

An Atypical Path of Women Teacher Training between the 19th and 20th Centuries: the *Istituti Superiori di Magistero Femminile* (Higher Institutes of Teaching for Women)

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Over the course of the last thirty years, the historiography of education in Italy has paid special attention to the construction of gender identity, understood as a cultural construction of male and female social roles, especially in the area of professions (Becchi, Covato, Giallongo, Soldani, Ulivieri). Research has primarily focused on the reasons why women were absent from certain teaching and professional occupations long considered male professions. Historians have also tried to understand those processes that favoured, in Italy more than elsewhere, the establishment of ‘the equation between women and education’,¹ which framed the role of women as educators more in terms of elementary school teachers than high school teachers. As Giulia di Bello wrote, this last figure has been less studied than the elementary school teacher. She began being identified as a sort of specialized teacher, and, unlike the male professor, found huge difficulties in establishing herself as a competent professional in the transmission of intellectual knowledge.²

In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, the debate surrounding the access female teachers had to secondary education eventually led to the creation of the Higher Institutes of Teaching for Women (*Istituti Superiori Femminili di Magistero*), established in Florence and Rome in 1882, for the explicit purpose of training future female teachers of the Normal Female Schools (*Scuole Normali Femminili*). Important studies have highlighted different aspects of both Institutes. Research concerning the Florentine Institute has primarily focused on the legislative-normative aspects that characterised the very beginnings of this institute all the way up to the foundation of the Faculty of Education (*Facoltà di Magistero*).³ Approaching the Roman Institute, Furio Pesci’s work not only reconstructed the training curricula that was offered, but also carried out an in-depth study of the teachers who taught pedagogy.⁴ Given that at the turn of the century these two institutes represented the only path for female teachers to enter secondary schools, the present contribution aims to reconstruct to a large extent their respective histories. With reference to the aforementioned studies, we will also look at the women who trained there and transmitted then their professional knowledge to future generations of female elementary school teachers.

Since this is still very much an ongoing investigation, the main aim of this paper is to offer further methodological and interpretative approaches to enrich this field of study by shedding light on the relationship between life, training and professional career. From this perspective, autobiographical writings (diaries, letters exchanges etc.) mixed with other documentary

1 Covato 2014, p. 96.

2 Cf. Di Bello 2004, II, p. 545.

3 Cf. Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980.

4 See Pesci 1994.

sources allow us to reconstruct different fragments of a collective biography and thus enable a deeper understanding of those who have taken their place behind the teachers' desk over time.

1 The difficult debut of women in high schools and universities

Much has been written concerning the great majority of daughters of the urban working class and lower bourgeoisie for whom the Normal School (*Scuola Normale*) became the habitual path for their education between the 18th and 19th centuries. It was the compulsory educational path for those girls who wanted to continue their studies in order to obtain a high school diploma and enrol at a university.⁵ At the beginning of the 1870s, the first cases of female enrolment in gymnasiums and high schools were registered; in fact, the Casati law (1859) did not clearly forbid the enrolment of women and the admission of female students was granted by headmasters who, in some cases, refused it, as happened at the Liceo Dante in Florence.⁶ The headmaster of the Liceo Galvani in Bologna showed to be more liberal. He accepted the enrolment of two girls who belonged to the lower bourgeoisie: Giuseppina Cattani and Giulia Cavallari. Both women got their high school diploma in 1878. Giuseppina Cattani enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine and graduated in 1884, while Giulia Cavallari graduated in Literature in 1882 and in Philosophy the following year. More than ten years later a third woman achieved a high school diploma at the well-known school in Bologna. In more than 20 years, during the period 1878-1900, eighteen women out of 1342 students obtained their high school diploma at the Liceo Galvani, reaching an average of 1.34%.⁷ Born in Imola on 5 March 1856, Giulia Cavallari was the first woman to get a Bachelor degree at the Royal University of Bologna and the only woman to enrol at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy in 1882/83.⁸ We know that she started to teach Classical Literature at the high school Erminia Fuà Fusinato in Rome the same year in which a Ministerial Circular, allowing women to access all levels of secondary school, was signed – a full seven years after the Bonghi Regulation had legally sanctioned the enrolment of women at Italian universities. As a consequence of this opening up of universities to women, starting from 1889, statistics on secondary-school enrolment started to register the presence of women attending high schools: 44 female students out of a total of 8326 students. The rate increased steadily over the course of the next decades, and in 1900, 287 girls attended high schools out of 12,870 students. From this point onward, women's enrolment in university courses increased rapidly: twenty women graduated between 1877 and 1888, while 204 women graduated between 1889 and 1900. In reality, however, these were still low numbers, because they were exceptional cases up until 1888. And while there was a phase of great expansion at the end of the 19th century, it was always disproportional compared to the number of male students. Vittore Ravà's statistics allow us to analyse data relating to the distribution of women that graduated in the different faculties: Literature (140 female graduates); Philosophy (37); Natural Sciences and Physics (30); Medicine and Surgery (24); Mathematics (20); and Law (6).⁹ At the beginning of the

5 Starting point is the essay of Bertoni Jovine 1964, pp. 223ff.

6 Cf. Raicich 1989, p. 169 and p. 170.

7 Cf. Gaspari 2012/2013, p. 33.

8 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22.

9 See Ravà 1902.

20th century, we can see that almost 90% of women who graduated became teachers. In fact, the odds against finding a job still persisted in other professional fields. This exclusion had more to do with the strength of social customs than any actual legal constraints, which were increasingly difficult to justify and apply.¹⁰ And since the very few women who did graduate in Law were not allowed to enter the legal profession, they turned to teaching. In 1900 three out of six women who received a degree in Law obtained a professorship in the normal school, after having also obtained a degree in Literature.¹¹

However, although the vast majority of women who graduated chose to teach, or often turned to teaching in secondary schools, it was not at all easy to find a job in state institutions, as aspiring male teachers were always ranked ahead of the women. Moreover, women were not permitted to teach in male or coeducational high schools, which meant they could teach only in one of the very few girls' classes.

Furthermore, men who had previously shown a preference for other professional careers were no longer put off by the idea of a job as teacher at a renowned high school.¹² It should be pointed out that the Sonnino-Boselli law (1906) had defined the new legal status of secondary-school teachers. This law mandated public competition, preference for those holding a degree, and made reference exclusively to 'male' subjects. This law denied women the possibility of pursuing a teaching career in male and mixed classes. Moreover, two later regulations passed in 1908 and 1910 further reinforced the exclusion of women in this capacity. As Marino Raicich argued,

'the situation was particularly unfair because even if women graduated obtained excellent results, they could only teach in girls' classes which in those years tended to decrease, despite the growing education of girls, due to the new trend of rural and city school authorities, to favour mixed classes in both gymnasiums and technical schools'.¹³

2 Regulations and study programmes

As we have already seen, the initial difficulties of having women teach in secondary schools, particularly in high schools where very few girls were enrolled, largely due to persistent prejudice against coeducation during adolescence, had opened a debate during the 1870s that influenced the political choice to provide higher education courses reserved for women. At the same time, the dizzying growth of normal women's schools meant that more women were entrusted with the task of teaching for decency.

The Minister Francesco De Sanctis became a proponent of this needed development and consequently initiated a lively debate on this issue. On 16 December 1878, he signed the decree for the creation of two Royal Institutes of Magisterium for Women in Rome and in Florence reserved to women who graduated from the normal schools. These new institutes were assigned the dual task of training future teachers of Literature, Pedagogy, and Foreign Languages in the women's complementary and normal schools and, at the same time, 'offering to those young

¹⁰ Cf. Vicarelli 2007, pp. 7ff.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹² Cf. Santoni Rugiu 1959, pp. 176ff.

¹³ Raicich 1989, p. 170.

women who aspired to do so a higher level of education than they could have received at elementary and normal schools'.¹⁴

The De Sanctis law represented a radical revision of the Royal Decree dated 15 September 1873 (No. 1577), signed by Minister Scialoja, which had set up a two-year complementary course of study. These courses were implemented in the two women's normal schools in Rome and Florence 'with the aim of giving a better education to young women who had obtained the normal diploma in that school'.¹⁵ Having two schools, which will also continue with the birth of the following two women's higher schools of Magisterium, was justified in the first case because Rome was Italy's new capital city, the centre of cultural life; in the second case, Florence offered the 'advantage of good practice of the spoken Italian language'¹⁶ in what was considered the cradle of the Italian language.

However, the complementary course did not meet expectations, because no formal qualification could be obtained. As a result, these courses were not academically attractive and thus not many women attended them.¹⁷ After Bonghi's short tenure as minister (1874-1876), who failed to approve the reform of this course, the new Minister Francesco De Sanctis wanted to create two royal Higher Institutes for Women. They had to be four-year programmes and should be attached to the University of Rome and to the Higher Institute of Florence instead of the Normal School. He entrusted the direction of the respective schools to a professor of the Faculty of Literature or of Sciences at the University of Rome and the President of the Department of Philosophy and Literature at the Institute of Higher Studies in Florence (art. 4). In order to qualify for enrolment, a candidate required a Normal High School diploma and an admission's exam that was based on what was taught within the normal school programmes, related to those dating back to 10 October 1867 (art. 3), excluding Pedagogy.

Upon completion of their second year of the course, students had to choose a specific curriculum that determined the subjects they were to teach at the women's normal schools: Italian language and literature, history and geography, pedagogy and ethics, or foreign languages and literature.¹⁸

However, De Sanctis' decree had to overcome several obstacles, and it became the object of a lively discussion in the press with serious consequences in Parliament regarding the creation *ex novo*, simply by means of a decree vs. a law, of an institution of higher education on par with and parallel to a university programme, especially one aimed at training only female teachers. Moreover, the women who enrolled in such programmes had come from a shorter, less demanding course of study than those who attended the high-school courses.¹⁹

As Giulia Di Bello wrote, in the controversies that made the implementation of the ISMFs difficult, 'all polemical arguments that will accompany the Magisterium in its hundred year of history are clear, especially its development as an 'academic' degree of a curriculum of studies of less dignity (Normal School), as well as its being considered a 'feminine' rough copy of the university faculties, most of which were attended at that time by men'.²⁰ Moreover, De Sanctis'

14 D'Alfonso 1896, p. 289. D'Alfonso was a Professor of Pedagogy at the ISMF in Rome from 1889 to 1923 (cf. Pesci 1994, pp. 44ff.).

15 Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 38.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

17 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 305.

18 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 138.

19 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 50ff.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

project was called into question by the feminists Anna Maria Mozzoni and Emilia Mariani, who were very critical regarding an exclusively female avenue of training. They had certain reservations about this project because it was segregating and culturally inferior, just as all of the female schools regardless of level and degree pursued used to be.²¹

The task of converting De Sanctis' decree into law No 896, dated 25 June 1882, was accomplished by Guido Baccelli, who became Minister of Public Education on 2 January 1881. This law underlined the double task of both Institutes: 'to promote a broader education for women by accomplishing and extending that which was imparted at women's secondary schools, and to prepare and enable women to special subjects in all girls' schools of the Italian Kingdom' (art. 1).²²

The enrolment was open, in addition to the women who graduated from Normal school to those who had completed the final exams in the three grades of an equivalent level (grammar school and technical school) (art. 2). All candidates also had to pass an admission's exam based on the programme of the final year of the Normal school.

The hybrid character of the ISMF, halfway between a school for aspiring female teachers and a degree course, was particularly evident in article 3, on the basis of which instruction was to include 'literary, scientific, pedagogical, and moral studies, designed to perform and extend those offered in normal secondary schools [for women]'.²³ Therefore, the ISMF represented a level above that of the secondary school, since they offered professional training to teachers who will instruct future teachers. But, as Pasquale Villari, chairman of the commission that had formulated the regulation, expressly stated in his report, 'wanting to make ISMFs into real universities or university faculties for women would be a distortion of their character'.²⁴ This has to do with the fact that those attending the institute come from the normal schools in 'which the culture imparted is far inferior to that received in high schools and technical institutes by those who enrol in universities'.²⁵

The regulation (19 November 1882, No. 1882) outlined the study programme, which was to be similar at both ISMFs. It had to include two biennial courses: the first two years were common to each kind of diploma, and the third and fourth years were the specialisation phase. As we shall see, this curriculum was certainly not comparable to that of a more specialised degree, for example, in Literature. In both ISMFs the teaching consisted of delving deeper in the different subjects already touched upon in the previous master's course; but there were also some important innovations, such as the insertion of modern languages and literature (French and English or German), which compensated for the lack of classical languages. While the aspiring teachers had the option of pursuing a qualification in foreign languages and literature, none of them ever obtained this diploma. This most likely had to do with the fact that foreign languages were not taught at the normal schools and thus such a diploma did not seem pragmatic.²⁶ The scientific subjects were also well represented and in perfect balance with those of the humanistic subjects (in the first two-year programme the sciences occupied one-third of the total weekly hours). Their theoretical teaching was accompanied by practical exercises in scientific cabinets, under the guidance of the respective teachers (art.16). Moreover, in line with the positivistic culture

21 Cf. Pironi 2013a, pp. 57ff.

22 Regolamento organico per ISMF di Roma e Firenze, in Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 142.

23 Legge 25 giugno 1882, n. 896 (serie 3), in Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 139.

24 Covato/Sorge 1994, p. 305.

25 Ibid.

26 Cf. Di Bello 1984, p. 19.

of the time, the addition of a diploma in physical and the natural sciences was proposed several times; however, it was finally established in 1919 and then rescinded the following year. The Florentine Institute had been requesting precisely this next step from the moment it first opened by the Government Council, given the presence of a scientific section, composed of distinguished professors (G.F. Airoli, C. Del Lungo, A.R. Toniolo, A. Grandi).²⁷ It should be noted that the first Director of the ISMF in Florence was Giacomo Filippo Airoli, professor of physics and chemistry, and he was succeeded in 1886 by Agostino Grandi, professor of algebra, who graduated in mathematics at the Scuola Normale of Pisa.²⁸ When it comes to the topic of high-level scientific instruction, the Roman Institute was not outdone by its Florentine counterpart. Two female professors in particular stood out in this respect: Evangelina Bottero, professor of physics and chemistry, and Carolina Magistrelli, professor of the natural sciences, who were also responsible for equipping the institute with an advanced experimental laboratory.²⁹ They were the first women in united Italy to graduate in the Natural Sciences and were authors of successful books in their respective fields. Just like at the Florentine Institute, most full professors and administrators were professors of the scientific fields.

Both institutes shared a first two-year curriculum that included the following courses: 1. Italian and Italian literature (three weekly lessons in the first and second year); 2. general history; ancient, medieval and modern history of Italy, and geography (*idem*); 3. logic and psychology (three weekly lessons in the first year); 4. elements of physics and chemistry (three hours per week in the second year); 5. natural history, including botany, zoology, mineralogy and physical geography (three weekly lessons in the first and second year); 6. French and French literature (*idem*); 7. English and German and English and German literature (*idem*); 8. geometry, elements of reasoned arithmetic and cosmography (*idem*); 9. practical hygiene (three hours per week in the first year); 10. drawing and women's work, the number of hours to be decided by the Faculty Board (art. 4).³⁰

In the second two-year period of study, the subjects were subdivided according to the diploma sought, even though the three study programmes were not all that different and represented more of an emphasis on what was learned in the first two-year period. To achieve a diploma in Italian and Italian literature, history and geography the following exams were required: 1. Italian and Italian literature (history of literature; study of the classics; composition exercises for three weekly lessons in the first and second year); 2. ancient, medieval and modern history of Italy as well as geography (*idem*); 3. pedagogy and ethics (*idem*); 4. French and French literature (three hours per week in the first year); 5. English or German and English or German literature (three hours per week in the first and second years); 6. practical hygiene and anthropology (*idem*); 7. one course in the natural sciences, physics or mathematics to be chosen by the student (three hours per week in the first year); 8. drawing and women's work, the number of hours to be decided by the Faculty Board. In order to teach pedagogy, the only differences compared to the previous two-year programme were a reduction in the Italian literature, in ancient, medieval and modern history as well as in geography lessons, only taught in the first year. To compensate for this, psychology, pedagogy and ethics were included in the two-year

27 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 18.

28 Cf. *ibid.*

29 Cf. Govoni 2007, pp. 65ff.

30 Cf. Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 143. *Ibid.*, pp. 149f.

curriculum. The degree in foreign languages used the same basic course of study but expanded the study of modern languages to two instead of just one year (art. 9).

As we can see, both the study of foreign languages and an elective course in one of the natural sciences were components of all three curricula. Pedagogy, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same level of priority, as the time allotted to it included elements of logic and psychology as well. It should be noted, for example, that those who enrolled in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy only had to pass one pedagogy exam over the course of the entire four-year course of study. With a continuous oscillation between old and new, between a traditional view of women and their emerging professional aspirations, the subject of women's work was finally combined with drawing, even if considered recreational subject. Since it was clearly a training programme that was building upon the curriculum offered at the normal school, it was very different compared to that offered at a university faculty. Moreover, the two ISMFs only issued diplomas – not degrees – and in the legislative texts reference was made to 'female pupils' and 'school year' rather than 'female students' and 'academic year'. The point about the academic calendar is quite telling, because the lessons at the ISMFs did not start prior to 15 November, same as for university students, and the exam sessions ended on 15 July (art. 28). Lessons lasted from 60 to 90 minutes (art. 10) and could not exceed six hours a day, not including recreational activities, choral singing and gymnastics (art. 11), which were interspersed between the academic sessions. Attendance was mandatory and, at the end of the year, an exam was administered for each subject. If a student failed one or more subjects, she had to attend the remedial examinations in the second half of October; and if she failed a second time, she had to repeat the year.³¹

Women who distinguished themselves by means of their 'irreproachable conduct' and who had obtained a mark of seven in each subject were exempted from taking exams (art. 16). At the end of the first two-year period of study, they had to take a written exam for each of the subjects they attended: 1. they had to write a composition in Italian; 2. solve a mathematical problem; 3. write a composition in French; and 4. write a composition in one of the other two foreign languages (art.19). If they passed these tests, the student obtained a certificate of first grade diploma (art. 17), which enabled the graduate to seek employment as a governess. To obtain the second grade diploma, several prerequisites had to be met: 1. passing all of the exams in the second two-year period (art. 18); 2. a thesis on a topic chosen by the student; 3. a written test in the chosen foreign language; 4. an oral examination on the subject in which one specialised; 5. a teaching demonstration on the same subject (art. 21).

The regulations established the allocation of scholarships for each of the boarding schools that were reserved for non-wealthy students of unimpeachable conduct, the quality of which was attested to by a certificate of morality issued by the municipality or by a political authority (art. 26).

Under the guidance of the female director, who was also tasked with supervising the discipline of external students (art. 29), life at the boarding school was highly institutionalised.³² According to the Rules of Procedure of the Florentine Institute (1883), she was responsible for 'keep[ing] alive the love and the study of domestic things, the feelings of kindness and the

31 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 149f. and p. 154.

32 As remembered by one student who attended the ISMF in Rome, Paola Boni Fellini, 'female students who lived in the boarding school complained they could not have a walk to the Square Indipendenza, as we usually had as free citizens' (Boni Fellini 1955, p. 101).

habit of kindness that are the most beautiful ornaments in a woman' (art. 13).³³ From 1882 onward, Marianna Giarrè Billi served as Disciplinary Director of the Florentine Institute. She was a woman with strong patriotic principles and a role model for the students, having at 16 years of age challenged the fire of the gendarmerie, on 29 May 1851, in order to raise funds among the population for the families of the heroes of Curtatone and Montanara, during a commemorative ceremony prohibited by the government. She later married the former Garibaldian volunteer, Doctor Luigi Billi, and went on to become the life of an important intellectual club in the city, which was frequented by the intellectuals belonging to Carducci's circle, including Emilio Nencioni and Niccolò Rodolico both of whom taught at the ISMF.³⁴

The importance assigned to the ethical behaviour of the students therefore was a distinctive element of the teacher training, given that an ISMF student could remain at the boarding school for all four years provided her conduct was deemed satisfactory. Such students could also move on to the second two-year period without taking the passing exams if, in addition to reporting in each two-month period a grade of seven in each subject, she had shown excellent behaviour.³⁵ It was evident that the future teachers had above all the task of being educational role models for their students (who might themselves aspire to become teachers). Unlike those who graduated in literature or the natural sciences, the task assigned to these teachers went far beyond the pure transmission of subject content.

The next regulation, signed by the Minister Paolo Boselli (29 August 1890), dispelled any doubts about the ambivalent nature of the two ISMFs, which maintained the dual purpose of

'providing and increasing, on the one hand, the literary and scientific culture of women, and, on the other, enabling them to work as a governess or as a specialist teacher at normal women's schools, in high-ranking boarding schools or at any of the female secondary schools in the Kingdom' (art. 1).³⁶

It was the minister's explicit conviction:

'that Italian families do not like American promiscuous teaching and that, although the University's doors are open to women, they will never come in large numbers and I am convinced that, given the current deviation of the woman from the purpose for which she is truly born, that of being a teacher and educator, since in each mother there must be one and the other, it was necessary to give a higher and more serious culture to the woman'.³⁷

Boselli's regulation, however, introduced substantial changes to the curriculum, establishing the division of teachings into two sections, one literary and the other scientific (art. 2), as well as strengthening the cultural component by devoting more attention to the study of the classical world, via the use of translations, and which therefore included: 1. Italian (style and precepts, study of the classics, including Greek and Latin texts and composition exercises); 2. critical history of Italian literature (relationship with classical, Greek and Latin literature); 3. elements of comparative foreign literature (optional); 4. history (ancient Greek and Roman history in Italy, in relation to the general history of Europe; criticism, bibliography); 5. geography, with elements of geology; political geography, with elements of ethnography, statis-

33 Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 151.

34 See Conti 2000.

35 Cf. Ulivieri 1986, p. 221.

36 Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 154.

37 D'Alfonso 1896, p. 202.

tics and cartography; 6. philosophy (logic, psychology, ethics, pedagogy and methodology) 7. mathematics (elements of physics and cosmography); 8. natural history (botany, zoology and mineralogy); practical hygiene related to home and school; 9. French and French literature; 10. German and German literature; 11. English and English literature; 12. drawing, with special emphasis on teaching through objects, and geography. While the women's works adhered to the norms and the same hours stipulated by the faculty board, they were now separate from drawing (art. 2).³⁸ The second two-year educational phase underwent an even greater change, providing more space for didactic exercises. This included two hours of history and geography exercises, two hours of Italian, three hours of pedagogical teaching exercises. The same changes applied to the Foreign Language diploma, which was still unable to attract many students.

The exercises had to take place in the dual capacity of 'lectures' at the ISMF and as 'practical lessons' at the normal school: the former were the responsibility of the subject teacher, the latter of the ISMF pedagogy teacher (art. 12). The schedule was not to exceed thirty hours per week, including the exercises (art. 15). In order to be admitted to the next course, the students had to pass a 'special exam on each subject of the course' (art. 22) at the end of the year. The special exams in the first three years and for the license at the end of the fourth year consisted of both written and oral tests. The written tests focused on languages, specifically on Italian and the elective foreign languages, the latter of which consisted of a double translation. For those seeking a Foreign Language qualification, a composition in that language was mandatory at the end of the four years. Those students opting for a diploma in history and geography were required to take a cartographic design test at the end of the fourth year. The students were allotted six hours for the written tests and 15 minutes for the oral test (art. 23). Those who failed to obtain the pass mark (6/10) in more than one subject were allowed to take a repeat exam in the second session. A supplementary session was also offered for those who failed only one subject, with the exception for Italian (art. 25). After passing the special exams, the student was admitted to the diploma exam, which was carried out in front of a commission. The commission consisted of the professor responsible for the subject to be examined, who served as president, and several other professors from related disciplines – one of whom did not belong to the institute (art. 28). This final test consisted of: 1. a thesis read before the commission on a special topic (of the student's choice) within the qualifying discipline; 2. a 30-minute lecture on the subject in question; 3. a translation written in one of the foreign languages chosen by the student; 4. a teaching demonstration (art. 29). The evaluation of the thesis was done publicly and each commission member could award a maximum of 10 points. If the student received an average score of 6/10, then the candidate was admitted to the lecture and the translation test. Here, again, the student needed an average of 6/10 to pass. Having successfully completed these two further exams, the student was asked to demonstrate her teaching abilities by means of a practical teaching demonstration. The topic of the demonstration was selected by the commission and given to the student 24 hours in advance. It was to last no less than 30 minutes and dealt with material taken directly from the curriculum used at the normal schools. The sum total of all the points (art. 30) awarded constituted the final grade for the diploma. The distinction 'cum laude' was possible via a unanimous vote (art. 31).

By means of the decree dated 7 April 1889, Minister Boselli granted both ISMFs the authority to offer exams enabling graduates to teach at normal schools, a level of qualification that until then had been reserved for the university faculties of literature and philosophy. The request by

38 Cf. Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 155.

both ISMF directors to be able to also confer the qualifying diploma of sciences was refused by the High Council of Public Education.³⁹

It was with the approval of a new regulation (RD 9 October 1919, No. 1968) that the women who graduated from the ISMFs could teach in the female sections of technical institutes, in technical, complementary, normal, industrial and first-degree commercial schools, in women's institutes and boarding schools (art. 1). The most important changes were the elimination of the previous two-year periods of study and the addition of a specific diploma for teaching physical and natural sciences. This diploma was distinct from the other courses of study from the very first year, while Italian, history and geography were combined into one single programme in the literary subjects (art. 2).⁴⁰ The result of the new neo-idealistic cultural wave was the elimination of psychology in all three curricula, while Latin and Latin literature was included in all programmes, except the natural sciences. Philosophy replaced the teaching of logic and morality, and new subjects were introduced such as history, legal institutions, basic economic principles and the history of art (the last one was only available to those in the literary programme). Finally, no mention was made of women's work, and the lesson schedule was reduced to four hours a day, excluding exercises. The reduction in the daily workload was to ensure that 'part of the day remains free for the students, so that they can go to libraries, archives, lectures and study at home, study and research in libraries or laboratories, complete the knowledge acquired at school' (art. 11).⁴¹ Throughout the four-year period, they also taught lessons at female middle schools.

This new regulation further defined the legal status of the Disciplinary Director. She had to have a degree or diploma (from one of the institutes), be over thirty years of age and embody 'irreproachable conduct in order to be a civil and moral example for the students'. Moreover, it was also specified that the position of director should be hired through a competition based on qualifications (art. 35).⁴² The new regulation also meant that the students no longer had to present a certificate of conduct in order to be admitted to the programme. And those who had obtained a high school licence were now free from the obligation to take Latin (art. 44).

Students who received no less than 18/30 in each of the written and oral exams passed, which also included the possibility of receiving the highest distinction (*cum laude*) for those who graduated with full marks (art. 65). Just as before, however, one could still take a repeat exam (as was possible in the secondary schools). At the end of the four years, having passed all the subjects, they were admitted to the final exam which consisted of: 1. presentation of a thesis written on one of the core subjects of the programme in which the candidate wanted to graduate; 2. an oral defence of the thesis and two other papers on other core subjects before the commission, each lasting no less than 40 minutes (which was subject to an open vote and required at least 40/70 to pass); 3. a teaching demonstration on a topic selected by the commission and communicated to the student 24 hours in advance (at least 40 minutes, relative to the current regular and complementary school programmes). Those who failed one of the tests had to repeat it within the two subsequent sessions (art. 6).

Despite the fact that the majority of the ISMF graduates received their degrees in the literary disciplines, it was Minister Giovanni Gentile who, with the decree of 13 March 1923, trans-

39 Cf. D'Alfonso 1896, pp. 294f.

40 Cf. Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 169.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

42 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 178.

formed them into university-like institutions, prescribed an exclusively humanistic approach, eliminated all scientific subjects from their curriculum and opened them to qualified male teachers.

3 Teachers and female students

When it comes to enrolment statistics, for the time between 1882 and 1893, 876 female students attended the Institute of Florence, which works out to a yearly average of 80 women. During the same time period, an average of 15 women graduated per year (180 diplomas in total).⁴³ The Roman Institute had comparable numbers: 831 female students and 278 auditors attended the institute, with a yearly average of 69 women. It granted 162 diplomas, with a yearly average of 12 female graduates.⁴⁴ In the years 1901-1902, 327 women attended both institutes (120 in Florence and 207 in Rome); in 1910-1911, 21 diplomas were granted in Florence and 30 in Rome.⁴⁵

From 1884 to 1900, the breakdown of degrees by subject at the Florentine Institute is as follows: received 168 in Italian and Italian Literature, 114 in History and Geography, 104 in Pedagogy and no degrees were granted in Foreign languages.⁴⁶ In the Roman Institute, as well, the majority of the graduates received a degree in Literature, as it was more useful for finding a job teaching at girls' schools.⁴⁷

From 1919 to 1923, 300 women enrolled at the Institute of Florence. Most of them enrolled in either literature (229) or pedagogy (144), while in 1919, 10 women chose the natural sciences and 9 women enrolled in foreign languages. However, from 1919 to 1923, not one single woman enrolled in either the sciences or in foreign languages. In this period 248 women received a degree in literature and 35 in pedagogy.⁴⁸

Despite the fundamental ambiguity surrounding the status of the two ISMFs, conceived as a middle ground between the cultural education of women and preparation for the teaching profession, between normal school and university, these institutes offered a challenging course of study, as the exam requirements demonstrate, especially when seeking the coveted diploma. The end of year exams required a great deal of hard work. As Paola Boni Fellini, a student who graduated from the Roman ISMF said at the dawn of the twentieth century, these exams apparently 'were taken seriously by the students of that time! The studies continued during the exhausting summer days, with an exam each day for fifteen days in a row'.⁴⁹

However, as the first director of the Florentine Institute, Giacomo Filippo Airolì, stated, the level of preparation of those who took the entrance exams was rather feeble, especially when it came to the current use of the Italian language. This was such a problem that there was talk of implementing a *numerus clausus*, a proposal that was never adopted.⁵⁰

43 Cf. Airolì 1894, p. 31.

44 Cf. *ibid.*

45 Cf. Pesci 1994, pp. 29f., and see Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 226.

46 Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 306.

47 Cf. Pesci 1994, p. 29.

48 Cf. Di Bello/Mannucci/Santoni Rugiu 1980, p. 309.

49 Boni Fellini 1955, p. 100.

50 Cf. Airolì 1894, pp. 15f.

With regard to how the female students of that time perceived their respective institute, Paola Boni Fellini's memories offer some interesting insights. She describes the Roman Institute's building, close to Piazza delle Terme, as a place that 'had nothing but a big door. A long dark corridor, four classrooms on the right, the science and study rooms on the left' and which students criticised daily 'without mercy, with the exaggeration that entails age, rancid programmes and stale professors'.⁵¹ 'A sort of dead pond', Boni Fellini continues, where however there were some exceptional professors who managed to catalyse the girls' interest.

Among her professors, she passionately talked about Luigi Pirandello and Maria Montessori, both of whom had been appointed by Minister Guido Baccelli. The Sicilian writer's lessons were quite lively; each month he assigned a new topic, 'scrupulously corrected' them and then proceeded to use each and every single mistake 'to lead the students to reflect on the value and transposition of words, Pirandello tried to make us penetrate the secret of the language'.⁵² From 1900 to 1916, Maria Montessori taught hygiene and anthropology at the Roman Institute. She involved some of the female students in the research she was conducting at that time in the primary schools of Rome. These investigations eventually led her to combine her studies of the Biographical Chart with her new and experimental approaches in the field of didactics that propelled her to prominence. Some of her students at the Roman Institute continued to work with her on the implementation of the experimental approaches at Children's Houses.⁵³ We know that other teachers, such as the aforementioned Bottero and Magistrelli, as well as the feminist Fanny Zampini Salazar, a famous translator and teacher of English and English literature, were able to obtain professorships at the Institute of Magisterium. It should also be noted that, in some cases, their teaching represented a starting point for the longed for academic role. For example, Angelo Valdarnini, translator and supporter of Gabriel Compayré's and Spencer's works, used to teach pedagogy at the Magisterium of Rome, from 1883 to 1887, and later, in 1888, he became ordinary professor of theoretical philosophy at the University of Bologna. Luigi Credaro, who taught pedagogy for only one year (1888-1889), later obtained a chair of history of philosophy at the University of Pavia.

We should not forget that the appointment of ISMF professors followed the same rules as at the universities, whose director was chosen among the full professors and was nominated by the king (art. 30). The teaching staff was distinguished according to the degree of ordinary, extraordinary and adjunct professors (art. 34). Ordinary professors were appointed by public competitions on the basis of what was foreseen for the professors of higher education institutes and could not be removed, suspended or transferred without the explicit judgment of the High Council (art. 35); extraordinary and adjunct professors were instead directly appointed by the Minister (art. 35). However, the continuous and difficult negotiation between the universities and secondary schools was highlighted in article 36, in which it was stated that in the 'election of full, extraordinary and in charge professors, as well as to the scientific value and the didactic capacity already demonstrated in secondary schools or elsewhere, special consideration will be given to manners and moral character'.

51 Boni Fellini 1955, p. 100.

52 Ibid. pp. 106ff. Other famous writers also taught at the ISMF, such as Luigi Capuana, Giovanni Prati and Raffaello Giovagnoli. See Pesci 1994, p. 27.

53 Among the more prominent former students, Ines Catucci, who graduated in 1904, was proposed by Montessori to run the Children's House in Milan; Giulia Fancello, who graduated from the Rome Institute in 1909 with a thesis entitled 'Pedagogy and Social Psychology of the Children's House' (cf. Pironi 2010, p. 146, and see Pesci 1994, pp. 111ff.).

The Florentine Institute also included among its teachers several prominent personalities: the professors of Italian literature – Enrico Nencioni, Antonio Zardo and Orazio Bacci – were all members of the Accademia della Crusca and leading figures in the city's cultural and literary milieu. Nencioni was linked to Carducci's literary circles and editor-in-chief of *Fanfulla della domenica*. Zardo was a well-known critic of Dante, and Bacci was a philologist and the co-author (together with D'Ancona) of the very successful Italian literature textbook *Manuale della Letteratura Italiana*, which was published in 1892. He was also the Mayor of Florence between 1915 and 1917. This emphasis on linguistic education in the training curriculum of future female teachers, who would eventually go on to teach throughout Italy, makes it clear that a strategic decision was made to ensure that teachers had a strong command of authentic Tuscan. When it comes to history and geography, several important professors should be mentioned. Niccolò Rodolico was a distinguished professor of medieval and modern social history; he taught at the Magisterium of Florence from 1908 to 1920 and was soon thereafter awarded the chair of Modern History at the University of Messina. He was replaced by Antonio Anzilotti, who taught history for two years and then went to the University of Catania in 1922. Antonio Renato Toniolo taught geography at the Magisterium starting in 1912. He then moved to the University of Bologna, where he became a distinguished researcher, and later founded the Institute of Geography in 1936. Arturo Linaker taught philosophy and was a scholar of Lambruschini. He was a leading figure in the cultural life of the city, a scholar at the Accademia della Crusca and founder of the Pedagogical Association of Florence in 1881.⁵⁴ Later, Giuseppe Rensi won the competition for philosophical teaching; he taught in Florence from 1914 to 1916 before obtaining the chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Messina. It was during this time that he shifted from positivism to idealism, while still keeping his distance to Gentile's actualism, due to the sceptical and irrational nature of his thought. Finally, among those who taught pedagogy, the spiritualist Vincenzo Sartini was also quite distinguished; he was a regular contributor to the National Review, and co-author (together with Augusto Conti) of school textbooks on philosophy, which were continually reprinted during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. In 1919, the Chair of Pedagogy was given to Ernesto Codignola. He went on to become director of the institute in 1923, when the institute, as a result of the Gentile Reform, opened its doors to males students and became a university. As Giulia Di Bello noted in her research on the graduation theses in the field of pedagogy, many of them dealt with the thought of authors in the Risorgimento period, including Gioberti and Mazzini. They highlighted the importance of the aims and characteristics of national education; other theses included topics related to women's education and profiles of (famous) women, such as Erminia Fuà Fusinato and Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci.⁵⁵

Despite the basic ambiguities that characterised the two institutes, they both represented a significant training experience for an advanced group of young people, mostly coming from middle-class families. A further avenue of research yet to be carried out on a large scale is to enquire into their biographies of those who attended the institutes to identify possible repercussions of this educational experience in their later lives and professional careers. Moreover, it would be equally interesting and insightful to try to understand the different ways in which the hundreds of women trained at those institutes, and who subsequently taught at normal

54 Cf. Avanzini 2013, p. 36.

55 Cf. Di Bello 1984, p. 28.

schools, transmitted the subject-related content and behavioural models to their students, who themselves went on to become future teachers in elementary schools.

While it goes without saying that the ruling class wanted those who attended the ISMF to conform to the dominant values of that time, for some who went through the programme, the Institute of Magisterium represented an important opportunity to create networks of friends and colleagues that turned out to be quite significant at the professional level. The case of Emma Boghen Conigliani (Venice, 1866 - Rome, 1956), who belonged to the first generation of women who graduated of the ISMF, is emblematic of this fact. She obtained her diploma with full marks in literature at the ISMF of Florence in 1889, and went on to successfully balance teaching at normal schools in different cities with her essay writing and astute interpretations of the *feminine* in literature.⁵⁶ She belonged to a Jewish family, and was able to establish a working group with some of her schoolmates and professors. This eventually led to the publication of a series of *Antologie italiane* (Italian Anthologies) for high schools, a work she coordinated at the publishing house Bemporad. Many of the young women who graduated from one of the ISMFs went on to combine teaching and writing activities. They wrote textbooks, novels and short stories for children, not to mention essays and articles often published in feminist and socio-cultural magazines like *L'Alleanza* (the Alliance), a magazine edited by Carmela Baricelli.⁵⁷

Among those who stood out for their experimentation with new teaching methods is Aurelia Jozs (1869-1944), who died in Auschwitz. She graduated from the ISMF of Florence in 1890, and then went on to use new didactic tools (iconographic documents and materials) for teaching history and geography at the 'Gaetana Agnesi' Normal School in Milan. She created a sort of geo-anthropological museum, filled with postcards and witness reports, and used the theatre to teach history. While she authored history textbooks that were used in secondary schools, complete with a rich iconographic appendix, her legacy is indelibly linked to the creation of the first female agricultural school in 1901, originally established at the girls' orphanage of the Stella (Star) but later moved to Niguarda.⁵⁸

Some women, after finishing the ISMF, waged a battle against the gender segregation of schools and institutes of higher learning. Among many others,⁵⁹ Alessandrina Gariboldi (1873-1965), who graduated in 1896 in Pedagogy and Ethics from the Institute of Rome and taught pedagogy in normal schools in different Italian towns, was an emancipationist and a great admirer of Maria Montessori, who she met in 1898 during a pedagogical congress in Turin. Gariboldi was also the only woman and teacher who presented a report on woman's education (*L'istruzione della donna*) at the Congress of the National Federation of Middle School Teachers held in Naples in September 1907. She later proposed an agenda for open coeducational schools, requiring a single ranking no longer divided according to gender, so that, with equal qualifications and merit, female teachers could aspire to teaching in mixed classes.⁶⁰ Gariboldi's proposal indeed arouse a level of discontent amongst audience members, mostly male professors (six women out of 140 participants), who were alarmed at the prospect of having to compete with women.⁶¹

56 Cf. Magazzeni 2017, pp. 249ff. See Gagnani 2011, pp. 29ff.

57 See Cagnolati/Pironi 2006.

58 Cf. Pironi 2010, pp. 60ff.

59 Cf. Pironi 2008, pp. 164f.

60 Cf. Gariboldi 1908, pp. 151ff. See also Pironi 2013b, p. 620.

61 In the magazine *L'Alleanza*, 199 (31 May 1911)

Moreover, during the Giolittian Era feminist movements rebelled against the ghettoisation of teaching positions in schools distinguished by sex. On 6 July 1907, the journal *L'Alleanza* (The Alliance), edited by Carmela Baricelli, a teacher at the Normal Female School of Pavia, joined the protest, promoted by the Women's Union and the Women's Association, against the Minister's decision to exclude women from professorships for gymnasiums, high schools, boys' and mixed technical schools. Those advocating gender equality insisted that a new system based on merit, not gender, should be established. Further protests and calls for equality were staged in 1911,⁶² but their message did not resonate, not even within the Teachers' National Federation (FNISM), where female teachers represented only a small minority.

As the school publications of that time make clear, the female high school teacher (*professoressa*) was a marginal figure compared to that of the elementary school teacher. Women teachers were generally speaking neglected, and when they were the subject of discussion, they were usually described as know-it-alls and pedantic people. Even Dino Provenzal's book *Il manuale del perfetto professore* (Manual for the perfect teacher) is addressed exclusively to the male teacher. He goes on to strongly advise against ever marrying a female colleague: 'It is true that when you marry her, she will not have time to help you (perhaps you will correct her homework) and you will have to learn how to lull, dress, amuse children and even how to bottle-feed them'.⁶³ With the call of the men to the battlefields during the Great War, the general state of emergency meant that teaching position at all school levels were now open to women. The law preventing women from teaching mixed and male classes was repealed during this traumatic time. Unlike in elementary schools, female teachers in the higher levels were always significantly outnumbered when compared to their male colleagues. During the school year 1920-1921, only 7133 out of a total of 20,742 high school teachers were women.⁶⁴ No longer invisible, the presence of women became a matter of some concern. Giovanni Gentile was aware of this fact, and he worriedly wrote to Minister Berenini stating that the teaching profession had been abandoned:

'by men attracted to more advantageous and virile careers and invaded by women who are now flocking to our universities and who, we must argue, do not, and never will have, that daring originality of thought, nor the spiritual vigour which are the superior intellectual and moral forces of humankind and must be cornerstones of a school which shapes the superior spirit of the country'.⁶⁵

However, the fascist regime ushered in new exclusionary sanctions. For instance, in 1926, a Royal decree, promoted by Minister Pietro Fedele on the regulation for competitions in high schools, excluded women from the chairs of classical literature and philosophy. It also excluded women from chairs of Italian and history at technical and teacher institutes. Women were, by their very nature, not considered capable of teaching the most noble disciplines. Only with the advent of the Italian Republic, after the Second World War, was equality between men and women enshrined in the Constitution, which on a legislative level effectively rescinded the rules discriminating against women.

62 Cf. Di Bello 2009, pp. 492ff.

63 Provenzal 1917, p. 59.

64 Cf. Covato 2014, p. 108.

65 Gentile 1919, p. 8; Gentile 1918.

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