

Foreword

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Two major international texts pave the way for incorporating gender equality into public policy: the 1960 Unesco Convention against Discrimination in Education; and a 1975 European directive on implementing the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (which also includes training). Subsequently, in 1999, the Treaty of Amsterdam reinforced the EU's commitment when it introduced the promotion of equality between men and women and the combat against all discrimination, whether based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. A final step was taken in 2010 with Recommendation CM / Rec (2010) 5 issued by the Committee of Ministers to member states regarding measures for combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

All that remains, then, is for countries in Europe to take possession of these principles.

At the same time, from 2004 onwards the Vatican has been speaking out against what it calls “gender theory”, fearing “that homosexuality, like the right to abortion, will ultimately be recognised, and that ideas about the complementarity of the sexes and the equal dignity of men and women (as opposed to the goal of equal rights) will also be called into question” (Paternotte, 2015, p. 14). But it was only really in 2013 that anti-gender protests were triggered in France and Italy: opponents in both countries brought the debate to the attention of the general public when they succeeded in opening up a front in schools. This is also the strategy adopted by the American religious right when it pits the teaching of creationism against theories of evolution (Fassin, 2014).

As part of her master’s research, Ludovica Anedda has examined Italy’s efforts to integrate a gender perspective into its educational policy in line with the European directives. More particularly, Anedda has analysed “equality” educational projects in Cagliari, Sardinia, together with the way that the press tries to inform or influence public opinion. Anedda shows that equality projects that had been relatively well-received are now obliged to take on new challenges: Look, we’re taking an interest in them... and we’ve found that they’re a danger to society! In the face of these threats to teaching about gender and LGBTIQ equality, Anedda reflects on the development of new strategies for circumventing or repelling attacks.

The first part of Anedda’s research focuses on the Italian response to the 2010 European recommendation, which the country’s government undertook to deliver in 2012 under the direction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The implementation paper stressed that preventing, combating and eliminating all forms of discrimination is a priority in the wider context of promoting equal opportunities. The ministry officially delegated the development of a national strategy for opposing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to the National Office against Racial Discrimination (Ufficio Nazio-

nale Anti-Discriminazione Razziale, UNAR). As it stands, the 2013-2015 National LGBT Strategy is somewhat ambitious. Moreover, it features a section focused on education, designed to increase the knowledge and skills about LGBT issues of all actors in the school community; and to help raise awareness about new structures that make up the “family”.

A number of training sessions have been organised as part of this project, which meant to include about twenty courses in regions such as Tuscany, Umbria, Basilicata, Calabria and Sardinia – the last-named being the region we are interested in here.

While institutionalisation is in its early stages, attacks against the “*teoria del gender*” are making an appearance. Anedda demonstrates that these form part of a wider international context that is moving across Mediterranean Europe and is “calling on people to question the trans-national dynamics of Catholic protest” (Avanza & Della Sudda, 2017). Although transfers of militant practices have been evident from the 2000s, they became more visible to the general public following the anti-gender movements in southern Europe between 2011 and 2015 (Paternotte, 2015).

This mobilisation started in Spain (Gallan & Valle, 2015) before meeting unexpected success in France. It subsequently arrived in Italy, where the conservative movements were dumbfounded by the enthusiastic mobilisation of a minority in France (that was very visible) which they saw as highly secular (Avanza & Della Sudda, 2017).

As part of the extended debate on legalising same-sex marriage, neo-conservative Catholic groups (amongst others) in France lashed out in January 2014 at the educational trials known as the *ABCD de l'Égalité* (The Basics of Equality), which were designed to combat gender stereotypes in primary schools.

Following in the footsteps of these Catholic groups was Farida Belghoul, a former anti-racism campaigner who now has close links to the extreme right and acts as a mouthpiece for some Muslim groups (Chercuti, 2014). Belghoul organised a *Journée de Retrait de l'Ecole*

(JRE) – Don’t Go to School Day – that called on parents to engage in civil disobedience on the basis of a supposed “conscience clause”: the “gender theory”, argued Belghoul, runs counter to family values. As a result, children needed to be protected from what was described as “brainwashing” with the hint of a conspiracy theory (Cedelle, 2014). Families that were apparently Muslim were targeted by messages declaring that “transsexual men and women would come into nursery schools to give masturbation classes”. An internet link to a video of Belghoul was sent out in an attempt to substantiate the rumour. The absurd nature of the accusations should have been enough to raise a smile but on January 24, 2014 – the date of the first JRE – schools in districts on the edges of France’s major cities were devoid of pupils. Although the absenteeism caused by the JRE was ultimately quite low on a national level, the story caught the attention of the press, especially since it was widely seized upon in the general right-wing political discourse.

This association with the Muslim population in marginalised districts of large cities is specific to the French context; yet it has undoubtedly contributed to heightening the movement’s visibility, including on the international stage.

Anedda analyses this conservative resistance in Italy and more precisely in Sardinia, where the church’s spokespersons voice their opposition to the introduction of the “*teoria del gender*” at school in the national and regional press. Anedda shows that the catalyst in 2013 was a proposed law (the *Legge Scalfarotto*, named after one of its main supporters) suggesting that the idea of discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation should be incorporated into the legislation of October 13, 1975. In conservative circles, this was seen as preparing the ground for legalising same-sex marriage. It also marked the first meeting of the *Sentinelle in Piedi*, which took its cue from the French Veilleurs movement and several other associations, such as the Italian branch of the French *La Manif pour Tous*.

Nevertheless, projects for promoting gender equality are being carried out in Cagliari. Anedda introduces three of these: *Alla scoperta della differenza*, *Ci piacCiAmo!... anche in biblioteca* and *SAVE*. The first two apply specifically to children in primary and lower secondary education. The third project is designed specifically for teachers. Anedda shows how the schemes are executed and presents the criteria for their success. In addition, she examines the various obstacles that the people behind the projects have had to contend with, especially when the attacks on “the gender theory” were stronger.

Anedda has collected and analysed “anti-gender” press articles that mobilise a “discursive mechanism for unambiguously and totally identifying a plural object: educational programmes on gender and sexuality in schools, recognition of same-sex couples, gender politics, feminist and LGBTQI theories and movements, as well as abortion and euthanasia on occasion” (Prearo, 2017). Anedda has appended articles that try to defuse the debate and educate the general public so that they do not give in to moral panic (Mathieu, 2015).

Last of all, Anedda suggests possible avenues of action and resistance strategies so that this kind of equality programme can be implemented, even though governments – both in France and Italy – have retreated in the face of minority interest groups.

Anedda’s work is an attempt to understand and explain a confused situation that is steeped in ignorance and misinformation. Her research has been recognised by the 2018 Gender Prize awarded by the Equality Office at the University of Geneva. Anedda demonstrates that, although the road to gender and LGBTIQ equality is still fraught with difficulty, people operating in the field, trainers and researchers – both men and women – are working to make progress in Cagliari and across Europe.

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