So, our balcony is opposite their balcony. Whenever we come outside, they go inside. In Corona lockdown, my son took his toys to the balcony and played there. He would give signs to his classmate, and they would play together remotely. Whenever his parents saw that their son was playing with my son, they would call him inside and close the door and the stores. It is clear that they did not want their son to play with my son. Once, I was in the street with my son, and my son's classmate and his mother were there, too. I greeted them and told her: <<My name is A. I am ** mother. Your son and mine are classmates>>. She nodded and looked the other way. That was very rude, especially since I had stopped in order to talk to her. I felt very offended"* (Int.48).

These parents taught their children not to play with migrated children. It should be the teachers' responsibility to defuse these mechanisms, but, in this case, it was lacking. Children and parents cannot understand why they are being excluded, and the children could start to feel wronged. A very different testimony comes from this Arab parent living in Italy:

"The parents of the children who study with my children are also nice; they send me messages: If you need anything, let us know. For example, if I need information about what the homework is, they send me a photo, there is cooperation on information about the school" (Int.47).

Probably, the parents of her son's classmates also suggest that they socialize with and help him. The same problem regarding local parents' attitudes toward migrant pupils is also found in Sweden:

"In a Swedish city, there were 2 schools, one with all Swedish pupils and one with all migrated pupils. Politics decided to mix them because, at the end of their educational path, they could not become friends in this way. However, Swedish parents disagreed because this could affect the good educational results of their children. It needs much dialogue to make them accept" (Focus group1).

Swedish parents enrolled their children in the school without pupils from migrant backgrounds, creating a ghettoization that prevented socialization. When politicians tried to resolve this situation and mix them, they opposed the reason that the presence of migrant pupils would hurt their children's academic results. They, as German parents in the previous quote, have prejudices towards migrant pupils, considering them and their families as ignorant and not interested in studying, from which their children have nothing to learn. The reality is often very different; newly migrated pupils often excel when they learn the language and their parents often have high educational levels:

"Now, when I attend a parents' meeting in her school, I feel proud to introduce myself as her mother. I feel respected because she is successful. Moreover, now that I learnt some German, I introduce myself, and say <<I am a physics and chemistry teacher >>, and I can feel their astonishment and how this

changes their view towards me (Laughs). I want to return to my son's school and have an internship there so they can see I am no less than they are. Their view of us was wrong. I can be in the same place as you, and your son could be in my son's place. Moreover, I would ask them, would you like your son to be treated this way? However, they did not accept me" (Int.48).

This statement makes it possible to understand how prejudice is at the base of relationships. This family suffered exclusion until they learned German and the daughter started to have good results. Then, something changed, and even more so when the mother learned German, becoming capable of showing her social role and education, that is, showing her identity which had been hidden until now beyond the label of "poor refugee". This label fit tightly even to this girl:

"They are good and... They always ask me <<do you want help>>, <<how can I help you? >>. And I feel ok; please ask me not again because I feel like I am loose, and you want to help me. I can help myself, and if I need help, I ask you, I will ask you, and then they stop asking me" (Int.39).

She has a good relationship with her classmates, without discrimination. However, she did not like their pitying attitude, which she sees as biased against Arab women in European society, who are often viewed as victims who need help. Instead, she wants to be seen as a normal person, a student who would like to show her capabilities and go to university. There are also been positive experiences regarding the relationship with German pupils:

"The experience with my daughter was positive. She was elected class representative in the 1st grade of the secondary school after being in her new school for 8 days only. Everybody was new to the school, and they had less than 2 weeks to get to know each other. Within this short period, she managed to gain their sympathy, so they elected her. […] Until now, the relations with her classmates and teachers are very good […]. She is beautiful, knows it, and always says everybody likes her. There is no mobbing in her school. It is a Gymnasium. All the pupils are German, and only in her class are foreigners. […] If she suffered any bullying, it was from other Arab pupils who asked her why she did not wear a headscarf" (Int.48).

The positive relationship with German pupils has, as a counterbalance, the negative relationship with other Muslim pupils, who judge her as too integrated, as a girl who, in order to be liked and accepted in the host society, has renounced her own identity. There are even positive relationships without any counterbalance, both in Germany and in Italy.

"My classmates were very nice; I did not have any problems like racism and these things. They tell me sometimes, every Saturday, come to go out with us […] Here, I am a bit lonely, the boys are very good but we do not always talk, sometimes in class too, there is only my neighbour who is my partner. Only with him did we start joking all the time, he told me to teach him some Arabic, Arabic jokes, so we

started joking together […] They helped me, not only to study, but my friends also in the class make me... Because you cannot learn the language only by studying, but also by talking to someone else, they started talking to me a little bit […] My classmate always started talking to me to make me learn more things, and I thanked them also they made me understand a bit more Italian, and then... I learned a little bit Italian, a little bit of school, that I was not, I did not study so much the language; I learned it with my classmates" (Int.05).

The language appears to be the only problem for this Syrian pupil, but his classmates are helping him to learn it. From this quote, it is possible to understand the willingness of some pupils to help newly arrived classmates to learn the language and become integrated into the class. Many other interviewees state the same. Parents note the encouragement provided by classmates to their children (Int.47) and appreciate that the good relationships in the classroom have also become friendships outside of school (Int.45). A parent explains these good relationships as a cultural characteristic of people from the South:

"Here in the south, people are simple; it is not like in the North or Germany, here people are simple, they do not have discriminatory attitudes towards children. Every child is the same. […] There is mutual respect; there is a serene climate, everyone greets us" (Int.44).

In her opinion, people in the South are more welcoming, simple, and respectful. Although it may be agreeable that socialization in Mediterranean countries is easier and more spontaneous than in Nordic countries, this does not prevent other refugees from having strongly negative experiences.

"My son has always been positive about school, but it is obvious that he feels a bit halfway... he told me so many things and dynamics. For example, he felt tied to the foreign children's group, even if he had no difficulty integrating with Italian children, he noticed that they formed a group apart from those of foreign origin […] If there are 4 foreign children, they decide to put them together, let them sit together. They say that it is to put them at ease. However, there were teachers who said no; they had to move to approach with everyone. Then the cultural side takes over: can girls sit next to boys? They think they can have problems, and so they tend to put them together. […] Thus, even during the break, foreign children do not mix up. However, I said << let us move them! But not only them, all of them! So that there can be constant interaction between children, even boys and girls. This way, fixed couples are not created, and the relationship can be facilitated>>. I remember my son telling me that children of foreign origin were always in a group among themselves. We faced this problem. However, most parents and teachers, preferred it this way so as not to create problems" (Int.42).

This pupil has a Moroccan mother and an Italian father and experiences discomfort when placed in the group of newly migrated pupils despite knowing the Italian language and feeling Italian. The division of pupils into two groups, one of migrants and one of Italians, created his discomfort.

As they are so young, teachers and parents are the cause of this situation. The fear of potential problems limits parents and teachers in trying to create relationships between Italian pupils and those with a migratory background. Although this Moroccan woman suggests mixing up the children so they can get to know each other better, they are apprehensive about the relationship between male and female pupils because they think foreign parents do not want their children to have relationships with the opposite sex. Accustomed to this way in kindergarten and primary school, in some cases, relationships remain limited even at high school:

> *"There is a class group on WhatsApp, they did not let me enter. Only in the 4th year, they did. Because every time the teacher says <<Omar, why did not you study this? >>, and I say <<I am not in the group; I do not know what I have to study>>, she says <<let Omar enter the group>> and they say <<yes, ok, later>> and later they do not let me enter. At the end of the 4th year, they let me enter; this is the first thing my classmates did... because they were all together, they had friends, everything, so, for me, they did not do anything with me, just a little help when something is difficult"* (Int.06).

Even though this Syrian pupil's classmates sometimes help him with studies, they do not include him socially. It is not clear why they have chosen to exclude him; nevertheless, it is possible to note the professors' efforts to resolve the situation. The mother is more direct in explaining the situation of exclusion, perhaps because she is not affected by shyness and shame in the same way the pupils are:

> *"They perceive a kind of discrimination. You know, kids, teenagers... for example, they do things that it is not fair for my kids to do. They are rebels; I do not know how to say. There have been problems with some kids who provoke and try to create problems. […] When he finishes school, he stays alone. […] When I saw my son come back sad from school, I suffered from it, and he still did not speak good Italian, so he could not defend himself. It was the first period that we were here, in a foreign country, it was difficult, but we made it a source of strength. I told my son <<do not worry, defend yourself and talk to them […] it is okay, these people do not love you, leave them alone. Think about studying>>"* (Int.43).

In her opinion, Italian adolescents discriminated against her son because he did not do what they usually did, such as going out at night and drinking. Another boy said that the fact that he, as a Muslim, did not drink made it difficult for him to socialize in a place where going to the bar to drink was often the main socializing activity for teenagers (Int.21; 27). The student is mocked for being "a good boy" and does not have the linguistic ability to defend himself. Discrimination does not seem to be based on hatred towards an ethnicity or religion, but rather on mocking those who do not do the things considered cool. This social selection is often based on clothes (Int. 11; 20; 27), something that relates more to economic possibility than to religion or ethnicity, to which Arab pupils are not accustomed since they have uniforms in their home countries' schools:

"In Syria, there is a dress that you must go to school only with this dress. Here you can choose any dress, and you can go, and I do not like the difference that you have branded or non-branded clothes, or you wear a shoe that costs 5.000 or 10/15 euros, there is a difference here, especially in Italy I tell you. In Syria... all the same. […] I can dress the brand as long as I do not go to school dressed as if I were going to a wedding... no, I go with a dress, this, 2 or 3 dresses, these for the school, that I do not go too elegant, I go to study. […People are too much] attentive to clothes and culture... how do you call it? Of the dress, that you have or not money and I do not like this at all, and there is too much difference in my school. Until now, I have had problems with these things. In the end, I will dress all in gold and go to school (laughs)" (Int.21).

Another pupil states:

"It was a bit difficult, and also, they were teasing you all day long. I do not know. They put water on your chair; I do not know, they throw something at you from above, like we had the class that there was the wall that was open from above, so, they would throw something at you, and run away and I was alone in the class, so it was difficult right at the beginning" (Int.09).

This boy suffers from his classmates' jokes because he is new and alone. However, even in this case, there is no discrimination based on ethnicity or religion explicitly. The only explicit discrimination based on religion happened to a pupil who decided to run for a pupils' representative at a provincial level in Rome, attracting criticism and offense from fascist students (Int.16). It is essential to say that he won the election and they lost, even though other pupils did not appreciate this racist and discriminatory behaviour. However, this is a more political sphere that goes beyond the relationship with classmates. In Sweden, there is only one account regarding this topic:

"A child cries to the teacher because other children ask him <<Do you come from Syria? Have you chairs, or do you sit on the ground? Have you forks or do you eat by hand? >>" (Focus group1).

It shows the ignorance of this child's Swedish classmates, who know nothing about Syria and think that they have no chairs and forks. However, it could also be seen as merely children's curiosity without bad intentions, as they may be eager to know but ask it in the wrong way.

11.7.4 Racism, discrimination and tolerance in and towards teachers

"The only people with whom this always occurs was the Israelis, the only teachers who allow themselves to speak in that way are those who tell the Israeli history, the Israelis' things. In my opinion, the only case in which what you say occurs, but for others no, they always speak and joke normally" (Int. 28).

In Egypt, pupils never experienced discrimination from teachers towards internal religious groups, other people, or cultures, except Israelis, about whom they spoke with hate. In Morocco, pupils

are taught to be tolerant towards all people, ethnicities, religions, and cultures of the world, including the Jewish one. In particular, concerning the local minority, teachers teach pupils:

> *"That these Berbers are practically the real inhabitants let us say, the real local people, and they have an older culture than ours, they have an old culture very, very... ancient"* (Int.23).

Having an old culture mean they deserve respect and esteem. No interview emerged suggesting that the teachers had a practical attitude opposed to these teachings. In Syria, however, teachers do not mention ethnic differences (Int.37), the existence of Kurdish people and pupils (Int.39), or Armenian people (Int.29). The only identity, culture, and story they are allowed to speak of is the Arab one. This silence around the topic causes most people to remember that no episode of racism occurred. It is important to remember that teachers cannot emphasize differences in ethnic or religious belonging, as the government considers it an attack on national unity. Despite this, someone may have a different opinion on the practical discrimination that occurs in school:

> *"In Afrin, there were these Kurdish teachers [...] they help you a bit if you do not speak Arabic, they help you to learn. But in Aleppo, it was impossible; you have an Arab teacher who cannot help you and does not want to help you […] Then the teachers think that… they want you to be like them"* (Int.19).

Kurdish teachers help Kurdish pupils secretly by teaching them Arabic using their mother tongue. Arab teachers, however, even if they do not say offensive things against Kurds, cannot and do not have the will to help non-Arab pupils learn Arabic as a foreign language. Therefore, they teach as they would to all Arabic-speaking pupils, effectively discriminating against them every day. The misrecognition of pupils' diversity by teachers serves to promote total uniformity, in which teachers believe they must make pupils equal to them by strictly reproducing the dominant culture. Consequently, any personal or collective difference must be repressed in the name of this uniformity, which is more political than ethnic or religious in its origin:

> *"We have this teacher that is an Arab, with the government, and she knew that I am not in this Party, I am not active in this Party so... we were discriminated by this"* (Int.33).

The woman in this quote is not Kurdish; she is Arab and Sunni. However, her family is against the government and she did not join the Party youth section active in her school. Therefore, the teachers discriminated against her for her political choice, as is the case for many Kurdish people who do not join the Ba'th Party. Even parents judge Syrian and Lebanese teachers as being racist (Int.44). Leaving out minorities it is helpful to remember that Syrian teachers transmit hate towards Israeli people and other people whose government obstacles the political planes of the Ba'th Party. Anyway, Lebanon is the country in which pupils experience the most discrimination from teachers:

"I found this year terrible, the worst of my life. Because every day there was a problem in this school, the headmistress, if there was a classmate who did something, they always say that I did" (Int.06).

Lebanese teachers complain about the presence of Syrian pupils in their classrooms. When Syrians are allowed to attend class, they are often unjustly blamed for the troubles that afflict them.

"I entered a Lebanese school that was not so good because teachers are bad […] I had problems with teachers, more with the French ones, because I do not like the French language so much […]. The French teacher gets pissed off a bit and starts saying many things because I do not study, because all my classmates are Lebanese, all of them know how to speak French because they started studying it at an early age. I am the only one who does not know French, and the teacher does not like it. Sometimes she also starts to raise her hands, but I do not say anything; I was young; I go back home and talk to my parents" (Int.05).

This pupil had to deal with a French teacher who was angry with him because he did not know the French language, even though it was not his fault, as he had not studied it in Syria. Instead of helping him, she missed no opportunity to belittle, insult, and attack him, openly displaying her annoyance at having him in the class.

"Not all teachers, but they are a little racist [...] Lebanon is like a country that each side has... that it is divided into 4 parts, so we are afraid of them [...]. So there are in the class few friends, let us say friends, who are of a particular part, so the teachers do not do anything with them, that even the teachers say we do not want to create problems [...] So there is a bit of racism as if I had problems with the teachers, those who start shouting just because… However, it is a normal thing there; it is normal to find these things; with time, I got used to it; if someone makes fun of me, it does not matter" (Int.05).

Teachers are scared of Lebanese pupils who belong to particular groups, and do not intervene in any way to advocate for weaker pupils, such as Syrian refugees. On the contrary, they prefer to blame them since no one will come forward to defend them at school, as opposed to Lebanese pupils who misbehave. It is now easier to understand why Italian schools appear so fantastic in the descriptions of Syrian pupils who have attended school in Lebanon:

"They are friendly and good; they help us understand things and do not say that we have to make a distinction. Okay, here at high school, they make a distinction between them and us. It is not a problem, but in Lebanon, they made a very ugly distinction because the difference between people is not like that... Okay, I am Syrian and you are Italian, not that I am ugly and you are good and nice" (Int.22).

The distinction made by Italian teachers in many experiences is, for example, to give newly arrived pupils a summary of a topic instead of the many pages given to their Italian classmates. In this way, they can more easily follow the class. The point is that they do not feel that teachers are discriminating against them, but rather helping them. The same occurs comparing Libya and Italy:

"Racist/discriminatory behaviour, for example? No, I have not seen them. I have seen them much more in Arab countries than in Italy. When we were in Libya, which is a Muslim country, there was racism against Syrians, more than in Italy" (Int.44).

Libyan discrimination based on national criteria is experienced as stronger than the so-called Arab unity and Italian racism towards Arabs. This is not only the opinion of Syrians who have been refugees first in Libya and then in Italy, but also of Libyan people themselves:

"Here they treat me very well, which is not as I had thought before. Before, I was terrified of this thing, because, as I said, where I live, they do not treat foreigners well, so I thought it would be the same here, but it is not." (Int. 07).

This Amazigh Libyan pupil, starting from how teachers dealt with migrated and minority pupils in Libya, was afraid of how Italian teachers would treat her. Instead, she found them to be gentle and welcoming. Most interviews reported good relationships with teachers, who tried to welcome and help newly arrived pupils despite problems and limitations:

"First of all, there is a bit of curiosity. They also want to understand the family's dynamics. They want to know how they should behave and what relationship they can establish. There is also a difficulty at the beginning, because they do not know, because there is also a language problem, sometimes they cannot communicate at all […] They find themselves in a bit of difficulty because they do not know what approach to take with them or how to behave for education, given the cultural differences. They stopped me every morning to ask me for help...because there was a need, really..." (Int.42).

From the words of this Moroccan mother, who works as a cultural mediator, it is possible to understand the teachers' effort to understand the culture and habits of their new pupils and their families. The unpreparedness of the teachers and their willingness to fill this gap emerge simultaneously. In this atmosphere, parents do not consider misunderstandings to be the result of racism, but rather the lack of knowledge of others (Int.43), which they attempt to remedy together. Despite the linguistic problems, most parents and pupils do not feel discriminated against:

"Every teacher tells me <<come and stay with me, so I can make you study a little>>. And they start to speak a bit with me in English that I understand a little bit […] I went to the 3rd grade with marks that they gave me to tell me <<come on, you can do it>>. In 3rd grade, I started to study more" (Int. 05).

Teachers, and the Italian language teacher (Int.30) in particular, attempt to assist migrant pupils in learning the language by providing them with exceptional support. What the recently migrated pupils interviewed most appreciated about their teachers was their ability to openly address and comprehend differences through dialogue:

"At secondary school, I had this Italian, history and geography teacher who, for me, was spectacular. A person who always manages to go into depth, always to answer, to look for... She was open to all perspectives, she is a wonderful person, able to manage all the differences in the class, she was a really spectacular person" (Int.16).

Unfortunately, however, not all experiences have been so positive:

"The teachers had discriminatory attitudes because when one of the Egyptian boys did something, they blamed the whole group criticising him like <<Egyptians talk, Egyptians disturb>>" (Int.30).

This Egyptian boy experienced in Italy the same as Syrian pupils do in Lebanon; the teachers were not pleased to have them in the class and labeled all the Egyptian pupils as the group that caused problems, even the more studious and quiet ones. This is just one of many negative experiences:

"All teachers say that he is good, they do not believe his father is Moroccan as he is so polite" (Int.03).

This positive opinion about a Moroccan pupil is offensive; teachers explicitly told this mother that they were surprised that a Moroccan boy was polite, as they assumed all Moroccans were evil persons with no education. By complimenting the person, they were offending his belonging. These teachers did not help the pupil, who was failed twice due to his poor Italian language, and he found himself still in middle school with children when he was already an adolescent:

"A teacher told him <<what are you doing here? You are big, why did you come here? >> He never wanted to go to school again. And his friends laughed, and you know the adolescents get hurt [...] We also got a call from the social worker who spoke to the boy and agreed with him, saying that the school was wrong. He said that he had wasted two years and he did not want to go back, either to high school or anywhere else" (Int.03).

The teacher would know that he had failed due to language difficulties and would help him rather than offend him and make him feel excluded. In this case, the prejudices of the first teachers, who thought that he could not learn the language or succeed in education, and the discriminatory behavior of the last, act as a selection for this pupil who can enroll without any selection, but who after three years leaves middle school without having achieved any results. Sometimes, parents experience exclusion as well:

"There have not been many meetings. On two occasions, I was asked to go for an interview; once I went, but to nothing; they did not speak to me. You know, I do not speak Italian, they told me: why did you come? It was not necessary" (Int. 44).

In this case, the father of a pupil was excluded from the school meeting because he did not speak Italian; instead of providing a translation service, the teachers made him feel worthless and unwanted. Sometimes, discrimination intersects with economic issues:

> *"I do not like the English teacher because she is always angry. The truth I feel is that she is making the difference between them and us; that we are foreigners and they are Italians, we came here to take everything. Sometimes she shouts at me, I do not like anybody shouting at me. I understood the first and second time that she is the teacher, but not every time you can shout at me. It is not nice. I ask why do you always shout at me? See how the Italians behave because I am not ashamed of these things […] Always the same story: you do not have the book. I do not have any books, I take them from my class-friend, we always take them and make photocopies"* (Int.22).

Even in this case, the teacher scolds mainly newly-migrated pupils, showing displeasure about their presence in the classroom. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the pupil does not have the book in front of all her classmates, when she does not have any book for economic reasons, stressing her economic condition in an unkind manner. Even newly migrated pupils in Germany often have to deal with teachers who do not take pleasure in having them in the classroom. In this country, migrant and refugee parents and pupils experience more often racist and discriminatory behavior from teachers than tolerant ones:

> *"Her teacher was not good with her. I remember that the first time she was in class, he asked her <<Who brought you here? >>. She answered <<we have moved here, and I am registered here>>; he said to her <<you do not speak German either, I will bring you to the 2nd grade, come and sit here in front of me because you are not good and I will take you to 2nd class>>. When I went to her, I saw her crying; I cannot describe to you how she was. As a mother, I am satisfied with my daughter and told her that maybe you are not very good, maybe her language is not perfect, and he speaks that way. It does not matter. Do not be sad. After 2 days, she should write a test; I taught her everything, but he did not let her write the test and said <<no, you are not good enough, and I have to bring you to the 2nd class>>, then I talked to him, and then he was convinced and accepted my daughter in his class"* (Int.50).

Non-language proficiency is often used as an excuse for teachers to discriminate against and exclude pupils and parents, without giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills or abilities. This is based on the assumption that they are not up to standard. Teachers display their biases both in their interactions with pupils and in their interactions with parents, where cultural issues often come to the fore beyond any linguistic difficulties:

> *"Because of the language, sometimes I feel they do not like to speak with us, or maybe they have the feeling that I am a mother who cannot teach her daughter or does not care about her. This thing is*

wrong. I think (sorry for telling you that) they mean we do not understand anything, and this education is not ours, and we are still unable to explain it to our children" (Int.50).

This parent feels that teachers have no pleasure in speaking with her and attributes this to her limited language ability. However, in reality, she understands that teachers are prejudiced towards her because of her migrant background, believing that parents with a migratory background are not properly engaged in their children's education. Teachers do not perceive these parents as partners in the joint effort of educating children, but rather as obstacles because they do not share the same culture and educational background. They seem to perceive parents' identity as a threat to the education they intend to impart, creating an inability for parents and pupils to show the reality of their culture and enhance their identity. Teachers' harshness in the face of language difficulties and the resulting exclusion affects pupils' progress and selection:

"He was excluded. He told me: <<Mama, the teacher made me sit at a table near the window alone – away from my classmates>> […] <<I raise my hand to give the right answer, but she never responds to me. She always makes the other children give the answer>>. He hated school. So we looked for some mediation. We took somebody who can speak Arabic and German and asked for an appointment with the teacher […]. She said: <<He does not have enough words to express himself. His language is not good enough>>. We said: <<If he had not, they would not have him enter the 1st grade>>. […] Then we were surprised by the teacher who said <<he has to repeat the 1st grade – not because his marks were bad, but because his German was not enough to follow the lessons>>. […] He repeated the 1st grade – but with another teacher. He lost a year of his life. Still, things are slightly better now. It is better that he did not stay with the same teacher and suffered exclusion until the 4th grade. Or being discouraged every day by <<You do not understand; You do not know to answer>> and that sort of remarks. Thank God, things are better now. He is in 2nd grade now, and his results are good – all between good and excellent" (Int.48).

This teacher does not accept the school admission of this pupil because she has determined that his language skills are insufficient. Rather than working to improve his skills, she has demotivated him through exclusion. Fortunately, the pupil changed classrooms and teachers, but only after failing in the first year of school, a failure that could have negatively affected his entire path if he had stayed with the same teacher. The new teacher accepted him, and he started to have good results. Nevertheless, not all teachers have discriminatory and racist behaviors:

"I remember that in the 1st grade, we asked for an extra appointment, and they gave us one immediately. I also would like to stress that with my daughter's teachers, who stayed with her from 1st grade to now, we did not experience any kind of racism or discrimination. Not at all" (Int.48).

Some interviewees spoke about available and friendly teachers who did not show any racism or discrimination, even if no one mentioned teachers who particularly helped them or exceptionally managed multicultural classrooms, as was the case in Italy. In some cases (Int.37; 39), tolerant teachers were found only after changing schools due to a negative experience with racist and discriminatory teachers. Instead, in Sweden, no one complains about racist or discriminatory behavior from teachers. Considering the experiences of Arabic-speaking refugees and migrants in educational institutions, it is also interesting to see how teachers belonging to minorities have experienced their situation. In Syria, Kurdish teachers are subject to government repression:

> *"No, they cannot, they cannot explain or... help, but they did it because they are Kurds, to help, but generally... in the government's rules, you cannot teach even one thing in Kurdish, if a professor or someone teaches something in Kurdish to a pupil he goes to prison"* (Int.19).

To help pupils through their mother tongue is variously implemented in the countries surveyed, from Sweden, where it is the official system, to Morocco, where it is a possibility yet to be fully implemented, passing through many countries that mostly ignore this practice, which allows for the enhancement of pupils' identity rather than its belittlement. In Syria, however, it is completely forbidden, so Kurdish teachers who want to implement a proven beneficial method for pupils' psychological well-being and educational outcomes have to do it clandestinely, risking imprisonment. On the contrary, being a Palestinian teacher in Syria is a good experience, as they can speak about their country and advocate their cause with pupils (Int.34) that is, openly express their identity with pride, gaining solidarity and esteem. Even Arab teachers in Israel have more freedom and can more openly live their identity than Kurdish teachers in Syria can:

> *"Usually in the Arab school, they all are Arab professors... yes... Some who also study after in the Arab college, and so are also trained after in Arabic/Hebrew but... There is the possibility to do a whole educational path in Arabic to become a teacher in Arabic, and it is done"* (Int.08).

If the position of Arab teachers in Israel is objectionable due to their ghettoization, they can still work with Arab pupils using their native language and transmitting their culture. However, this is not the case for Kurdish teachers in Syria, and possibly even less so for Syrian teachers in Lebanon:

> *"I was in Lebanon, and in Lebanon, I teach... I started first with the UN... to give lessons for the Syrian refugees in the camps and I take it one time a week, it was not officially, it was volunteering. I take a little, […]. They are all without school [...]. I tried to work as a teacher in the school, but it was difficult because the government of Lebanon said no, in the school, just Lebanese teachers, no Syrian teachers. In Beirut, I did not try before I tried in public school for the Syrian, I tried twice to make it, and they said no... The Lebanese do not allow it because there was conflict, because the Lebanese said <<oh, we have a lot of Syrian refugees, and we spent a lot of money>>, and the UN said <<No, do not worry. We*

give you money>>. And there is a big conflict and many parties, political parties, in Lebanon <<ah go away, Syrians go away>>. In conflicts like this, the UN spend more money, said <<no, we give money for the Lebanese teachers to give the afternoon for the Syrian students in the school>>" (Int.41).

This Syrian teacher refugee in Lebanon is trying to work in Lebanese schools but there are no work possibilities for him and for all the Syrian teachers who are refugees in Lebanon like him due to the country's political and economic situation. Lebanese were worried that Syrians would steal their jobs, so even though Syrians proposed to be teachers for Syrian children, the government had to ensure that funds for schooling Syrian refugee pupils were used to pay salaries for Lebanese teachers, excluding Syrians. Syrian teachers may teach Arabic language and culture or other humanities subjects taught in Arabic; however, they can only help as volunteers in refugee camps. In the other diaspora countries, Arabic is not among the official instruction languages. Unfortunately, there is no way to work as a teacher in public schools in Turkey (Int.38):

"I did not have enough language, so... I stayed there only 3 years, and you cannot stay there without working because you need to eat (laugh). So, I did not have much money to stay home and study, so I should work. So I work with the work that I could" (Int.32-22).

Language and economic conditions are the main reasons they could not attempt to work as a teacher. Furthermore, in Italy, people did not even consider the possibility:

"Why did you choose to go away from Italy after 2 days?
R: Because many my friends tell me... they said to me you can take a pass, a nationality here, it is better than Italy, more chances to find a job" (Int.34).

This teacher arrived in Italy by boat and escaped after two days from the asylum seekers' centre where she was welcomed, as her friend had suggested she move to Sweden, where she would have a better chance of finding work in her field.

"I came here with English, just English […] and I began studying the Swedish language. It was not easy, but I like languages in general. After 1 year, I could make practical work in a school, and after 6 months, I got a contract with them for 3/2 years. After that, I worked as an English teacher and a support teacher for newly migrated students" (Int.35).

From this statement, it is easily understandable that there is a difference between Sweden and Italy. In Italy, although it is theoretically possible to become a regular teacher for foreign people, there is a complicated national selection procedure and no training program for refugee teachers. In Sweden, however, refugee teachers feel valued by an education system that allows them to do the work they have studied for. If they reach a good level of Swedish, they can teach as regular teachers. In the meantime, they can teach as support teachers for newly migrated children, making

themselves useful by using their mother tongue. In Germany, as in Sweden, and in contrast to Italy and Lebanon, there is a shortage of teachers. In Sweden, the system makes it easy for newly migrated teachers to start working; however, in Germany, this is not the case, even though they need teachers:

> *"Yes. When my daughter went to school, there were English lessons as well. Then they stopped. When we asked why, they said there was no English teacher. I said I am an English teacher and I can teach even as a volunteer. But they did not respond. They did not have English lessons all year long"* (Int.48).

This English teacher offered to work free of charge in her daughter's school to help them and challenge herself as a teacher, but she was not accepted. The point is that teachers' selection in Germany is much stricter than in Sweden:

> *"I need more education, I have to do something more to be a teacher here. I must go to university and have more levels in language, yes. I have to pass more levels in German; then I must go to university and study another subject like arts or mathematics; here in Germany, teachers must have 2 certificates in 2 subjects. I like to be a teacher, but I must think carefully about what I can study at university and what chance I could have here in Germany. I must think carefully because studying here needs... to be a hard worker"* (Int. 38).

The teachers interviewed do not feel capable of meeting the training and selection requirements of the German teaching system, which is based on language proficiency just as pupil selection is. To become a teacher in Germany, it is necessary to possess the C1 level (Int.41), which deters most people from pursuing this goal and makes them feel inadequate and unsuitable. In addition, in some federal states, there is another obstacle for teachers with diverse cultural backgrounds:

> *"They said that because of my hijab, I could not teach here, but now everything is changed, and they accept people because they need a lot of teachers because they do not have enough teachers"* (Int.37).

This Kurdish teacher's experience in Berlin highlights the controversy surrounding the established freedom of religion in schools. In Berlin, there was a law prohibiting teachers from wearing the hijab, which appears to have been removed more to address the lack of teachers in the city, thereby allowing Muslim teachers to assume the available positions, rather than out of an ideal conviction regarding religious tolerance. The topic arose only in the interviews carried out in Germany, since in Sweden there is no law against the hijab and in Italy migrant teachers do not try to teach at all regardless of the use of the veil. Therefore, Muslim people do not feel that Italian discrimination against migrant teachers is religious discrimination like in Germany. Of all the teachers interviewed, both those belonging to a minority in their home countries and those belonging to a migrant minority in a host country, only the Palestinian refugees in Syria and the refugees in

Sweden felt valued in their professional role and personal identity. This recognition also had positive effects on refugee pupils' perceptions, who saw their refugee compatriots performing an institutional role such as teaching, helping to increase their self-esteem and hope for a better future in the host country. Nevertheless, someone expresses his criticism even toward the Nordic system:

> *"The immigrant here, either from Arab countries or from, is already... Taken as something or someone to be educated, to be introduced in a cultural system or some working areas, so you see the adults who arrive here, immediately language, now overly square the thing, but it is already a service…"* (Int.08).

The excellent service provided by the State in teaching language and introducing newly-migrated adults to the workforce is seen as a sign of a supposed Nordic cultural superiority, according to which immigrants must be educated and directed to the labor market.

11.8 Identity and belonging

This last chapter treats the interviewees' statements in which they directly discuss their identity and belonging following Yampolsky et al. (2016) pattern, thus examining how they order their different identities and belongings during their educational paths and migratory movements.

> *"All locals, all boys of the same... of the same religion and country, there was no foreigner"* (Int. 23).

National and religious belonging completely overlap in Moroccan pupils, in a fully integrated identity, based on the common ground between being Moroccan and Muslim. In this case, Arab identity moves to the background due to a legitimate culture transmitted in schools that correlates both Amazigh and Arab people to Moroccan and Muslim belonging, categorizations that acquire a predominant role in defining identity. In other countries, it is possible to find different solutions. In Algeria, schools attempt to promote an integrated identity, in which there is a complementarity between Arab, national, and religious belonging:

> *"From this point of view, they gave importance to the Arab-Muslim identity […]. We give importance to nationality, so until university, I did not know that there was this distinction between Arabs and Berbers, I thought... That there was not this difference in ethnicity, but I thought, when one say, this one is from Kabylia, that is a Berber city, just like saying that one is from Roma, from Naples, Milanese, etc. I thought it was like that. Therefore, at high school, there were never such distinctions […]. At university, you find this distinction because there is a Berber city where Berbers underline their identity due to... For historical reasons, because there was... After the French colonisation, when the Algerian government rejected the Berber language and therefore every Algerian had to speak Arabic and not Berber; to speak Berber was forbidden... The national language was Arabic, only Arabic... This is why*

many Berbers feel the need to say that they are Berbers and speak Berber, for identity […] but in the end, they are all Muslims" (Int.12).

It is possible to see how Arab and national identities overlap in the legitimate culture transmitted by schools, to the extent that this student did not have a clear idea of the Amazigh issue until she attended university. The attempt to categorize ethnic identities within the framework of national belonging by giving predominance to the Arab one started with the first independent government and continues to this day. The repression of minority identities appears in her words more as a legacy of the past than a choice of the present, and Muslim belonging seems to be chosen as the predominant, making the different ethnic belongings converge with equal dignity. Therefore, as in other cases, the dominant identity that holds ethnic differences together is the Muslim more than the national one.

In Syria, there is no Moroccan homogeneity or Algerian religious predominance, so the regime has been attempting to create a homogenous identity based on ethnicity:

"There was no talk about minority issues at all, there was a kind of... unified identity, they were trying to create, but it was... they cannot talk about Kurdish people and do not talk about religion" (Int.40).

In Syria, politics have elected the Arab identity as the exclusive one that schools must teach and transmit, repressing ethnic and religious particular belongings that have no place within the legitimate official discourse.

"They speak, for example of people who are called Medi; these are the Kurds, but... They do not say these things; they do not explain these things, just generally. In Syria, they generally want everybody to be Arab, everybody, one thing... why do they not let me study Kurdish? I cannot speak Kurdish in school, No one, not even a Kurdish person, has been able to give a Kurdish name to their son or daughter for the past 20 years" (Int.19).

Minority members are the people who are most aware of the identity-building measures voluntarily enacted by the state, as it has impacted their own identity in a conflictive way and they suffer from it. In this quote, it is possible to see how the relationship between ancient Syrian people and Kurdish people is hidden, not allowing the Kurdish identity to be perceived as a legitimate Syrian identity, that is, as two complementary identities.

"I am 23 years old; I am Syrian and Kurdish, from Aleppo city" (Int.19).

Indeed, this Kurdish-Syrian boy does not define himself as either Kurdish-Syrian or Syrian-Kurdish, but as both Syrian and Kurdish, as two separate and conflicting identities that coexist within the same person. One is linked to the nation and reproduced by school education, while the

other is transmitted by and relates to family and community. There is no integration between the two identities. Sometimes, people who have lived under the Syrian government's identity obsession (Remotti 2011) and have had the opportunity to reflect on themselves, avoid all strict identifications:

> *"I was born in the Kurdish region in 1980, and I can speak Arabic and Kurdish"* (Int.32).

This teacher, who now lives in Sweden, has found a less confrontational way to express her identity; she talks about where she was born and the language she can speak, not using the verb "to be" in an oppositional way, demonstrating an integrated identity. The reasons for the differences could be that she is older and, perhaps, even the training she attended in Sweden to be a teacher helped her to manage her different identities. Nevertheless, how Syrian education addresses Kurdish identity is not exceptional compared to other minorities; rather, it is the most egregious example:

> *"Because Armenians are also Syrians, yes, but they are always... Even if they are Armenians, of Armenian origin, but they are always born in our territory, maybe his father. Then we also have Palestinians. But, if he is Palestinian, I cannot say <<why he is Palestinian>>. However, he was born in our territory, so I cannot look at him as a foreign person because he was born here, born like me, in the same territory... We are all of different origin, nobody who came... if you look in history too many people has different origins, but it does not mean that if I came here more than... or for example, my family came here before your family it means that we are... different from you, no. Our life starts when we are born, that is, our life starts here, what is gone, is gone, gone with the history"* (Int.29).

This student explains how people and institutions in Syria do not discriminate against people with different backgrounds; however, the problem is that they do not even recognise these differences. The right to be equal, in this case, justifies the different identities being hidden, as the desired result is exclusive or predominant identities in which the Arab one has to prevail over the others:

> *"They said we are all Arabs and then Muslims and Christians and nationalism is more important than religion"* (Int.39).

The Arab identity must be exclusive in terms of ethnicity. Instead, it must be predominant in terms of the religious beliefs that are allowed to exist within the Arab identity, that is, Christianity and Islam, the traditional Arab religions, excluding all other religions of the world. Not all Arab pupils or teachers accepted this identity imposition as right and motivated by the desire to avoid creating discrimination among citizens:

"We know Kurdish people live in Syria; they live more or less in the north, but they were allowed to learn Arab history and not their own history, and we did not learn at school that there were Kurdish people in the North; it was not taught. It is not a topic in school. The Kurdish question is complicated because the regions where they are living are divided between countries like Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and so on... Wherever they want to find a state, nobody got. Any country of those would give them the right to have their own state, and so nothing like this is taught in schools" (Int.36).

This Arab Syrian teacher identifies politics as the cause of the identity imposition, for which transmitting the Arab identity and culture as the only legitimate one in school is a way to ensure the state's territorial integrity against separatist tendencies. With its egalitarian rhetoric, Syrian nationalism often succeeds in influencing people with complex identities to identify themselves overall with the nation.

"I do not really consider myself European... when I am in Syria, I am Syrian, so I do not really consider myself as European because my father is also Syrian and we have a Syrian ID and everything but... I think yes, I am the only person that is half European in the school" (Int.40).

The mother of this student is European, and his father is Circassian. She displays a context-dependent identity, saying that when she is in Syria, she is Syrian, caught up in the scholastic identity homogenisation process. When Syrian pupils arrived in Lebanon, however, the instilled feeling of belonging to an Arab supranational community lost strength as the national identity became more important:

"I had difficulties the first year, as always when you go to a new place, you have to have difficulties, or you have to have that... it is not your culture. Even if it is Arab, Arab no, there is a new culture" (Int.21).

Syrian pupils have suffered the impact of the Lebanese culture, which is very different from their own despite both being Arab. The differences are very pronounced in schools, where they find themselves treated as unwelcome foreigners rather than Arab brothers and sisters to be included in society, as is the case in Syria with Palestinian refugees. Even the foreign languages' role in education significantly affected them, making them feel provincial and backward compared to their Lebanese peers capable of speaking English and French. In the Syrian migratory pathway, the homogeneous and superordinate identity that the regime had tried to build disintegrated:

"The religious, ethnic and communitarian differences were not important in Syria, but they became so after the war for a security feeling. These communitarian belongings continued to affect us in Europe where we are identified by them" (Focus group1).

Particular belongings became important during the civil war when no one could trust people outside their restricted community. In this statement, a parent complained that in Europe people continue to identify refugees with their communitarian belongings, implying the discomfort that this identification causes them as externally imposed and not felt. New migrated Syrian parents in Sweden express profound identity distress, despite the good education policies already analysed:

> *"I feel that my children born in Sweden are taken away from me by the education system, like there is the Berlin wall between our house and outside, on the values' level"* (Focus Group 1).

This father is worried that his children, attending school, are internalising Swedish culture and values much more than he is and this is creating a distance between them. He feels they live two different lives, one inside the house and one outside, developing separate identities. It is interesting to compare this statement with the testimony of pupils born and educated in Italy:

> *"When I was a child, I felt Italian, I had the Christian culture below and around, the churches in Verona and the Christmas, and saints, and so... that was that context. My path was very much surrounded by spirituality, by the monotheism culture, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim"* (Int.08).

This boy has developed an integrated identity as an Italian Arab-Muslim, in which the monotheistic religions' common roots seem to play an important role. His spirituality, imbued with Sufism, has allowed him to move between Italy, Palestine and Israel, giving more importance to similarities than differences. Even without this religious peculiarity, often children born in a country feel they belong to it, regardless of their ethnicity and religion, such as this Algerian Muslim:

> *"I was totally Italian, integrated, included; I did not have... I never had any problem... I had many friends and... So, a happy childhood... friends at school, where we lived, in the neighbourhood, so... I never had any problem that you see in the newspapers"* (Int.12).

This student seems to have developed a superordinate identity in which belonging to the nation in which she was born has a major role. Children born in Italy feel Italian as they are well welcomed but, on the other hand, they are not valued also for the other culture they bring with them:

> *"In schools, the approach is, yes, of welcome, but often there are no tools available, and there are no mediators. So, for them, when a foreign child is arriving, it almost becomes an emergency state because they do not have tools. The child is labelled as the one who has to adapt, the one who is lacking and therefore at a disadvantage. The things he brings with him are not valued. His experience abroad is not valued. Instead, know it, give it the right value and integrate things is necessary. Instead, the foreign*

child is always lacking; he must always recover. In a phase of identity formation, it is not a good thing! It is distressing for a boy, especially when he comes with a school career behind him" (Int.42).

Therefore, they often opt for a context-dependent identity, being Italian at school and Arab at home. This is even truer for children who arrive in the host country in the middle of their schooling, with experiences and knowledge already acquired that are not recognized, causing frustration and affecting their self-esteem. Therefore, schools should strive for harmony in children's identity development, recognizing and valuing them as people and pupils, and attempting to prevent a large cultural divide from the family, while promoting family involvement in school life. This Moroccan mother in Italy appears to have managed to evolve alongside her child:

"Yes, some values are inevitable because they are also mine. However, I have changed a lot in these 20 years. I have taken many things away. And so I see that he has acquired a lot of things from me, but he has integrated as well, so there is no conflict between the two cultures […] It is clear that there are very different systems of values, different aspects... there is a call to reflect on one's own values, on a personal and community level. Here too, one lives in another society, but also there is a Moroccan community, that is like a society inside the society. So, the discourse is how to find a balance between these. Obviously, some of our things, already acquired for us as adults, are questioned. Some things are revised, and some improved. There is much questioning because confrontation is inevitable every day in daily relationships. Unless you close up yourself and do not go out. Otherwise, when there is contact with society, every day is a challenge; the comparison with others always leads us to look inside ourselves, to see our own, theirs. It is a challenge, in my opinion. I liked it very much" (Int.42).

This mother states that she has changed along with her son, adjusting herself, abandoning some habits and thoughts and acquiring others, as is typical in the course of life, even if one does not emigrate. However, refugee parents may fear the usual adjustment to life in the face of changed circumstances, as they fear losing their identity. This is the case for the Syrian father in Sweden, not the Italian mother, whose profession as a cultural mediator has likely helped her in terms of her aptitude for managing differences. This woman experienced cultural confrontation as a positive challenge through which people can improve themselves and build integrated identities. In her statement, an important element of identity development in the host country is evident; that is, the community of compatriots, a society within the society, such as the Moroccan one in Italy or the Syrian one in Germany. These communities may sometimes act as an impediment to the development of relationships and engagement with the host society, and even to the peaceful development of one's identity:

"If she suffered any bullying, it was from other Arab pupils who asked her why she did not wear a headscarf" (Int.48).

This mother is worried for her well-integrated daughter due to the opinion of the Arab community. From these types of testimonies, it is possible to understand how difficult it is for pupils to find a balance in their identity between the host society and the culture of origin, as they are pushed on both sides to adhere to certain behaviors rather than others. In the case of this pupil, her Arab classmates push her to build an exclusive identity, that is, to feel totally German, making her feel like she is no longer accepted in her native community. Most parents interviewed, however, try to help their children to develop a complementary identity in which both native and host country's cultures can have a role:

> *"Those who come to European countries try to maintain their culture of origin, whatever their culture of origin is, even if it is very different from the European one. Here we have met Arabs who have lived in Italy for 20 years but still preserve their culture. We here... Something have changed... our children, we want them to be good, we want them to build a future that no one has to tell them what place to take but that they choose their place in life. We maintain our culture, our traditions, but for sure we have mixed culturally, we have got used to things we were not used to"* (Int. 44).

This mother perceives the closeness of families in native culture as a limitation to children's success in Europe. She does not wish to dismiss it entirely, but rather to be open to the host country's culture and allow children to develop a harmoniously integrated identity.

> *"They were so small that they experienced the change spontaneously. The problem is more with adults, who have their own habits and traditions. For them, the difference is in many things, even clothes. For example, wearing the hijab […]. Then as far as traditions are concerned, everyone has their traditions, beliefs and culture, and you have to respect that. You must not threaten the other, and the other must not threaten you. I have seen this in Italy"* (Int.47).

As this mother states, little children adapt spontaneously to a new environment and, often, families feel the identity problem more than children do. The parents are the ones who have to find a balance between tradition and openness, also in preparation for the adolescence period when troubles relating to identity have a greater probability of emerging in their sons and daughters:

> *"There were no particular problems, but with adolescence, identity problems took over. He did not know which side to take. The problem of the foreigner, the Moroccan, took over. Moreover, he was trying to understand at that moment if he was Moroccan, Italian, or in between"* (Int.42).

This adolescent is trying to determine his identity, deciding between an exclusive one (Italian or Moroccan), or an integrated one, in which he accepts both his belonging and let them mix. In adolescence, the identity configuration has essential repercussions on social life and love relationship:

"For us, some things must not happen. For example, it happened to Omar. Some girls wanted to become his "girls". He said <<I, as a Muslim boy, cannot>>. This is with the first one, who is more able to dominate his feelings. On the other hand, the second one cannot control his feelings, but still retains the principles and values. He goes to her house with his girlfriend, and she comes here, but there is always someone from the family present. The girl's family is happy that we are like that. I can say that, in general, we have managed to maintain our values. We are integrated but in our own way. We have many friends, and people love us for who we are. I am like that, <<do you like it? Ok. If you do not like it, bye! >>" (Int.43).

In this case, the Muslim identity is the dominant one and influences how these two brothers relate to girls. Their mother believes they must find a way to respect their values and be accepted by society without sacrificing theirself in an effort to please others. Of course, the way one approaches the host society and negotiates identities depends on the type of person one is and the education received:

"We did not change. When we were in Syria, our values did not fit there. Here everything is in line with our values. I studied philosophy, and if I had been brought up in a very conservative milieu, I would probably suffer from a cultural shock. However, I was raised differently. That is why there were not any problems with my identity. Nevertheless, I saw other families we supported as volunteers. They were very afraid of German culture. As if they thought this society is a monster who would swallow their children. Or that they lose their influence on their children. That they will take drugs. Of course, they were afraid because of the girls; because in our society they give more freedom to the boys […] I did not have these problems. I respect German society very much because it gives freedom to people, at least to a great extent… And I raise my children accordingly" (Int.48).

This woman has a particular experience, as she felt not integrated into Syrian society; instead, she agrees with the German mentality, where she finally feels at home. She has an integrated identity based on the similarities between the values her family taught her and the predominant values in German society: freedom and responsibility. She also underlines what scares other Syrian parents, leading them to try strenuously to maintain a specific culture and identity for their children. These things are losing control of them, taking drugs, and, especially for girls, forming relationships in ways that they do not contemplate. Therefore, Muslim identity affects newly migrated pupils in these social aspects, in which they must find a balance between their parents' expectations and their peers' habitus. Muslim identity affects them in their relationships with their peers, even in a more political sense:

"As a Muslim, I do not want an Islamic state or movement, I always said to all my friends, and I have this... this... I look for my Islamic... why are you Muslim? Are you not proud that you are Muslim? Yes,

I am proud that I am Muslim, everyone is proud of his religion, country, and land, but I do not want the president or someone who wants to bring his rules and force... I do not want this feeling that I feel forced to make something I do not want to do. Just because of him, he is our president, or he is our king, we have to do that, and it is not Muslim, even not Christian, religion is another topic" (Int.39).

This student continuously has to answer her peers' questions that relate her religious belonging to political issues with which she disagrees. In their eyes, it seems that if she does not declare herself a fundamentalist, she is not proud of her religion. She suffers from the identification of religion and nationality with politics and has to defend her identity against this prejudice.

"There are different people who feel shy, and I make it... I can understand it. For example, a girl said <<ok, I have the hijab, I am shy like a Muslim, and I am a refugee, and I do not have pride in this>>. She does not trust herself; does not believe in herself, and I feel sorry for her […]. I think the problem is when migrants or refugees come to Europe, they always think about what these people think about us, as Arabs, as Muslims, as Middle East people, and as women too, when I am a woman. They think that when I am a woman, I need help; I always need help. […] We came to Europe, and these people asked <<what did you do? What do you want to do for Germany? Germany has given you a chance to learn in Germany; what do you do? Why? Do not have a job until now? Why did you not find... a school? A course? A language course? You can find a job; you can go and clean; that is a job! >>. Ok, but it is more psychology. These people need time to learn about this land; to learn about that system in this land; to learn how they can contact people; how they can see myself when I am in a bad situation, with people who are racist or that say me <<go back>>, who said me <<why you are here>>. […] I think we have to help these people to make themselves first and then to make something in society" (Int.39).

In this last statement, a student living in Germany highlights how it is difficult to live with pride in one's personal identity when one is a refugee, especially a Muslim woman, who is often viewed as a victim who needs help to emancipate themselves from a culture considered to be retrograde. Women with low self-esteem are asked to commit to the host society without being given the time to understand who they want to be in that society and to build their identity in a harmonious and integrated manner. Academic or work success cannot be expected if there is no psychological balance between who a person was, who they are, and who they would like to be. There must be a vision of a harmonious identity that manages to link the different belongings.

12 Conclusions and further research

The historical reconstruction and the multifactorial analysis show how the Arab educational systems have served to reproduce specific values and social relationships (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Traditional education transmitted religious identity and belonging to multi-ethnic empires. Today, many people regret its equity concerning economic and ethnic differences, since it offered everyone the same education and identification with the Islamic civilisation without stifling specific identities. In contemporary times, some local powers have instituted independent education systems, such as those in Tunisia and Egypt, competing with traditional education, missionary Christians, and modern Ottoman technical high education, thus building the model of today's national supra-confessional education systems. Colonialist powers interrupted this process, establishing education systems to train skilled servants with European values, thus contributing to the creation of nationalist elites. Secularism, linguistic policies, and the widespread attendance of the elite at private international schools are the most visible legacies of colonial education. At the time of independence, more than in other places or times, states built education systems to transmit national values that were not the values of society and a habitus existing in society. It was only the Arab nationalist elites' habitus, in opposition and concurrence or alliance with religious elites and in opposition to other ethnic groups. Arabization characterised all Arab countries, with strong nationalist narratives evident in humanities and social sciences to produce and reproduce the Arab national identity. Saudi Arabia was the only Arab country never colonised and it built an educational system based on its Wahhabi ideology, transmitting its narrative more inside religious matters than in the humanities, combining technological development with tradition and religion. Indeed, two different approaches to the modernisation of education developed: a secular and socialist one, based in Egypt, model at the independence time, and a religious and capitalistic one, based in the Arabian Peninsula, becoming the new educational model at the time of globalisation. These two models still compete in determining pupils' identities today. With globalisation, the official aim of national education systems changed, focusing on the market needs and on scientific matters, considered more important for the country's development, with a return to religion on the Wahhabi model resumed by the Sadat motto *"Science and Faith"*. Humanities lost their role and prestige within education and in some countries, Islamist ideologies replaced the nationalist spirit. Private education regained space at the expense of the devaluated and defunded public one, with the crystallisation of diverse parallel education systems: public and international, religious, or standard privates. The choice between these diverse forms of education is a sign of each family's socioeconomic status and political vision, creating fragmentation in people's educational experiences. Finally, the Arabization drive softened in most countries, such as Morocco, leading to the recognition of the rights of linguistic minorities.

In the first decades after independence, Morocco followed the common Arabization policy in education, and in the last decades of the century, Islamists gained a foothold in the sector. At the turn of the millennium, the Moroccan government included personalities such as the minister Tawfīq of the *ṭarīqa Būdshīshiyya*. The Sufi influence has meant spreading a tolerant and open-minded religious interpretation, avoiding the dichotomy between secular education on the French model and religious education on the Wahhabi model, and opting for an education anchored in religion and identity but not close towards others. In linguistic policy, the trend has been to recognise Moroccan society's multilingualism and value it. The scientific breakthrough here appears to be not so influential, with the humanities playing an essential role in transmitting national identity and pride based on religion and loyalty to the king more than ethnicity. This does not mean that Moroccan education has no limits and problems; in fact, it is characterized by scarcity of resources, low educational results, and economic inequity visible in the dichotomy between public and private education, as is evident in all the interviews. Nevertheless, both in public and private education, humanities content tends towards building an open identity through the values of tolerance and peace, of which respondents say they are very proud, as they believe these values represent Moroccan Islam.

On the opposite side, there is the Syrian education system, which, on the contrary, has excellent learning outcomes but whose political regime negatively influences freedom of thought, opinion, and discussion in the classroom, and propagates through humanities an aggressive Arab identity, which is closed off to minorities and the rest of the world. The interviewees often express this contradiction between a functioning educational system in terms of school attendance and learning results, and the repression within it. In other countries, the Arabization drive has softened at various levels, leading to the recognition of minority rights; however, in the Syrian educational system, there is still a ban on indigenous minority languages and a taboo about specific religious affiliations. At the turn of the century, Bashar al-Assad took his father's place, declaring that he wanted to modernise the country and the education system to bring it up to the challenges of the new millennium and open it to the world. Literature and interviews agree that the changes have only concerned scientific disciplines and information technology; however, even this modernisation appears to be more propaganda than reality, according to interviews. The modernization process proceeded slowly and revealed the technological gap between cities and small villages, strengthening the reproduction of a city elite increasingly detached from the rural population. After 2011, the civil war led to the fragmentation of the national education system with the creation of different systems, each aiming to build its own imagined community (Anderson 2016) and transmit certain narratives and values to future generations. Governmental education, Daesh education, Arab rebel, and Kurdish autonomous educations represent different

narrations and visions of the same country. Non-governmental and non-Islamist groups have carried out the most significant pedagogical experiments, which have been little analyzed in the literature, are difficult to assess, and are mostly already ended.

An essential issue in the interviews is the strong influence of colonial and post-independence politics on education: the interviewees show awareness and talk about them as determining factors of their education, and colonialism emerges as one of the most sensitive topics in identity construction. The interviewees deal with colonialism, emphasizing its role in defining the general structure of the educational system, and religion and humanities, mainly history, as the most affected disciplines. In Algeria and Tunisia, history teaching is very focused on it and the conflict that the theme brings with it is largely an internal conflict in people themselves, who have to manage a mixed tradition, language, and culture, more than in their relationship with France today. Interviewees consider the weight of foreign languages in school to be a consequence of colonialism and subsequent political choices, identifying neo-colonial relationships of subjugation, as stated by Algerians regarding French or by Syrians regarding the introduction of the Russian language. Egyptian interviewees find the reason for the current educational situation in their country in the last decades of the 20th century's history, stressing the dichotomy between Islamist teachers who returned to Egypt imbued with Wahhabi pedagogy and aiming to form a Muslim identity, and Nasser's Arabist ideology which aimed to build a national Arab identity on which Egyptian education is still based. Moroccan people are aware of the advantages of studying with the French model and language in regards to their study and work opportunities abroad. They do not suffer from secularization of education due to French colonial influence, such as Tunisians and Algerians, since Moroccan education continues to assign great importance to religion and the foreign education model coexists with the local tradition, enabling the creation of mixed but strong identities capable of withstanding the impact of other cultures in migration contexts. The interviewees see international relationships as the cause of the deradicalization of religious teaching compared to the end of the last century when extremism was spreading and sensitive topics, such as the Roman Empire, the Jews' history, and the Palestinian issue, were discussed in religious classes. The new religious educational policy of the new century removes the issues that can create hate towards others, but interviewees never mentioned the influence of the Sufi brotherhood *Būdshīshiyya* and the change in position towards Israel is experienced not only positively, but also as a censoring of debate on sensitive topics. Conversely, Syrian people never directly deal with colonialism when they talk about political influences on their education system. Colonial influence is not experienced as strongly as in other Arab countries due to the anti-colonialist ideology of the Ba‘th party, which claims to have liberated Syrian culture and education from European colonialism. It is possible to read the Ba’th regime's anti-colonial ideology and its

influence on education as a consequence of colonialism itself, so that ultimately there is an even more decisive influence on education, the form and content of which are imbued with colonialism and anti-colonialism. The only cases in which interviewees spoke directly about colonialism concerned some regions characterized by ethnic specificities, such as the Kurdish one, where the Syrian government was perceived as the colonizing power that exerted its violence on pupils' education. Indeed, all the schools' organisations aim to instil in pupils Arab belonging and loyalty to the party, presented as the only way to be united against the enemies, which are the colonizing West and Israel. Minorities and opponents experience such a situation with greater difficulty, feeling forced to adapt.

The influence of class relations on educational experiences (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and identity construction appears powerfully in the experiences of interviewees, who widely speak about the educational systems' selectivity and the parallel public/private systems in terms of access possibilities to education according to social class and job perspectives. This is the case in Morocco, especially for lower-class pupils. The same is true in Lebanon for Syrian pupils, where the selection is based on national belonging and refugees' political status, which is, in any case, a condition characterized by low socio-economic status. The same is also true in Morocco for African pupils. As for discrimination in selection and channelling based on ethnicity, the most felt is that experienced by the Kurdish minority members in Syria. Unlike the other local communities, they do not have private communitarian schools, so they have to enroll in the public ones and pass through a strict selection based primarily on the Arabic language. Kurdish pupils have to learn Arabic in primary school without any language support and often fail, even if they are good in other subjects; sometimes they leave school due to their continuous failure in the language. Ultimately, the result of this early selection depends on the family's social and economic status: those who come from a family with a good education and can speak Arabic tend to succeed in school. In all the other Arab countries considered, the issue of scholastic selection based on ethnicity does not arise so strongly. However, belonging to an ethno-linguistic minority caused more trouble than belonging to a religious one everywhere, since linguistic difficulties are among the most frequently discussed topics. In both Arab and European contexts, belonging to a minority has an impact on selectiveness and channelling, and overlaps with families' social and economic status, influencing school-family relationships, those among pupils, and the teachers' attitude towards pupils.

The early selection in Arab schools is characterized by severe examinations beginning in primary school. All the interviewees perceived their home country's education system as stricter than the European ones, with the Syrians perceiving theirs as the strictest of all. Middle school determines pupils future: whether to attend high school and which one is mainly based on their grades in

middle school, not their desires, and the type of high school attended directly determines university studies. Scientific studies are the only ones that can give access to the two most prestigious faculties: medicine and engineering. As in other countries of the world (Nussbaum 2011), human and social sciences are at the lowest level in today's classification of sciences. Success depends on the social and economic condition of a student's family; whether they can afford private education during high school in order to achieve the highest grade. To meet their expectations for their children, families exert significant pressure, as their success or failure is seen as that of the entire family in the eyes of society. This selectiveness seems too deterministic in the eyes of those who are accustomed to the Italian education system, such as the people interviewed in Italy, who spoke about their pleasant surprise in discovering that people can access all types of high schools and all university faculties with any type of high school diploma. On the contrary, people attending the German education system do not experience a significant difference from their home country, as the pupils' channelling system is strict and starts at an early age. The Italian school system does not require a specific language proficiency level for admission, and the first separation of careers occurs in the 8th grade. This means that newly migrated pupils can enter common schools until they are 13-14 years old without any selection. Nevertheless, it is difficult to succeed in it because there is no structured language support, and the selection occurs informally during the educational path, unlike in Germany where it happens officially at its beginning. In Germany, to enter a regular class, German language proficiency at the C1 CEFR level is required, and selection and channeling begin very early, causing new-arrival parents and pupils to find this selection process very stressful. In the end, in most cases, both in Italy and in Germany, newly migrated pupils attend vocational or professional schools as they hardly succeed in acquiring the skills needed to cope with a lyceum. In addition, for economic reasons, most of them need to start working as soon as possible, so even brilliant pupils prefer vocational or technical schools. Therefore, channeling appears to be strongly influenced by social and economic conditions.

Attendance at private schools in Arab countries allows pupils to enter foreign universities and the labor market and interact with the West and the rest of the world through foreign languages. Most Arab governments require private schools to adhere to national curricula, especially concerning humanities, to foster the same national identity. Therefore, the main difference between public and private education is the focus on foreign languages and cultures, which, in any case, influence pupils' identities in the direction of a more cosmopolitan and open-to-the-world identity and contributes to elite reproduction. In Morocco, the economic and social status of the parents appears to be the most significant factor in determining a pupil's educational path. Families try to send their children to private international schools, where they can learn foreign languages to study at university or work abroad. Private education was not so widespread in Syria until the last

generation, and ethnic and political belonging (to the Arab ethnicity and, in general, to the Ba'ath party) are often more influential than economic status for educational success. However, some peculiarities make the Syrian education system fragmented and unequal. In addition to Christian schools, there are parallel systems for refugees such as the United Nations schools for Palestinian refugees and the governmental schools for refugees coming from Golan. Refugees' ghettoization and discrimination make them second-class citizens, even though the same subjects and curricula are taught in those schools, and Arab nationalism is spread in the same way as in the public school system. The dichotomy between public and private schools is hugely evident in Lebanon, where only those who cannot afford private schools attend the public ones, as reported by Syrians. They live with astonishment at the differences with Syria education and feel like foreigners despite being in an Arab country. A significant cultural difference is in languages teaching: the Syrian education system focuses on the Arabic language as a tool for national unification; the Lebanese one on foreign languages, with scientific disciplines taught in English.

The differences in the diverse educational experiences regarding economic issues allow the interview sample to be read in a new light. Syrians aged 18-25 in Italy and Germany are mostly university students who studied in their country's public education system and arrived in Europe with good instruction to continue their studies. Moroccan interviewees of the same age attended their home country's public education system and are now mostly outside of an educational path; they have mainly stopped for economic reasons and have difficulty starting an educational path in Europe. Instead, most Moroccan students in Europe have attended at least a part of their educational path in a private institution. This economic divergence emerges since preschool. In most countries, public nurseries and kindergartens are not widespread and families can choose between private standard, religious (*kuttāb*), or international kindergartens; the choice reveals the family's economic and social status, as well as their ethnic and religious belonging. Thus, elite reproduction through education begins in international kindergartens, where younger pupils begin to learn foreign languages and meet only people of their same social status. Religious institutions were often the only educational ones in the villages, and people interviewed emphasised that the poor and the rich attended the same religious kindergartens, as it is the norm in the Islamic tradition, implying a critique of the current economic differentiation.

The teaching method in Arab countries appears to be homogeneously based on school text memorization, especially in humanities and history. This method tends to create personalities that are unaccustomed to expressing themselves in public, asking questions, or adding a comment. On the contrary, it represses them, conveying the idea that all one needs to know is what is written in books, inducing unreflective personalities and conformist behaviors, thus creating a personal identity built only on what is transmitted and not also on personal re-elaboration and reflection.

Pupils who moved to a European education system often appreciate the differences in the method but need time to adapt to new approaches that give the responsibility of the learned content to the pupils themselves. The teacher figure in Arab countries is more authoritarian and traditional than in Italian schools, and many interviewees speak about the lack of respect for teachers in Italy and Sweden compared to the respect they are given in their countries of origin. Family social status is the most critical factor on which teachers' behavior seems to depend. Particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Libya, the family's social status often indicates overall political affiliation. Interviewees have complained about teachers' direct discriminatory behavior against some ethnic or religious groups in Libya and Lebanon, where teachers' racist attitudes are strongly experienced. More widespread are situations and behaviours that are discriminatory in practice, especially towards Kurdish people in Syria. No religious discrimination, either directly or indirectly, was reported about the home countries, while it is often experienced in the host European countries. Anyway, the experiences in which more teachers' discriminatory behaviors and racist attitudes are found are those of Syrian refugee pupils in Lebanon. Here, their feeling of belonging to an Arab supranational community, strongly transmitted in Syrian schools, lost force as national identity became more important, and the Arab identity that the regime had tried to build disintegrated. Syrian pupils suffer the impact of the Lebanese culture, which is indeed different from their own, despite both being Arab. The differences are noticeable in schools, where they are treated as unwelcome foreigners rather than Arab brothers and sisters.

How schools relate to families depends on families' ethnicity, language and social and economic status; instead, how families relate to school seems to depend only on their social and economic status. Teachers' most common idea is that Arab families do not care about their children's schooling but it is because they are not used to having a relationship with the school, as this is not required in their home country. Newly migrated middle-class families share the idea of European families that schooling is essential to find a good job, reflecting a habitus of both Arab and European middle-class, rather than an approach influenced by ethnicity, nationality or religion. The interviewees that dropped out of schools were not minority members but belonged to the lowest socio-economic class (Moroccans) or had to stop education due to the war (Syrians). Family socioeconomic and educational levels arise as determining factors in the school-family relationship, with the other major issue being the language. In Italy, when a linguistic and cultural mediation service is offered, parents appreciate it, and the communication is positive and effective. In Germany, parents narrated more about negative experiences of exclusion and discrimination, in which the educational institution has not activated any form of mediation in the relationship between teachers and parents. Language is the central issue, but it is possible to find more value-related issues concerning individualism or communitarianism. Parents used to highly centralized

education systems, have difficulty understanding a system like the German one, in which each Lander and each school has broad decision-making and organizational autonomy, and teachers have great freedom. In Sweden, instead, most parents underline the convergence between family and school values, and the difference in the education systems stimulates parents and children to reflect on education and widen their mental horizons. It is worth saying that the Swedish education system is the only one that provides official courses in the mother languages and cultures of pupils with different cultural backgrounds. It also provides language support with mother tongue tutors and allows newly migrated teachers to work in Swedish education with quick training. All that helps pupils and families to live their belonging and the values' negotiation more positively since they see their culture respected and valorised. In addition, in Sweden, there is no law against teachers wearing the hijab. In Germany instead, foreign teachers can become teachers, but with a C1 level in German language and many Landers prohibit the hijab. In Italy, it is very difficult for foreign teachers to work in the school, although there are no official impediments.

Concerning religion, it is worth underlining the defensive attitude shown by the interviewees. The word *normal* is widely used to say that the Muslim religion class is not something different from the Catholic or Protestant religion classes in Italy or Germany. Indeed, Islamic religious classes are very homogenous, with moderate approaches and values, aiming for peace between people and to form tolerant and open Muslim identities in pupils. Between secularist authoritarian regimes and radical Islamist parties, institutional religious teaching mainly spread a moderate Muslim identity, in which respecting other people's choices is an essential value. Following very different processes, religious teaching in Morocco, Syria, and all the countries considered arrives at the same result: a homogenous Sunni teaching that contributes to the national unity and the national identity's reproduction, beyond particularistic belongings and more extreme and controversial interpretations. The different schools of thought in religion influence subjects' contents and teachers' behaviours and speeches outside the well-defined field of official Islamic education. In Morocco, typically, respect and tolerance toward others seem to be taught together with information about all the world religions, with Islam presented as the religion capable of understanding and including all the others inside it. At a primary level, religion is taught by the teacher of Arabic and humanities with a deep intermingling of language, humanities, social sciences and religion. In literary high school, pupils study Islamic philosophy, deepening through discussion issues related to contemporary problems. Students, who criticise schools for being under government censorship for what concerns the debate on political issues, appreciate the level and freedom of debate during these classes. In none of the interviews the opposite emerges, namely free political debate and censored or radicalised religious debate. The issue of the hijab seems a controversial question more in Europe than in Arab countries, where the debate on it does not exist

in the interviewees' school memories but it is seen as a personal choice. Anyway, some of the interviewees think that standardised religious teaching is missing on the philosophical and spiritual side. The philosophical side is treated only in the last years of literary high school; the spiritual side is never dealt with. The Sufi approach is considered controversial since the rigorist currents oppose it; therefore, in school teaching, only the essential elements of the Islamic religion that no one could question are dealt with.

Even in the strict Syrian education system, the Islamic religious class is not considered oppressive, and its mark does not count in the general grade. Notwithstanding, the social reality of religious pluralism is not reflected in the religious teaching where only a moderate Sunni interpretation of Islam is taught, even if Muslim pupils that attend the classes belong to many different traditions and schools. This reflects the regime's Arabist ideology, in which Arab and national identity is more important than specific religious belonging. For this reason, Sunni Islam is taught as the true Arab tradition that every Syrian pupil has to know. For Syrian pupils, attending schools with Christian pupils is the norm, and they have their own religious class, in a coexistence without discrimination as is also in Egypt and Lebanon. Not to discriminate against Christians is taught in all countries and Christianity is considered a part of the National Arab identity. On the contrary, due to the political situation, there are more difficulties to speak about Jews religion, despite being an Abrahamic religion with whom Islam shares prophets and values, so much so that, in the analysed experiences, the topic was always avoided. The other religions of the world are not even mentioned. In all countries, non-Sunni Muslim currents are dealt with quickly and from a Sunni point of view; in Syria, they are avoided at all. Interviewees explained it as a way of defending the peaceful coexistence between people with different religious belonging, considering it useless and harmful to engage in discourse about different belongings. Beyond these reasonable values of intercultural and interreligious coexistence, the censorship on the different Muslim belongings has other causes and meanings: it is a social taboo. Consistent with the historical reconstruction, the regime is trying to build a solid homogenous Syrian identity, in which the numerous and different belongings have to lose importance in favour of a unified Arab identity. To this end, specific religious belongings, especially the one to which the president belongs, should not be discussed so the majority of the Sunni population will not perceive a difference between them and the political power. If families talk about these topics, their conversations are never reported in schools, and parents prohibit pupils from asking about their classmates' religious classes. Many respondents entrench themselves in a defensive attitude and talk more about multiculturalism than censorship. They genuinely believe in multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence among people of different backgrounds and religions, with whom they feel comfortable and who do not discriminate. It is even essential for them to stress this point to deconstruct the imaginary that

equates all Syrians with Isis fundamentalists. However, they find it difficult to admit that the government explicitly forbids talking about religious differences in schools, considering it a crime against national unity, and above all, they are unable to discuss if this law contributes to the reproduction of traditional Syrian tolerance or weakens it. The censorship creates an atmosphere of fear and silences around these topics, and unresolved misunderstandings grow, becoming conflicts that divide the population. While this in no way calls into question Syrian people's deep tolerance, demonstrated in this work by all their statements in which it is impossible to find some racist or discriminatory attitude, pluralism and tolerance cannot be fully lived in the multicultural Syrian society. This law and the social taboo teach pupils to be silent on controversial issues rather than to talk about them in an open and tolerant manner, teaching more fear than tolerance, which continues to be taught in the privacy of families.

It is not a task of this research to determine what historical truth needs to be taught in schools but rather to point out the differences in school contents that create the most doubts and personal crises for those moving from one school system to another. Certainly, a methodology based on discussion is more suitable to personal understanding than a method based on memorisation, regardless of content, because the former allows to construct one's own truths rather than passively assimilate those proposed by authority. In most Arab countries, humanities are taught with a memorisation-based method and this causes an added difficulty for pupils who move to Europe, where they have to face different narrations, values and historical "truths". In Moroccan primary school, Arabic language and literature, civics, history, geography and Islamic education overlaps in a single teaching, in which to be Arab, to be Muslim, and to be a Moroccan citizen is equivalent. As in many other countries, it focus mainly on national history and include Arab-Islamic and some European history and geography. What is missed is Africa, to which Morocco belongs geographically, but the identity transmitted is that of an Arab-Islamic country facing Europe. Syrian geography curricula, instead, focalise obsessively on Arab countries. As for Morocco, the cultural and overall political categorisation outweighs the geographic collocation so that the continental identity, such as African and Asiatic, is not transmitted to Moroccan and Syrian pupils. Syrians study the *Bilad al-Sham* as one united land in which Palestine is marked as a state with the boundaries it had before the Israeli occupation, and, typically, Israel is not studied as a legitimate nation but as the Palestine occupant. This difference and the reasons beyond it are not so clear to pupils who arrived in Europe at an early age and saw the Palestinian land called Israel in European schoolbooks for the first time. Although it was a shared feeling among the interviewees, none of them discussed it with their teachers, showing a lack of dialogue on this sensible issues. Pupils encounter categorisations that are difficult to understand because they have always studied that Israel is a terrorist and illegitimate country. This was the case in Germany,

where, in a book, there was a list of the terrorist countries, including Syria and excluding Israel. This could lead to deep confusion in pupils about their identity: some affirm that, with time, they have understood German different mentality, but this is not the case for everyone, especially for those who cannot rely on European people's support and willingness to engage in dialogue.

Regarding history, in all countries, national history is the main topic, of which colonialism represents a fundamental section. It significantly impacted pupils' identity development, especially those who have moved to European countries. Indeed, the study of colonialism is felt as dramatically more fundamental in the education systems of any Arab country than in any European one. Among the diverse Arab education systems, the Syrian one is the most focused on it. Most Arab countries transmitted colonialism as the limited historical period of European colonisation, starting with the French colonisation of Algeria and ending with the liberation and the creation of Arab independent national states. What is essential to learn from this period is more the national pride for the liberation than hostility towards the coloniser country or other people. At the two extremes of this spectrum, there are Morocco and Syria. The principal differences are that legitimate Moroccan discourse on colonization and national liberation reinforces the loyalty to a monarchy that presents itself as a champion of tolerance and openness to the world without departing from the Islamic tradition. This identification with the monarchy goes beyond the Arab identity, and Moroccan never deals with the Palestine issue when speaking about colonialism. Relegating colonialism in the past served to build in pupils peaceful identities toward European and Jewish people that the Morocco sovereign welcomes into his territory. Nevertheless, this past is transmitted as a fundamental part of the Moroccan identity, as it shows the unity between Arab and Amazigh Moroccans and the monarchy against the enemy; therefore, it serves to strengthen national unity under the king's leadership while not nurturing negative feelings toward other peoples. If in Moroccan schools the idea that Arabs colonised the Amazigh is tolerated and sometimes taught, with the subsequent recognition of their cultural identity as an essential piece of Moroccan current unified identity, the Arab colonisation of the Great Syria, where other people lived before the Arab conquest, is not even remotely considered as an idea. This non-recognition of the local people's cultural colonisation, such as the Kurds, is a symptom of their actual status as colonised people, whose cultural identity and rights are not recognised. In Morocco, the importance of colonisation remains the same as in the first period after independence, while the importance given to belonging to Arab countries decreases. The declining emphasis on Arab identity, through the declining emphasis on Arab history, is accompanied by the growing integration of the Amazigh people's role in national history. The result is a history curriculum that tells less about Arab and more about a multi-ethnic nation kept unified and cohesive by the monarchy, which emerges as the national identity's protector and the real protagonist of the history

program, often experienced as too much engaged in celebrating the Royals. The situation is very different in Syria where the nation is the Arab Nation more than the Syrian nation itself, and the Arab identity transmitted refers to the ancient *Bilad as-shams*, so people living in the neighbouring countries are considered compatriots. The proposed identity is an identity mutilated by the division into different states of the common homeland operated by foreign powers. The symbol of this identity threatened by foreigners is Palestine. Pupils felt Arabism more than in the other 22 countries, as can be understood by comparing interviews. Syrian pupils talk about colonialism, or imperialism, as the primary topic of the whole history program, since all the period between the end of the Abbasid Empire (1258) and today is considered imperialism, passing through the modern Ottoman and contemporary French and ending with the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land. Arabism and anticolonialism are strictly related to the legitimate culture transmitted by Syrian history teaching. It teaches to defend the motherland against external and internal enemies, which are the ethnic minorities who claim their rights. Kurdish pupils' experience with history teaching is particularly conflictual since the obsession with Arab identity questions their Kurdish identity. The regime would all the population to be Arab and, therefore, Kurdish people and the other Syrian pupils cannot learn about their history. Recognizing and telling it seems to be a dangerous step toward political recognition, so the regime prefers that they do not appear at all inside the legitimate culture transmitted at school. Syrian history teaching aimed at reproducing Arab identity as loyalty to the regime in the struggle against imperialism without any possibility of questioning this correlation. Therefore, it is imperative to convey the regime's anti-colonial ideology and willingness to fight against colonialism and Israel to new generations, as if in the hostility against Israel, people had to embody centuries of struggles fought by their ancestors to maintain their own identity.

Colonialism is studied as a common past in all Arab countries, building a sense of shared identity that finds its symbolic representation in the current Palestinian issue. However, there is a difference internal to Arab countries, among those in which colonialism is studied as a past event, like Morocco and Egypt, and others in which it is studied as a present phenomenon, like Syria. This difference in the historical perception reflects in the role of the Palestinian issue inside history and geography teachings, in the officiality or non-officiality of the identification between the past movements for national independence and the current movement for Palestine liberation. It is not only a question of solidarity with people of another country but, on the contrary, it is the identification with Palestinian people since Palestine is considered as a part of Syria, so the Syrians themselves are colonised by Israel in this perspective and have to be ready to fight to regain it. Consequently, no great importance is given, for example, to the historical figure of Hitler. All Syrian pupils' thoughts and feelings clash with the European history and geography teaching on

the topic. Here, imperialism and colonialism have very little space in textbooks and sometimes teachers skip them at all. The history of newly migrated pupils' countries of origin is little and generally dealt with, and no mistakes or differences are found. The only exceptions are on the Palestinian issues and Islamic history, crucial identitarian points of reference even in Europe. The Palestinian issue is the topic on which, Arab and European scholastic official cultures more often clash, mainly in the history and geography teaching. Attending European schools, especially the German ones. Syrian pupils feel disoriented when they read about Nazism depicted as one of the most important events of the 20th century. Even in adulthood, people who migrated to Europe find it difficult to face these issues and feel the need to reconsider what they had studied as incontrovertible truths. All the emotional burden of the Jews extermination is foreign to them, and they find themselves in an environment where anti-Semitism is harshly condemned. Arab pupils often experience the widespread culture against anti-Semitism in Europe as a form of censorship of Israeli policy. They are used to living in a society and a school environment where they widely and openly criticise the Israeli government. In Europe, they found a society and a school environment in which to be against Israel could mean being labelled as anti-Semite. Avoiding shifting the discussion to my or others' opinions on the issue, the problem is the ability or inability of European educational institutions to understand a widespread feeling among their pupils and to allow a free and open dialogue. Of course, being against a government policies is not the same as being against the very existence of an ethnic group on earth; therefore, equating young students worried about their Palestinian brothers and sisters fate with Nazis is a dangerous operation that does not contribute to their identity harmonious development. On the contrary, it pushes them to increasingly extreme positions and ideologies in which politics links to religion.

Another subject involved in identity building is Civics. The most corresponding Arab designation is *tarbiyya madania*, as it is called in Algeria (Int.12), or *tarbiyya al-mouwatana*, as it is called in Morocco (Int.13). Instead, *Tarbiya wataniya* means national or nationalistic education and is the name used in Syria, where it is a totally different subject compared to European Civics. In most countries, in primary school, it is taught in the Arabic language all-inclusive teaching. In Morocco, it focuses on the right way to behave with other people to be a polite child and then a good adult citizen. There is no contradiction between politics, religion and family, as most Moroccan state that they learned at school the good values and behaviours shared by all these three entities and with whom they agree. This subject deals with racism and helping people, contributing to the education of citizens with an open mind, without racist prejudices and sympathetic to the weakest, following Islam's hegemonic interpretation in Morocco. It looks pretty similar to the Italian "*Educazione Civica*". No one complains about this subject, and never conflicts or contradictions emerge, so this discipline works as a well-functioning reproducer of Moroccan identity and

culture, playing the role assigned to it without provoking resentment, a sense of oppression or protests. On the contrary, Syrian *Tarbiya Wataniya* is a separate subject, compulsory in all private and minority schools, and which mark counts in the general grade. However, people do not recognise its importance and have a negative experience with it. Its contents are described as continuous praise of the ruling family's prowess, accompanied by foreign policy topics such as the war against Israel. Differently from the other countries analysed, pupils do not study the typical Civics topics, such as how to behave politely, racism, and so on; differently from the Maghreb, there are no songs or plays, and the subject is experienced as dramatically different from the Italian one. Civics teachers do not have a specific degree but are chosen by the Party among its more loyal members to dictate the ideology of the Party and recruit new members among young pupils. No one in school can contest them and all the information has to be learned and repeated without thinking or discussions. Pupils' consideration of these teachers is much worse than the one they have of religious teachers, that have a degree and allow discussions and dialogue. They consider religious teaching useful to live peacefully inside society, contrary to nationalistic education, considered helpful to prepare pupils to fight against national enemies. The Arab identity does not totally overlap with the Muslim one, such as in Morocco; on the contrary, ethnicity overcame religion. Kurdish pupils are among those that most hate nationalist education subjects, as their claim for cultural rights is considered a threat to the nation. Brilliant students cannot have the highest grade at the end of the year because they are not good at this subject, as they believe that repeating by heart the contents of its lessons denies their own identity. The identification between the nation, the party and the single person impact personal dignity and self-esteem, as disappointing the party means betraying the homeland and one's own identity.

Concerning philosophy, in Arab schools, it is experienced as a complicated and foreign subject reduced mainly to Greek philosophers, rationalism and enlightenment. The interviewees see the non-recognition of Arabs' contribution to the field of philosophy as having distant historical roots and an essential current political significance, that of keeping them in a state of subordination, in which the Arab identity is not able to boast of this pride and appears instead as backward and irrational in comparison with the West. The situation is different in Syria's literary lyceum where European and Arab authors are presented, focusing on the Arab ones, consistently with Arab nationalism and allowing pupils to have a clear picture of the historical connections between Greek, Arab and European philosophy, avoiding the subordination of Arab cultural identity to European one. The contributions of all the diverse cultures are valorised so that philosophy seems to be the most intercultural subject, the only one in which a message of equality and cooperation among peoples, regardless of their belonging, is conveyed. This is also the only case in which someone affirms that something is taught about Sufism in Syria, which is non-existent in history

and religion. Even in Europe, philosophy is taught only in a few high school types, and very few interviewees attend them as most newly arrived pupils attend vocational or technical schools. However, the few that studied it felt that there is a conflict between atheists and believers, which finds its natural battleground in the philosophy class. While religion teachers, in most cases, promote a dialogue that respects the others' identities, philosophy teachers show an aggressive atheism, which belittles and offends, making it difficult for pupils with a different cultural background to defend their own identity. Syrians (and other people from the Middle East) are used to attending school with Christian classmates and speaking about Christianity as a similar religion. What is challenging to manage is instead the confrontation with atheists who question the Muslim identity. A battleground between atheists and Muslims is the sciences. People interviewed affirm that there is no dichotomy between science and faith since Islam has never fought science, as was the case with Catholicism in the Middle Ages, and they do not feel any contradiction between their Muslim identity and job aspirations in the scientific field. All the scientific theories are studied in the Arab schools, regardless of their correspondence with religion, and pupils are required to know them but not to believe in them. Controversial theories such as the evolutionary theory are neither censored nor imposed. On the contrary, the clash between Muslim identity and scientific theories exacerbates in pupils' experience in Europe where they are taught not as fallible theories but as the correct theories in which pupils have to believe. Newly arrived pupils who question them may be labelled by teachers and classmates as backward or Islamic fundamentalists, or pupils themselves could feel backward and deep discomfort. Therefore, part of the problem is the pressure of the environment on newly arrived pupils, and the discomfort felt by pupils in European schools depends on how European teachers manage the religious differences. All this reflection on religion, ateism and sciences is congruent with Habermas theorization on the topic.

In most European schools, there is rarely the possibility to have a class of Muslim religion. Nevertheless, it is not the main problem of Muslim refugees and migrants, who are more interested in the way they are treated as Muslims in their school life and in the way teachers and other pupils speak about Islam. Most interviewees in Italy feel not discriminated against in school for their religious belonging, and teachers asked them to explain their religion and customs so that they could feel that they are protagonists and do not have to be subjected to others' narratives. Muslim pupils often attend Catholic religious classes as a space in which they can learn about their classmates' religions and traditions, understand the differences between Islam and the tradition of the country in which they live, and learn about the other religion of the world. Despite the teaching being called Catholic religion, good teachers' method and attitude transform it into a class of interreligious dialogue that succeeds in managing adolescents' typical confusion, often deeper in newly migrated young who relate to another culture. In these teachers, Muslim pupils found a

reference point to rely on and openly discuss. Testimonies from Germany are quite different. Pupils speak about a more conflictual dialogue about their religious belonging and no one of the interviewees attended the scholastic religious class or narrated positive experiences regarding religion. Instead, they spoke about cultural clashes exacerbated by material things, correlating problems based on religion to a social and economic dimension. Economic and social differences appear even in interviews conducted in Italy, for example about the Italian people's high clothing standard at school; the difference is that in these discussions about socio-economic discomfort, there is no place for religion, so the two levels do not overlap, thus not leading to identity resentments based on religion. During this research, it was impossible to verify how similar the experiences of other Arab and Muslim pupils in Germany and Sweden were compared to those in Italy. Fewer people were interviewed in these countries, and in Germany, they did not attend any religious classes. It would therefore be interesting, in further research, to compare how the way of dealing with the religious element in the three countries impacts pupils' identity.

Cultural clashes concerning the concept and importance of children's autonomy in education, parental style, friendship and social life emerged only in Sweden and Germany and never in Italy, stressing a difference not between Arab and European or Christian and Muslim education, but between Mediterranean and Nordic culture. This interesting point is touched upon marginally and should be investigated more in detail in further research. Based on the present results and conclusions, it would be important even to extensively discuss in further research how educational systems in Europe should be redefined to better interact with pupils with a migratory cultural background and to include historical alterity. Starting from the analysis pupils and teachers' experience with European curricula, it may be possible to try to define how curricula should be reformed and decolonised, especially those of history, and the extent to which changing curricula could affect the personal and professional trajectories of migrants, and cultural minorities.

Regarding the analysis of education in Arab countries, primary sources such as school textbooks or other printed material may be used in further allowing for a comparison between personal accounts of interviewees and the actual teaching material used during a specific historical period. Strictly related to the present research would be the in-depth analysis of the alternative educations developed during the Syrian civil war in comparison with the official one. It would be fascinating and valuable to investigate the difference in the contents of the humanities taught in these diverse education systems and to understand the diverse conceptions of the world and the history that coexist in the country. Finally, it would be consistent with the current research to analyse the education systems' identity building and the educational experience of pupils with a migrant background in the Arabian Peninsula, by examining how identity is negotiated within it.

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Table 1: Newly arrived Arab-speaking migrants in Europe by age group and origin country (2018)

Country	age 0-15	From African countries	Non Arab-Africans	Arabs From Africa	From Asian countries	Non Arabs from Asia	Arabs from Asia	TOT. Arabs	More represented nationality
Belgium	23.830	2.847	1.639	1.208	4.830	2.322	2.508	3.716	Morocco
Bulgaria	4.334	22	8	14	429	189	240	254	Syria
Czech rep.	5.844	23	12	11	984	939	45	56	Egypt
Denmark	8.742	402	309	93	1.648	1.215	433	526	Syria
Estonia	1.462	22	16	6	62	52	10	16	
Croatia	1.104	2	0	2	122	41	81	83	Syria
Italy	44.965	10.246	3.694	6.552	9.938	9.365	573	**7.125**	**Morocco**
Latvia	1.300	4	0	4	78	78	0	4	
Lithuania	2.170	0	0	0	88	53	35	35	Syria
Luxembourg	3.682	188	139	49	459	342	117	166	Syria
Hungary	4.311	120	53	66	945	806	139	205	Syria
Holland	27.256	2.799	2.301	498	5.046	2.494	2.552	3.050	Syria
Slovakia	3.385	0	0	0	24	24	0	0	
Finland	5.662	501	269	232	1.779	864	915	1.147	Iraq
Sweden	30.622	4.385	2.778	1.607	13.527	4.582	8.945	**10.552**	**Syria**
Tot.	261.117	21.561	11.219	**10.342**	39.959	23.367	**16.593**	**26.935**	Syria, Morocco

Immigration by age group, sex and Citizenship. [migr_imm1ctz]. Last update: 05.03.20. Source of data: Eurostat. Data aggregation e disaggregation by the author

Table 3: Cultural macro-groups of pupils with a migratory background in Italy

(Est) European	**46,28%**
Arab	**18,761%**
Indians (sub-continent)	**9,226%**
Sub-saharian African	**7,384%**
Chinese	**6,42%**
Asiatic (South-East)	**3,999%**
Tot.	**92,07%**

Source: Miur (2015-21)

Table 4: Arabic-speaking pupils in Italian education system

Country	Number of pupils	% on foreign pupils	Country	Number	%
Morocco	105.057	12,248	Oman	207	0,024
Egypt	26.139	3,047	Mauritania	152	0,018
Tunisia	19.752	2,303	Palestine	110	0,013
Algeria	4.830	0,563	Yemen	70	0,008
Syria	1.625	0,189	Saudi Arabia	60	0,007
Libya	694	0,081	EAU	38	0,004
Iraq	564	0,066	Kuwait	22	0,003
Lebanon	505	0,059	Bahrein	8	0,001
Jordan	431	0,050	Qatar	6	0,001
Somalia	349	0,041	Comore e Gibuti	4	0%.
Sudan	300	0,035	Tot.	160.923	18,761%

Source: Miur (2018-19)

Table 2: Arabic-speaking residing in Europe aged 0-15 in 2019

Country	***Africa***	Dji but	Com	Somalia	Algeria	Egypt	Libya	**Morocco**	Sudan	Tunisia	Maur itania	***Arabs from Africa***	***Asia***	**UAE**	Bahr ain	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Oman	Palestine	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	**Syria**	Yemen	***Arabs from Asia***	***Arabs***	***Tot.***
Belgium	29.974	184	0	1.795	1148	358	105	9080	149	664	185	13.668	30.225	9	0	4.252	98	3	270	1	1.222	0	28	10.170	43	16.096	29.764		
Bulgaria	81	0	0	5	14	21	12	4	3	0	0	59	5.116	0	0	227	30	2	79	0	3	0	1	3.732	3	4.077	4.136		
Czechia	413	0	0	5	60	95	46	13	5	45	0	269	19.611	0	0	67	22	1	25	0	23	0	7	208	33	386	655		
Denmark	7.725	9	2	2.351	42	103	25	295	223	52	1	3.103	29.858	0	0	1.809	131	4	138		0		11	13.217	12	15.322	18.425		
Germany	86.940	17	17	9.408	1488	5.424	3.214	6.620	971	1.796	73	29.028	468.810	289	70	66.399	1.359	247	5.650	33	1.285	118	918	236.764	1.202	314.334	343.362		
Estonia	70	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	1	1	0	10	516	0	0	18	2	0	1	0	14	0	0	72	2	109	119		
Ireland	3.542	0	0	99	84	164	134	9	164	16	1	671	7.199	17	1	136	23	21	4	50	18	1	324	152	8	755	1426		
Spain	ND	:	0	:	14.109	:	:	199.520	:	:	1.451	215.080															215.080		
Italy	241.130	2	0	560	4.790	36.872	664	104.097	387	22.001	97	169.470	208.587	5	9	673	322	6	464	7	186	0	22	1.672	57	3.423	172.893		
Latvia	6	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	314	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8		
Lithuania	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	421	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	183	0	194	197		
Luxembourg	1.426	0	0	18	65	35	8	117	6	93	0	342	2.833	0	0	312	4	3	6	0	0	0	0	726	4	1.055	1.397		
Hungary	401	0	0	5	27	179	40	11	13	5	0	280	5.998	4	2	213	50	12	17	2	18	8	40	351	28	745	1025		
Netherlands	16.548	5	0	671	73	645	57	2.783	283	103	3	4.623	45.314	1	2	1.734	65	11	49	27	0	0	112	25.852	221	28.074	32.697		
Austria	6.099	0	0	1.368	113	966	170	162	87	295	2	3.163	41.667	19	2	3.646	137	15	186	0	0	4	92	16.494	81	20.676	23.839		
Portugal	8.945	0	0	12	29	44	33	152	7	20	0	297	9.775	6	3	85	64	7	77	2	10	0	34	277	0	565	862		
Romania	159	2	0	4	10	46	10	7	10	8	0	97	3.185	0	0	464	60	0	71	0	35	1	1	863	8	1.503	1.600		
Slovenia	34	0	0	7	5	6	2	0	2	0	0	22	492	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	100	0	127	149		
Slovakia	41	0	0	0	3	7	12	0	1	1	0	24	584	2	0	35	0	1	2	0	1	0	6	2	0	49	73		
Finland	4.815	0	0	1.775	20	89	33	85	250	28	1	2.281	12.864	0	0	3.323	15	0	28	4	0	0	1	2.422	63	5.856	8.137		
Sweden	25.417	121	0	7.118	92	963	87	493	334	152	4	9.364	68.998	3	2	5.214	298	13	342	7	664	0	137	36.756	387	43.823	53.187		
Tot. EU	25.417	340	19	25.201	22172	46030	4652	323448	2894	25282	1820	451.858	949.516	355	92	88.638	2680	346	7412	133	3.486	132	1734	350.013	2152	457.173	909.031		

Population on 1 January by age group, sex and citizenship [migr_pop1ctz], Last update: 08.06.20. Source of data: Eurostat. Data disaggregation by Eurostat software, aggregation by the author

Tab. 5 Analytical table of Arab education systems' multifactorial analysis

	HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT					MULTIFACTORIAL ANALYSIS OF TODAY			
	GOLDEN AGE	OTTOMAN PERIOD	COLONIALISM	INDEPENDENCE	GLOBALISATION, SCIENTIST TURN, RADICALIZATION	MODEL	MINORITY AND LANGUAGE ISSUES	GENDER	RELIGION
MIARSAHQRE Q	Traditional education. Madrasa *Niẓāmiyya* in Baghdad (Abbasid Caliphate's capital)	Competition between missionary Christians, Muslims traditional and modern technical Ottoman high education.	British 1918-45 Opposition of Arab Nationalist (pedagogue Sati' al-Husri)	Educative Boom - Arab socialism of Saddam's Ba'th party 1960-70.	Educative crisis: 1991 war, embargo, reduction in educational budget, religion return.	Compulsory free-of-charge education. Channelling in middle school. Focus on scientific subjects.	65%Arabs, Kurds 23%, + other. Official religion Islam: Shi'a 62.5%, Sunni 34.5%. Equal access to education for all citizens. '90 Kurds' Autonomy (language, books, history and geography).	Joint school with courses for women only: family and health education.	Important role of the Muslim religion. Optional teaching of Christian one.
DBAILNA	Traditional education	Competition between missionary Christians, Muslims traditional and modern Ottoman high education.	British 1918-46 81 public schools and 111 missionary or private schools	Educative boom; Arab Socialism Illiteracy from 88% to 7%.	NO CRISIS. 1st Arab country for human development index	Compulsory and free-of-charge general schooling. Nursery 59% (double Arab average)	Palestinian/Syrian refugees increase the number of pupils = double shifts in public schools or UNHCR schools, of lower quality and attending which rarely gives access to university	Common schools 60%; schools by gender 40%. No inequality	Important role of the Islamic religion. Alternative activities for non-Muslim pupils
DLEABLA-SONHAM	Traditional education Focus on Religion, Arabic grammar and poetry	High competition between local and foreign religious education. Educative freedom for ethnic/religious communities=secta rianism. Attempt a build national ed. system by al-Būstānī	French 1918-45 High competition between foreign Christian ed. missions. Syrian P. College become American University of Beirut.	Sectarianism in Politics and Education. Prevalence of Private, foreign and community schools	High dropout, foreign languages as instruction language for mathematics and science. Low level public schools CIVIL WAR	Decentralised education system based on communities' autonomy. Absence of a national narrative of events Basic education free-of-charge and compulsory. Focus on foreign languages.	Private schools of all ethnicities and religions, each with its own history programs. UNRWA schools for Palestinians. Syrians mostly in public schools: difficulties in foreign languages. No access to university.	No differences	Low in public school. Study of different religions, respect for others, peaceful coexistence, openness. Private schools each teach their own doctrine.
PALESTINE	Traditional education Focus on Religion, Arabic grammar and poetry	Competition between missionary Christian, Muslims traditional and modern technical Ottoman high education.	British 1918-48 Attempt to secularise kutāb	No Independence. Educational fragmentation: West Bank (Jordan), Gaza (Egypt): reduced focus on Palestinian identity. Under Israel, illegal popular education.	Education's inaccessibility for Israel attacks and restrictions. 2000 Oslo agreements: Education led by Palestinian Authority. 2006 Hamas electoral win = block of international funds for education.	High enrolment rates, overcrowded classes, double shifts, dropouts. UNHCR & private schools. Kindergartens doubled. Teachers no salary and social role.	Absence of Jewish elements, historically and currently, until the Shoah despite Palestinians being a minority at home. Students wishing to travel abroad must obtain documents and return visas from Israeli authorities with particular difficulties.	For girls, movement restrictions and security threats. More dropouts. No higher education in some places. Gender division but progress in mixed schools.	High role of religion in the education system.

	SYRIA	Traditional education Focus on Arabic grammar and poetry	Competition between missionary Christian, Muslims traditional and modern technical Ottoman high education.	French 1918-46. Spread private foreign Christian schools. Defund and censorship of public schools. Leader of nationalist education M. Kurd Ali	Educative Boom with Arab secular Socialist Nationalism. Focus on the Arab language, history and identity. Minority languages banned.	'70 Ideological education by the Asad regime. Aggressive Arab Nationalism in humanities. '80 Hama massacre and the strict homogenisation of religious identity on the Sunni one	Efficient dictatorial educative system aiming at building national belonging and party loyalty, eradicating family, sectarian and regional ones. CIVIL WAR 2011: fragment educative system: Arab rebel, Kurdish, Islamist.	Language of instruction Arabic. Minority languages were forbidden (Aramaic, Armenian, Yazidi, Circassian, Kurdish). After 2011 Kurdish school system: teaching in Kurdish and Yazidi religion, modification of history curriculum, printing of textbooks.	Both mixed and segregated schools. No discrimination.	Sunni 74%, Shi'a 12%, Christian 5.5%, + others. Christian religion class, High role of Sunni Islam in national identity building.
NORTH AFRICA	ALGERIA	Traditional education focuses only on Quran. Amazigh people in Zawiya Sufi. Low level of Education due to the local population's little knowledge of the Arabic language.	No time for Ottoman reformism due to the early French conquest	French (1830-1962) impose its educational system, substituting Algerian identity with the French. 1800Anti-colonialism: 'Abd al-Qadir; 1930 Islamist	National educative system based on Arabism, Socialism and Islam. Disconnection with University in French	'78 Liberalism. Complete schooling not achieved. Unemployment of graduates. In 1991 FIS (Islamic Front) won the election. CIVIL WAR until 1996	French model. Maghrebi identity, linked to France and Amazigh, overcomes Arab-Muslim identity. Main problems: illiteracy, linguistic disconnection between school and university.	1996 Constitution recognises Amazigh as part of national identity. 2003 recognition of Tamazight as a national language. 2016 recognition as an official language in the new constitution to be taught in schools relating to this community	Full formal equality between men and women.	Little relevance in this education system based on French secularism
	EGYPT	Traditional education also focused on poetry and grammar. Al-Azhar (970) is the most important institution of Islamic Studies. *Maktab* Copts' traditional schools as opposed to the Islamic *Kuttāb*.	1839 Mohammed 'Ali, national autonomy. First national high schools. Copts contributed to building the national supra-confessional education system and identity based on a common past.	British 1882-1952. No support for Coptic autonomy. Creation of a unitary education system. Against it, Muslim brothers, with their Islamist educational network	Nasser (50-70) Arab socialism against Islamism. Regional leader in education. Full schooling. National identity based on Arabism, with a role for both Islam and Christianity.	Sadat (70-80), infitāh, science and faith, rehabilitates Islamists as allies to fight socialism. Mubarak (80-2011), liberalism, fight against Islamists, Egyptian national identity, focus on scientific development.	Public schools decline, overcrowded classes and private tutoring. The growing role of private and international schools to access university.	The Copts have independent schools and/or the teaching of the Christian religion in state schools, and their holidays are respected. The programmes recognise that they are part of the history of the Egyptian people.	No inequality, mixed schools	High role of religion in education, led by Al-Azhar, in concurrence with Muslim brothers and opposition with secularists.

	LIBYA	Traditional education, especially in the zawiya in the desert for nomadic population, also Amazigh.	Qaramānlī (1711-1835), semi-independent. The Proto-nationalist spirit in Al-Sanūsī Brotherhood had education as its main objective. 1856 Zawiya Jaghbūb political/cultural centre.	Italy 1911-42. Zawiya centres of military training, then destroyed. Hero of resistance al-Mukhtar. Kuttāb + new Italian schools for Arabs.	Monarchy (1951-69) Education for all, Egyptian model. Schools and universities centres of nationalism against monarchy and Western allies, for the alliance with Egypt	1969-2011 Gaddafi *Jamāhīriyya*, Islamic socialism. Compulsory primary and then preparatory education, based on Islam and Arabism. *al-Kitāb al-Akhḍar*. Ban on English and Tamazight.	Authoritarian, mnemonic, teacher and book centred, focused on exams. 2000 English reintroduction. After 2011, purge ideological elements of the curriculum. 2014 CIVIL WAR = dropout.	For Gaddafi, the Amazigh population (10%) were of Arab origin and their language an Arab dialect. He persecuted anyone involved in the Amazigh cultural revival. After (2011), they begin to use and teach the *Tifinagh*.	Gender segregation. Also, inside mixed classes, studying together violates a social norm.	Central religion role=conservative education. Kuttāb style is found in public schools, with no participation, discussion or criticism.
	TUNISIA	Traditional education focused on Quran and Hadith. Central role of Al-Zitouna (734 AD). Low education levels due to people little knowledge of Arabic. Khaldun's first modern educational reform proposal.	Husainidi (1705) Bey with political independence. Influenced by western culture, maintaining Arab-Islamic identity, founded modern schools. Khayr ad-dīn at-Tūnisī, father of reformism. 1845 first female school. Zitouna reforms.	French 1881-1956. Modern and secular education on French model. Zitouna centre of resistance against France (*Young Tunisian* nationalistic movement), became a university in '56.	Secular nationalism Bourghiba 1957-87 + Ben Ali until 2000. Education for progress and modernity. Arabization, secularisation and mass schooling was achieved.	Unemployment and frustration of trained young; drop out; low international test results; growth of trade unions and religious associations. Islamism spreading after the 2011 Revolution.	French model. Compulsory and Free-of-charge education. Optional kindergartens (Ministry of Family Affairs) Kuttāb (Ministry of Religious Affairs). Free public university, private sector growth.	Official language Tunisian Arabic (Maghrebi or Dariji); elites speak French. Many disciplines are taught in Tunisian; French is taught as a foreign language. Cultural synthesis of French and Arab-Muslim culture. Homogeneous Sunni population.	Since '57, total equality. Most advanced Arab countries in women's rights.	Secularism. Until the 2011 revolution, there was a ban on wearing hijab in schools. Curriculum purged of extremism. In the private sector, religion return with Wahhabi Kindergarten.
	MOROCCO	Independent from Idrisid dynasty (788). Traditional education focused only on Quran. Zawiya of Sufi brotherhoods also Amazigh. Central role of madrasa Al-Qarawiyya (859). Low level of Education due to the local population's little knowledge of Arabic.	Independent kingdom, also Amazigh dynasties. Most education is provided in zawāyā, with Kuttab and al-Qarawiyye composed of one homogenous Sunni Maliki educative reality referring to the King. In 1862 first Israelite and French schools.	French 1912-56 2 levels of education: 1professional and 1 for the elite, both in French (Arabic as a second language). 1930 Salafiyya schools centres of rebellion. Separate institutions for Amazigh led to nationalistic rebellion.	Magrebi Nationalism, Arabization, free public education. Unchanged French-speaking private system and University in French. Overlapping traditional, nationalistic and French educative models.	Crisis. Education Budget Decrease = growth of the private sector. '80-90 Islamist influence and Re-Islamisation, removing ancient history from curricula to not address the Amazigh issue.	Big spending, no results, functional illiteracy, low standards. National Chart of education 2000 and 2002Reforms. Nationalist but not racist or Islamist. French-speaking benefits from the private French system.	Multilingualism. Official language Fusha taught, but nobody speaks. Moroccan Arabic has no recognition. Tamazight recognised since 2000, with experimental courses in schools. Arabization is incomplete but limits access to universities since faculties are divided by language: human, social and Islamic sciences in Arabic; scientific in French.	No formal discrimination but low schooling rates for women in rural areas	Important role. From 2000 Sufi influence (minister Tawfiq of tariqa Budshishiyya) spread a tolerant and open-minded religious interpretation, represented by the position towards Jews.

ARABIC PENINSULA	BAHRAIN	Traditional education	Conquered only in XIX century for little time. Traditional education.	British 1916-71 Traditional education and private English institute (community schools)	Independence gained when socialist ideology had already died out in favour of globalised and Islamic atmosphere in education, of which this country is a leader. Focus on science and technology, development of education toward knowledge economy. Tiny space for humanistic subjects.	English model with Wahhabi contents. Focus on Arab, English, maths and science to compete in the global market.	Community, private and foreign schools for foreigners. They can have their national curriculum, added Arabic language and Islamic religion.	Gender segregation in Arab schools. Highest enrolment, attendance and results for women due to the higher motivation of female teachers.	Central role in education according to Wahhabi ideology. Science and Islam.
	KUWAIT	Traditional education	Emirate from the XVIII century submitted to the Ottoman empire for a few decades in the XVIV century. Traditional education	British 1913-61 Traditional education and private English institute (community schools)	Independence gained when socialist ideology had already died out in favour of globalised and Islamic atmosphere in education. Focus on science and technology, development of education in the direction of creating a knowledge economy Tiny space for humanities.	Compulsory and free education system. Core subjects: Arabic, English, mathematics, applied sciences.	Native citizens attend state schools; many immigrants attend foreign private schools with their national curriculum, with Arabic, Islamic and civics education.	Gender segregation in Arab schools. Highest results for women due to the higher motivation of female teachers.	Central role in education according to Wahhabi ideology. Science and Islam.
	OMAN	Independent from the Abbasid empire. Traditional education	Independent, with a flourishing commercial empire in the area. Traditional education	British 1891-1970	100% schooling, global competition and local identity. High quality of education.	Free compulsory general education (10 years 4+6). Focus on technology. Optional private Islamic kindergarten.	1/3 of the population are immigrants from South Asia, and there are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Bahá'í, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and Christianity.	Gender Segregation, no discrimination.	High role of religion, Ibadite Islam. Tolerance, no discrimination
	QATAR	Traditional education	Born of the nation at the end of the XIX century. Traditional education	British 1916-71 Traditional education and private English institute (community schools)	Independent, global, scientist and Islamic education. Focus on E-learning. 2001 Education for a new era aimed at "independent" schools on the American model. No attention to humanities	Free schools of 5 types: independent, public, private (international, Arab, community). Essentials Arabic, English, Maths, Science.	Foreigners attend private and community schools, usually of high quality. They teach the national curriculum in the mother tongue with compulsory Islamic and civic education.	Gender segregation. International schools have common elementary.	High religion role with Wahhabi ideology. Private and independent schools have to do Islamic education.

	SAUDI ARABIA	Fragmented tribe in Arabs and Mameluk empire. Traditional Education	1750 first Saudi State with Wahhabi ideology. Traditional education	NO. Independent State from 1932.	Female education since 1961. Huge state investment, completely free education. Low quality, low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, poor relationship with the world of work. Despite the pressure to change textbooks after 9/11, they were not changed.		Compulsory 6-15 (6+3+3). Mnemonic method, dependence on single textbooks. Core subjects: Islam, Arabic, nationalism, technology. Highly centralised governance. Lack of English.	Arabs 88%, Saudis 74.8%. Islam Sunni 93.3%, Shia 3.4%, Christian 2.9%. International schools 2 types: community schools of foreign (limited 1 per locality for each nationality; not segregated) or schools of Saudi (segregated).	Segregation. For women, physical education was replaced with art and home economics— better results for women. Islamic and oil studies are not allowed.	Priority to religion. Since only 2 years separate discipline, previously taught in all fields. Strictest application of Wahhabism than in other countries of the Arabian Peninsula.
	EAU	Traditional education	Partly inside the Ottoman empire. Traditional education	British 1853-1971	Oil boom, 25% GDP on education to bridge gap with world-leading systems taken as models. Digital focus, diversity, knowledge economy, global competition. Low skills in Arabic outclassed by English used to compete in the global market. The challenge is to have native and qualified male teachers.		Arabic-English bilingualism. Arabic language of instruction. English model of comprehensive school. Free school for natives, Compulsory until 16. Male foreign teachers.	80% of foreigners: Muslims (Arab/non-Arab) e non-Muslims. Non-Arab, mainly British and Indian. Immigrants can attend public schools paying taxes but prefer private in which there is their language of instruction, home country's curriculum + Islamic education, social studies and Arabic.	Segregation in public schools. Private, mostly not. Female pupils perform better with local female teachers who feel they are building the nation.	Religion is a priority. Islamic studies decided by the minister for all Muslim schools (public and private) based on competence in the Arabic language (divided into Arab-speaking and beginners)
	YEMEN	Traditional education	XVI-XX century in the Ottoman Empire. Traditional education	British 1839-1967	education is a national priority with high investments	The education system was devastated by the conflicts. Low schooling and literacy, lack of teachers and infrastructures.	Basic education is free and mandatory (6-14)+ high school.	93% Arab. Sunni 90%, Shia-Zaydite 10%. Millennial Jewish presence	Women have lower rates of attendance	Important role
EAST	SUDAN	Peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims.	History link to the Egyptian one. Traditional education and missionary	British 1899-1956. Slaves and orphans were taken to school for female doctors	1956-64. Nationalism. '57 Nationalisation of missionary schools against propaganda and	Civil wars (63-72 &83-2005). Low enrolment, high dropouts and un-schooling, lack of material and	Elementary 4 years, middle academic /vocational. Most kindergartens are private/religious. Few studies and	Arabs-Muslims (north /centre) + Christians (south). 32 languages + dialects. Teaching Arabic is difficult due to the lack of qualified	Segregation. There are fewer girls' schools, but girls have better results.	Important role with Muslim brothers participating in power. The Christian

AFRICA		Traditional education	Christina education.	in Egypt to turn them into female health officers.	the Latin alphabet for non-Arab languages. Ibrahim Abboud (58), Islamisation and Arabisation.	infrastructure, inequalities. Peace 2005+ secession 2011 higher enrolment rate.	data. Low quality. Poor teachers' selection, training and supervision.	staff. English 10h a week at the intermediate level; is the only language in the higher one.		religious hour is left as a possibility.
	COMOROS	Arab conquest, little information	Madagascan dynasty. Centre for the slave trade. No information on education	French (1841-1978). Long colonisation, Frenchification of language and education. Assimilationist policy.	Its marginality leads to decolonisation at a very late stage. This country will not be part of the Arab independence and nationalist period of the 1950s and 1960s. Spread of private schools system for elite		French model. Low literacy rate, low rate of elementary attendance 31%, and lowest in high education 10-11%	86% Arab/African population, majority Muslim & Catholic minority. Comorian is the most common language, and French, Arabic and Malagasy are spoken. Half people were educated with the Latin alphabet and the remainder with Arabic.	No inequality in enrolment and attendance rate	Central role in the education, especially for poor people, in free Quranic schools.
	DJIBOUTI	Traditional education	History link to the Egyptian one. Traditional education and missionary Christina education.	French Somalia (1894-1977). Long colonisation = Frenchification of language and education. Assimilationist policy.	Its marginality leads to decolonisation at a very late stage. This country will not be part of the Arab independence and nationalist period of the 1950s and 1960s. Spread of private schools system for elite		5 years of primary school, 4 years of middle school and 3 years of high school. French language of instruction. Literacy 70%.	Somali 60% and Afar 35%, minorities Arab, Ethiopian, French and Italian. Official languages are Arabic (Islamic tradition) and French (education). Somali and Afar are the most widely spoken languages.	No information	Muslim majority, 6% Christian (Ethiopian and European). Islam state's Religion, freedom of religion but a ban on proselytism.
	SOMALIA	Independent sultanate. Traditional education	Independent Sultanate. Traditional Education	Fragmentation: English (1886-1960); Italy (1889-1960); International schools.	Socialism. 1972 Somali language in Latin alphabet. Italian official language until 63	CIVIL WAR 1991 never ended. Conflicts between Islamist groups and various governments.	Mandatory schooling until 14 years. Few schools.	The majority is Muslims, with a small Christian minority. Somali is the first official language, second Arabic, then Italian and English as a vehicular language.	No equality	Conflicting role

Table 6: Overview of the interviews' sampling

	Interview Date	Arab country of departure	European host country	Sex and age	Educative status	Educational paths (with transit countries)	Peculiarities
INTERVIEWS IN ITALY							
Int.1	15/02/2020	MOROCCO	Italy	male adult	Out of education	all in Morocco	pivotal interview
Int.2	22/02/2020	MOROCCO	Italy	male teenager (13 years)	Pupil in middle school	Morocco-> middle school in Italy	pivotal interview
Int.3	04/03/2020	MOROCCO	Italy	female adult	Parent of 16 age pupil	(her son) Morocco-> middle school in Italy	pivotal interview (with linguistic mediator)
Int.4	15/01/2021	JORDAN	Italy	female adult	Parent	School in Jordan-> university in Italy	born in Italy
Int.5	19/01/2021	SYRIA	Italy	male teenager (17 years)	Pupil	Syria 2 years of elementary-> Lebanon elementary and middle-> high school in Italy	
Int. 6	19/01/2021	SYRIA	Italy	male young adult (20 years)	Pupil	Syria until middle school-> middle school in Lebanon-> high school in Italy	
Int.7	22/01/2021	LIBYA	Italy	female teenager (16 years)	Pupil	Libya -> Italy in 3rd middle school	Amazigh
Int.8	5-12 /01/2021	PALESTINE	Italy (Verona)	Male adult	Educator in Finland	elementary in Italy-> from the 4th of elementary in Israel (Arabic school then University)	born in Italy
Int.9	13/02/2021	EGYPT	Italy	male young adult (25 years)	Student	Egypt-> high school in Italy with a scholarship	
Int.10	22/02/2021	MOROCCO	Italy (Milano)	male adult (33 years) (Milan)	Student	Morocco-> in Italy from the 4th grade of elementary school	
Int.11	09/03/2021	SYRIA	Italy	female teenager (16 years)	Pupil	elementary in Syria-> 1 year of elementary in Armenia -> Lebanon-> in Italy in middle school	Armenian Christian
Int.12	10/03/2021	ALGERIA	Italy (Milano)	female young adult (26 years)	Student	Elementary and middle school in Italy-> Algeria in secondary school	born in Italy
Int.13	11/03/2021	MOROCCO	Italy	male young adult (21 years)	Student	Morocco-> University in Italy	
Int.14	1-9/03/2021	TUNISIA	Italy	male youung adult (28 years)	Student	Tunisia-> University in Italy	
Int.15	11/03/2021	TUNISIA	Italy (Napoli)	female young adult (28 years)	Student	Tunisia-> University in Italy	
Int.16	19/03/2021	EGYPT	Italy (Roma)	male young adult (20 years)	Student	Egypt-> middle and high school in Italy	
Int.17	05/05/2021	SYRIA	Italy (Camini)	male young adult (18 years)	out of education	3 years of elementary school in Syria-> some middle school in Lebanon-> professional high school in Italy	with linguistic mediator
Int.18	05/05/2021	SYRIA	Italy (Camini)	female young adult (20 years)	Out of education	elementary in Syria-> 2years of middle school in Labanon -	
Int.19	05/05/2021	SYRIA (Aleppo)	Italy (Camini)	male young adult (23 years)	Student	Syria-> high school and university in Lybia	Kurdish
Int.20	11/05/2021	SYRIA	Italy (Camini)	female young adult (20 years)	Pupil	Syria until middle school -> in Lebanon middle school-> in Italy middle and high school	
Int.21	11/05/2021	SYRIA	Italy (Camini)	male teenager (18 years)	Pupil	Syria-> Lebanon in 4th of elementary-> Middle and high school in Italy	
Int.22	11/05/2021	SYRIA	Italy (Camini)	female teenager (16 years)	Pupil	Syria elementary-> Lebanon elementary -> Italy middle and high school	
Int.23	11/05/2021	MOROCCO	Italy (Camini)	male young adult (19 years)	Out of education	Morocco until middle school	with linguistic mediator
Int.24	11/05/2021	MOROCCO	Italy (Camini)	female young adult (21 years)	Out of education	Morocco until first year of high school	with linguistic mediator
Int.25	11/05/2021	MOROCCO	Italy (Camini)	Male adult	Out of education	Morocco until middle school	with linguistic mediator
Int.26	11/05/2021	MOROCCO	Italy (Camini)	female young adult (23 years)	Out of education	one year of primary school in Morocco	with linguistic mediator
Int.27	11/05/2021	LIBYA	Italy (Camini)	male and female teenagers (15/16)	Pupils	elementary in Lybia -> middle school in Italy	Pakistani
Int.28	27/10/2021	EGYPT	Italy	male young adult	Student & teacher of Italian in home country	Egypt -> Master degree in Italy	Al-Azhar school
Int.29	02/11/2021	SYRIA (Homs)	Italy	male young adult (28 years)	Student	Syria-> Lebanon at the end of high school-> University in Italy	
Int.30	08/11/2021	EGYPT	Italy	male young adult (20 years)	Student	Egypt -> high school in Italy with a scholarship	

Interview	Date	Arab country of departure	European host country	Sex and age	Educative status	Educational paths (with transit countries)	Peculiarities
		INTERVIEWS ABROAD					
Int.31	13/10/2020	MOROCCO		male adult	Educator	School in Ghana -> work in Morocco	Ghanese
Int.32	29/11/2021	SYRIA	Sweden	female adult	teacher	all in Syria -> training course for teacher in Sweden	Kurdish
Int.33	29/11/2021	SYRIA	Sweden	female adult	teacher	all in Syria -> training course for teacher in Sweden	
Int.34	01/12/2021	SYRIA	Sweden	female adult	teacher and parent	all in Syria in UNRWA school for Palestinian -> training course for teacher in Sweden	Palestinian born in Syria
Int.35	01/12/2021	SYRIA	Sweden	female adult	teacher and parent	all in Syria in UNRWA school for Palestinian -> training course for teacher in Sweden	Palestinian born in Syria
Int.36	10/03/2022	SYRIA	Germany	female adult	teacher	all in Syria -> training course for teacher in Germany	with linguistic mediator
Int.37	11/03/2022	SYRIA (Homs)	Germany	female adult	teacher and parent	all in Syria	Kurdish
Int.38	12/03/2022	SYRIA	Germany	female adult	teacher and parent	all in Syria (Damascus) -> her children begin school in Turkey	
Int.39	15/03/2022	SYRIA	Germany	female young adult (21 years)	Student and volunteer teacher in Germany	in Syria until 1st year of high school ->in Germany wilkommen classe in the the 3rd year of middle school and then high school	
Int.40	15/03/2022	SYRIA	Germany	female young adult (25 years)	Students	in Syria until first year of high school in refugee school for people from Golan -> in Germany high school	German/Syrian (Circassian)
Int.41	18/03/2022	SYRIA	Germany	male adult	Teacher	all in Syria, university also in France, working as a normal teacher in Syria and in Lebanon as a teacher with refugee	Christian
		INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP IN PARENTABLE PROJECT					
Int.42	15/10/2020	MOROCCO	Italy	female adult	Parent	she studied in Morocco; his son in Italy from the beginning	the son is born in Italy
Int.43	26/11/2020	SYRIA	Italy	female adult	Parents	her schooling was all in Syria, her sons arrive in Italy in high school	
Int.44	04/12/2020	SYRIA	Italy	male adult father	Parents	his children went to primary school in Lybia some year before arrive in Italy	
Int.45	10/12/2020	LYBIA	Italy	female adult with 4 children between 11 and 19	teacher and parent	her children start school in Lybia and entered in different year of Italian school from elementary to high school	Amazigh
Int.46	18/12/2020	LYBIA	Italy	female adult	teacher and parent	she did not go school. 5 children; 4 begin Lybian school and entered in Italian school at 16, 13, 11, 8; one is born in Italy	born in Morocco
Int.47	21/12/2020	MOROCCO	Italy	female adult	parent	she studied in Morocco; their doughter in Italy from the beginning	the doughter born in Lybia
Int.48	26/06/2020	SYRIA	Germany	female adults (3 people)	teachers and parent	they studied all in Syria; their children arrived directly from Syria to Germany in various grade	
Int.49	25/02/2021	SYRIA	Sweden	male adult	teacher and parent	he studied all in Syria, his sons begin in Syria and enter Swedish school in 3rd and 5th grade of elementary school	
Int.50	23/02/2022	JORDAN	Germany	female adult	teacher and parent	all in Syria-> training course for teacher in Germany; her children begin school in Germany	
Focus Group 1	27/11-1/12/2021	SYRIA, MOROCCO, TUNISIA	Sweden	male and female adults	teachers and parents	they studied all the path in their home countries	also teachers were Arabic
Focus Group 2	18/03/2022	SYRIA	Germany	male and female adults	teachers and parents	they studied all the path in their home countries	the teachers are German
Focus Group 3	04/04/2022	SYRIA, MOROCCO, LIBYA	Italy	female adults	teachers and parents	they studied all the path in their home countries	the teachers are Italian

Table 7: Table of ParentAble Focus group activity *"How do you experience your role as a parent"*

	Experience of my parents with my school تجربة أهلي مع المدرسة	**My experience with my children's school in home and travel country** تجربتي مع المدرسة في وطني (او في بلد إقامة مسبقة)	**My experience with my children's school in host countries (Sweden, Germany, Italy)** تجربتي مع المدرسة في ألمانيا
When and where أين ومتى ؟			
Who are the teachers? من هم المدرسين؟			
Who were/are other pupils? من هم الطلاب الآخرين؟			
Who were my parents/ who am I in society? من هم أهلي؟/ من أنا في المجتمع؟			
What methods are being used? ما هي طرق التدريس المتداولة؟			
Language(s) of instruction ما هي لغة التدريس؟			
What was the school system like? ما طبيعة النظام التعليمي؟			
Why was/ is education important? ما أهمية التعليم؟			
How were/are parents -school relationships? ما طبيعة العلاقات بين المدرسة والأهالي؟			

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the late Prof. Ventura, who passed away in the summer of 2022 before I completed my doctoral research, for being the earliest supporter of my work. It is thanks to him that I have been able to delve into profound historical and cultural analyses, hoping to have captured even a fraction of his remarkable intellectual legacy.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my current supervisor at the University of Calabria, Prof. Leccese, for agreeing to accompany me on this journey. Despite the sorrow of losing our shared mentor and the challenges we have faced along the way, he has continued to support me with professionalism and attentiveness.

Special thanks are extended to all the members of the former Occhialì laboratory on the Islamic Mediterranean for their numerous initiatives, stimulating debates, collaborative work, and valuable discussions that have greatly contributed to my academic growth and guided me on this doctoral journey. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Fedele and Dr. Zecca for their invaluable support.

A heartfelt thank you is also extended to my co-tutor, Prof. Miriam Stock, for her professionalism and dedicated guidance throughout my academic journey. I am especially grateful for our collaborative work on the implementation of the Erasmus Plus projects 'Enable' and 'ParentAble', for which she was responsible. These projects, along with their network of partners, have played a vital role in facilitating empirical research conducted in Italy, Germany, and Sweden.

Therefore, heartfelt thanks are extended to the 'Back on Track' association in Berlin, Germany, and to Kia Kimhag from the University of Gävle in Sweden for their invaluable support and assistance in organizing and conducting the interviews. Their dedication and the remarkable work they do with recently immigrated pupils and teachers are truly admirable. The same gratitude is extended to the other professors of the University of Schwäbisch Gmünd, who have been supportive both academically and personally during my research period abroad, as well as to the staff of the University of Muğla in Turkey. From them, I gained valuable insights into psychological counseling for Syrian refugees in their country, which has greatly enriched my understanding.

The interdisciplinary nature of my research led me to seek support from various professors at my doctoral school and department at the University of Calabria. I would like to express my gratitude to them for their valuable suggestions. Prof. Jedlowski for his insights on narrative and biographical research methods; Prof. Affuso for his expertise in Habermas' theorization; Prof. Beonio Brocchieri for his knowledge of colonial and world history; Prof. Servidio for his contributions to the psychological approach to the issue of identity; and Prof. Rossi for his expertise in Martha Nussbaum's intercultural approach. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the scholars who, in a more informal yet impactful manner, have contributed to the completion of this work over the years: Prof. Della Corte, Prof. D'Agostino, Prof. Elia, Prof. Corradi, and Prof. Vingelli.

However, the greatest thanks should be extended to all the individuals who generously agreed to be interviewed, sharing their stories and dedicating their time, thoughts, and emotions. Without their willingness to participate, this work would not have been possible. I sincerely hope to soon present them with the final outcome, as many have expressed their curiosity, and that it will meet their appreciation.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my partner and my young daughter for their unwavering support throughout this journey, despite the challenges we faced. I am also deeply grateful to my family and friends for their constant encouragement and assistance, with a special mention to my mother for her infinite patience in supporting me during the writing process.