WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON THE EDUCATIONAL PATHWAY
OF SRI LANKAN WOMEN GROWING UP IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

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This multiple case study of five Sri Lankan women explored their lived experiences as second generation immigrants in Rome, Italy, in order to better understand their various pathways to higher education and their choice of whether to pursue that education in Italy or elsewhere. The study attempted to explore the financial, political, cultural, and educational challenges that impacted the decisions these women made, including the process of navigating between the Sri Lankan and Italian cultures. Utilizing an interpretive qualitative approach and a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling, I selected and interviewed women who had either been born in Italy or moved there prior to or during primary education, conducting interviews with them via Skype at their various locations around the globe. From these interviews, a narrative of each participants’ life was constructed, followed by cross case analysis of themes brought to light by the participants themselves. Findings indicate that although economic opportunity was a significant factor in the participants’ decisions to pursue higher education and career outside of Italy, the greatest motivation was their parents’ desire for them to move beyond the constraints of Sri Lanka and Italy and into the best possible future they could have. The women navigated the tension between conservative Sri Lankan culture and western Italian culture in different ways, but their parents’ decisions to enroll them in an international school profoundly impacted both their integration into the Italian system and their expectations of moving beyond Italy post-graduation as much or more than other potential that exist within the Italian immigrant experience.

Keywords: immigration, higher education, Sri Lankan women, second generation, Italy, integration, cultural navigation, international education, transnationalism
“I wish with all my heart that every child could be so imbued with a sense of the adventure of
life that each change, each readjustment, each surprise--good or bad--that came along would be
welcomed as part of the whole enthralling experience.” ~ Eleanor Roosevelt
To the young Sri Lankan women in Rome, who inspired my research… who inspire me still.

To Cecilia Castellano, for always believing in me and encouraging me to take risks and to follow my path, even when it might be inconvenient.

And to my parents, Chris & Glenda Boggs, who took me on the adventure that started all of this.
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Participant Demographics

Sample form Research Question Matrix

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Italy has historically been positioned as an emigrating country (Caglioti, 2008; Campani, 1993; Campani, 1994; Liddicoat, 2008; Wong, 2006) but has seen an influx in immigration over the last thirty to forty years (Caglioti, 2008; Campani, 1994; Frisina, 2011; Wong, 2006) with immigrants now outnumbering Italians (Wong, 2006, p. 152). Due to Italy’s low birth rate, there are an abundance of jobs in the service and care industries (Näre, 2010; Totah, 2002). This particular labor niche has become an immigration route for Sri Lankan immigrants looking for opportunity and better wages (Gamburd, 2008; Näre, 2010) and has resulted in large numbers of Sri Lankan migrant workers and their families relocating to Italy (Attanapola, 2013; Brown, 2014; Gamburd, 2008; Näre, 2010).

As a result, there is a large contingent of second generation Sri Lankan immigrants born or coming to Italy as young children, completing primary and secondary education there, and looking for a future of their own. Although they are one among many immigrant groups currently residing in Italy, they face the same issues as their counterparts from other countries, but from their particular cultural background. They are Italian in many ways but with no formal citizenship until they apply for it (Bianchi, 2011) and must navigate a particular brand of Italian biological racism (Marinaro & Walston, 2010). At the same time, they are Sri Lankan by blood, raised by Sri Lankan parents who may still adhere to a more conservative way of life that sees Italy as a liberal, western nation (Brown, 2014). For Sri Lankan women, coming from a culture that has very specific gender roles and perceptions of femininity (Gunawardena, 2003), navigating between their two cultures may be even more challenging as they pursue education and a career.
Although there is existing research regarding the Sri Lankan-Italian immigration flow and regarding the second generation experience in Italy, I have been unable to find any research on this significant generation of Sri Lankan-Italian immigrants, most particularly in regards to young women. As immigration continues to be a contentious topic in Italy and beyond, it is important to understand the experiences of these young women, to learn how growing up both Sri Lankan and Italian has impacted their educational pathway and career goals. In order to address this gap, my study explores the lived experience of five Sri Lankan women who were either born in Italy or who immigrated to Italy as a child. Learning about their experiences is the first step in understanding how they navigate their position in Italy and the larger global experience.

**Background and Justification for the Study**

Immigrants in Italy face challenges in becoming financially viable, politically stable, legally papered residents or citizens based on factors such as racism, assimilation issues, diaspora support, economic opportunity, and immigration policies. It is my belief that these factors have significant impact on the education and future choices of Sri Lankan women who find themselves growing up in Italy. I will look at the students’ experiences in their own words to see what themes come to light about their lived experience in Italy and the impact their status as immigrants has on their decision to pursue higher education and career in Italy or to continue elsewhere in those pursuits or to return to their home country of Sri Lanka.

This is just one small piece of the puzzle in regards to immigration in Italy, but I believe that answering these questions will provide valuable insight that may begin to fill the existing information gap.
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to explore the financial, political, cultural, and educational challenges that the children of Sri Lankan immigrants in Italy are faced with in order to gain a broader understanding of the implications those factors have on the educational choices made both during their time in Italy and beyond. Through interviewing subjects who have lived in Italy as immigrants for the majority of their young lives, I hope to answer the following questions:

Central question.

How does the experience of growing up as a Sri Lankan woman in Italy impact their decisions to pursue higher education in Italy or elsewhere?

Sub-questions.

1. How are these students able to marry the two cultures they are growing up in (Italian culture and Sri Lankan culture)? What does that look like and how does it hinder or propel their educational decisions?

2. What conflicts arise between the future/educational goals of Sri Lankan women and those of their parents when they are raised in a dominant culture other than Sri Lanka?

Organization of the Chapters

This thesis will proceed to explore these questions over the next four chapters. In order to provide a background for understanding the purpose and results of the study, Chapter II provides a substantial review of existing relevant literature. It examines the relationship between globalization and migration and the way in which contemporary globalization offers the possibility of economic betterment to immigrants from developing countries if they are willing to accept menial or undesirable positions in more developed countries. It shows how the promise of
better wages may cause individuals to leave behind families and/or spouses to immigrate in order to better support those left behind. It then seeks to understand the way in which transnational immigrants and their children experience acculturation into their adopted country as they navigate the expectations of their adopted country while staying closely connected to their country of origin via kinship networks, financial investment, and/or by regular return visits. The chapter discusses the different perspective that second generation transnational immigrants may have as they grow up more intimately connected to their adopted country than to their country of origin, but still uniquely tied to their parents’ experience and their ethnic culture. The chapter delves into the history of immigration in Italy and explores some of the barriers that have arisen in reaction to the rapid increase in immigration over the last thirty to forty years, more specifically at those barriers that impact Italy’s second generation in their pursuit of education and career opportunities. Finally, it examines the Sri Lankan-Italian immigration flow and its position within the larger Italian immigration context before looking at the role of the Sri Lankan woman along with available education and opportunity. These topics provide the necessary groundwork for more fully exploring the experience of the Sri Lankan woman in Italy.

Chapter III moves from the existing literature to the methodology used in carrying out this multiple study. Rooted in a conceptual framework created from personal experience and the literature, this study assumes that educational choices and goals are impacted by the lived experiences of Sri Lankan women in Italy and proceeds to investigate that assumption through interpretive qualitative work in the form of a multiple case study. Participants in the study take part in Skype interviews intended to serve as a starting point for discussion of their experiences growing up as second generation immigrants in Italy. The chapter details the participant selection criteria and process, as well as the creation of the semi-structured interview protocol and the data
collection process before moving into an in-depth discussion of data analysis, validity measures, and methodological limitations.

Chapter IV provides detailed biographical narratives for each of the five case study participants in order to provide a comprehensive picture of their lived experiences as shared during their interviews. Their stories are followed by the presentation and discussion of fifteen dominant themes identified through cross-case analysis that detail the impact of the following five systems on the educational pathways of Sri Lankan women: the family unit, primary and secondary schooling, being Sri Lankan, the Italian experience, and the self. The chapter then addresses the research questions within the context of these findings, showing that the educational pathways of these women were primarily impacted by their parents’ initial decision to enroll them in an international school and to protect them from the possible negative influence of the Italian system and secondarily by the unstable economic climate of Italy today. It also shows that the way in which each woman navigated the Italian-Sri Lankan cultural divide varied according to their individual combination of personality and family dynamics and that their parents were willing to support them in their desire to move on from Italy for education or career even though that meant they could no longer supervise their daughters’ behavior.

Chapter V concludes the thesis with a brief summary of the salient findings along with implications of the research, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. It shows the study’s finding that the women interviewed did face barriers to upward mobility or opportunity. However, it also shows that their parents’ desire for them to have a better future was their predominant reason for leaving Italy to pursue higher education elsewhere. The conclusion also notes that their enrollment in an international academy was the first step along that pathway, further separating them from the Italian system and offering them the opportunity to move
beyond Italy after high school. The chapter reports that the study is limited by the sample size and by the fact that all of the participants attended an international school and indicates that further research to capture the experience of Sri Lankan women who were enrolled in the Italian public education system as well as further research on the impact of international schools on the lived experience of second generation Italian immigrants of all ethnicities would be merited before ending with a personal reflection.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the current literature regarding transnationalism, citizenship, and assimilation as a background to the educational choices made by Sri Lankan women who immigrated to Rome as children. It is only by understanding these larger concerns that one can begin to make sense of the lived experiences of the individual women. The primary goal of this chapter is to define and develop these concepts, as well as to set forward the complexities of Italian immigration and the history of the Sri Lankan immigration flow to Italy.

Globalization and Migration

Any discussion of modern immigration must include a basic understanding of globalization. The dictionary definition of globalization is summed up in one phrase: “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). This phrase, however, does not begin to explain globalization and all that it entails. Globalization has three primary flows: economic, political, and cultural or social (Bisley, 2007; El-Ojeili & Hayden, 2006; Schattle, 2012). While globalization is often used solely in regards to refer to matters of economics and trade, Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004) state that, regardless of discipline, globalization can be “best characterized as a set of processes that tend to de-territorialize important economic, social, and cultural practices from their traditional boundaries in nation-states” (p. 14). Although the term has only come into use in the last century (Scholte, 2005), globalization is not a new concept. Humans have explored, traded, migrated, and exchanged knowledge for hundreds of years (Coatsworth, 2004; Eitzen & Zinn, 2012; Scholte, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Browne & Braun argue that the promises of contemporary globalization, “improved efficiency in the distribution of resources and higher
standards of living” (p. 16), apply only to some while for members of developing countries, globalization means poverty and yet more inequality instead. Changes within the economies of more developed countries, including the feminization of employment (especially opportunities in prestigious jobs), dual-income or dual-career families, more equal numbers of men and women in the workforce, and changes in state welfare involvement (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011; Stiell & England, 1997), have created a demand for domestic and service workers while underdeveloped or developing countries generate a ready supply of domestic workers (Stiell & England, 1997). At the same time, developing countries have become more interested in the possibilities for development that migrant remittances offer. These global market forces have led to an increase in migration world-wide in the last twenty-five years (Piper 2008). World Bank states that there are currently more than 247 million international migrants and estimates that remittance flows from 2015 exceed $601 billion, $441 billion of which are estimated to go to developing countries (2016).

The absolute number of immigrants moving across borders is larger than ever before, although the relative percentage is fairly consistent (Kunst, Thomsen, Sam, & Berry, 2015; Schattle, 2012). Perhaps as a result of increasing numbers, there is more resistance to immigration than there once was even in relatively open receiving countries (Bisley, 2007; Scholte, 2005). In spite of this, many migrant workers move to wealthier countries to take on long hours at undesirable, low paying jobs that no longer appeal to the native population (Schattle, 2012). One development of the current global economy is “a globally mobile workforce of skilled migrants… who emigrate seeking better career opportunities and living conditions in the developed economies, such as the USA, the European Union and Canada” (Devos, 2014, p. 403-404). Many of these skilled workers are able to move freely due to their
qualifications and take employment overseas in hopes of better pay and opportunities. Whether or not they find employment that meets their qualifications, they are able to make higher wages than they could make at home and are able to send money back to support their family (Devos, 2014; Salamone, 2015).

One trend that has resulted from the economic impact of globalization is an increase in the number of women participating in transnational migration in order to find jobs (Browne & Braun, 2008). Women actually surpass men in modern immigration through both involuntary (refugees, displaced person) and voluntary (education and job opportunities) flows (Lutz, 2010). Women have their own goals and aspirations in migration and are not simply followers as was once assumed (Pajnik & Bajt, 2010). There are specific areas of employment that are readily available to females and that are seen as feminine labor markets. These include domestic and care work, entertainment, agriculture, tourism, and prostitution (Lutz, 2010; Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011; Pajnik & Bajt, 2010).

Kofman (2008) discusses the “vision of a deterritorialized globe” in terms of “two disconnected universes, that of the managerial elites, master and beneficiaries of the information economy and network society, who exist in the timeless time of spaces of flows, and the rest of the population, including many of those in the developed world, who live in places” (p. 17) or actual locations. Boundaries, both physical and conceptual, their existence, and their dissolution form the basis for discussions of globalization (Kofman, 2008; Schattle, 2012). Geddes talks about physical territorial borders that allow for the regulation of immigration flows and the limitation of political community, as well as transnationalism, which is linked to belonging and community (as cited in Kofman, 2008, p. 19).
Transnationalism

Transnationalism “refers to the emergence of social structures that transcend state borders” (Bommes, 2015). Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton (1994) define transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (p. 7). It is important to note that transnationalism may be defined narrowly, “institutionalized and continuous participation in transnational activities and organizations,” or broadly, “only occasional participation in transnational linkages” (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002, p.770), but that in most cases transnationalism refers to more consistent and regular ties, including “the accumulation, use and effects of various sorts of capital, their volume and convertibility: economic capital, human capital, such as educational credentials, skills and know-how, and social capital, mainly resources inherent in or transmitted through social and symbolic ties” (Faist, 2000, p. 191).

Prior to the era of cheaper, more efficient travel and ready communication, immigration “typically lent itself to a permanent, abrupt, and complete break with the past” (Salamone, 2015, p. 390). Communication with those left behind was inefficient, as was travel between nations. The nineteenth century, however, brought a veritable flurry of new technologies in communication and transportation, allowing for more efficient communication and travel both within and between countries. Scholte (2005) details the ways in which communication and transportation evolved throughout the twentieth century. As the speed of communication accelerated with the development and usage of transatlantic cables, telephones, satellites, computers, and the internet, travel also became more accessible and efficient. Improvements in roads, railroads, airplanes, and other means of transportation allowed for an ease of travel that was unknown a century ago. The quality and accessibility of modern transportation and
communications technologies allow for family units to maintain connection across national borders (Douglass, 2006).

The desire for homeland is easier to act upon within the current global economy due to these advances (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002; Kivisto, 2001). This ability to migrate and return to one’s home country more easily, as well as to interact readily with family and kinship groups remaining there, has given rise to transnational immigration or transnationalism. While the decision to migrate is often based on the desire for economic security or a better future (Attanapola, 2013; Yeoh, Huang & Lam, 2005), that does not necessarily mean a desire for separation from one’s home country. Instead, large numbers of immigrants now maintain ties to both their origin country and their destination country (Bommes, 2005; Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002; Salamone, 2015; Yeoh et al., 2005). “As they cross international borders and forge connections to their new country,” Salamone (2015) says, “they continue to establish and maintain social and political networks and obligations that extend back to their homeland. Aided by technology and a globalized economy, many immigrants have one foot planted in the old country and one in the new” (p. 390). Rather than breaking ties with their home country, they maintain connections that “transcend national barriers” (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002, p.766).

“These connections have enabled immigrants during their years abroad to have children cared for by kin at home, to continue as actors in key family decisions, to visit at regular intervals, and to purchase property and build homes and businesses in their countries of origin, even as they have bought homes and created businesses in their countries of settlement” (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995, p. 53).

One prime characteristic of transnationalism is the practice of sending remittances back home (Salamone, 2015). Immigrants have historically travelled from their origin countries to
countries that have more economic opportunity or higher wages (Devos, 2014). “Faced with wide-spread deterioration in their standards of living, professionals, skilled workers, unskilled workers, merchants, and agricultural producers all have fled to global cities or to countries such as the U.S. that still play central roles in capital accumulation” (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995, p. 50). “Transnational labour migration has become a main livelihood strategy for large numbers of people worldwide” (Attanapola, 2013, p. 222). As previously mentioned, the World Bank reports that more than 247 million international migrants (3.4 percent of the world population) live outside their countries of birth. Remittances are nearly three times the size of official development assistance to developing countries, estimated at $441 billion in 2015 (2016). These remittances, indicative of half the typical migrant’s wages, sent back to households or families at home are a significant indicator of the importance of household transnational connections in the global economy (Douglass, 2006).

There may be other reasons than economic need for participating in transnational remittances or activities. While immigrating to a country with a stronger economy may make monetary sense, immigrants often lose social status by the very fact that they are participating in labor migration. Labor migration does not guarantee a better job, but is motivated by the hope of finding a better paying job. Many migrant workers move to wealthier countries to take on long hours at undesirable, low paying jobs that no longer appeal to the native population (Schattle, 2012). “Many regional based organisations, such as health services and hospitals, are reliant on overseas-trained professionals to provide basic services to the communities they serve” (Devos, 2014, p. 405), but immigrants are often underemployed. They may find themselves unable to reach the economic status or security that they desire in their new country or may face racial discrimination in spite of finding viable employment (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995). This can lead
to frustration with the lack of occupational mobility or status that migrants may face in their host country. This lack of status or respect stands in stark contrast to the status or prestige they may hold in their origin country as a result of their investment in family and community through remittances (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002). Such unfair or exclusive treatment in their host country may quell a desire to fully participate and drive immigrants to maintain their connection to their country of origin (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002). Glick Schiller et al. (1995) state that “immigrant transnationalism is best understood as a response to the fact that in a global economy contemporary migrants have found full incorporation in the countries within which they resettle either not possible or not desirable” (p. 52).

Another key reason for transnationalization is rooted in the family unit. Family is one of the key imperatives for transnationalism and remittance practices. “The realm of the ‘family’ continues to retain its significance in the face of distance, dispersal and translocality even as the desire to go on being a family under such conditions is occasionally ruptured and continually reworked” (Yeoh et al., 2005, p. 307-308). Family members often follow each other, providing means and support for yet another person to migrate and join the transnational community (Devos, 2014). The transnational family unit must be able to flex and take on new challenges in order to maintain connection across the shifting stage on which their story is played out. It takes a tremendous amount of work to maintain transnational connections, but dislocation and stress are realities in the day-to-day lives of transnational immigrants (Conradson & Latham, 2005). Transnationalism offers opportunity for women, in particular, to explore autonomy and independence as opposed to family obligation or cultural expectation (Yeoh et al. 2005). Especially in Europe, female transnational migration in the care industry, a feminized domain,
a growing field due to multiple factors including birth rate decline, elder aging, increased female workforce participation, and welfare cuts (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011).

Transnationalism impacts immigrants at both ends of the economic spectrum. “Among higher-income families, transnationalizing the family can also become a strategic move undertaken to accomplish specific projects intended to enhance the overall well-being or status of the family in response to changing circumstances. In this case, enhancing social, cultural and symbolic capital as a means of social reproduction (rather than augmenting remittances for economic survival) is often the primary goal of the transnational family strategy. Central to this strategy of securing a better future is the ‘project’ of educating the children” (Yeoh et al., 2005, p. 312).

More recently, a new highly skilled transnational workforce has arisen. These skilled workers are “perceived as a privileged group with the skills and freedom to move globally and to determine their direction and lifestyle” (Devos, 2015, p. 406). These newer transnationals are not simply bi-directional (Devos, 2015), but are able to participate in a myriad of migration choices. As family and kinship networks continue to grow transnationally, opportunities are no longer tied only to home and receiving countries (Vathi, 2013).

**Transnationalism and Citizenship**

Transnationalism and the concept of the nation-state live in tension with each other as transnationalism “refers to the emergence of social structures that transcend state borders” (Bommes, 2005, p. 15). Immigrants are more likely to operate within transnational spaces that fall outside the bounds of the nation-state (Bommes, 2005; Kivisto, 2001; Vertovec, 1999). As these transnational spaces become more and more relevant within the context of immigration, the nation-state concept of integration and adaptation is weakened (Bommes, 2005; Faist, 2000).
Kivisto (2001) describes ‘space’ as being categorically different from ‘place’: “Space has a social meaning that extends beyond simple territoriality; only with concrete social or symbolic ties does it gain meaning for potential migrants” (Kivisto, 2001, p. 566-67). Faist (2000) identifies three types of transnational social spaces and gives functional examples: kinship groups are based on reciprocity such as sending remittances back to an origin country; transnational circuits are based on exchange such as that found in trading networks; and transnational communities are based on a collective identity and shared ideas or beliefs such as those found in diasporas (p. 194-95).

Immigrants may interact within transnational spaces while also pursuing citizenship within the nation-state. Citizenship is the formal symbol of belonging to a nation-state. It indicates state sovereignty and confers certain rights and duties on the holder (Faist, 2000). “Citizenship also connotes the public representation of ties between members and corresponding nation-states. It is based on the perception of common belonging to a state – or a nation or both – and it confers the identity ‘citizen’” (Faist, 2000, p. 203). The actions of transmigrants blur these concepts and “are seen as being engaged in a more fluid and syncretistic process of adaptation” (Kivisto, 2001, p. 569). “They are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities, and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However, at the very same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated” (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995, p. 48). They are both maintaining connections to their origin country while spending enormous amounts of energy investing in their transnational lives, as well (Conradson & Latham, 2005).
Citizenship access is regulated by the nation-state in varying ways. Citizenship is generally based on *jus soli*, *jus sanguinis*, or some combination of the two (Faist, 2000). *Jus soli* is citizenship based on place of birth while *jus sanguinis* is citizenship based on parentage or bloodline (Merriam-Webster, 2015). However, “virtually all countries have regulations which we could call a sort of *ius domicile*, that allows denizens finally to acquire full citizenship. Based on social and symbolic ties immigrants have developed since their arrival and their economic contributions, *ius domicile* specifies the conditions that newcomers have to fulfil when applying for citizenship, after having lived for periods of mostly two to eight years in the country of residence. Among the most common criteria for the admission of newcomers are uninterrupted residence and work history for some years, a regular income, sufficient living space, no criminal record and mastery of the dominant language in the nation-state” (Faist, 2000, p. 205).

Although citizenship may be a scarce commodity, “The more transnational or multifocal ties immigrants entertain, the greater their ambivalence towards the receiving polity; the weaker the roots in the nation-state of settlement, the stronger the incentives to form a transnational community; the bolder the claim to a diaspora, the greater the tendency on the part of natives to question the allegiance of the newcomers, and, finally, the weaker the inclination of immigrants to adapt to the immigration country” (Faist, 2000, p. 202). To further complicate the issue, transnational migrants to countries in the European Union have to navigate an additional layer of identity as members of the European Union (Salamone, 2015, p. 390). Kivisto (2001) points out that “immigrants do not assimilate into a society that is fixed and given but rather one that is fluid and subject to changes brought about by the presence of immigrants” (p. 571). This fluidity challenges concepts of classic citizenship (Joppke, 1999) and leads us into a discussion of transnationalism and assimilation theory.
Assimilation, Acculturation and Integration

By its simplest definitions, “to become similar” or “to make similar or treat as similar” (Brubaker, 2001, p. 534), assimilation with respect to immigration is the means by which an immigrant becomes a part of their new country. “In the general, abstract sense, the accent is on the process, not on some final state, and assimilation is a matter of degree. Assimilation designates a direction of change, not a particular degree of similarity. In the specific, organic sense, by contrast, the accent is on the end state, and assimilation is a matter of either/or, not of degree” (Brubaker, 2001, p. 534). Bommes (2005) says, “Assimilation refers to a general condition of existence for all individuals in modern society, i.e. the permanent expectation to control their behaviour and action according to the structural conditions of the differentiated social systems. Seen in this way the problem of migrant assimilation refers to not more (and not less) than to the conditions under which they succeed or fail to fulfil the conditions of participation in social systems” (p. 20). Gans (1997) states that assimilation “refers to the newcomers’ move out of formal and informal ethnic associations and other social institutions into the nonethnic equivalents accessible to them in that same host society” (p. 877). His straight line view of assimilation assumes that immigrants become more like the dominant culture with each passing generation (Gowricharn, 2009). In this view, immigrants are eventually absorbed completely into the culture (Brubaker, 2001). Gans (1997) notes that assimilation is really a “range of adaptations” rather than a dichotomy (p. 875) and acknowledges that immigrants may acculturate rapidly while maintaining significant ethnic or social ties through multiple generations (p. 876). Faist (2000) writes that assimilation begins with acculturation to be followed, in most cases, by structural assimilation, then by identificational assimilation and states, “The final result is more or less overall cultural submergence” (p. 211-12). Gans (1997;
2007) clarifies that while immigrants can choose to acculturate on their own with acculturation happening as a natural and automatic process, assimilation is only possible if the dominant culture allows access to its groups or institutions. “Although open associations admit everyone freely, closed ones establish entry requirements and gatekeepers who can bar entry” (Gans, 2007, p. 153-154). There are historical instances of nation-state attempts to force assimilation, but those attempts have generally been both unsuccessful and tragic (Brubaker, 2001). Assimilation is often viewed negatively as a state-imposed evil that attempts to repress minorities and immigrants rather than the spontaneous interaction that occurs between minority and dominant cultures in a shared cultural space and which does not require the erasure of all ethnic or cultural markers (Alba & Nee, 2014).

Berry’s discussion of acculturation utilizes the following four terms: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Ward 2008). These terms are defined by the balance between participation and cultural maintenance that immigrants experience. If they are able to participate in society while maintaining their own culture, they experience integration, while assimilation indicates that they are able to participate in society only if they do not maintain their own culture. The other alternatives are separation, where immigrants maintain cultural integrity at the cost of participating in society, and marginalization, where immigrants choose not to maintain their own culture but are still unable to fully participating in society (Berry, 2010, Ward, 2008). Exclusion is the fullest expression of marginalization in that it is marginalization imposed by the dominant group; on the other hand, multiculturalism is the fullest expression of integration where society as a whole embraces cultural maintenance and inclusion and participation for all groups (Berry, 2010). True integration involves mutual accommodation
in which immigrant and host societies cooperate: immigrants attempt to integrate while host societies actively encourage such integration (Kunst et al, 2015).

While classic straight-line assimilation theory is linked with upward socioeconomic mobility and was once seen as necessary in order for immigrants to successfully join mainstream society, there is another perspective regarding assimilation. Today’s immigrant population comes from varying socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity has led to the theory of segmented assimilation. While some immigrants will assimilate successfully into mainstream dominant culture, for immigrants with fewer available resources there is a risk of downward assimilation as a result of real or perceived challenges such as racial discrimination or lack of opportunity that will cause them to experience downward assimilation, falling into a lower socioeconomic status than expected (Alba & Nee, 2014; Gans, 2007; Gowricharn, 2009; Salamone, 2015; Thomson & Crul, 2007). Segmented assimilation posits that especially for children of socioeconomically challenged immigrants, it may be best to remain tightly connected to their ethnic community in order to ensure their future success rather than attempting to fully assimilate into the dominant culture in a way that may put them at risk of downward mobility (Greenman & Xie, 2008; Xie & Greenman, 2011). In this case, Portes presents transnationalism “less as an alternative to assimilation than as an ‘antidote towards downward assimilation’” (in Kivisto, 2001, p. 563). There is a third concept to be mentioned in regards to second generation assimilation. Second generation immigrants may often relate both to their ethnic culture and the dominant culture in a way that allows for a hyphenated sense of belonging. They may take on an assertiveness that comes from the dominant culture and which is very different from their parents or ethnic community while still maintaining their ethnic otherness within the dominant culture. While this “second generation attitude” can be a negative at times, leading to an antagonistic relationship
with the dominant culture, it also creates a space within which they can create their own identity from the different worlds that they are a part of (Andall, 2002, p 391-392). They may wish to move beyond these classic definitions of integration to “avoid culturalism and encounter contemporary diversity by going beyond ethnic and national boundaries and by challenging common-sense representations…they prefer to invoke a cosmopolitan self-representation” (Riccio & degli Uberti, 2013, p. 236).

**Transnationalism as a Variation of Assimilation**

This brings us to the questions Vathi (2013) poses. “Will immigrants assimilate or do they retain their culture? And how do ties with their homeland affect their integration in the host society?” (p. 904). Immigrants may find themselves resisting assimilation to the dominant culture because it actually helps their chances for upward mobility (Gans, 2007). Such resistance, or at least perceived resistance, is becoming more commonplace throughout Europe as mass migration continues to grow (Kivisto, 2001; Salamone, 2015). One explanation for cultural persistence or resistance to assimilation is that immigrants “build organizations to preserve their practices and values, even as they assist in adaptation” (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995, p. 56). Strong proponents for acculturation and assimilation see immigrant culture as a sort of baggage brought from the ‘old world’” (Faist, 2000, p. 211) and have trouble recognizing concepts such as cultural diffusion and syncretism (Faist, 2000). Immigrants understand that citizenship acquisition and acculturation do not equal the playing field between them and the dominant culture. The “official language, holidays, or church relations cannot but privilege the ethnic majority population over the immigrant minorities. This is the starting point for various programmes of multicultural citizenship, which seek to accommodate the distinctive needs of culturally excluded groups (not only immigrants) within the universal citizenship framework”
This observation leads into the understanding that transnationalism is a mechanism that allows us to “witness a decoupling of the different forms of assimilation. This in turn implies the more general thesis that transnational developments are part of a general process of destructuration of social inequality” (Bommes, 2005, p. 24-25).

Although transnational immigrants maintain a presence in at least two cultural spaces, they do have to integrate in some part to their new country, simply from a functional perspective. This is known as structural or goal-driven assimilation, where “Processes of assimilation emerge inside the organisations of the important functional realms of modern society, i.e. in entreprises, hospitals, schools, universities, and administrations. They emerge when individuals start to work or try to get access to goods, education, rights, social welfare etc. Every individual that intends to work or to gain access to these provisions must fulfil the expectations that define the social preconditions for the success of these efforts. Every individual must therefore have some knowledge of what it means to work or how to behave as a patient, a client, a pupil, a student, or an applicant” (Bommes, 2005, p. 19). From this perspective, we can see that all migrants undergo some form of assimilation or integration as they begin to take part in the organizational expectations that are part of the dominant culture (in such spaces as schools or places of employment) while also holding on to and balancing aspects of their home culture and family expectations (Bommes, 2005).

Transnationalism, in which immigrants both begin to acculturate while consciously maintaining transnational ties (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995; Kivisto, 2001), and assimilation are not exclusive. In fact, transnationalism may be understood as a particular type of assimilation (Vathi, 2013). In general, schools are no longer political tools, trying to teach immigrant children to completely assimilate into the dominant society, but are attempting “to educate individuals in
a way that they become competent to participate in social systems” (Bommes, 2005, p. 22). From a citizenship perspective, as well, cultural homogenization is generally no longer deemed necessary, and discrimination for religious or cultural reasons is illegal (Bommes, 2005). Instead, citizenship is based on criteria such as the ability to communicate in the language of the dominant culture, being familiar with the history of the dominant culture, and renouncing allegiance to one’s country of origin; or, in the most liberal cases, citizenship is simply based on fulfilling residency requirements (Joppke, 1999). Most European nation-states even officially tolerate dual citizenship (Joppke, 1999, p.646). In this sense, transnationalism means that “forms of assimilation are loosely coupled in a globalised world and the nation state loses relevance for social integration” while “participation in social systems is more and more mediated by transnational migrant networks” (Bommes, 2005, p. 25). As a result, migrants no longer have to focus on the needs of the state and are free to pursue transnational interactions; they are “more or less continuously included in border-transcending social structures concerning family, economic, legal, political or educational relations” (Bommes, 2005, p. 17). In a world where people migrate for any number of reasons (economic, political, familial, educational) and where the nation-state no longer demands full assimilation, the effort that it takes to assimilate (or become similar) to the dominant society in the traditional sense may no longer make sense, especially when the migrants involved may even be participating in more than two locations (Bommes, 2005). “The participation of more and more migrants in different social systems is distributed over several locations (‘plurilocal’) and regularly transcends nation state borders (it is ‘transnational’)” (Bommes, 2005, p. 25). It is important to note that transnationalism is increasingly more complicated by the fact that it may involve a multiplicity of localities or places rather than the traditional homeland-diaspora connection. “Importantly, migrants’ ties are not only established
across nation-states but are also influenced by laws, social institutions and conventions which operate at various scales—the local, the national and the global” (Vathi, 2013, p. 904).

**Transnationalism and the Second Generation**

Transnationalism looks very different for second generation immigrants. “While for the first generation, research often focuses on their migration process and the economic dimensions of their lives in the country of settlement, research on the second generation has often centred on their allegiances, ties and belonging” (Vathi, 2013, p. 907). Children and youth who grow up away from their parents’ country of origin are less likely to feel emotional ties to that place and are forming memories that are not necessarily connected to it (Vathi, 2013).

However, even as the second generation assimilates into their host country, they may serve as a social and emotional reason for their parents to stay connected to their origin country. Orellana, Thorne, Chee, Wan Shun Eva Lam, & Smith (2001) list various reasons for parents to maintain connection with their origin country on behalf of the second generation including a desire for their children to “know and appreciate their roots, relatives and home language,” a means of maintaining “difference” from the dominant culture, a way of maximizing the children’s future options, and a response to their children’s desire for homeland connections (p. 588). Second generational transnationalism may involve a return home (Thomson & Crul, 2007) although they are not necessarily looking for a home connection to that country of origin (Vathi, 2013). Their feelings of connection and home are tied to the location where they are growing up and integrating (Vathi, 2013) while their links to their homeland are colored by their second-generation experiences in a transnational space (Thomson & Crul, 2007). As a result, they may experience multiple and fluid identities (Kivisto, 2001).
Second generation immigrants should experience some degree of assimilation to their new home country and may appreciate the anonymity, independence, or freedom available to them there (Brown, 2011; Vathi, 2013). As they experience western or cosmopolitan systems, they may embrace a more independent lifestyle than would be acceptable to their family’s cultural background (Vathi, 2013) or that challenges traditional gender roles (Gowricharn, 2009). “The group or former group identities are interpreted less rigidly, as persons within families become socially and emotionally more independent, claiming more freedom. Individuals become more flexible and traditional patterns are followed less strictly. Individualization goes together with adjustment of social roles. This happens initially for the relationship between men and women, a development that is not restricted to the younger generation” (Gowricharn, 2009, p. 1625). Second generation women, particularly, experience more independence than their mothers as they have more freedom to decide between work and more traditional roles (Thomson & Crul, 2007). They may even choose to study away from the family in order to gain more independence (Vathi, 2013).

Second generation immigrants may also begin to experience translocality in a different way. For them, transnationalism is not necessarily bounded by the notion of a two nation sending-receiving formula but becomes a broader concept as they experience the opportunity to go on class trips or to visit relatives in other countries. This may also indicate assimilation into the global youth culture or a more cosmopolitan way of thinking (Vathi, 2013). As they assimilate into the broader culture, “the ‘fading away’ of transnational communities should be discernible with second-generation immigrants” (Gowricharn, 2009, p. 1620).
Immigration in Italy

Italy has historically been a land of emigration (Caglioti, 2008; Campani, 1993; Campani, 1994; Liddicoat, 2008; Wong, 2006), sending some twenty-seven million Italians abroad between 1867 and 1988 (Wong, 2006, p. 152). It is only during the last thirty to forty years that Italy has seen a significant influx in immigration (Caglioti, 2008; Campani, 1994; Frisina, 2011; Wong, 2006). In the 1970’s, non-European immigration to Italy grew as many western European countries implemented restrictions on immigration (Totah, 2002; Wong, 2006). In 1973, the number of immigrants coming to Italy finally outnumbered the Italians leaving the country (Wong, 2006, p. 152). At that time, there was a significant amount of illegal immigration (Campani, 1994) which was facilitated by Italy’s 7,600 km (4722 mi) coastline (Cavatorta, 2002) and the lack of “precise migratory policy” (Campani, 1993, p. 509) combined with the abundance of service sector jobs due to Italy’s low birth rate (Totah, 2002). “From 1986 to 1990, Italy became Europe’s largest receiver of mass immigration. By the end of 1990, 781,000 foreigners held residence permits in Italy… in 2001, the number rose to 1,203,717… the majority of immigrants hailed from lesser developed nations…” (Wong, 2006, p. 152).

Now, Italy is faced with a new phase in their immigration experience. An entire generation of Italian immigrant children who are Italian in many ways but have no citizenship rights upon reaching majority, even if born in Italy, are calling for citizenship and naturalization reform (Bianchi, 2011). Italy has not been completely accepting of its new role as a destination country for immigrants from the developing world. In spite of the need for immigrants to take on jobs that Italians are not interested in, portions of the Italian population have reacted with hostility, racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism (Campani, 1993; Campani, 1994; Totah, 2002; Wong, 2006; Zincone, 2006). These attitudes are factors in the tenuous position that immigrants
hold in Italy and have helped to create the social emergency posture taken towards immigration by Italian politicians and journalists, along with some scholars (Campani, 1993). Italian attitudes towards immigrants are in line with a “European-wide rise in anti-immigrant sentiment” (Totah, 2002).

Italy has traditionally held a relatively tolerant attitude towards irregular and clandestine immigrants (Pastore, 2004) based on its need for migrant laborers (Andall, 2007) and its flourishing informal economy (Calavita, 2005). Although some immigration provisions existed from 1930 onward, there was no real regulation. Illegal immigration was allowed and mostly ignored until the 1980’s when Italians began to discuss the necessity of immigration policy (Campani, 1993). Italians, along with other European nations, have been resistant to change, perhaps as a combination of their low sense of national identity, observable increases in unemployment and crime, and economic failures (Totah, 2002). Racism and xenophobia have found more of a voice in Italian immigration politics in recent years in keeping with (Totah, 2002; Vaiou, 2012). “Restrictive immigration measures often adversely impact immigrants of color, particularly those from African Nations” (Totah, 2002, p. 1463). In spite of adopting an official policy of antidiscrimination meant to address both direct and indirect discrimination are difficult to enforce or are weakened by lack of an enforcement plan (Totah, 2002). Immigration laws make it difficult for aliens or stranieri (literally interpreted “strangers”) to achieve permanent legal status (Calavita, 2005; Marinaro & Walston, 2010).

Citizenship is even more difficult to obtain than legal status. “Italy, [is] the last of the European countries to fully base its laws of citizenship on blood and ethnicity, the jus sanguinis…” (Wong, 2006, p. 154). The waiting period for citizenship is ten years for all “non-nationals – which includes…almost the entirety of immigrants” (Pastore, 2004, p. 38). This
waiting period was increased from five to ten years in 1992 while access for people of Italian
descent abroad was increased (Andall, 2002). Although permanent residency and citizenship are
possible, the requirement of years of uninterrupted legal residency makes it nearly unattainable
(Calavita, 2005). In fact, less than one percent of Italian immigrants are naturalized each year
(Colombo et al., 2011).

Children born in Italy share their parents’ status whether it is that of undocumented
immigrant (Calavita, 2005) or documented resident (Bianchi, 2011). “Only after reaching 18
years of age and satisfying numerous conditions…are they allowed to request Italian citizenship
– ensuring that they do so before turning 19, and beginning a tortuous process that can take many
years to navigate the Italian bureaucracy” (Bianchi, 2011, p. 324). The legislation passed in
1992 added additional restrictions for the second generation, as well (Andall, 2002; Riccio &
degli Uberti, 2013). It states that “children born of foreign parents in Italy assume their parents’
nationality. However, if they remain continually resident in Italy, they can request Italian
citizenship within one year of turning eighteen” (Andall, 2002, p. 393). Any delay in establishing
residency for an infant of immigrants who are often unfamiliar with the particularities of this rule
can cause issues with their claim for citizenship once they reach the age of 18” (Andall, 2002).
“Thus, the children born to foreign parents in Italy are likely to be culturally integrated with their
legally Italian peers, yet they lack the passport which would guarantee them the same freedoms
and mobility” (Marinaro & Walston, 2010, p. 8).

As Italy has transitioned from a land of emigration to one of immigration, fear of
immigrants has increased, triggered by a sense of threats to cultural identity and employment
availability, as well as by increasing poverty and social unrest in the developing world
expressions of identity of a rising number of people who have grown up in Italy and consider it their primary home but who are often denied treatment as ‘real’ Italians by their peers, in public debate and in legislation” (p. 5) has become a critical political and societal issue.

“Immigrants who are visibly different…may encounter greater discrimination, lower expectations, and less encouragement from teachers and others in positions of authority in schools and the community” (Hirschman, 2001, p. 331). In the 1990’s, national identity was a hot political issue that was exploited by at least one political party in such a way as to actually legitimize racist attitudes (Andall, 2002, p. 395) including hostility towards immigrants and stereotyping. García-Peña (2013) states that Italian discrimination has been explained “not in racial but in cultural terms” (p. 139), allowing Italy to justify racism by a strict interpretation of group identity. Some forms of discrimination and/or racism, such as legislation which requires “foreign citizens” to display their documents on request or face fines and/or jail time, are so blatant and pervasive that they have become normalized even from the immigrant perspective (Andall, 2002, p.399-400). In response, there has been a growing anti-racist movement that integrates Catholics, former Communists, Greens, and immigrant associations. This collaboration is instrumental in the growth and expansion of immigrant associations and is vital in the fight to give immigrants a voice in the volatile landscape (Campani, 1993; Caselli, 2009). There is minor social movement towards ethnic inclusion, reflected in the Italian television system, but these efforts currently tend to point out the differences between ethnicities rather than truly promoting inclusion (Ardizzoni, 2005).

**Italy’s Second Generation**

Given that Italy has now been receiving steady numbers of immigrants for thirty to forty years, a significant second generation is now in play. Although an earlier second generation
exists from Italy’s first immigrant wave in the 1970’s, most existing research deals with the second generation children of minority immigrants from the 1980’s and 1990’s as they are “growing up in a social and political climate where the issue of immigration has assumed some prominence” (Andall, 2002, p. 390). Second generation children are the children of immigrants, either brought from their origin country at a young age or born after their parents immigrated (Andall, 2002). The cut-off age for those children who immigrated with their parents is a matter of some debate. Some say they should have arrived before age 12, or before age 15, or that they should have arrived before starting school (Andall, 2002). The European second generation is ethnically varied with a pattern of immigration from ex-colonies or of being recruited as labour migrants (Thomson & Crul, 2007). In one study alone, Minello and Barban (2012) calculated that “parents of immigrant children hailed from ninety-two different countries” (p. 5). Accurate data collection of both numbers and diversity breakdowns for second generation students can be challenging due to the fact that data does not always indicate whether the children, broken out by ethnicity, are native-born or foreign-born (Andall, 2002; Portes, 1994). Thomson & Crul (2007) explain that the European scenario is much different than the U.S. scenario with such varied origin and receiving countries in play. Integration is “about less quantifiable aspects like culture, ethnic or religious identity, citizenship and (though more problematically) race” (p.1027). The success of the second generation is dependent on a variety of factors, most of which are not within their control: government policy, labor market accessibility, cultural and economic resources (Salamone, 2015; Thomson & Crul, 2007). At the same time, this new second generation has an impact, however subtle, on the dominant culture (Salamone, 2015).
Italy’s Second Generation and Education

Italy, along with many European school systems, has taken on an intercultural approach to education. Liddicoat and Diaz (2008), note some of the requirements for intercultural education. Educational programs must include “integration activities” for immigrant students and adapt Italian language education to their needs. Schools must also coordinate education about their immigrant students’ country of origin as part of regular coursework, as well as including lessons about Italian culture. “The main goal is to promote the capacity for constructive cohabitation in a culturally and socially diverse environment” (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008, p. 142). In spite of good intentions, intercultural education techniques often focus on educating Italian students about diversity through making examples of the immigrant students rather than including the immigrant students as intercultural learners as well. Intercultural education also plays a part in educating immigrant children about Italian societal norms and rules (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008). Although the goals of Italian education are based on “promoting mutual enrichment for all children…immigrant learners [have] been increasingly marginalized” (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008, p. 148).

According to the CIA World Factbook (2011), Italy’s positive net migration rate is 4.86 migrants per thousand, eighteenth in the world. Italy’s Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (2011) states that immigrants make up approximately 7.5% of the population. Immigrant children account for only ten percent of the child population (Mencarini, Baldoni & Zuanna, 2009), but they “represent the fastest growing segment of the child population in Italy” (Chiaradia et al., 2011). “In the academic year 1985-86 there were 3,025 migrants’ children enrolled at primary school in the Lombardy region, compared to 3,073 at high school (scuola superiore). By the academic year 1994-95, while the number at high school had increased to 9,089, it had jumped
much more massively to 20,199 at primary school level (Besozzi 1997: 10). By the mid-1990s, the Lombardy region had the highest number of migrants’ children enrolled in schools in any region in Italy (23 per cent), followed by the Lazio region in central Italy (14 per cent)” (Andall, 2002, p. 392-393). “Between 2001 and 2009, the foreign-born share of Italy's student population more than tripled, rising from 2.2 to 7 percent. Nationally, students with non-Italian citizenship constituted about 7 percent of total enrollment, though this share differed by educational level. Youths with immigration backgrounds constituted about 8 percent of primary and lower secondary-school students, but less than 5 percent of upper secondary-school students. Although preschool is not compulsory, non-Italian students represented less than 8 percent of the total” (Minello & Barban, 2012, p. 2).

Italian public education is free with compulsory attendance until age 16. Minello & Barban, (2012) give a detailed overview of the system. “The four main components are (1) preschool (three years, not compulsory); (2) first level, which includes scuola primaria, or primary school (five years) and scuola secondaria di primo grado, or middle school (three years); (3) second level, which includes high school or other secondary schooling (five years); and (4) university (three years for a bachelors)” (p. 2). After each level (except for preschool), there are exams that must be passed in order to move on to the next level. At the second level, each student must choose one of three tracks to pursue: high schools and art schools (licei), polytechnic institutes (istituti tecnici), and vocational schools (istituti professionali). Although all three tracks may be followed by university, most university students will opt for licei as vocation schools prepare students directly for the job market as well as access to university (Minello & Barban, 2012).
In spite of Italy’s intercultural approach to education, Minello & Barban (2012) cite data from Italy’s Ministry of Education that indicates that “students with non-Italian citizenship have lower educational attainment and poorer academic achievement than their Italian counterparts, and they are less likely to pursue university education” (p.2), opting instead for vocational school at a rate more than twice that of the whole population. The same study showed that family resources, family background and parental education, ethnic ties and social capital, and gender all impact education goals and expectations. (Minello & Barban, 2012). One challenge specific to the European context is worth mentioning. Without citizenship in the European Union, immigrant children are required to get an individual visa to go on cross-border school trips while Italian citizens are covered by a common school visa (Andall, 2002).

**Barriers for Italy’s Second Generation**

Although general trends in Europe show that there is social mobility across generations, second generation immigrants still face many barriers (Thomson & Crul, 2007). On both sides of the Atlantic, the “hourglass economy” has brought about a shrinking job market for the working class and limiting opportunity for less educated members of the second generation (Salamone, 2015; Thomson & Crul, 2007). In the past, quick assimilation into the dominant culture meant success, but that is not always the case today and may sometimes create barriers instead (Salamone, 2015). Italy’s restrictive citizenship laws exclude immigrants from fully belonging to the dominant culture until they are adults (Marinaro & Walston, 2010; Thomson & Crul, 2007), and the narrow, white definition of Italian identity (*jus sanguinis*) rejects hyphenation (i.e., African-Italian) for second generation immigrants, even if they hold Italian citizenship (Thomson & Crul, 2007).
Although racism is no longer politically correct, it is a very real issue in Italy. Silvio Berlusconi, Italy’s prime minister, has made more than one public racist comment which give the sense that “a person cannot be Italian and black, a concept which is obviously very relevant to the second generations especially but not only if they are physically distinguishable from the majority of Italians” and acknowledges, if not formally, the strong undercurrent of biological racism that exists in Italy (Marinaro & Walston, 2010, p. 14). Although many immigrants are quick to dismiss Italian racism as ignorance rather than malice, this means that second generation immigrants, even if born in Italy and fluent in Italian, may be passed over due to discrimination based on the color of their skin (Andall, 2005). “In many cases, we are dealing not only with the sons and daughters of migrants, but often their grandchildren: second and third generations who have no personal experience of migration… These youths are growing up with diverse and hybrid identities; they are often multilingual and well-travelled and have global competences which, if encouraged, could potentially make them part of Italy’s future political and business elite” (Marinaro & Walston, 2010, p. 6).

Andall (2005) states, “Perhaps the most revealing statement about the second generation’s sense of belonging in Italy was their frequently articulated desire to leave Italy” (p.401). Acknowledging their western identities, they had no plans to return to their origin countries, but looked forward to going elsewhere in pursuit of opportunities that they did not have access to in Italy (Andall, 2005). Even for teenagers with a strong sense of belonging to their city in Italy, connections to the nation-state itself may be distant. “The strong assimilationist pressure they feel from the host society and the economic stagnation in Italy fuel the desire to move to countries which are better-off economically and more open culturally. These plans are hampered by their lack of Italian citizenship and consequent difficulty in settling in other
European countries” (Vathi, 2013, p. 911). Relocation is seen as both an opportunity and an escape form the strong discrimination they may face in Italy.

The Sri Lankan-Italian Connection

With Italy’s failure to respond quickly to its new role as a destination country thirty or so years ago, there were limited regular immigration routes. One such route, and now labor niche, was to meet the increasing demand for home care workers who could be privately employed to handle domestic duties or to help with care of the elderly in upper class, middle class, and working class households (Näre, 2010). When Catholic missionaries during the 1970’s called for domestic service workers to come to Italy, Sri Lankan women responded (Näre, 2010). Their wages of roughly US$100 each month were “between two and five times what women could earn working in Sri Lanka, and equaled or exceeded the wages earned by most village men” (Gamburd, 2008, p. 12). With rapid economic success, Sri Lanka migrant workers often decided to relocate their families to Italy (Brown, 2014). Once the immigration route was established, “Sri Lankan migration continued through family reunification, sponsorship, smuggling, and more recently with Schengen visas to a third country” (Näre, 2010, p. 68). Since men in Sri Lanka struggled to find jobs appropriate to their level of education and that allowed them to provide for the needs of their family, they also joined the immigration stream motivated by an opportunity to better their lives and those of their families (Attanapola, 2013). Working in Europe was seen as more desirable than working in the Middle East (another destination for Sri Lankan domestic and care workers) as wages were better and social status upon returning to Sri Lanka was higher (Attanapola, 2013, Gamburd, 2008).

Children were often sent back to Sri Lanka for periods of time, sometimes with a parent, sometimes to stay with other relatives. It was important to their parents to have them connect
with relatives, learn to speak Sinhalese, and get a good moral education (Brown, 2014). Italy was not considered an appropriate place to get a good moral upbringing; only in Sri Lanka could they “be brought up as good Catholics—respectful of their parents and worthy members of the extended family and local community” (Brown, 2011, p. 46-47). To those left behind in Sri Lanka, Italy was seen as a liberal place full of social evils, and the returning “semi-foreigners” were a disruptive presence with their glamorous European ways (Brown, 2014). And Italy was liberating for Sri Lankan transnationals. They were exposed to new, modern ideas and had freedom to express themselves and explore new identities without family pressure and judgment from the more restrictive Sri Lankan society (Brown, 2011; Brown, 2014). “Besides the financial rewards that Italy provides, most migrant workers mentioned that when they were away they enjoyed a freedom that was unavailable at home, the possibility of fashioning themselves in new ways, the work discipline, and the existence of simple rules that were much easier to follow than the ones at home” (Brown, 2011, p. 49).

Of course, that was only one side of the story. Sri Lankans left at home could never understand the difficulties that Sri Lankan transnationals faced in Italy. Although the immigrants were generally paid well and on time, and even experienced limited social mobility (transitioning from domestic workers to chefs and lab technicians) they still had to deal with racism, paternalism, and a life of hard work with very little time for anything other than side jobs or church on Sunday (Brown, 2011). As mentioned before, social mobility was limited, primarily still in the service sector, and tenuous as most workers had no contract (Attanapola, 2013). Qualified Italian government jobs were only available to Italian citizens, and many Italians refused to waste their time and money on such a bureaucratic process (Brown, 2014). Brown (2014) quotes an immigrant rights activist, “If you are born in Italy to Sri Lankan parents, you
have access to free education like any other Italian. You can go to the university and become a doctor if you want. But then you will never find a job, at least if you want to work for a state hospital because they only hire Italians”” (Brown, 2014, p. 344). Sri Lankans made good wages in Italy and were sought after workers, but had to be prepared to take their place at the bottom of the Italian labor market with little hope for advancement (Brown, 2014). For those immigrants who did attain citizenship and have their families join them, the dream of a permanent return home changed to vacation or retirement plans (Brown, 2011).

In spite of the challenges detailed above, there are currently 104,405 residence permits possessed by Sri Lankan immigrants according to the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (2014). Approximately eleven percent of these permits are within the Lazio province, ten percent within the city of Rome. There are also significant groups of Sri Lankans in Naples (Näre, 2010) and Milan (Andall, 2002).

**Education and Opportunity for the Sri Lankan Woman**

Education has always been valued within Sri Lankan society. Education primarily took place in Buddhist temples or the homes of the Hindu Brahmin in its earliest forms (Jayaweera, 2007; Peebles, 2006). When Europeans came to Sri Lanka, education underwent a series of changes, including expansion to include girls. By the 1960’s, free education had almost eradicated gender inequalities in education through grade 12. In fact, more girls than boys were being educated in grades 9-12 (Jayaweera, 2007). Today in Sri Lanka, primary school is universal. Both boys and girls have access to secondary education comparable to that of western societies (Caldwell, Caldwell, Caldwell, & Pieris, 1998). In fact, female and male literacy are almost equal, and females remain at slightly higher enrollments in secondary school (Malhotra & Tsui, 1996). “According to recent sex-segregated statistics in Sri Lanka, compared to the male
literacy rate at 93 per cent, the female literacy rate stands at 91 per cent (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2012), a rate which is extraordinary for a developing country and the highest recorded in South Asia” (Handapangoda, 2014, p. 354).

Although gender differences in achievement are small, there are gender stereotypes in education that suggest certain fields of study as being more “feminine” (Jayaweera, 2007). Women are more likely to pursue education in liberal arts programs (Malhotra & DeGraff, 2000), nursing schools, teacher’s colleges, social work, accountancy, or secretarial courses (Kiribamune & Samarasinghe, 1990). Already limited by the narrow fields of study that are considered “feminine,” competition for a limited number of jobs within Sri Lanka is further thwarted by the fact that employers prefer to hire male workers as they are less likely to need child-related leave (Malhotra & DeGraff, 2000). As a result of exposure to education and western influences, along with a changing economy, female migration has become more common as youth strive for the opportunity to leave rural areas for social and economic opportunities in more urban areas (Hewage, Kumara, & Rigg, 2011). Unskilled labor is Sri Lanka’s largest export. In the 1980’s alone, around 200,000 women migrated to take domestic labor positions as cooks, nannies, house-keepers, housemaids, etc. Many of these women were from rural areas and had no professional skills. Some of them were not able to communicate in English, and some were even illiterate in their own language (Kiribamune & Samarasinghe, 1990). “Gender stereotypes that engender and perpetuate power asymmetries are pervasive and persistent in the country’s private and public arenas alike, resulting in inequality and disempowerment for women. It would seem that by migrating as household workers women have acquired the potential to challenge existing inequalities which hinder them in their home country” (Handapangoda, 2014, p. 355).
Women are generally expected to fulfill traditional social institutions: kinship, marriage, family, and the construction of femininity (Gunawardena, 2003). One interesting note…

“Although Sri Lanka is technically a patrilineal society, there are matrilineal features in many social relationships and residential arrangement is one. It is not uncommon to find children, although technically ‘belonging’ to the father’s group (inheriting the surname) having closer relationships with the mother’s parental family” (Pinnawala, 2008, p. 458).

**Situating the Present Study within the Literature**

Immigration is not a simple issue, but it is one that has impact for every citizen of the world. In the current era of globalization, characterized by an increasingly diverse emigrant makeup in the categories of both nationality and social spectrum (Le Bras, 2001), immigration offers a means of economic and educational self-betterment to citizens of developing countries (Kubow & Fossum, 2007).

Full integration into Italian society has proven to be a difficult accomplishment for immigrants from developing countries. Although Italy has not embraced institutionalized assimilation—there are no policies or programs forcing immigrants to assimilate into faux Italians, leaving behind their ethnic or cultural heritage against their will—as some other countries have, the path to integration for children of immigrants is not as straightforward as once assumed (Alba & Nee, 2014; Brubaker, 2001; Colombo, Leonini, & Rebughini, 2009). These second generation students claim the best of both worlds, holding on to their separate ethnic and cultural citizenship while embracing their Italian identity with no wish for full assimilation (Colombo, 2010; Colombo et al., 2009; Colombo, Domaneschi, & Marchetti, 2011). They are looking for admittance, equality, and protection from discrimination and prejudice (Colombo et al., 2011).
It is important to understand the stories and experiences of second generation students in Italy. My focus is to pursue and explore this topic through the lens of Sri Lankan women growing up second generation students in Italy, knowing, or not knowing, as the case may be, what options are available both for the present and for the future. Understanding their perceived experiences, their educational goals, and whether those goals were supported or impeded by their experiences in Italy and by their own families will add to the overall understanding of how immigration impacts the educational pathways of immigrants in a global society.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

By exploring the financial, political, cultural, and educational challenges that the daughters of Sri Lankan immigrants in Italy are faced with, the purpose of this study is to gain a broader understanding of the implications those factors have on the educational choices made both during their time in Italy and beyond. Within this chapter, I will identify my theoretical framework and research questions. I will then present the case study methodology around which I based my research, the means by which I selected my sample, the steps taken to create instrumentation and to collect data, the process by which I analyzed the collected data, and the validity measures used and limitations recognized.

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

My research project has grown from a conceptual framework created during my first year in Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural & International Education (MACIE) program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) and further developed since that time. I created a concept map (Appendix A) based on the complex variables that impact being an Italian immigrant from a developing country. Based on the literature and personal experiences of living and working with immigrants in Italy, I surmise that their educational choices and goals are impacted by the broad categories of immigration policy, economic opportunity, diaspora support, and racism and assimilation (or acculturation), as well as basic career aspirations. I posit that immigrants in Italy face challenges in becoming financially viable, politically stable, legally papered residents or citizens based on the complex interactions between the above mentioned categories. I believe that the instability they often face has implications for the education and future of the New Italians, immigrants born and/or raised in Italy but unable to gain stable footing through residency or citizenship (Bianchi, 2011). One non-Italian influence is diaspora support, as
immigrants’ family and native culture also have significant impact on their decisions to immigate to Italy in the first place, and then to pursue education and career in Italy or to return home or continue elsewhere in that pursuit.

My goal is to answer the following question, “How does the experience of growing up as a Sri Lankan woman in Italy impact their decisions to pursue higher education in Italy or elsewhere?” Sub-questions explore how these students are able to marry the two cultures they are growing up in (Italian culture and Sri Lankan culture) and how that hinders or propels their educational decisions as well as what conflicts arise between their own future/educational goals and those of their parents. My study does not attempt to address all the factors that may be involved, but instead looks at the students’ experiences in their own words to see what themes come to light about their lived experience in Italy and the impact their status as immigrants has on their decision to pursue education and career in Italy or to return home or continue elsewhere in that pursuit.

**Multiple Case Study Methodology**

I used an interpretive qualitative approach in considering this study. My original intent was to use phenomenological methodology based on my interest in the lived experience of my subjects. However, as I delved further into the study, I realized that a multiple case study would be a more appropriate method for my purposes. By definition, “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In this case, the bounded system is Sri Lankan immigrant women in Rome, Italy, who have completed all or most of their primary and secondary education while living in Italy. Although, as Creswell (2007) states, “The focus of all qualitative research needs to be on understanding the phenomenon being explored rather than solely on the reader,
the researcher, or the participants being studied,” (p. 3) my intention is not to distill the essence of my participants’ lived experiences. It is rather to explore each individual participant’s story (or case), to pull out themes related to my research questions, and then to compare those themes across cases to provide a detailed picture of the perceptions and realities of my participants. This is in keeping with Yin’s (2003) statement that “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1).

I am using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) working from a conceptual framework (Appendix A) rather than a theoretical framework. This approach allows me to build my research from the ground up, exploring themes brought up by the participants themselves rather than simply pursuing my own suppositions or the assumptions of prior researchers. This is in keeping with Creswell’s (2007) description of qualitative research. It “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem…The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action” (p. 37). The focus is kept on the participants’ held meanings.

**Sample Selection**

This study focuses on interviews with Sri Lankan women who were born in Italy or who moved there prior to or early in their primary school experience. I arbitrarily selected to focus on this group as I had previous ties to their community. I excluded minors from my sample, working instead with women from age eighteen to thirty, as I thought that these women might find it
easier to articulate their experiences both during and after high school and how those experiences impacted their decision of where and how to pursue higher education. I also thought that they would be better able to shed light on the ease or difficulty of furthering their education or finding employment once out of secondary school since by this point they have already graduated and moved forward in pursuit of those options.

I used a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling moving to snowball sampling for this study. Purposeful sampling is a strategy used in order to select participants who meet a specific set of criteria which allow them to speak to a particular line of research inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). Convenience sampling (or non-probability sampling) is often frowned upon for not providing a credible sample, but is sometimes used to gain access to a group of people who are difficult to locate or to whom it is difficult to gain access (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). Snowball sampling is another form of non-probability sampling. Through snowball sampling, one uses existing participants to connect to other individuals who also meet the criteria of the study (Creswell, 2007).

The purposeful part of my sampling strategy was to look for participants who met the following criteria:

- Sri Lankan
- female
- first or second generation immigrant to Italy
- at least 18 years of age
- had completed all or a significant amount of their primary and secondary education while living in Italy
Since I am working from 4665 miles away, my access to this group of women is limited. For convenience, I contacted Ms. Ruth Santos who serves as the principal and director of International Christian Academy (ICA) of the Christian Association for the Third-world Children (CATCH). ICA is a small, private school which utilizes an American curriculum and is taught completely in English. Its student population consists primarily of students from immigrant families, most commonly from Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. Ms. Santos was able to serve as my gatekeeper, connecting me to several Sri Lankan women who were former students of ICA. I reached out to them via Facebook and/or email, putting forward a flyer (Appendix B) detailing the purpose of my research project and my expectations in regards to participants. Once I had connected to these women and confirmed their participation, I then asked them to assist me in connecting to other women meeting the same criteria from the Sri Lankan community in Rome. When such connections existed, I asked my participants to introduce me to their friends or acquaintances and then reached out to these new contacts exactly as I had to the first round of participants: by sending a flyer and request for participation via Facebook and/or email. Through this method, I was able to schedule interviews with six participants, five of whom met the criteria for my study.

The participants vary from 19 to 30 years of age. They came to Italy at different points in their lives and have pursued different paths post-high school, both in level and location of education completed as well as where they currently reside. Table 1 breaks down these details and includes the pseudonyms selected for the anonymity of the participants, including the woman who came to Italy at age 18.
While their timelines and stories differ, each of these women shared the experience of growing up in Italy as a first or second generation immigrant as well as attending ICA in Rome. In spite of my attempts to reach beyond the walls of ICA, snowball sampling brought only additional ICA students into my participant pool. I was unable to connect with any Sri Lankan women who had completed their secondary education in the Italian school system.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

For this study, I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol. This approach allowed me to focus on the specific phenomenon that I wished to study and provided contextual understanding (Maxwell, 2005). My goal was to encourage my participants to share their lived experience as immigrant women in Rome. Maxwell (2005) states that unstructured approaches “are particularly useful in revealing the processes that lead to specific outcomes” (p. 80). In order to facilitate that, I worked from my conceptual framework (Appendix A) to create a research question matrix (see Table 2) which captured my questions about the variables impacting

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**Table 1**

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age of Arrival in Italy</th>
<th>Number of Years in Italy</th>
<th>Current Country of Residence</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Country of Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiruni</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>21-22 years</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayani</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tharushi</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachini</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Born/Returned at Age 9</td>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashmi</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayani</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Born</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
educational choices and identified where I might look for the answers. I categorized and narrowed the questions to those that could be answered from the participants’ perspective and selected ten questions that would encourage my participants to discuss their lived experiences and serve as a starting point for follow-up questions both during the interview and after reviewing the collected data. I examined the questions for accuracy, simplicity, and directness. This was especially important as my participants were all second- or third-language English speakers. The ten questions that became a part of my formal interview protocol (Appendix C) are exploratory/explanatory questions regarding the experience of growing up in Rome as a Sri Lankan immigrant girl and woman while navigating biculturalism and the demands of family and the education system. By asking this type of question, I am striving to understand and to be able to regurgitate my participants’ experiences in a meaningful and enlightening way (Creswell, 107).

Table 2

Sample from Research Question Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I need to know</th>
<th>Why do I need to know this?</th>
<th>What kind of data will answer the questions?</th>
<th>Where can I find the data?</th>
<th>Whom do I contact for access?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do immigrants from developing countries come to Italy?</td>
<td>To establish the perspective from which educational goals are pursued.</td>
<td>Interviews with students and their families</td>
<td>In the Sri Lankan community in Italy</td>
<td>Previous students in Italy and the principal of my school there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are their goals for their time in Italy?</td>
<td>To establish the perspective from which educational goals are pursued.</td>
<td>Interviews with students and their families</td>
<td>In the Sri Lankan community in Italy</td>
<td>Previous students in Italy and the principal of my school there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the individuals'/families' residency status?</td>
<td>To determine if they have been able to establish their desired status in Italy</td>
<td>Interviews with students and their families</td>
<td>In the Sri Lankan community in Italy</td>
<td>Previous students in Italy and the principal of my school there</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once my protocol was in place and connection had been made with my first participants, I began the actual interview process. Although I interviewed only six women, the time span for the interviews was from October 2015 to February 2016. The primary reason for this length of time was difficulty in connecting with my participants. Ideally, these approximately one hour long interviews would take place in person. However, due to the fact that my participants live in three different countries, it was impractical to attempt that. Instead, we utilized Skype interviews with video when possible, but sometimes with only audio due to network restrictions. Distance was not the only difficulty that we faced. Timing was an issue, as well. With time differences varying from five to fifteen hours plus the multiple obligations to work and school that both I and my participants have, it was often a challenge to negotiate a time that was mutually acceptable. To further complicate our scheduling issues, there were sometimes network problems that kept us from keeping our appointments. In spite of these obstacles, I was able to connect with six Sri Lankan women via Skype and to complete in depth interviews with them.

In order to ensure that my participants fully understood the context and requirements of my study, I sent two documents to them: an information sheet describing the purposes of my study (Appendix D) and a Consent to Interview Form (Appendix E) explaining the benefits of the study, the procedures required by the study, and the means by which I will protect their confidentiality. I gave them time to review those documents as we were scheduling our interview appointment. The consent itself was given verbally in the first portion of our recorded interviews.

The interviews were done virtually via Skype, usually from my home to their home, although one exception was made when I worked from a relative’s home for my last interview. I worked with my participants to ensure that they would be in a comfortable quiet place with plenty of time to devote to the interview, clearly communicating the expected time commitment
in advance. The interviews were recorded digitally using the Evaer program which allows for both audio and video recording of Skype conversations. I then transcribed all interviews verbatim and saved both audio or video files and transcription.

During the interviews, I kept field notes which helped me to identify unexpected themes that came up so that I could ask related questions in future interviews. I also made further notes regarding the interviews when transcribing if there were areas where I needed clarification or that I felt should be pursued with other participants in follow up emails, messages, or interviews.

**Ethical Considerations**

Although the risks associated with this study are no higher than those which occur in everyday life, it is still important to protect the participants. To that end, I have given them pseudonyms for anonymity. I have also stored all interview data, both recordings and transcriptions, on a password protected computer. I informed my participants that we would be recording audio and video in my informed consent and specifically asked them if that was acceptable prior to starting the interview. I suggested that they find a comfortable and private place for conducting the interview so that there would be no concerns about outsiders overhearing the interview itself. I also made sure that they understood that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any question or to leave the study at any time. These measures were taken to make sure that my participants felt safe and secure while sharing their stories, their lives and experiences, with me.

**Data Analysis**

In analyzing the stories shared with me by my participants, I recognize my role as a biographer and interpreter as described by Stake (2005). In the role of biographer, I am detailing the lived experience of my participants, crafting a concise picture of their experience out of the
stories they have shared with me during our interviews. In the role of interpreter, I am further mining the interview data in an attempt to present new meaning or knowledge regarding my participants’ experiences. From this perspective, I chose to use thematic analysis as an essentialist method for my data analysis technique. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis may be utilized to describe patterns or themes across qualitative data in the same way that grounded theory data analysis is used, but without the expectation that the resulting analysis will be utilized for theory development (p. 81). Thematic analysis, when used as an essentialist method “reports the experiences, meanings and the reality of the participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This position well supports the analytical roles of biographer and interpreter that I have assumed. I utilized within-case and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007) to pull data and themes from my multiple case studies and then to organize that data into a spreadsheet to allow for comparison and contrast across participants.

Following each interview, I transcribed the audio/video recording, along with any descriptive field notes. I then reviewed the transcriptions for any emerging themes for use in further interviews as well as initial data analysis. I sent a copy of each participant’s transcribed interview to them for feedback to ensure that I had accurately represented them.

To begin the analysis process, I read each transcript several times, making margin memos as appropriate. This allowed me to gain a broad picture of my gathered research including all participants’ viewpoints prior to pulling out themes and subthemes. The purpose of the margin memos was to begin to capture ideas or concepts that jumped out to me for further review in the following steps of analysis without complicating the reading with categorization (Creswell, 2007). In these readings, I was not concerned with the answers to my interview questions, but rather was attempting to hear and understand the overall story shared by my participants.
Utilizing the margin memos, as well as my overall impressions from the initial readings, I utilized holistic coding (Saldaña, 2009) to identify specific broad coding categories that could be drawn from the research, attempting to stay within the guidelines of “lean coding” with no more than five or six categories (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). When using holistic coding, the researcher lumps research together in broad categories rather than splitting it into narrow categories (Saldaña, 2009, p. 118). From this initial reading, I created eight categories or themes, slightly more than Creswell recommends. These eight themes were:

1. Cultural differences
2. Lack of opportunity/future in Italy
3. Family goals/support
4. Immigration paths/citizenship
5. Educational paths/experiences/challenges
6. Racism
7. Language Adjustment
8. Current situation

Although not every interview had data that fell into every category, every category was represented in multiple interviews. I utilized these categories to create a data document, pulling in the phrases or sections of data that supported each category. This step was useful in helping me to organize the answers to the various questions from my interviews so that I could begin to create the biographical narrative for each participant. Correlations between these initial holistic themes and those derived afterwards from line-by-line coding will be further discussed in chapter four along with findings from the study.
With Saldaña’s work on coding methodologies for qualitative research as a guide, I returned to my transcripts. I utilized a combination of initial, descriptive, and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009) to analyze my interviews for themes (codes) that might not have been obvious in the broader reading. Saldaña attributes the term initial coding to Charmaz, but quotes Strauss & Corbin when he defines it as “breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (as cited in Saldaña, 2009, p. 81). Saldaña (2009) says that initial coding allows the researcher to truly begin to take ownership of the contents and nuances of the collected data. Descriptive coding is similar to initial coding, but notes topics rather than literal verbiage (Saldaña, 2009). In vivo coding refers to words or short phrases that are taken directly from the participant responses and is utilized to capture the voice of the participants (Saldaña, 2009).
Once the first-cycle coding was complete, I moved on to second-cycle coding, consolidating and re-organizing the themes (codes) that I had pulled from my data in order to “develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149). I utilized axial coding to determine the most frequent or significant themes from cases and to compare them across cases (cross-case analysis) (Saldaña, 2009). It is important to keep the major categories to a relatively small number (between three and eight is recommended) and to make sure that they reflect the key themes as they relate to the study objectives in order to create a complete research project (Thomas, 2007). To this end, I took care to group related categories, eliminating redundancies, and to note exceptional categories, ending up with five major themes to be expanded on in Chapter 4. Table 3 is a sample of my coding scheme (See Appendix F for complete coding scheme).
Table 3

Sample from Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Level Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Major Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War in Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>Reasons for Coming to Italy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Difficulties</td>
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<td>Available Jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Better Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan schools competitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizenship/EU</td>
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<td>Learn English</td>
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<td>International School</td>
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<td>Inexpensive</td>
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<td>Study Hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t Like Italian Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tutors</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Hoped we went abroad”</td>
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<tr>
<td>International School</td>
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<td>Go anywhere in the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better Future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraged by family</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You can do anything”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pick a career you like</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Support varies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overprotective</td>
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<td>Restrictive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pressure to Conform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents think like Sri Lankans</td>
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<td>Levels of Trust</td>
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<td>Levels of Freedom</td>
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<td>Parents’ Experiences</td>
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During both phases of coding, I was involved in ongoing conversations with my participants via Facebook messenger in order to ask follow up questions and to clarify points that were unclear or incomplete. I also submitted each participant’s biographical narrative to them and asked for their feedback or any corrections (stakeholder checks).

I created a visual map of the themes and ideas (see Figure 4) that were pulled from my data to make sure that there was a coherent flow and that each piece related to the whole. Next, I compared this visual map to my original concept map to see if the two pieces correlated or
conflicted in any way. I then utilized these categories and the visual map, as well as memos written throughout the process, to begin to fashion the narrative description of my research results.

**Figure 3. Visual map of themes and ideas**

**Validation**

There are varying perspectives on best practices for validation within qualitative research methodology. Creswell (2007) speaks of validation as the process by which a researcher strives to assess the accuracy of his or her findings by utilizing various strategies to document said accuracy. He references validation as a process. Maxwell (2005) presents validity as a goal rather than a product, something that cannot be proved and should not be taken for granted. He states that “validity threats are made implausible by evidence, not methods; methods are only a way of getting evidence that can help you rule out these threats” (p. 105). I have selected the following
verification strategies for the purposes of this study: triangulation, member or stakeholder checking, and clarification of researcher bias.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation utilizes various sources such as different types of data collection, review of existing research, multiple interviewees, etc. in order to corroborate the research gleaned from one’s own study (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). This method is employed because it “reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93-94). I used both triangulation of research methods (interviews and existing research) and triangulation of sources (multiple case studies).

**Stakeholder or member checks.** According to Maxwell (2005), one of the most important means of identifying misinterpretation or researcher bias is by asking participants to periodically evaluate and respond to research assumptions. Asking participants and others who may also be connected to the research to respond to a summation of research validates accuracy (Creswell, 2007) and “enhances the credibility of findings” (Thomas, p. 244). I asked for stakeholder checks from both my interviewees and my gatekeeper in Rome.

**Clarification of researcher bias.** Creswell (2007) says the following about researcher bias: “Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). Although it is important to clarify my own position, experiences, and assumptions in order to show how they might possibly shape my study approach (Creswell, 2007), it is also essential to recognize that the incorporation of my own experiences and identity provides a certain level of insight (Maxwell, 2005). Regardless of background or experience, a researcher must be open to
contrary findings (Yin, 2003) and be aware of their own potential bias in order to ensure an accurate and complete research project. Prior to beginning this study, I wrote both a researcher identity memo and a validity threat memo in order to identify my own background motivations for pursuing this study topic. From those memos, I have parsed out several pieces of info which I believe have bearing on my research project and should be acknowledged.

There are definitely layers of personal interest for why I am interested in the how the lived experiences of Sri Lankan women in Italy impact their educational goals or choices. Three years after graduating from college, I spent a year as a volunteer teacher in Rome, Italy. The school in which I worked was a small, English-speaking, American curriculum-based, Christian school with an immigrant student population composed primarily of Africans, Sri Lankans, and Filipinos. As a result, my time in Italy was less focused around Italian people than it was around immigrant children. As I began to build relationships with my students and their families, doing home visits in an effort to build trust with parents so that I could pursue outside activities with my class, I began to recognize their struggle to find balance between their traditional cultural values and the more westernized Italian world in which they were growing up. I heard stories of discrimination against immigrants and personally experience the impact of that discrimination when our school was raided by police who were astonished to find only kids and the few teachers that managed the school as they had been told we were a terrorist cell. I have also experienced the frustration of dealing with Italian bureaucracy through both the school’s attempts to get their documentation finalized (the whole time I was in Italy) and through American friends’ attempts to get their residency visas to go through.

At the same time, I shared an apartment with two Italian college students and began to learn about their lives and the pressure of being students in the Italian higher education system. I
fell in love with Italy, with the language, the culture, the food, the history, the people, and had conversations with young Italians about the world in which they lived. I lived through the transition from the lira to the Euro and heard some of the frustration of a culture losing yet another piece of itself.

I think that I need to be cautious not to glamorize the position that the immigrant community is in. I need to keep that balance between the story, the perception of reality that they have and the realities of the Italy that they are a part of. As someone who has nearly always been a member of the dominant culture, I do not fully understand what it feels like to be an immigrant so I must be careful not to impose my own assumptions into the story. I must keep an open mind to hear what my participants have to say as individuals who are living that experience. Also, although I love the Italian people, as well as the immigrant community in Italy, I carry through a perception that the dominant culture exhibits a sort of insensitive arrogance that runs roughshod over immigrants from developing countries. It is important to acknowledge this bias so that I do not allow it to influence my understanding of the research.

Methodological Limitations

I had hoped to have ten to twelve participants in this study, including Sri Lankan women who had completed all or most of their primary and secondary education in the Italian school system or who might have attended Italian universities after high school. Since I was unable to connect with participants from these groups, I must note that their voice is missing.

Due to the widespread locations of my participants, I was unable to bring the women together for a focus group or group observation. Although all of them were easy to talk to and very willing to share their stories and to answer my questions to the best of their ability, I feel
that a focus group or group observation would have provided richer data as participants shared
and discussed their experiences with each other rather than discussing only one-on-one with me.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a detailed picture of the lived experiences of several first and second generation Sri Lankan women who completed all or most of their primary and secondary education in Italy and further discusses them within the context of the existing literature and in response to my research questions. I utilized in-person interviews to present their stories of living and studying in Italy. The primary purpose of the case study is to come to understand the case, or multiple cases (Stake, 1995). To that end, this chapter first provides a summary of each individual woman’s story as told in their own words, teasing out the essential elements of their experiences in Italy, especially in regards to educational decisions and goals, and using direct quotes for illustration. The chapter then presents a breakdown of the themes that emerge from their stories, connecting them to the existing literature and utilizing the data to answer the following questions:

Central question.

How does the experience of growing up as a Sri Lankan woman in Italy impact their decisions to pursue higher education in Italy or elsewhere?

Sub-questions.

3. How are these students able to marry the two cultures they are growing up in (Italian culture and Sri Lankan culture)? What does that look like and how does it hinder or propel their educational decisions?

4. What conflicts arise between the future/educational goals of Sri Lankan women and those of their parents when they are raised in a dominant culture other than Sri Lanka?
Participant Stories of Navigating Sri Lankan-Italian Transnationalism

**Hiruni.** Hiruni was born in Rome, Italy, in 1987 to a Sri Lankan Catholic family and is the oldest of three children. She has both a younger brother and a younger sister. Her parents came to Italy about thirty years ago, not long before she was born. They were looking for a better future for their children. At the time, there was an ongoing war between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers, so they wanted to escape that conflict. Italy was a good country to migrate to because of the opportunity for economic betterment. So her parents traveled to Italy as tourists and then asked to stay under asylum status, from what Hiruni understands. Both of Hiruni’s parents finished high school, but did not have a college education. They wanted their children to get the education that they never had, so they did all they could to ensure that and to encourage them to fulfill their dreams for specific jobs or careers. Both parents were able to find jobs in Italy: her father as a shopkeeper, her mother as a housekeeper. Living and working in Italy also allowed them to send back money to assist family still in Sri Lanka.

Hiruni’s parents sent her to Italian primary school for grades one through three, but then sent her back to Sri Lanka for grades four and five because they wanted her to learn English. Hiruni has few memories of her time in the Italian primary school due to her age at the time, but she says that the students all got along well and that her different skin color did not make a difference at all either with her classmates or her teachers. However, she told me that she did not really have a good experience in the Sri Lankan school system. Her first critique was that she never really fit in or had any real friends. Instead, she felt that she was seen as an outsider, the kid that came from Italy. Her classmates seemed to be more interested in the things she could give to them (candy or treats from Italy) rather than in her as a person. One teacher even went so far as to ask Hiruni if her parents could buy a guitar for her son who was a musician. The second
critique was in regards to the competitive nature of Sri Lankan schools. It was intensely competitive. Hiruni says, “You know, everyone wants to be the best, and there’s a lot of backstabbing, as well, and putting people down. And in a way, there’s a lot of psychological bullying, as well, going on there.”

Her third critique was in regards to the teachers. Subjects were difficult and many of the teachers were not really eager to assist students unless there was something in it for them. She gave an example:

In Sri Lanka, you would go to school, and the teacher would explain to you the hardest mathematical calculation. And then he would turn around and say, ‘Oh, if you want to have the shorter version, come to my tuition classes.’ So they would get extra money out of it… and a lot of kids in Sri Lanka had private tutors. I had a private tutor. Every day after school, I had a private tutor that would teach you things because only just attending school you wouldn’t be able to pass.

When she returned to Rome at age ten, again because of the war in Sri Lanka, Hiruni’s parents decided to send her to International Christian Academy (ICA), an international school. Compared to other international schools in Rome, ICA was small and inexpensive and provided English as its language of instruction. Her parents wanted her to go there so that she would continue to learn English and so that she would have better opportunities to study and work abroad if she desired. When Hiruni began at ICA, she expected that it would be like the schools in Sri Lanka. Instead, she found a caring community of both classmates and teachers. She talks about ICA feeling like a family and states that it was a completely different environment. That started with the teachers and trickled down. In Hiruni’s words, “They cared for you.” She said that they would be willing to explain something to you twenty times if that was what it took for
you to understand it. They did not play favorites and encouraged her to think for herself and to feel free to express herself. And according to Hiruni:

They did it because they really actually cared for you and not because, you know, they were just put there to teach you… And I think that’s what, you know, was the good thing of the school… that they would know your weaknesses, and they would target them and help you to make them stronger and not to leave you there holding onto your own troubles. And you know, even if they would see you down, they would come and ask you what’s wrong and things like that. So there was a lot of… how can I say? They cared for you.

Her relationships with her classmates were starkly different, as well. Almost all of the students at ICA were children of migrants who wanted their children to learn English. As a result, they understood each other. They were children of immigrants whose parents wanted a better future for them. Their life experiences were very similar. They formed a bond that went beyond the friendship of mere classmates to a strong and long-lasting support system.

The only issue that she mentions in regards to ICA is the fact that, as a private school with American credentials, the school was not recognized by the Italian government. It was recognized in all foreign English-speaking countries (i.e. Australia, England, the U.S.), but in order to attend an Italian university, Hiruni would have had to go back and finish Italian secondary school on top of her time at ICA. In spite of that, Hiruni stayed at ICA and graduated from there in 2005.

Hiruni did not go to college at that time, instead opting to join the workforce. Leaving Italy was a scary idea to her, and she preferred to stay close to friends and family. She says, “Italy was my comfort. I knew everything. I knew how everything worked. I knew the system.
So, it was sort of a safe option to stay there. And once I finished high school, I got a job there immediately.” Hiruni took a job with TrenItalia, Italy’s main rail transit company, for four years. But she faced frustrations there that stemmed from the “corruption and underhand things” that go on in Italy. She got tired of being passed up for promotions while employees that she had trained moved quickly up to become her supervisors simply because they knew the right people. In her words, “Unfortunately now in Italy, you don’t go anywhere unless you’re recommended by somebody.” That frustration combined with the government bureaucracy and the ongoing recession brought her to the point where she said, “I don’t think I’m going to have a future here.” In 2010, she decided to go to Australia to pursue higher education.

In Australia, Hiruni planned to study medicine and become a doctor, but realized it was too expensive. She felt that she was a financial burden on her family and that it was time to change her priorities. So she pursued nursing instead, staying in a field that she loves and still satisfying her personal goals. She graduated and has been working as an RN for three years now. When asked if she felt pressure from her family to be a doctor, she said her family only pushed her to finish her studies and to do something she loved. She finishes by saying, “And to be honest, I couldn’t have done a better choice than becoming a nurse. I love it…. Every single bit of it… lovely.” Today, she helps to support her parents back in Italy. Her mother has been ill, and her father recently lost his job. She also supports her younger brother and sister who have already joined her in Melbourne to pursue higher education, providing housing and paying for school fees. Hiruni hopes that her parents will be able to come to Australia in the near future.

When Hiruni thinks about growing up as a Sri Lankan in Italy, she says, “It wasn’t the easiest.” She felt the conflict between the Sri Lankan and Italian cultures and the pressure to not embarrass her family in front of other Sri Lankans in the community. She said, “We can’t act
like Italians when we are with Sri Lankans, and we can’t act like Sri Lankans in front of Italians or they won’t hang out with us.” She said that there was a constant struggle to find the balance between the more conservative Sri Lankan culture and the Italian culture that “fits me perfectly because I was born there.” She could not easily fit into the Sri Lankan world where women are expected to marry, to have children, to care for the home, and not to speak up to men and where she was not allowed to go out like her Italian friends did without a major discussion with her parents. She also struggled at times to justify her friendships with males since in Italy that is completely acceptable but is relatively unheard of in Sri Lanka. She felt that she could have had a lot more freedom and less pressure if she was not involved at all with other Sri Lankans in Rome. Because her family participated in some Sri Lankan parties and events, she and her family were known. This made her more self-conscious that she might embarrass her family in front of the Sri Lankan community just because she behaved more like a westernized Italian. Hiruni felt that her parents put extra pressure on her to be a good example for her younger siblings.

Although she sometimes resented that her parents tried to bring them up in the Sri Lankan culture, she acknowledges that they were more liberal than many Sri Lankan parents in Rome and says that she has learned to appreciate that side of her heritage. “Not that you have to accept it, but you start to appreciate it. And at the end of the day, you decide what you want to do and what makes you happy and how you want to live your life regardless of what culture you have.” Hiruni found Italian people friendly and warm. Her ability to communicate in Italian, and specifically in the Roman dialect, allowed her to navigate the cultural divide pretty fluidly. She said that Italians are often thought of as racist but that she did not experience that at all. “In the twenty years that I lived in Italy, I never encountered any episode of racism. And if I did, there were always other Italians who turned around and supported me.”
She and her family are all citizens of Italy, although that was not quite as smooth a process. Although Hiruni was born in Italy, her parents did not understand the Italian residency and citizenship rules. As a result, she was missing three months of the residency requirement (from birth to three months). When she turned eighteen and should have been eligible for citizenship, she was not. Instead, she had to go through the formal citizenship process for immigrants who had lived in Italy for at least ten years. There were document issues because they wanted her Sri Lankan police check and other paperwork. However, since she was born and had always really lived in Italy, she was not registered in Sri Lanka. Eventually, she was able to achieve citizenship around age twenty-three. She said that this is another reason “why I think I got a little sick of the Italian system and the Italian government and I decided to come overseas.”

Hiruni appreciates that her parents sent her to an international school, encouraged her to learn English, and prepared her to move on from Italy. They had originally planned to return to Sri Lanka, but listened to their children when they wished to stay in Italy to finish their education. She says, “I think they hoped, in a way, that we would go overseas like they did and follow our dreams. I mean, we could have stayed in Italy and done whatever we loved, but I think it’s a good experience for us, as well, knowing that we did the same thing they did when they came to Italy. We are putting our foot down [in Australia] and building our own lives here like they did when they came to Italy.”

Nayani. Nayani was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1988 and is the youngest of her Buddhist family with two older siblings, one brother and one sister. She is not sure what motivated her father to move to Italy, but he moved there around twenty-two years ago. Seven years later, he had his family join him. Nayani was twelve years old at the time. Her father owns
his own business, a bar or café, that allows him to support his family and send money home to her grandparents, and her mother does not work outside the home.

Nayani does not remember much about school in Sri Lanka. “All I remember is I played,” she laughs. She does not know if her parents had any particular educational aspirations for her, but she says that she did not want to stay in Italy for school. Her father learned about ICA from her uncle and decided that she should stay in Rome and enroll there in spite of her objections. Her parents did not want Nayani to attend an Italian school because they thought she would pick up bad behaviors there. They saw Italian students as having bad manners and felt that they indulged in bad behavior such as smoking, doing drugs, and partying. Instead, they wanted her to attend an international school because English is the second language in Sri Lanka. They also thought that attending an international school would allow her to move to another country later. ICA was challenging for Nayani since she did not really speak English prior to enrolling and was also unfamiliar with the workings and subjects of the American system. Although the first few years were extremely difficult, Nayani says that studying at ICA really helped her with learning English. She talks about ICA in very simple terms stating that the teachers were like parents, that they cared about their students as if they were their own children. She said that they did not pick favorites and that the school was like a family. She laughs as she says:

ICA is like a family. Not a normal family… it’s a Christian family. I am happy to have them. And I still love them… especially the teachers. It’s a school. And actually, it’s… it’s like a home. We do everything… like, we joke, we play, we do everything, we study. It’s a home. It’s a second home.

Perhaps this fact was so important to Nayani because, as she says, “I’m the one who’s shy… the shy girl.” Her classmates accepted her and became like her sisters and brothers,
helping her not only through school, but through the good and bad times in her life. She was especially close to two other female Sri Lankans although her classmates were from various immigrant groups including Africans and Filipinos.

The only issue that she mentions in regards to ICA is the fact that, as a private school with American credentials, the school was not recognized by the Italian government. It was recognized in all foreign English-speaking countries (i.e. Australia, England, the U.S.), but in order to attend an Italian university, Nayani would have had to go back and complete five years of Italian secondary school on top of her time at ICA. In spite of that, Nayani stayed at ICA and graduated from there in 2007. When she graduated, her plan was to leave Italy to pursue higher education in Australia or England. She wanted to become a pediatrician, but she and her parents did not have Italian citizenship yet, so she was unable to leave the country. Instead, she tried every university in Rome to see if it was possible to attend with her ICA credentials. In each case, she was told that she needed an Italian diploma to attend an Italian university, a requirement which she feels is really unfair. She also checked out John Cabot University, an English university in Rome. She would have been able to attend there with her ICA diploma, but the fees were too expensive for her parents to send her there.

Nayani found the Italian people nice for the most part. They were different from her in the way they thought and acted, but at least ninety percent of them were nice. She says, “I can say they are not racist.” She felt that the other ten percent looked down on Sri Lankans and felt their only value was in working for Italians. When further questioned as to how they were different, she says, “I really don’t know… all I can say is they are different.”

However, she felt that the other Sri Lankans in Rome, outside of her classmates, were worse than Italians. She said she really could not get close to Sri Lankans in Italy because they
were so jealous. Her family did not really have much contact with other Sri Lankans in Italy.

Nayani says, “I’m not saying that they are bad, but they are worse. That’s what I think.” Instead, she generally stayed home or went out with her parents. Even after graduation, she generally just went to work and then went home. Occasionally she went out, but her shyness made that difficult for her, especially when joining with Italians.

When Nayani thinks about growing up as a Sri Lankan in Italy, she says, “It’s not really easy to grow up the way that I grew up here because my parents think like Sri Lankans even though we are in a European country.” Her parents were much stricter than most of her friends’ parents. She was only allowed to go to school and come back home. She did not go out with friends after school, and on the occasions when she did go out with friends on a weekend, she had to be home by 6:00 p.m. Nayani found that frustrating. She says, “They were afraid that I would do the wrong things. I’m not telling that I had wrong friends, but they were afraid of that because they had the mentality of Sri Lankans.” Now that she is older and has a daughter of her own, she thinks that she may be just as protective, but as a young girl, she would sometimes get angry with her lack of freedom.

She found her parents’ strictness especially difficult because Italians, Romans, have such a different mindset. They do not stay home. They are always out having fun, and that usually means staying out until 10:00 p.m. They did not understand when Nayani told them that she had to be home early. They would make fun of her or make jokes that made her feel bad. She felt like she was missing out on some opportunities simply because cultural difference made it impossible for her to fully join into the Italian way of life.

Nayani loves Italy. She says that she loves Sri Lanka, too, but since she has been in Italy for the last fifteen years, it is home and she really does not want to leave. She appreciates the
freedom that Italians have to just live their lives without worrying about what everyone else thinks. There are fewer rules in Rome than there are in Sri Lanka, and that is very alluring, even for a shy girl.

After high school, Nayani’s English education allowed her to find a job working on tourist buses. Through her job, she met a Sri Lankan man whom she dated for five years before introducing him to her parents. They are now married and have a five month old daughter. After her maternity leave, Nayani will return to her job as a tour bus guide. She still has problems with her citizenship documents. Although she has lived in Italy for fifteen years, fully meeting the ten year residency requirement, there is one wrong letter on her marriage certificate and that has kept her paperwork at a standstill. She says, “I have a mistake with a letter… only for one letter, they reject everything… And it’s a mess. It really is a mess. I hate to do the documents, really.” Her husband is still a resident as well, as are her parents. In spite of the various setbacks and frustrations she has faced in regards to her education and her Italian citizenship, Nayani is content with her family and finds joy in the daughter that her world now revolves around.

Sachini. Sachini was born in Rome, Italy, in 1986 and is an only child. She holds to both the Buddhist and Christian traditions, since her grandmother was Buddhist, but her grandfather was Christian. She is not exactly sure of the timeline, but her mother moved to Rome maybe thirty-two years ago to join relatives already living there. Since she and Sachini’s father were in love, he followed shortly after, and they were married in Rome. A few years later, Sachini was born. Her parents began having problems around the time of her birth, so when she was six months old, Sachini’s father took her back to Sri Lanka to live with her grandmother, who she affectionately calls Granny. By the time she was one year old, her parents were divorced and her mother was no longer a part of her life. The details are vague, but Sachini chooses to be gracious,
“I don’t want to give fault to my mom, but then I don’t know what was going on. So since they got divorced and my dad wasn’t able to take care of me by himself… he has given me to his mom so that she can take care of me.” In the meantime, her father continued to live and work in Italy as a caregiver and domestic worker and later as a school driver for children attending an international school. He no longer sends financial assistance back to Sri Lanka, but did purchase a house and set things up so that rent from that house goes directly to support her grandmother.

She lived with Granny until she was nine years old and says that it was a difficult time in her life in some ways. Although she loved Granny as she would her mother, Sachini always felt that people viewed her differently, and sometimes negatively, because her parents were not around. In Sri Lanka, parents are expected to take care of their children, and Sachini very much felt that lack. Sachini went to kindergarten at a Sri Lankan Catholic girls’ school staffed by nuns, but Granny, a devout Buddhist, was not really happy with that. The next year, Sachini went to a different school, still all girls, where she remained until her return to Italy. In both cases, the schools language of instruction was Sinhalese, but English was a subject as well.

It was a relief to return to Rome to live with her father, even though they had to get used to living with each other for the first time since infancy. Sachini had spent her entire life to this point with Granny, seeing her father just once a year when he visited Sri Lanka for a month’s vacation. Her connection with him was not great, and he was not used to taking care of a little girl full-time. She was not used to the four seasons of the Italian weather, and she did not speak any Italian, just Sinhalese and basic English. Her father’s Italian friends always tried to talk to her in Italian. She says, “I was just staring at them… I didn’t understand what they were talking about. All I knew was just how to say, ‘ciao’ and that’s it.” She says, “It was so many new things for me.”
To further complicate her life, Sachini’s father enrolled her in ICA, an international school that he had learned about from Sri Lankan friends whose daughter attended there already. Sachini does not talk about her father having specific career goals for her, but he definitely wanted her to attend an international school. She says:

My dad never wanted me to join to an Italian school because he always had this bad thought that Italian schools don’t have enviable behaviors and all. So he always wanted me to join some international school… My dad always wanted me to move to some other country or at least learn some bit of English.

He felt that attending an Italian school would be limiting because she would only be prepared to study and stay in Italy rather than moving on internationally. Instead, an international school would give Sachini the opportunity to study in English. While still struggling with her Italian language limitations, Sachini started fifth grade at ICA in a second language that she did not really speak. Thus began the difficult process of learning two new languages at the same time: English at school, and Italian outside of school. Sachini talks about that time as difficult:

I had a hard time since the language was different and I had never studied Italian. Even though I was born [in Italy] I never knew Italian. And then, when I started school… I started with studying all in English—all the subjects are in English… Those were the hard times when I moved back in Rome.

There were other adjustments to make, as well. It felt strange to move into a school that was so diverse, not only with students from different countries, but with boys! She remembers her first day of school:

When I saw so many different kids from different countries, and it was not only a girls’ school, but it’s a mixed school… I couldn’t believe what was happening at first! I didn’t
know how to talk to them or how to act with them. I wasn’t prepared. But then slowly
because all of the students which I met in ICA were really friendly… I was welcomed
then.

These new friends became an important part of her life, helping her to learn both English and
Italian. Both they and the teachers were invested in helping Sachini succeed. It took some time
but she improved in English and school became easier. She stayed at ICA until her graduation in
2006.

After graduation, Sachini first thought of going to an Italian university, but the cost was
prohibitive. Tuition at an Italian university was nearly three times what it was in Sri Lanka. Plus,
she had her own house in Sri Lanka, so did not have to pay for room and board. “It was all
covered,” she says. Also, Sachini was nervous that she would not be able to handle academic
work in Italian. “I thought, since I have never studied in Italian, and paying that much money…
maybe it’s a risk for me because I might not even understand some of the things that they might
teach me,” she says. She could not bear the thought of wasting that time and money. So she
returned to Sri Lanka. She first attended Asian Pacific International Information Technologies
(APIIT) to complete her foundation before transferring to South Asian International Technology
Management (SITEM) to complete her degree in Marketing Media. Sachini talks proudly about
her time at SITEM, noting that they are the only private university in Sri Lanka that has a
medical program and that they are the only non-government university that is acceptable to
attend. She was grateful for her English education while she was at university since lectures at
her schools were in English only. She was often looked at as a foreigner since she was so
proficient in English and Italian, while not so good in Sinhalese.
When Sachini thinks about growing up as a Sri Lankan in Italy, she does not talk about it in terms of a challenge. She and her father had Sri Lankan and Italian friends and seem to have navigated both worlds easily. The first Italians that Sachini remembers were her father’s co-workers. She smiles as she says:

Even though I didn’t understand what they were saying, they were always smiling and giving me chocolates and all these kind things. I thought they might be really friendly and nice and all… Once I got to know how to speak Italian, and once I started understanding what they were saying, my first impression wasn’t wrong. They were friendly.

Of course, some Italians are not kind and friendly, but Sachini sees that as a generational issue. She says that sometimes older people make her feel uncomfortable, staring at her as if she might be a thief when she is on the metro. And occasionally someone will come into the shop where she works and prefer to be waited on by the Italian owner rather than her. “Maybe they just aren’t used to seeing people of other ethnicities?” she offers graciously. In spite of such instances, Sachini finds Italians friendly and warm and says that she has never really had a problem with anyone. She says that the new generation is not as uncomfortable with people of “Asian colors and African colors. This only happens with ladies of eighty to ninety years old.”

Sachini does not remember there being a large number of Sri Lankans in Rome when she first came to Italy. Those that were there all knew each other. Her father always took her to Sri Lankan parties and events and introduced her to the Sri Lankan community in Rome. By the time she was a junior in high school, she had a bunch of Sri Lankan friends (not from ICA) that she would meet up with after school. She is still friends with some of them.

Once in a while, Sachini tries to imagine how life might have looked for her had she not come to Italy. “This country has so much freedom,” she says. “In Sri Lanka, the culture is really
the opposite of this, especially for girls.” She talks about all the rules in Sri Lanka, and that she found them restrictive. She did not have the freedom to manage her own schedule or dress as she pleased. Instead, she had to be back home by 7:00 p.m. or Granny would start calling her over and over to ask her where she was. Even now if she goes to Sri Lanka for vacation, she has limits. “It’s because of the culture,” she says. “If I grew up in Sri Lanka… with all these strict rules and this way of dressing up and all, I would be a totally different person, not like here [in Italy].”

Instead, today Sachini works as a secretary and cashier in a shop that deals in all types of technology from cell phones to washing machines. More importantly, she works as a translator and interpreter for her boss as he develops new product launches with companies and clients outside of Italy. Sachini says that her English skills were instrumental in helping her to get his job and takes pride in the fact that she often becomes the primary contact in these exchanges. “I will call from my boss’s cell phone,” she says, “but immediately they say, ‘Hello, Sachini…’ because they know that it will be me calling them.” She has a warm relationship with her boss and his wife who include and support her in their business.

Outside of work, she finds fulfillment in giving back to the Sri Lankan community. She and her father, now a driver at an international school in Rome, and one of his friends have begun sponsoring concerts and events for the Sri Lankan community in Rome. They bring in singers and artists from Sri Lanka to perform concerts. The weekend before our interview, they had hosted a concert that featured five performers from Sri Lanka. “It’s a lot of work,” Sachini says.

“I have to look for a location and take care of the artists who come to Italy… do the tickets, make the posters, do publicity… but then once you are done with the work and
the concert is actually through… It’s a strange feeling. I’m so happy whenever it happens.’”

Sachini was just recently granted Italian citizenship, but it was no easy process. When her parents divorced shortly after her birth, her mother removed her from her passport (children are not given their own passport until they are eighteen). However, Sachini and her father did not realize that. As a result, she had no proof of residency. This made her an irregular immigrant, not an immigrant born in Italy with continuous residency and at least some education in Italy. Sachini found all of this out when she turned eighteen and wanted to apply for citizenship. She had to wait until 2009 to apply and then had to wait three years for the lengthy procedure only to be denied during the last stage because of her father’s income. In 2013, she gave up pursuing citizenship. When she received a letter in March 2015 saying that her citizenship had been granted, she immediately showed it to her lawyer who thought it was a joke. It was not a joke, but it is still a mystery. Now she is in the process of applying for dual citizenship in Sri Lanka. She says the most important thing about her Italian passport is that she can now move freely around Europe—to live, to study, to vacation.

Sachini is grateful for her experience attending an international school in Italy. She is bothered by the fact that one of her cousins can speak only Italian, no English, no Sinhalese. And says that if her father had sent her to Italian school and spoken only Italian with her, she would have ended up the same. “Actually I think my dad was right to send me to international school just because learning English did help me a lot,” she says. She feels that her opportunities would have been limited if her father had not had his own ideas about her education and followed them out. She is happy and busy, working and living in Rome, but has been checking out some European universities, especially Swedish universities, and still hopes to pursue further
education someday now that those doors have been opened for her as an Italian citizen. In the meantime, she lives on her own in Rome and recently began dating an Italian man. Sachini is happy and fulfilled both with her job and her Sri Lankan cultural activities.

**Rashmi.** Rashmi was born in Rome, Italy, in 1996 to a Sri Lankan Catholic family and is the youngest in her family. Her father came to Italy about thirty years ago, and her mother joined him after they got married. A couple of years later, Rashmi’s only brother was born. He is ten years older than her and still lives in Italy with his wife and child. Rashmi is not sure exactly why her parents came to Italy. “That’s a good question… I haven’t asked that question of them,” she laughs. “I think maybe it was difficult for them to earn money in Sri Lanka.” Rashmi does know that after she was born, her parents planned to return to Sri Lanka and settle there. She and her mother did return for one year during which Rashmi completed a year of nursery school (preschool) in an international Sri Lankan school. “Luckily, they thought again to return to Italy,” she says. Her parents were both able to find jobs in Italy: her father as a receptionist, her mother as an in-home childcare provider. With the income from these jobs, they have been able to send money back to assist Rashmi’s grandmother in Sri Lanka and continue to do so even now.

Upon returning to Italy with her mother, Rashmi started kindergarten at ICA in September 2002. Her parents wanted to send her to an international school because they were thinking of her future opportunities. Even if she had grown up in Sri Lanka, Rashmi feels that she would have attended an international school. Her parents learned of ICA from other Sri Lankans, parents of Rashmi’s friends. “I think that the International Christian Academy was the first international school in Rome that my parents knew,” Rashmi says. Although she was familiar with English from the year she spent at the international nursery school in Sri Lanka, she
definitely was not fluent. Italian and Sinhalese were mostly spoken in the home. ICA, however, was conducted completely in English and required passing the SAT to graduate. The teachers at ICA were from all over the world: the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Germany, to name a few of the countries. Rashmi says that the teachers were very nice and that she grew up like a family with her classmates and teachers. She found it very easy to study there and stayed until her graduation in 2014.

For Rashmi, the fact that ICA was not recognized by Italian universities was never an issue. She never had any intention of completing her higher education in Italy. When I asked her if she had applied to any Italian universities, she told me no. When I asked her if she had ever had any interest in studying at an Italian university, she laughed and told me no. Her plan was always to attend an international school, graduate, and pursue her education overseas. There was no interest in returning to Sri Lanka for higher education, either.

Instead, as soon as she graduated, Rashmi began planning to move to England to pursue higher education. She is currently attending Barnfield College in Luton, just outside of London. Rashmi says that it was not difficult to gain entrance to an English school. She took a numeracy and literacy test and passed with a score that allowed for her admittance. She is currently doing an access course for health and social care so that she can enter university next year to study to be a pediatric nurse. She has applied to five universities in England and is just waiting for her acceptance letters so that she can make a decision on where to attend. Rashmi says that her parents had bigger goals for her. “They always wanted me to be a doctor,” she laughs. “But me personally, I felt like… I want to be a child nurse first. And then, if I can or if I want, I can study more.” Even though it might not have been their original plan for her, Rashmi’s parents
supported and encouraged her to pursue her dream of pediatric nursing, even when that meant moving away from them.

Rashmi lived with her cousins in London at first, so she was not completely on her own. However, it was still a huge adjustment for her to move overseas and out on her own for the first time. Although she was excited to move to a country that she is not familiar with, it was a challenge because she has never lived without her parents before. “I have to do everything by myself… not like before,” she laughs. “I need to study. I need to work.” Rashmi is helping to support herself by working as a caregiver for the elderly which she says she enjoys. She recently moved into her own place and is completely on her own. She has been in London for over a year now.

When Rashmi talks about growing up as a Sri Lankan in Italy, she acknowledges that it was sometimes difficult:

Because Italian and Sri Lankan culture is totally different… sometimes you feel you are not part of that world. My parents follows and believes the Sri Lankan values and culture, so we had to follow them. However, at the end of the day we are Sri Lankans, so we cannot change our originality.

And then she talks about her rich connection to the Sri Lankan community. She was involved in Sri Lankan cultural dancing lessons and music classes from the time she was six until she was twelve or thirteen years old. Her family always got together with other Sri Lankans every Saturday or Sunday, as well. Rashmi liked that they met up with other Sri Lankans almost every day. She says, “Even if we are in a different country or out of our homeland, when we come together, we feel like we are back in our home. It is nice.” Rashmi’s family is Sri Lankan Catholic, and her parents raised her with conservative Sri Lankan values.
When asked about cultural differences, Rashmi talked about the huge differences between the Italian and Sri Lankan ways of life, but does not seem terribly impacted by those differences. She was raised in a Christian family, and attended a Christian school. She was taught the same moral values in both places and was secure in that continuity. So, although she talks about the more liberal Italian culture, it is in terms of observances, not experiences. For instance, she tells me, “In Sri Lanka, you can’t have babies before you get married, but in Italy, that’s fine. It’s a normal thing for them.” Perhaps closer to home, she likes that it is fine to go around with your boyfriend or with friends late at night without Italian parents making a fuss while with Sri Lankan parents, that is not allowed. When asked if that frustrated her, she said, “Honest to say, yeah. It bothered me a bit… I can say that Sri Lankans are protective.” Her brother was especially protective. Rashmi does not think that she really had more freedom in Italy than she would have had in Sri Lanka. “I didn’t have that freedom because I’ve got parents and my brother,” she laughs. She also mentions the differences in weather between Sri Lanka (always hot) and Italy (four seasons), and the different people groups in Sri Lanka, that they have “not just Sri Lankans,” but Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims, as well.

Rashmi admires the open-mindedness of Italians in some ways, although she finds them a bit rude when it comes to their acceptance of other cultures. In her words, “Italians are a bit rude because they don’t really like to have Asians or black people in their country.” However, Rashmi says that she has not personally experienced racism that she can remember. She also says that she really did not have Italian friends. Most of her friends were Sri Lankan or international.

Rashmi is an Italian citizen, but is the only member of her family to hold citizenship. She says that it was a simple process for her. She was born in Italy and attended school in Italy and lived here for eighteen years. When she turned eighteen, she applied and was interviewed, and
was quickly issued a passport. She did have to pursue it on her own as Italy no longer automatically sends out a letter to immigrant children when they turn eighteen if they were born in Italy. Currently, her family members are all on permesso di soggiorno, a visa that must be renewed every couple of years. Her father has applied for citizenship, but is still waiting. Even though he was born in Italy, Rashmi’s brother was unable to get citizenship because he attended school in Sri Lanka. Rashmi attributes this to the fact that her parents always thought of going back to Sri Lanka. She says, “But at last… they are still in Italy.”

Rashmi is sweet and a little shy, but understands how to handle living in a third culture now that she is on her own in England. She finds strength in her upbringing and ends the conversation with these words:

It’s challenging… You see different kinds of people and different cultures, and it’s sometimes difficult to adjust with the environment or with people, but you need to go on. I believe, even if you live in a different country… out of Sri Lanka or out of Italy… even if you live alone or with your family, you need to be yourself and remember what your parents taught you.

She recently returned to Italy for her school holidays but says that she does not think that she will return there to try to work. Even if she wanted to, she thinks that there are fewer career paths and opportunities. “And,” she finishes, “I am hoping to go to Australia.”

**Gayani.** Gayani was born in Rome, Italy, in 1996 to a Buddhist family and is the oldest of three children. Her father, just nineteen at the time, came to join his brothers in Italy around thirty years ago. He came both for a job and to avoid the war in Sri Lanka. Her parents had known each other since they were children. When they decided to marry four or five years later her mother moved to Italy as well. After several miscarriages, Gayani arrived, shortly followed
by a brother. Her youngest brother was born when Gayani was six, and she still remembers it as one of the happiest moments of her life. Although they had family in Italy and were close with the Sri Lankan community there, as well, Gayani’s parents had a large group of friends. Her father played cricket for a well-known club, Rome Cricket Club Cappanelle, even traveling to England and Thailand to play in tournaments. Gayani says, “Half-Italian, half-Irish, you know… lots of friends he had.” These friends provided support and friendship for her family, even assisting with finding a location and cooking food for her parents wedding celebration in Italy. Even though her parents liked living in Italy, her father always wanted to return to Sri Lanka to live. For Gayani and her brothers, however, Italy was home. Gayani says that when they were small they “didn’t even like to eat our cultural food, Singhalese food. We would always like pasta and Italian food.” She says that they convinced her parents to stay in Italy so that they could stay in their school and with their friends. “We like Sri Lanka for vacation, for summer holidays, to visit relatives… but never to live there,” she says.

At first, both parents worked as couriers for separate companies, but then her father lost his job in 2012. In 2014, her mother took a position as a housekeeper for a French family in Rome, and Gayani’s father took over her mother’s courier job. He has since picked up a second job as a delivery man for a factory. Italy’s economic crisis has caused financial difficulty for the family, starting as early as 2004. Her parents, who still send money back to her maternal grandmother in Sri Lanka, do not have any savings to speak of and have had to live paycheck to paycheck in recent years. Gayani says, “We struggled to pay some tuition fees, etc., but still my parents coped… because, obviously, the school helped me a lot and was understanding of our financial situation.”
Gayani is speaking of fees incurred by her attendance at ICA. However, Gayani completed her first year at an Italian public school overseen by Catholic nuns. She said that it was quite strict, but really nice. She was the only immigrant child, the only Asian girl, and she found the morning prayers and the rosary interesting. Some of her parents’ Sri Lankan friends told them that they were planning to send their daughter to ICA the next year, and they decided to send Gayani as well. When she switched to ICA, she joined a very diverse English-speaking school with students from several countries and teachers of different nationalities. Gayani said that sometimes her other friends or Italians that she met would ask why her parents put her into an international school. They did not understand why they would pay for private school fees rather than sending her for free to an Italian school. But Gayani’s parents wanted more for their daughter than the life they lived. Although they did not have specific career goals for her, it was important to them that she be educated in English so that she could have the opportunity to move on to whichever country she would like for her higher education. They urged her to do her best saying, “‘Please study hard so that you won’t do the jobs that we are doing. Study hard… to have a good future. You can do anything. Just study a career that you would really like.’”

Gayani did not speak English when she started at ICA, so her first couple of years were rough. She was actually held back to kindergarten her first year. With extra tutoring and summer school, she was able to pass her evaluation and be placed directly into second grade for the following year, skipping first grade completely. “It was quite hard to cope with the studies for me,” she says, “and I got really bad grades. I was small, and I was even too lazy. But it quite discouraged me.” She felt so much pressure and embarrassment that her mom decided to ask an older Sri Lankan student at the school to tutor her and her brother who was now also attending ICA. By the end of her fourth grade year, Gayani was taking top honors in her class. She said,
“Later on, I really began to become competitive. I really wanted to get the first place… but at least come to an honor so that I would satisfy myself and my parents. I wanted to show them I am really studying hard.”

Gayani had rich cross-cultural experiences during her time at ICA. She met Americans who came to visit the school. She did a pen pal exchange with American students. And she continued to learn about Christianity which she adopted for herself instead of her family’s Buddhist traditions. Her classmates were immigrant children, but most of them were born in Italy like her. They would talk in Italian in school, even though they were supposed to only use English. She was also extremely busy with extracurricular activities, participating in Sri Lankan cultural dance, swimming, and even playing on a girls’ cricket team until family finances dictated otherwise.

Her closest friends were the Sri Lankan girls in her grade. Their parents all knew each other, and the girls would meet outside of school for Christmas or New Year’s or just to hang out. But it had its pros and cons. Gayani was always curious about what it would like to attend an Italian school. She would compare stories with her other friends… Italian school versus international school. She even though she might want to attend Italian school, but by that time she was afraid that she would not be able to do the work because she did not know Italian grammar. Instead, she stayed at ICA until she graduated in 2014 and says that ICA was and remains like a family for her. She keeps up with her teachers and her principal, updating them on the status of her studies. She completed the SAT and also the British Council IELTS test and also started working towards her citizenship just three days after she turned eighteen. “I was worried because I wanted to go to Australia at that time, so that’s why I was quickly rushing to get my citizenship,” Gayani confesses.
Gayani and her friends from ICA had all dreamed of moving to Australia to study, but instead, they separated. “Some stayed in Italy. Two of us, we came to the U.K. One went to Australia. So it’s really hard. We didn’t expect that,” she says. Gayani’s parents, still struggling financially with the loss of her father’s job and the Italian recession, were unable to send their daughter to Australia. Instead, her mom suggested that she might like to try going to England for one year. Gayani was not able to find a college in London proper that would accept her because she had not taken the British system General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) certificate in math and English. But she was able to enroll in Barnfield College in Luton to complete those courses while also taking an access course for health and social care so that she can enter university next year to study to be a nurse. The access course, in particular is really helpful to her. Gayani says, “I think in the whole of Rome, my school was the cheapest in tuition fees. So, obviously, we didn’t have much of facilities, a lab, everything… I’m currently now studying this access course, health studies, which helps me to get into nursing in university.” And maybe someday, she will pursue becoming a pediatrician. But for now, she is happy to pursue nursing.

Gayani is really happy with her decision to move to England. She says, “I find that, for now, the U.K. is giving me lots of opportunity to pursue my education which I couldn’t do back in Italy.” She never wanted to attend an Italian university, and she also knew that her credentials from ICA were not accepted by the Italian higher education system. There is one international school in Rome that she could have tried to attend, but her SAT score was not quite high enough. It was extremely expensive, too… around nine thousand euros per year. Instead, as an independent student in England, she was able to apply for student finance (financial aid) which covers both her tuition and room and board. She says, “Obviously, I think now that I made the
right choice coming to the U.K. because even if I needed to pay a little amount like one thousand or nine hundred euros, I still couldn’t afford it because I am not an only child… we are three.” Gayani works on the weekends and rents a room with a nice Pakistani family in Luton. “I’m happy,” she says, “because I don’t need to bother my parents to send me money here. I can cope myself.”

When Gayani thinks about growing up as a Sri Lankan in Italy, she speaks in positives. Although she talks about the differences between the Italian and Sri Lankan cultures, she seems to have been able to navigate that difference well. She and her family had a good connection with the Sri Lankan community. They attended the Buddhist temple every week, and Gayani had Sri Lankan friends outside of ICA. But they were also richly connected to Italians. Gayani says:

I knew lots of Italian neighbors. They were really good, helping. We had a really good lady, our landlord, when my second brother was born, and she really helped look after me and my brother when my mom was in hospital. She was like a second mom to me.

She tells me that her Italian neighbors loved Sri Lankan food:

They would smell our spices, our curry, when my mom used to cook. And one lady used to come and knock on our door… ‘Can I please have some of your spices? Give me some!’ So my mom used to give fish balls and cutlets, rice, and the woman really enjoyed it. We would always exchange food. They would make some Italian dish, and we would give our Sri Lankan food.

Gayani’s family also had warm relationships with her father’s colleagues:

They would invite us over to their restaurant or to their place. Or we would go there because they had houses near the lake or the sea. So we had a good time because of these
kind of connections with some people. They really helped my family. They were in contact like real friends, obviously.

Gayani loved the Italian way of communication. She says, “Italians are really open. They tell you what they want in that moment… They are always direct, open. It’s a good thing!” She appreciated the freedom to be herself, to talk to adults and not be thought poorly of. Even the Italian style of greeting with cheek kisses on first the right, then the left, was more relaxed. “In Sri Lanka,” she says, “you just greet each other facing each other. And it’s really hard to open up… even with your uncle.” She found Sri Lanka stricter and more formal and a little close-minded while Italy was more carefree.

She liked living in Italy. She loves the food, the weather, the lifestyle. Since she has come to England she has come to appreciate that even more. Where Italy is warm and bright, England is cold and rainy and crowded. She even finds the houses depressing. She says, “They are all big houses, but they kinda look moody. When I see them, I feel just sad because it’s just cold, dark, and everything. Whereas in Italy it’s always light, even if it rains… there is the sun.” She says that you are free in Italy. If you have spare time, you can travel to the next city to see something. But in England, she feels that people are stuck, that they cannot get holidays. Gayani appreciates and misses that more laid back atmosphere… and the food. She says, “I really miss it… I don’t like English food because it’s all kind of frozen or… I don’t know. Maybe I’m too used to Italian food, but I really love Italian food, and I really miss it.”

Of course, Italy is not perfect. Although Gayani found most Italians to be wonderful people, she says that not all of them were that way. Sometimes when she went out with friends or was on the Metro, she could see people looking at her strangely or hear them say rude things just because she and her friends had dark skin. She would cope by ignoring them, knowing that she
would not see them again. If an occasional conversation started up, perhaps an Italian woman being hard on them, it usually dissipated once it became clear that she had been born in Italy and spoke fluent Italian, as well as two other languages. The thing that was hardest for Gayani to take was hearing Italians talk about Sri Lankans (and other immigrants) coming to their country to steal jobs. She says, “It feels sad to hear that when you know that your parents aren’t working for themselves, but to earn a future for us, for their own children.” But she acknowledges that it is not just Italy. “Nowadays it’s a little bit racist, but I think it’s all over the world. It’s not just Italy.”

The main problem that Gayani sees with Italy is that it is difficult to find employment. She has friends who are still looking for jobs after graduating from Italian universities. “I would recommend to some other person to live in Italy if it’s good financially, if you can easily find a job,” she says. “But if not, it’s really bad. You have a really hard life if you don’t have a stable job, especially a firm one.”

Gayani is an Italian citizen, as is her eighteen year old brother. She was a little worried that attending an international school might cause problems with her paperwork, but, because she met the residency requirement, she was granted citizenship within a month with no issues. Once she became a citizen her parents were able to apply for permanent residency or carta di soggiorno. Until that time, they had been on permesso di soggiorno, a visa that has to be renewed for each family member every two years at a cost of two hundred euros per person.

Gayani says that her life had its share of difficulties, including issues with her father, but she appreciates the effort that her parents made to give her and her brothers a better future. She knows that even though life might not have turned out the way they planned, they sacrificed to make sure that their children could have more. She values the fact that she is multilingual,
crediting that to her success working in England. She feels that she better understands the value of family now that she is on her own, and is especially grateful to her mother for encouraging her to go to England. Gayani does not seem discouraged by the struggles she has faced but says that they have made her the independent person that she is today. She still hopes to travel to Australia one day and try out living there. But she also still loves Italy. Gayani says, “I would never leave forever Italy. I think one day I will go back there after having the right career for me.”

**Discussion of Themes from the Research**

The purpose of this multiple case study is to explore the lived experiences of Sri Lankan women who grew up in Italy and to examine how that lived experience impacted their educational choices. The data compiled from the participants’ individual interviews and follow-up conversations revealed that their life courses were impacted from a variety of interconnecting sources. Grouping those sources into specific areas was challenging as interconnections abound. It is important to note that categories in qualitative research may be untidy as various elements may belong in more than one category to some degree or another (Saldaña, 2009). There are two points of impact on the educational pathway to be considered: decisions on primary and/or secondary education while living in Italy and decisions on higher education after graduation. There are also five major categories or sources of impact that axial coding of the themes revealed:

1. The impact of the family unit;
2. The impact of primary and secondary schooling;
3. The impact of being Sri Lankan;
4. The impact of the Italian experience; and
5. The impact of the self.
Table 4 presents the detailed themes situated within these five major categories. It also shows how the broad categories taken from my initial holistic coding exercise can be organized within these five categories as well as how they relate to the educational points of impact. By presenting these themes and their influence both within and across the multiple case studies included in this research project, I hope to provide a glimpse of how and why these five women made the decisions they did in the pursuit of higher education.

Table 4

*Relationship between Axial Coding and Holistic Coding Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Axial Coding Category</th>
<th>Holistic Coding Category(-ies)</th>
<th>Point(s) of Educational Impact</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Looking for a Better Future Acculturation Factors</td>
<td>Impact of Family Unit</td>
<td>Family Goals/Support Cultural Differences</td>
<td>Primary/Secondary Ed Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools for a Better Future Multicultural Support System</td>
<td>Impact of Primary and Secondary Schooling</td>
<td>Educational Paths/Experiences/Challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan Culture Is Restrictive Sri Lankan Culture Feels Like Home Navigating between Two Cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independence and the Desire for Adventure Moving Towards a Better Future Staying Connected</td>
<td>Impact of the Self</td>
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<td>Higher Education</td>
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**Looking for a better future.** For each of the women in this study, their family played an integral role in their lives. Because of their family, they came to or were born in Italy, returned home to Sri Lanka, studied, learned, and experienced life in a specific way. In spite of their
common cultural heritage, life looked very different for each of them. Although their families immigrated to Italy for reasons as varying as escaping the war in Sri Lanka to finding available jobs to following family or love, there was a common theme that ran through each interview. Each woman’s family was looking for a better future for their children. Devos (2014) and Salamone (2015) discuss that immigrants often travel overseas to look for employment in hopes of better pay and opportunities that allow them to support their immediate families and send remittances back to those still in their country of origin. Yeoh et al. (2005) point out that a secondary, or perhaps even primary, goal of immigration may be a strategic plan to educate their children as a means to “securing a better future” for them. This was certainly the case with my participants. Hiruni summarized her parents’ reasons for immigrating:

I think the main reason they came to Italy… was to have a better future because those time (I think the 1980’s) there was the war between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers. And there was a lot of, you know, conflicts and things like that. And I reckon that the reason they came to Italy first, obviously, economically-wise, financially-wise, it was a good country to come in because there was opportunities. And secondly I think it was just to, to have a better life than what they used to have in Sri Lanka. Both my parents just finished high school. They never went to university or had any degrees or anything. And I think what they expected for us is, you know… they wanted us to get an education that they never had or never had the opportunity to continue.

Labor migration does not guarantee a better job according to Schattle (2012) but is motivated by the hope of finding a better paying job and may mean taking on undesirable or low paying jobs in the immigrants’ new countries. Gayani’s parents sacrificed to make a better life
for their children. She talked about her parents putting their children’s futures above their own current desire for success:

But their life went not the way maybe they wanted to…And they chose to give us a better future by coming to Italy and then working hard, very hard, to earn money. Sending us to private school, to let us have a good future, I mean good career. So that one day we won’t be like them.

As part of a plan for a better future, it was important to each of these families that their daughters receive an international education. They did not want their daughters’ futures to be limited to Italy, so they chose to send them to an English-speaking international school. While Nayani’s parents were more concerned that she learn English because it is the second language in Sri Lanka, most often, English is linked to future and perhaps international opportunities.

Rashmi says:

I think that the International Christian Academy was the first international school that my parents knew. They thought of sending me to an International school because it will be good for my future, so I can come… like now, I’m in England. So they thought of my future.

Sachini says that her father had similar reasons for his choice:

He always wanted me to join some international school, thinking also in future… going to an Italian school, it will only teach me Italian and very little English. My dad always wanted me to move to some other country, or at least I would learn some bit of English, not Italian. Because, after all, if I had gone to Italian school, I can’t go to some other country because otherwise I have to do English apart, not in school.
**Acculturation factors.** As the first point of impact on educational pathways of the women in my study was their parents’ choice to enroll them in an international school rather than the Italian public school system, I looked to the literature and to their interviews for a deeper understanding. Minello & Barban’s (2012) detailed overview of the free Italian public education system presents data showing that immigrant students generally perform at lower academic levels than Italian students and that they are twice as likely as the entire student population to move directly into a vocation rather than pursuing higher education. Schools are cultural organizations which facilitate structural or goal-driven assimilation according to Bommes (2005). Immigrant students have opportunity to integrate as they begin to take part and learn the expected behaviors of students within the school system. However, Gans (2007) points out that immigrants may resist integration into the dominant culture in some cases because such resistance positions them more effectively for upward movement. Bommes (2005) also points out that assimilation in the traditional sense may no longer make sense for immigrants in a world where they may be participating in two or more locations.

The parents in my study may have been concerned with their daughters’ future educational opportunities abroad, but they were also extremely concerned about the impact that attending Italian schools would have on their daughters. Sachini’s father had reasons other than educational opportunity for sending her to international school. She says:

> My dad was looking for a school for me since I moved from Sri Lanka. My dad never wanted me to join to an Italian school because he always had this bad thought, thinking that Italian schools, they don’t have enviable behaviors and all… they are not so good, you know. So he always wanted me to join some international school…
This concern about Italian behaviors was also expressed across cases, especially with the three older participants. While some parents were more lenient than others, even the most relaxed were concerned with their daughters being influenced by Italian “behaviors.” Nayani’s parents chose to send her to an international school so that she would not be exposed to supposed bad behavior of Italian young people who were thought to smoke, do drugs, and party. She said, “I always stayed at home. Sometimes, like once a month, I went out. I was always with my parents.” She sometimes got angry with her parents because they were so strict with her. She said:

I did go to the school and come back to home. That’s it. I never went out… I went out with friends, but not the wrong way… It was a little bit hard…. If I go out with my friends like on Saturday or Sunday, my parents said, “You have to come home at 6:00pm.”

Because they had this thing… they were afraid that I would do the wrong things. I’m not saying that I had wrong friends, but they were afraid of that because they had the mentality of Sri Lankans.

It really bothered Rashmi that her parents and brother were so overprotective. She said, “For Italians, it’s fine if you go around with your boyfriend or with friends late at night. And their parents are fine. But in Sri Lanka, you can’t do that. You can’t hang out late at night or go around with your boyfriend.” Although she lived in a western country, she did not really feel that she experienced some of the freedom that she could have. She said, “I didn’t have that freedom because I’ve got parents. (laughs) And my brother. (laughs)”

Hiruni said, “I would have done things that I wanted to do… not bad things, but, you know… dress in a proper way, I mean dress in a way that you wanted, or hang out with people
that for their criteria were wrong but for my criteria were right.” She and her siblings sometimes struggled with their parents at times as well.

There was a lot of family conflicts going on then because, obviously, our parents had a different mentality compared to what we had and… For example, going out was not the easiest thing. We have to convince our parents a lot. We couldn’t just turn around and say, “Oh, I’m going out tonight” or something like that. We have to give them a pre-warning, about when, where, who, and the whole what, the whole story… But, I’m gonna have to say, you know, compared to other Sri Lankan parents, my parents were a little bit more open, you know, than others, but they still had that strong Sri Lankan culture that was a big weight on us.

This concern about their children learning behavior from Italians caused parents to set up boundaries that automatically separated their daughters from the Italian culture in many instances and to deny them a level of freedom and trust that made them feel that their Sri Lankan parents were too restrictive. According to Berry (2010) and Ward’s (2008) definitions of acculturation, this would indicate a degree of separation in the way that Sri Lankan parents encouraged their daughters to maintain their cultural integrity and values rather than fully participating in Italian society.

**Tools for a better future.** All of the women from my study ended up attending the same international school in Rome, International Christian Academy (ICA), although they took varied paths to get there. ICA was an international school with an American curriculum and English as the language of instruction and which catered to children of immigrants. All classes were in English, and students were expected to always speak English in school.
At ICA, they were also exposed to a variety of cross-cultural experiences. Although the long-term staff were mostly Filipinos, teachers rotated in and out each year from many countries including the U.S., Singapore, Germany, Sri Lanka, England, and Italy. Gayani remembers having American visitors and doing a pen pal exchange. “It was so much fun knowing how were students in America living, and plus, they knew how we were doing, our life, our hobbies, you know… everything,” she says. The international connections allowed them to build personal relationships around the world and further separated them from the traditional Italian experience.

Although ICA’s American diploma is not recognized by Italian universities, it is recognized by American universities in Italy as well as schools overseas in English speaking countries such as the U.S., England, Australia, and Sri Lanka. Four of the five participants graduated from ICA and went on to pursue higher education outside of Italy.

**Multicultural support system.** Students at ICA were primarily from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Africa, but they were all brought together by the common bond of being children of immigrants. Hiruni says, “We’re all children of immigrants. We understood each other. You know, we came to this school, you know, to learn English because our parents wanted us to speak English for a better future for us.” The students became family for each other, assisting each other with homework, coaching each other in English, and supporting each other through life’s experiences. Sachini moved back to Rome after living in Sri Lanka from the time she was six months old until she was eleven. She talks about the support that she found at ICA:

> [Learning two new languages at once] was really hard. The only way it was easy for me was that I had these friends which I got to know from ICA. They really helped me. Since they were friendly… the teachers and the students from ICA.
The teachers at ICA did not play favorites. They encouraged community and wanted each student to participate and feel a part. Because of this, the students found warmth and inclusion. The school had a small number of students which resulted in a certain intimacy that every participant remarked upon. Rashmi said, “The teachers were very nice. We were like a family as we grew up. And the classmates were friendly. Yeah… I found it easy to study in an international school in Italy.” Gayani agreed, noting that the closeness felt at ICA made up for the school’s lack of facilities:

I think in the whole Rome, my school was the cheapest in pay tuition fees, my school. So, obviously, we didn’t have much of a facilities, lab or everything. But it was pretty good. It was still good. It was like a family for me, ICA. It is a family until now.

And Nayani, who joined ICA at age twelve, echoes the sentiment saying:

ICA is another part of my life that it was really nice…. Really, really nice. The school and the teachers are like parents. They helped a lot. They care about the kids like their kids. Like [the principal], for example… We’re all like her kids. She was a nice principal, and ICA is like a family. Not a normal family… It’s a Christian family. I am happy to have them. And I still love them… especially the teachers. (laughs) It’s a school. And actually, it’s… it’s like a home. We do everything… like, we joke, we play, we do everything, we study. It’s like… it’s a home. It’s a second home.

The shared identity of the students at ICA went beyond their status as outsiders or children of immigrants. They also shared the way in which they belonged to the Italian culture as second generation immigrants.

Gayani remembers getting in trouble because she and her classmates would not stop speaking Italian.
I didn’t have lots of Italian friends because, obviously, I went to this international school ICA at the age of six. From then on I had only American, or Nigerian, Filipinos, or Bangledeshi… from all different countries, but there were no Italian students. But most of the students in my school were born in Italy like me. I didn’t forget Italian because we all even kept talking in Italian in school. And our teachers were always shouting all around, “Speak in English! Speak in English! You won’t ever learn to speak in English if you will keep up speaking in Italian!

Hiruni first attended an Italian primary school, then moved to Sri Lanka for two years to learn English. She returned to Rome when she was ten years old and began attending ICA in grade five. Although she does not have many memories of her time in the Italian school, she speaks eloquently of the difference between her time in Sri Lankan schools and her time at ICA:

I actually didn’t like [the Sri Lankan] school system because there was a lot of competition. And… honestly, I did not really have a good experience in Sri Lanka because… for everyone, I was the kid that came from Italy. They were just my friends because they knew that… my parents would send me anything and I would give it to them. I remember one occasion, I had a class teacher that said that her son was a musician, and she asked me if I could tell my mom to buy her a guitar for his son…In Sri Lanka, you would go to school, and the teacher would explain to you the hardest mathematical… calculation thing. And then he would turn around and say, “Oh, if you want to have the shorter version, come to my tuition classes.” So they would get extra money out of it.

She felt isolated and thought that the teachers were uncaring and materialistic. ICA was a completely different environment that Hiruni did not know existed until she came back to Rome.
Once I came back to Italy and attended ICA, it was just a different environment. I mean, I think the difference of ICA was the fact that you had friends… I mean, you were on the same level with young students. There was not… um, there was no special favorite. The teacher never had any specials or anything like that. And you could see that the teachers would really… um, wanted to help you. They did it because they really actually cared for you and not because, you know, they were just put there to teach you… I mean, even if you didn’t understand, they would explain to you twenty times… and until you didn’t get in your head, you wouldn’t go further. And I think that’s what, you know, was the good thing of the school… that they would know where was your weaknesses, and they would target that and help you to get them, I mean, to make them stronger and not to leave you there holding onto your own troubles… They cared for you. And I think that is what was a big thing.

Sri Lankan culture is restrictive. The perspectives of the participants vary significantly when it comes to their connection to the Sri Lankan community in Rome and/or the impact that Sri Lankan culture has on their lives, but this does not necessarily correlate to the amount of time spent in Sri Lanka prior to living life in Italy. All but one of the women from the study spent significant time in Sri Lanka as children before coming or returning permanently to Rome, and all of them have returned periodically for vacations and family visits. They agree across the board that Sri Lankan culture is more conservative than Italian culture, that it is more restrictive and less free. Brown (2011; 2014) presents the Sri Lankan opinion that Italy was not an appropriate place to get a good moral upbringing but that it was a liberal place full of social evils. He also explains that in Italy, away from the more restrictive Sri Lankan culture, there was opportunity for Sri Lankan transnationals to explore more modern ideas and new identities, to
express themselves more freely without judgment or family pressure. Brown (2014) says that existence in Italy followed a much simpler set of rules than those that existed in Sri Lanka. In Sachini’s opinion, the two cultures are exact opposites:

Living in Italy… this country has so much freedom, not like in Sri Lanka. Because in Sri Lanka, the culture is really the opposite of this, especially for girls. In Sri Lanka, there are sayings like a girl can’t go out of the house after 6:30pm. They have this… it’s not rules, but then people do try to look at you like in a bad way if you are just going out, or for dinner out. In [Italy] of course, you know that’s something really simple.

Where Italian culture is carefree, Sri Lankan culture is more controlled. Where Italian culture is more affectionate, Sri Lankan culture is more reserved. Where Italian culture is open-minded, Sri Lankan culture is close-minded. Morality is different. Relationships are different, even within families. There are different rules for dressing and going out. And there is a way of thinking that the three older participants spoke of as the “Sri Lankan mentality.” Hiruni, born and raised in Italy, defined the Sri Lankan mentality this way:

The woman stays home, takes care of the children, cooks, cleans, you know… and the men brings the money home and things like that… The Sri Lankan culture always thought that the man was superior than the woman, and whatever the men said, the women had to abide by it… Once you turn 18 in Sri Lanka, a girl is supposed to try to find someone to marry… You have to get married is between… 20 to 26, the maximum 28. The moment you pass the 28, means you find a husband… And, you know, even if there was family conflicts in the house, you would portray to the whole world that you were a happy family… I think mentality-wise Sri Lankans, back in the day, were a little bit behind. Now… they are getting back with time.
Gunawardena (2003) confirms that Sri Lankan women are generally expected to follow traditional paths and to fulfill traditional roles of kinship, marriage, family, and femininity. Sachini, who returned to Italy to live when she was eleven, thinks of rules and regulations when she thinks of that mentality:

If I ever grew up in Sri Lanka, I think I would have less freedom. Even right now if I ever go Sri Lanka for vacation, I do have limits. I mean, there are deadlines. I mean, before 6:30-7:00, I have to really come home because if not, my granny would start calling me 10-20 times, asking me where I am. And the way you have to dress up in Sri Lanka is different. You can’t dress up in short things… people would start staring at you. It’s because of the culture, actually. It’s their culture. They have grown up like that, different mentality. If I ever grew up in Sri Lanka…with all these strict rules and all this way of dressing up, I would be a totally different person… not like in [Italy].

Although all of the women expressed frustration with their parents’ adherence to more restrictive Sri Lankan cultural norms, not all of them have completely rejected those norms themselves. From Nayani’s perspective, living in Italy since she was twelve, the Sri Lankan mentality impacted her parents trust in her. However, in retrospect, she does not see that as completely off base:

They had this thing… they were afraid that I would do the wrong things. I’m not telling that I had wrong friends, but they were afraid of that because they had the mentality of Sri Lankans. It was a little bit hard with that… When I think about that now… it was a better thing. I’m sure that I will do the same thing with my daughter because I’m afraid of the people that are outside. I don’t know what they will do. I don’t know how they’ll
react with my kids. I think that same thing that my parents did when I was young. Parents had a different mentality, a Sri Lankan mentality.

The interesting thing is that even though she was frustrated and angry with her parents, she plans to take on that same overprotective, distrustful “mentality” with her own daughter.

**Sri Lankan culture feels like home.** The two younger women had a different experience with the Sri Lankan community in Rome than the older girls as it seems to have grown, or at least grown more connected, in the intervening years. Rashmi and Gayani were involved in a Sri Lankan cultural dance group, and Rashmi went to a Sri Lankan music class as well. Their best friends were Sri Lankan and all of their parents knew each other. Their families took part in weekly Sri Lankan gatherings. Even with all of that in common, the two of them have different responses when asked about the impact of the Sri Lankan community in their lives. Rashmi’s response: “I think most of the time because we meet every day and, yeah, even if we are in a different country or out of our homeland, but… when we come together, we feel like we are in home… we are back in our home.”

Gayani, on the other hand, talks fondly about the Sri Lankan events and friendships in her life, then launches into a list of all the extracurricular activities she was involved in: cultural dance, Sunday school, swimming, cricket… This leads to more information about her parents and her father’s career playing professional cricket with a Roman cricket club and traveling abroad, his Italian and Irish friends. In another place, she speaks of the warm friendships her family has had with Italians, swapping food and neighborly favors and sharing trips to the lake or the sea. Her connection to the Sri Lankan community, although important, does not define her. It is one of many connections that enrich her life in Italy. This ability to fully participate in society
while maintaining her own culture is an example of integration according to Berry’s (2010) definition.

Navigating between two cultures. For Hiruni and Nayani, it was difficult to balance between the Italian and Sri Lankan cultures at times. Nayani says, “That’s not really easy to grow up the way that I grow up here because my parents think like Sri Lankans, but actually we are in a European country.” While transnational parents often maintain connections to their home culture in an attempt to connect their children to their roots, relatives and home language (Orellana et al., 2001), second generation immigrants are more likely to feel connected to the country where they are growing up and integrating rather than to their homeland (Vathi, 2013). This results in the possibility of multiple and fluid identities created from the different worlds they are a part of (Andall, 2002; Kivisto, 2001). This second generation attitude may include the desire for the anonymity, independence, or freedom available to them in their adopted country (Brown, 2011; Vathi, 2013) and may be assertive in a way that is foreign to their parents or ethnic community but which does not detract from their ethnic otherness within the dominant culture (Andall, 2002). Hiruni felt the weight of trying to live up to Sri Lankan expectations while living in a western country:

Obviously, Sri Lankan culture was so strong in our family and because we were born in a western country, there was always that conflict… We can’t act like Italians when we are with Sri Lankans, and we can’t act like Sri Lankans in front of Italians because otherwise they won’t hang out with us. So we have to balance ourselves and sort of find a balance between our Sri Lankan culture and their customs and the Italian culture that fit us perfectly, well, fits me perfectly because I was born there.

She felt like she could never relax, was always under scrutiny from other Sri Lankans.
We got a large Sri Lankan community in Rome, so you had to be careful of what you do because everybody knew everyone. You had to always be careful of what you do and what you say and the way you behave even when you are in public with your friends because you would have a Sri Lankan behind your back just watching you… I think the fact that we’re Sri Lankan, we were all self-aware… we had to be the good guys. We couldn’t do anything wrong. We had to be the perfect kids because otherwise one wrong thing you did, the whole Sri Lankan community would know it.

Sachini, on the other hand, did not seem to feel that burden, perhaps because her family makeup was distinctly different. Her parents divorced when she was just a baby. Her mother exited the picture, and her father sent her to live with her grandmother in Sri Lanka. This was not in keeping with traditional Sri Lankan cultural expectations and placed a very different kind of pressure on her:

It was kind of hard because my parents lived in Italy, and I used to grow up with my Granny. So it was kind of not easy for me. When they have school meetings and they ask the parents to come for the meeting, and it was my Granny who was to come. People just started looking at me in a different way… just thinking where is your parents? Because… especially in Sri Lanka, they do look in a bad way as if you are growing up without parents or something like that. So I was really happy when I moved back to Rome because at least I was with my [father], and I didn’t have to face anything bad like that when I was in Sri Lanka. Once I was back in Rome, it was OK. I mean everything was fine since I was with my [father].

**Educational challenges.** Living in Italy as Sri Lankan immigrants has presented the women in this study with some specific challenges. One such challenge is a roadblock to higher
education. The second point of impact on the educational pathway of the women in my study is the decision on where and how to pursue higher education. While immigrants in the Italian public school system may be less likely to pursue higher education (Minello & Barban, 2012), those who attend international schools may find it impossible to pursue higher education in Italy. As previously mentioned, ICA’s American diploma is not recognized by Italian universities. This means that a student graduating from ICA is unable to attend an Italian university without first completing Italian secondary school (another five years). While most of the participants had no plan or desire to complete their higher education in Rome, this is a significant roadblock for those students who may decide to stay in Italy. Nayani was unable to leave Italy because of her visa status. However, when she attempted to pursue her higher education there she was thwarted at every turn.

After studies, normally it is better to have the [citizenship] over here. I was not able to get the [citizenship] because of my parents… so because of that, I was not able to move on to another country. I tried to go to another university in Italy. They didn’t accept me because I did the high school in English. They told me, “Just do the five years in Italian school, the high school.” I have to do it in Italian school, in Italian language. They didn’t accept the English diploma… that’s it… They said, “We want Italian diploma to go to university.” Actually, it’s not fair. I tried all of the universities in Rome. They said the same thing. And I tried an English one, John Cabot University… the cost of that, my parents was not able to handle that.

Sachini also looked at Italian universities before deciding to return to Sri Lanka to pursue higher education. She did not speak about whether or not she would have been able to enroll with her ICA credentials because she decided to return to Sri Lanka due to the prohibitive tuition
costs. “The main reason was the cost, actually… The same course I took in Sri Lanka was very much less than [Italy]. For the amount I pay [in Italy] for a semester, in Sri Lanka, I can finish the whole three years.” Fortunately, Sachini’s visa status allowed her to leave Italy to complete her education in Sri Lanka where she studied at two different English language universities.

**Ease of access to citizenship.** The success of the second generation is dependent on a variety of factors, most of which are not within their control. One such factor is government policy (Thomson & Crul, 2007). Italy’s restrictive immigration policies serve as a gate to the closed institution of citizenship (Gans, 1997; 2007) and make it difficult for immigrants to achieve permanent legal status (Calavita, 2005; Marinaro & Walston, 2010). Nayani faced (and still faces) a second barrier to forward progress in the form of bureaucracy and red-tape as she continues to work towards her citizenship. Although she was born in Sri Lanka, she has lived in Italy for fifteen years, five years longer than the residency requirement to apply for citizenship, she is still not a citizen:

To do all the documents, everything should be perfect. Like, every letter should be perfect. Everything should be… the marriage certificate, on the passport… and everything, the letter should be [exactly] the same. And I have a problem with the marriage certificate. I have a mistake with a letter… only for one letter, they reject everything… I have to fix the marriage certificate because I have a different letter from my birth certificate. And it’s a mess. It’s really is a mess. I hate to do the documents, really.

Citizenship in Italy can be complex, and none of the three older women had a seamless experience in working towards citizenship. Being born in Italy does not guarantee that there will be no difficulties in the citizenship process. Children of immigrants born in Italy share their
parents’ immigration status until they turn eighteen and are eligible to request Italian citizenship (Bianchi, 2011; Calavita, 2005). However, their residency in Italy must be established from the time of birth or they may have issues with their citizenship claim eighteen years later (Andall, 2002). Hiruni and Sachini were both born in Italy, but were missing residency when they turned eighteen. Hiruni was missing just three months of residency. Her parents did not realize that she needed to have her residency declared from her date of birth and established it three months later. Because of those three months as an infant when she was not declared a resident of Italy, she was unable to apply for citizenship as most immigrant children who are born in Italy. Instead, she had to go through the alien citizenship application process, in her words, “like other common foreigners.” This takes at minimum three years. She finally got her citizenship at the age of twenty-three.

There were a lot of document issues because usually they ask for a police check. Because I had a Sri Lankan passport back then, they wanted me to have a Sri Lankan police check. But I couldn’t get a Sri Lankan police check because I never lived in Sri Lanka, so I was not registered under them. Even though I stayed three years, for them, I was not considered a citizen of Sri Lanka. And I reckon that’s the issue why I think I got a little sick of the Italian system and the Italian government and I decided to come overseas, as well.

Sachini’s situation was a little different and a little more unexpected:

The thing was… They don’t give a passport for the baby. What they do is they insert the baby into the mother’s passport. So once [my parents] got divorced, actually, my mom has removed me from her passport, and I didn’t know anything about it until I was eighteen… And I realized that all those years I haven’t been in my mom’s passport. So
for Italian government, I wasn’t regular. I can’t prove that I was in Italy all that time. I had to apply showing my dad’s income and all income because that was the only way… I waited for like three years because it takes almost three years to finish the procedure in Rome. And at the last stage of the citizenship, they had sent me a letter saying that they can’t give the citizenship because my dad’s income was not enough. And so, I gave up. In 2015, in this year, month of March, I think… all of a sudden, I get a letter saying I got citizenship, without doing anything. I applied in 2009, and they wrote to me in 2013 saying that I couldn’t have citizenship. After 2 years, they sent me the citizenship letter, saying that I can come and collect it… It’s still a mystery. (laughs)

Rashmi and Gayani had no issues with their citizenship. They were born in Italy, lived there with established residency, applied for citizenship when they turned eighteen, and were granted citizenship without delay, Gayani within one month of her application. This may be linked to the fact that they went through the process ten years later.

**Lack of economic opportunity.** The third challenge facing these women is a lack of economic opportunity. Part of the problem is the shrinking job market for the working class (Salamone, 2015), observable increases in unemployment and crime, and economic failures (Totah, 2002) in Italy. The current recession in Italy has had significant impact on some of the participants’ families. Hiruni’s mother is ill and her father lost his job last year. Her job in Australia has allowed her to help her brother and sister with their higher education (also in Australia) and has also allowed her to support her parents back in Italy. Gayani’s family has been impacted, as well. She feels relieved to be in the U.K., supporting herself independently and going to school at no cost so that she is not a burden to her family.
My father even lost his job at the end of 2012. And we went really down because of Italy’s crisis, also my family financially went down. So, my parents didn’t have any saving money. We lived with the money they earned at that time, at that moment. So, I’m happy because I don’t need to bother my parents to send me money here.

She loves Italy, but has concerns about being able to support herself:

I mean, I have friends who graduated from Italian universities, but they were still looking for jobs. Italy’s a really good country to live in. I would never, like, leave forever Italy. I think one day I will go back there after having the right career for me… I would recommend to some other person to live in Italy if it’s good financially, like you can easily find a job. But if not, it’s really bad. You have a really hard life, if you don’t have a stable job, especially a firm one.

Hiruni’s move to Australia came as a result of frustration with her employment situation in Italy. Immigrants in Italy may find themselves unable to reach the economic status or security that they desire in their new country or may face racial discrimination in spite of finding viable employment (Glick Schiller, et al., 1995). Brown (2014) notes that there are many barriers to upward mobility for Sri Lankans who are seen as good workers but often have little hope for advancement from their place at the bottom of the Italian labor market. While she does not attribute her experience to being Sri Lankan, Hiruni felt the frustration and discouragement of not being promoted as quickly as those with connections. She went to work for TrenItalia directly after high school. She says this about her experience working for an Italian corporation:

Let’s say that there is a lot of corruption in Italy and a lot of underhand things…

Unfortunately now in Italy, you don’t go anywhere unless you’re recommended by someone. And that’s the situation. I worked for TrenItalia which is one of the major train
organizations in Italy for four years. And you know, I had people that became my supervisor… that I trained and that became my supervisors because they knew somebody in the higher positions, so… yeah. That just discourages you.

Her discouragement and lack of opportunity, combined with the recession, factored into her decision to leave Italy for Australia to pursue her nursing degree. She says:

The fact of coming to another country that you never know was a scary idea. Italy was my comfort. I knew everything. I knew how everything worked. I knew the system. So, it was sort of a safe option to stay there. And once I finished high school, I got a job there immediately. So, you know, I was like… “Well, I think I’ve settled down.” And then all this recession thing happened, and that just made me think, “I don’t think I’m gonna have a future here.”

Her connection to Rome was not enough to offset her desire to move to a country with better economic and cultural opportunities (Vathi, 2013).

Racism. I specifically asked each of my participants if they had ever experienced racism in Italy. Most of them were quick to say no but also identified situations where they felt that they were treated differently based on their appearance as someone with a darker skin color. Although not formally acknowledged, there is a strong undercurrent of biological racism in Italy (Marinaro & Walston, 2010). In spite of the need for immigrants to take on jobs that Italians are not interested in, portions of the Italian population have reacted with hostility, racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism (Campani, 1993; Campani, 1994; Totah, 2002; Wong, 2006; Zincone, 2006). Andall (2005) points out that many immigrants quickly dismiss Italian racism as ignorance rather than malice, but that does not eliminate its impact on their ability to fully integrate into Italian
society or the impact that discrimination may have on opportunity for them even if they are born in Italy and fluent in Italian. Sachini says:

I think it’s because they… some old people, they are not used to my skin color, maybe. Because in here, of course, in years back, I don’t think they had so much of, I mean, other colored people… I mean, Asian colors and African colors… I guess that’s one of the main reasons. So maybe that’s why… but not now. I mean, not the new generation. This is only happens with ladies of 80-90 years old. And nowadays… with my job because I’m working in a shop right now. I’m working as a secretary; plus, I’m working as a cashier, as well. So, sometimes people are scared to give their credit cards… I can see it in their face that they’re not so happy that I’m working the cashier. But still, like, anyway they have to pay and all…

Andall (2005) states, “Perhaps the most revealing statement about the second generation’s sense of belonging in Italy was their frequently articulated desire to leave Italy” (p.401). Instead, they move forward towards opportunities in other western countries that Italy does not provide for them.

**Independence and the desire for adventure.** Perhaps more important than any external factor is each woman’s personality and willingness to take on new challenges. The women in this study are, without exception, strong. Hiruni, Sachini, and Gayani are extroverted and easy conversationalists while Nayani and Rashmi are shy or quiet. But regardless of how they come across, they all have forward vision, goals, dreams, things they want to accomplish. Yeoh et al. (2005) point out that transnationalism offers opportunity for women, in particular, to explore autonomy and independence while Thomson & Crul (2007) indicate that second generation women have more freedom to decide between work and more traditional roles (Thomson & Crul,
2007) and may even choose to study away from the family in order to gain even more independence (Vathi, 2013).

Once the women from my study graduated from high school and made the choice to pursue education on their own away from family and friends, they did not look back. Only Nayani, constrained by her visa situation, was thwarted in pursuing her dreams of going overseas to pursue a career as a pediatrician. Hiruni left to study and work in Australia. Sachini went back to Sri Lanka to study before returning to Italy to work and live on her own. Rashmi and Gayani both moved to London, England, to further their education. Although financial support varies based on each family’s situation, emotional support is strong. Gayani and her father were having some problems and her family was in financial difficulties, but her mom worked with her to make sure she could go abroad. She says, “My plan was first to go to Australia, but for some financial problems that my parents couldn’t afford it, they thought what if you would like to go to U.K. instead for one year?” Hiruni says that going overseas was always part of the plan:

They hoped that we went abroad. Because obviously, you know, you wouldn’t put us into an international school if you wanted us to stay in Italy. So I think, in their eyes they saw it has… you know, if I put my children in an international school, they have more opportunities. You know, they can go anywhere in the world and find a job they want or go anywhere in the world and study.

**Moving towards a better future.** Hiruni moved to Australia, graduated with her nursing degree and currently works as a nurse, supporting her parents and siblings. Sachini returned to Rome with a degree in Marketing Media and now works as a secretary, cashier, and translator for an electronics store. In her spare time, she and her father work together to put on cultural events and concerts for the Sri Lankan community in Rome. Rashmi is on her own for the first time,
learning how to do life without her family alongside as she begins her nursing degree in the U.K. Gayani, in spite of financial obstacles along the way, is also on her own for the first time and is putting herself through school in the U.K. with the help of financial aid and a weekend job. Each woman is proud of her accomplishments and takes ownership of them. “I chose my own career… My parents never pushed me to do something they wanted me to do. I chose,” Gayani says.

These women have taken their place in a new generation of transnationals who are no longer tied to home and receiving countries but rather a multiplicity of localities (Vathi, 2013). Vathi (2013) connects this willingness to move forward and outward to a more cosmopolitan way of thinking that impacts the global youth culture.

**Staying connected.** Throughout the process of moving away from Italy to pursue higher education, the women have maintained a strong connection to their families, to Italy, and, in some part, to their Sri Lankan roots. While Rashmi and Gayani return home to Italy and family on school breaks, Sachini returned after university to work in Italy and to invest in the Sri Lankan community by helping her father to plan Sri Lankan cultural events and concerts.

From Australia, Hiruni supports her ailing mother and unemployed father back in Italy. This is an example of second-generational transnationalism based on remittances as a primary characteristic of transnationalism (Salamone, 2015). She has also been able to bring her brother and sister to join her in Australia where she assists them with their educational expenses. Devos (2014) describes this process of family members following each other, and providing means and support for yet another person to migrate, as another indicator of transnationalism. Hiruni is following in her parents’ footsteps, immigrating for a better life and supporting those left behind.

No matter to what degree they were frustrated by the strict Sri Lankan culture in their youth, most of the women spoke of their appreciation for it in some way. Perhaps most subtly,
four of the five women interviewed either planned to pursue careers in health care, a traditionally feminized field of work in Sri Lankan culture (Samarasinghe, 1990). When speaking of their experiences as children, though, they link their appreciation for Sri Lankan culture to their parents. Nayani feels that they provided a safe place for her to grow up and plans to institute similar approaches with her own daughter. Rashmi talks about the challenges of living in a third culture (England) but says, “I believe that even if you live in a different country… out of Sri Lanka or out of Italy… even if you live alone or with your family… you need to be yourself and remember what your parents taught you.” Perhaps Hiruni says it best:

But now, you know, I sit back and think, and I’m like, you know, you gave us a culture that we respect. But at the end of the day, it’s up to us to choose what culture we want. You know, we can respect that culture… I mean, if I wasn’t born in the Sri Lankan culture, I wouldn’t speak Sri Lankan. I wouldn’t know their cuisine. I wouldn’t know how they would think and things like that. So… you know, before I would sort of hate that culture. But once I think you grow up, you try to appreciate a side of that culture. Not that you have to accept it, but you start to appreciate it. And at the end of the day, you decide what you want to do and what makes you happy and how you want to live your life regardless of what culture you have.

**Answering the Research Questions**

The findings presented in this chapter are the result of in-depth interviews and ongoing conversations with five remarkable women. Their stories are beautiful in their very existence, and the frankness with which each woman conversed with me is an indicator of their ability to move between cultures, communicating with me in English from various corners of the globe.
After thoughtful analysis of these conversations, I submit the following opinions supported by the research to my initial questions.

**The central question.** My central research question is this: How does the experience of growing up as a Sri Lankan woman in Italy impact their decisions to pursue higher education in Italy or elsewhere? My expectation prior to this study was to learn that these women may have felt pushed aside or repressed by racist attitudes, government roadblocks, and deterrents to continuing their education in Italy. While these concerns definitely impacted their lives to some extent, I find that their decisions to study abroad have less to do with the fact that they are living in Italy than they have to do with the fact that their parents wanted bigger and better things for them. From their first days in Italy, these women were positioned to move forward from Italy. Their parents had hopes that they would complete higher education in an English speaking country and perhaps pursue their career there as well. To that end, they enrolled their daughters in an English speaking international school. Along with this, the parents’ desire to protect their daughters from the negative influences of Italian culture served to insulate the women from full integration into the Italian way of life. Not only were they not a part of the Italian education system with their peers, they were, in general, not allowed to socialize with them or only to socialize with them in very limited amounts. Since they attended an international school, they instead bonded with other immigrant children becoming a part of a sub-culture of immigrants in Italy and experiencing their version of being Italian as part of that group at least until after high school.

I believe that the second most important factor for their decisions to leave Italy was the economic instability that Italy and many other European nations have undergone over the last decade or so. The goal of a better future includes a stable job and the ability to support oneself
and one’s own family. With stable jobs unavailable or limited, Italy became less desirable as a place to settle. Only for Hiruni, who had a job and thought she was settled in Italy for life, did other factors such as being passed over at work and general frustration with the Italian government lead to her move overseas to pursue further education. Sachini returned to Rome and her father to work and to invest in the Sri Lankan community in Rome. But even from that place of security, she looks to the European Union and further opportunities to learn and move forward outside of Italy. Rashmi and Gayani both say that they will not return to Italy to pursue a career because jobs are not readily available and therefore opportunity is limited. Only Nayani, bound to Italy by visa restrictions, seems content to build her life there, a life which now includes a husband and infant daughter.

**Marrying the Italian and Sri Lankan cultures.** My sub-questions had to do with living between two cultures. The first sub-question comes in two parts:

- How are these students able to marry the two cultures they are growing up in (Italian culture and Sri Lankan culture)?
- What does that look like and how does it hinder or propel their educational decisions?

The answer to that question has varied answers as each woman handled her navigation of the two cultures differently. Although all of them started from the same point, being born into a more conservative Sri Lankan family while living in more progressive and westernized Italy, the combination of family dynamics and personality affected their cross-cultural experience.

Not only did Hiruni feel completely comfortable with the Italian culture, but her parents, still strict, were less strict than many others. She had an outgoing personality and embraced living and working in Rome post-high school. She felt comfortable there, knowing and understanding the system and interacting with Italians with ease.
Gayani’s parents embraced relationships with Italian and other non-Sri Lankan friends while also being well-connected to the Sri Lankan community. Gayani, also outgoing, grew up interacting with members of both groups. She loves Italian culture and food and hopes to return there someday to live. Her outgoing personality allowed her to converse easily with Italians and Sri Lankans alike. She pushed back against the restrictions of the Sri Lankan culture and embraced the Christian faith instead of her family’s Buddhist religion. In spite of that and her pride at being multilingual, all of her best friends are Sri Lankan.

Sachini’s family was a little less traditional with mom out of the picture and dad raising her amongst a combination of Italian and Sri Lankan friends. She returned “home” to Italy after earning her degree to pursue a job in Rome. This job brings her fulfillment and a sense of purpose as she works with an Italian businessman and his wife and foreign colleagues. At the same time, she gives back to the Sri Lankan community to whom she has strong ties by helping to organize cultural events to further enrich their lives. She is also dating an Italian man.

Nayani, a self-proclaimed “shy girl,” has followed a more traditional path of marrying and having a child. Her mother is the only one among all my participants who did not work outside of the home. Nayani was also the most sheltered. Not only was she restricted in her interactions with Italians and international friends, her family had few ties to the Sri Lankan community in Rome. She acknowledged finding other Sri Lankans more bothersome than Italians. After high school, she found employment in the tourist sector, utilizing her English rather than a job that required her to navigate in Italian. It may be that her late arrival to Italy at age twelve kept her from more fully becoming comfortable in the Italian culture. In spite of this, she loves Italy and has no desire to return to Sri Lanka. She seems content to live and work in Rome now that she has her own family.
Rashmi is the other quiet personality in my group of participants. Her family is very close and she fully embraces their values and Christian faith. Although she also found it difficult at times to live on the divide between the Italian and Sri Lankan cultures, she seems to identify more with being Sri Lankan than with being Italian. She sometimes felt that she was not part of the Italian world because the two cultures were so totally different. She was also sheltered by her parents and her older brother and speaks about the Italian culture as more of an observer than a participant. She says, “At the end of the day we are Sri Lankans, so we cannot change our originality.”

**The big surprise.** My final sub-questions is: What conflicts arise between the future/educational goals of Sri Lankan women and those of their parents when they are raised in a dominant culture other than Sri Lanka? While all of the girls experienced conflict with their parents over having to live by Sri Lankan rules in Italy, it seems that parents and daughters were on the same page with regards to their educational goals even if that meant that their daughters would move away from them to a different country to pursue higher education and a further career. The parents’ desire for their daughters to have a better future superseded their need to keep a close watch on their behavior. This could be due to the fact that they were adults, eighteen or older, by the time they were moving overseas, but none of the women indicated any conflict with their parents whatsoever in regards to their desire to leave Italy to pursue higher education. Perhaps their parents of the three women who have moved on to England and Australia hear an echo of their own brave move to Italy. Their daughters have embraced the freedom and autonomy that once seemed so desirable to them as they moved on beyond the country where they grew up. Hiruni says:
I think [our parents] hoped, in a way, that we would go overseas like they did and follow our dreams. I mean, we could have stayed in Italy and, you know, do whatever we loved, but I think it’s a good experience for us, as well. I mean, knowing that we did the same thing they did when they came to Italy. We are putting our foot down here and building our own lives here like they did when they came to Italy.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the lived experience of Sri Lankan women who grew up in Italy and has looked at the various areas of influence in their lives in order to understand the impact of immigration on their educational pathway.

A significant number of second generation Sri Lankan immigrants are coming to age in Italy and moving forward in pursuit of higher education and careers. While there are studies regarding Sri Lankan-Italian transnational labor flows (Attanapola, 2013; Brown, 2011; Brown, 2014; Handapangoda, 2014; Näre. 2010; Pathirage & Collyer, 2011) and on second generation citizenship and attitudes in Italy (Bianchi, 2011; Calavita, 2005; Colombo, 2010; Colombo, 2011; Colombo et al., 2009; Marinaro & Walston, 2010; Minello & Barban, 2010) as well as assimilation and integration of Italian immigrants (Campani, 1993; Vathi, 2013), there is no literature regarding the integration and second generation experience of Sri Lankan youths, women in particular. Through this study, I have explored the impact of these experiences on the second generation Sri Lankan woman’s choice either to remain in Italy to pursue higher education or to go outside of the country in that pursuit and have further investigated how Sri Lankan women navigate between Sri Lankan and Italian culture. While I have chosen Sri Lankan women as the focus of my study, the information regarding their experience as second generation immigrants in Italy is pertinent in discussing the experience of all second generation Italian immigrants from developing countries.

Implications of Research

Consistent with existing literature (Andall, 2002; Campani, 1993; Marinaro & Walston, 2010; Minello & Barban; Vathi, 2013), this study found that there are often barriers to upward mobility or opportunity for immigrants in Italy. While only one participant faced challenges in
her pursuit of higher education within Italy, three out five participants faced barriers to citizenship acquisition, and all of the participants were impacted by discrimination or racism and by a lack of economic opportunity. Based on the supposition that these factors within the second generation experience in Italy cause immigrants to stay or go, I asked the following central research question:

How does the experience of growing up as a Sri Lankan woman in Italy impact their decisions to pursue higher education in Italy or elsewhere?

The participants’ responses show that although economic opportunity was the second most important factor in the decision to pursue higher education outside of Italy for most of the participants, the predominant reason for moving overseas to pursue higher education was their parents’ desire for their children to have a better life. Often, one of the primary reasons for their parents’ initial move to Italy was to enable their children to pursue a better education that would open doors for their futures. The resulting decision to enroll their daughters’ in a private international school set them on a pathway that led out of Italy to bigger and better opportunities beyond.

The choice to enroll their daughters in an international school provided a certain amount of insulation from full integration into the Italian system. This plays out more apparently when answering the question:

How are these students able to marry the two cultures they are growing up in (Italian culture and Sri Lankan culture)?

While the women embraced both cultures, they also sensed the disconnect between the more conservative Sri Lankan culture and that of westernized Italy. They sometimes had to fight for the freedom that the Italian way of life offered but that the Sri Lankan way of life found too
liberal. Although they acknowledge the richness that their Sri Lankan history adds to their lives, only one of the five has followed the traditionally acceptable pathway to marriage and motherhood.

This leads to the second part of that question:

What does that [marriage of two cultures] look like and how does it hinder or propel their educational decisions?

Four of the five participants have fulfilled their goals of pursuing higher education outside of Italy, while the fifth has been constrained by her visa status and choice of secondary school and not by any Sri Lankan cultural implication. The independence and boldness fostered by the Italian way of life in combination with the Sri Lankan way of thinking towards a better future have propelled them to pursue higher education outside of Italy.

The final question that this study addressed was the following:

What conflicts arise between the future/educational goals of Sri Lankan women and those of their parents when they are raised in a dominant culture other than Sri Lanka?

For the participants in this study, there was no conflict between them and their parents. Their desire to pursue higher education abroad was a direct result of their enrollment in an international school and of their parents’ desire for them to move beyond Italy to pursue a better future.

The answers to these questions offer the fresh perspective that while it may seem as though there are inherent barriers within the Italian system that keep second generation immigrants from pursuing higher education or opportunity within Italy, other legitimate explanations for their choice to study abroad do exist. From my conversations with the women in my study, their parents came to Italy for a better future but wanted an even better future for them,
beyond Italy’s limitations and economic difficulties. Their overall attitude regarding discrimination or racism is that it exists but that it is a minor issue among the older generation. This differs from existing research (Andall, 2002; Marinaro & Walston, 2010) which links implications from racism or discrimination combined with lack of economic opportunity to the lack of integration for second generation immigrants and to the desire to move away from Italy for other opportunities.

**Limitations of the Study**

First, this study was limited to only the perspectives of Sri Lankan women who had attended an international school for their primary and/or secondary education. While I appreciate understanding their educational pathway more clearly, I would have like to have heard from Sri Lankan women who were involved in Italian public or private schools. I feel that their perspective and pathway could be significantly different and would provide a deeper level of understanding.

Second, the study was limited by my sample size. Although I had nine contacts, I was only able to interview six women. Several of my contacts declined or were unresponsive, and one of my interviewees was not appropriate for the study due to her immigration to Italy at age eighteen. I had originally hoped to obtain eight to twelve interviews. That larger sample might also have provided more diversity of age and experience.

Third, due to its multinational nature, this study was conducted completely via online resources, namely Skype, Facebook, and email. This lack of physical proximity limited the study in two ways.

1. The fact that I was unable to meet with my participants face to face certainly limited the data that I received. Although the fact that they lived in three different countries
would have made that challenging, I think that the study would have been richer had I been able to sit down in a more casual manner with at least the two quieter women. If I had been able to time a trip to Italy appropriately, I might even have been able to do a focus group with at least the two women who live and work there plus the two women currently studying in England. Given the opportunity to speak in a group setting would most likely have triggered additional thoughts or experiences that did not come out in the Skype interviews.

2. Traveling to Italy might have given me the opportunity to connect with a larger and more varied pool of participants through natural channels.

Finally, my own inexperience as a researcher must be accounted for as I was truly learning on the job. With such a small sample size, I learned something new about the interviewing process each time. Thankfully, my participants were gracious and responsive in providing follow-up information and dealing with occasional technical difficulties.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provided a first glimpse into the lived experiences of Sri Lankan women in Italy and shed light on the reasons for their decisions on where to pursue higher education. Their stories are richly connected to their families’ experiences as immigrants to Italy and would benefit from a deeper understanding of that layer. Although beyond the scope of this study, it would have been fascinating to draw from the parents’ perspectives as well. Existing studies on Sri Lankan immigration to Italy (Brown, 2011; Brown, 2014; Näre, 2010; Pathirage & Collier, 2011) are primarily based in labor flow dynamics, transnational networks, and the existence of economic and growth opportunity, not on the longitudinal development of the immigrant family. A further look into this established Sri Lankan-Italian immigration connection and the impact
that it has on families in Italy rather than those left behind in Sri Lanka might provide enlightening.

More simply, I believe that a broader study that was able to detail the experiences of Sri Lankan women in the Italian education system would further inform this study as that population is completely absent from my sample.

One further area of interest is the impact of international schools on the educational pathways, future opportunities, and integration success of second generation immigrants from developing countries. This area of study would consider additional ethnic groups who are also looking beyond Italy. After performing a cursory search, I find that most articles regarding international schools and immigrants seem to be focused on the immigrant elite. I think it would be informative to know more about the lower or middle class immigrants who sacrifice to send their children to private international schools in hopes of a better future.

Finally, comparative studies regarding the experiences of Sri Lankan women and those of Sri Lankan men who grew up in Italy or those of immigrant women from other ethnic groups would provide even richer detail on the complexities of growing up other in Italy. These studies would contribute to the greater picture of the Italian immigrant situation and might provide valuable insight for those who attempting to navigate immigration issues in the continuously more global community to which we all belong.

**A Personal Reflection**

The implications of this study go beyond the academic to impact me richly on a personal level. My interest in this study stemmed from my relationships with students that I taught in Italy some fifteen years ago. From that distant perspective, I assumed that their stories were perhaps framed or colored a certain way. However, through laying aside my own assumptions and taking
on the role of the researcher, I allowed them to show me the truth of their lives. By giving them the opportunity to explore and respond to the questions I set before them, I was given the gift of clearer vision and a reminder to always ask the questions that will not let you go. It is imperative to do the work required to move beyond the limitations of assumption and more fully explore others’ realities.

Not only was I reminded of the age old truth that one should never assume, I was surprised once again by the resilience and brilliance of the human spirit. The women in my study did not have perfect lives. There were moments in their lives that were challenging and obstacles that were at times insurmountable. They have not always been able to follow their intended path at the ideal moment. But when asked about the discouragements they have faced throughout their time in Italy, when encouraged to talk about difficulties or challenges, they are quick to highlight the good, slow to point out the bad, eager to display the beautiful parts of their stories while acknowledging but minimizing the harder parts. They embrace their stories and move forward in hope.

My hope is that by listening to these women tell their stories, by asking for their trust in sharing their struggles with me, by celebrating their accomplishments, by seeking to fully understand their lived experience, I have in some way affirmed that experience for them. Although I feel that my methods were thorough and my results sound, there is one moment that I experienced during the process that further justifies the importance of this qualitative work. In response to her life narrative when presented to her for validation purposes, Hiruni wrote, “It’s great. You nearly made me cry. You got all my life in a paper… It’s amazing.” I can ask for no greater confirmation of the value of the time invested in this thesis.
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APPENDIX A: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Impact of Immigration on Educational Choices and Goals of Sri Lankan Women in Italy

Political Systems
- Government Corruption
- Strong Informal Economy Benefits Italy
- Current trends in immigration are relatively new (past 30-40 years)

Immigration Policies
- Lax Attitude towards Clandestine Immigrants
- Lack awareness policies in regards to citizenship
- Strong ethnocentrism
- Catholicism

Racism and Assimilation
- Difficult to establish legal status or citizenship
- Limited by categorization of appropriate jobs for specific immigrant groups

Italian Culture
- 2nd Lowest Birth Rate in the Western World

Economic Opportunity
- Limited by categorization of appropriate jobs for specific immigrant groups

Diaspora Support
- In Italy
- At Home
- Abroad
- Career Aspirations

Educational Choices/Goals
- Italian School System
- Employment
- Pursue Post-Secondary Education in an English-Speaking Country
- Pursue Post-Secondary Education in Italy
- Return to Home Country for Further Schooling

Christy Bogos – Thesis Concept Map
APPENDIX B: THESIS FLYER

Where do we go from here?
The impact of immigration on the educational pathway
of Sri Lankan women growing up in Italy

Buon giorno! My name is Christy Boggs, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University in the School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy. I spent a year in Rome working with international students, including several lovely Sri Lankan ladies, in 2001 and have since been intrigued with the life and experiences of immigrants in Rome.

I am looking for participants for a research project that I am doing in order to complete my Master’s thesis. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of Sri Lankan women who have grown up in Italy and completed most of their education there. I want to better understand how the experience of growing up in Italy impacted the educational choices and goals of these women.

I am looking for Sri Lankan women who lived in Rome during all or most of their primary and secondary education and who are at least 18 years old. They will be asked to participate in an initial interview either via Skype or in-person. The interview questions are about their life, their experiences as an immigrant and student in Rome, and how those experiences impacted their future educational choices. The initial interview may be followed by additional interviews to explore additional questions or topics or to collect further necessary details.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will provide important information concerning immigration and education in general, and the impact of immigration on higher education (college) choices in particular. This work may be used to improve education as well as spread awareness about issues affecting immigrant students.

Contact Information: If you are interested in participating in my study, please contact me at 419.308.1641 or at cfboggs@bgsu.edu for further information. You may pass this flyer along to your friends if you think they would qualify or be interested, as well. I am so excited to meet and converse with you.

A presto!

Christy
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol: Impact of Immigration on Educational Pathways of Sri Lankan Girls in Italy

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:

Interviewer: Christy Boggs

Interviewee:

Project Goal: To explore the lived experience of Sri Lankan girls in Italy including the familial, financial, political, cultural, and educational challenges that they face and to gain a broader understanding of the implications those factors have on the educational pathway chosen both during their time in Italy and beyond

Questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself including your background and your education and/or career goals.
2. How old were you when you came to Italy (or were you born there)?
3. Tell me what it was like to grow up as a Sri Lankan girl in Italy.
4. Could you please describe your impressions of Italy, your school(s), your classmates, and/or Italians in general?
5. What part, if any, has the Sri Lankan community in Italy played in your time there?
6. Why did your parents decide to come to Italy? Did they have specific education and/or career goals for you?
7. Please describe your education in Italy: What types of schools have you attended? What was the language of instruction? What nationality were your teachers? Your classmates?
8. In your own words, tell me about the experience of being a student in _______ school? (May need to be repeated if various schools have been attended.)
9. You may have experienced encouragement and discouragement from a variety of sources during your time in the Italian education system. Can you give me some examples of interactions that were either encouraging or discouraging?
10. Is there anything additional that you would like to say about living as an immigrant in Italy that I have not asked you about?
Where do we go from here?
The Impact of Immigration on the educational pathway
of Sri Lankan women growing up in Italy

Buon giorno! My name is Christy Boggs, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University in the School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy. I spent a year in Rome working with international students, including several lovely Sri Lankan ladies, in 2001 and have since been intrigued with the life and experiences of immigrants in Rome.

As a result of that year, I have decided to integrate a study of Sri Lankan women who have grown up in Italy and completed most of their education there into my Master’s thesis research project. I want to explore your lived experiences, and those of other Sri Lankan women living in Rome, so that I am better able to understand how the experience of growing up in Italy impacted your educational choices and goals.

This study will contribute to the body of literature regarding immigration and education in Rome. There are very few studies concerning this topic, and those that I have found are broad in scope and are geographically focused in the north of Italy rather than in the capital. I have found no literature regarding Sri Lankans in Italy. I want your voices to be heard by those who are working for policy reform, whether governmental or educational.

My hope is that this study will bring to light the challenges and triumphs of Sri Lankan women who have completed the majority of their primary/secondary education in Italy and who have moved on to further their education, whether in Italy or beyond. A better understanding of your stories could inform future decisions by educators and by parents as they make educational decisions for the children they are responsible for.

Contact Information: If you have any questions regarding the study, now or in the future, please contact me at 419.308.1641 or at cboggs@bgsu.edu. I am grateful for your participation and am excited to learn about your story.

A presto!

Christy
APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Where do we go from here? The impact of immigration on the educational pathway of Sri Lankan women growing up in Italy

Buon giorno! My name is Christy Boggs, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University in the School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy. My advisor is Dr. Bruce Collet, Associate Professor. You are invited to participate in a study that I am carrying out in order to complete my thesis for a Master’s of Arts in Cross-cultural and International Education. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of Sri Lankan women who have grown up in Italy and completed most of their education there. I want to better understand how your experience of growing up in Italy impacted your educational choices and goals. You were selected as a possible interviewee because of your status as a Sri Lankan woman who lived in Rome during all or most of your primary and secondary education and are at least 18 years old.

Benefits: If you agree to participate in this research, you will provide important information concerning immigration and education in general, and the impact of immigration on higher education (college) choices in particular. This work may be used to improve education as well as spread awareness about issues affecting immigrant students. You will not be compensated for this interview.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in an initial interview either via Skype or in-person. The interview questions are about your life, your experiences as an immigrant and student in Rome, and how those experiences impacted your future educational choices. The initial interview will take about one hour to finish. Once I have compiled my initial interview results, I may request a follow-up interview to explore additional questions or topics or to collect further necessary details. These follow-up interviews may be conducted via Skype, in-person, or via email. Follow-up interviews should take about 30-45 minutes. All interviews will be recorded digitally, with your permission, for reference during the course of the study. I will ask for and record your verbal consent at the beginning of the initial interview.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship (now or future) with the researcher, Bowling Green State University, or International Christian Academy.

Confidentiality: Both audio and video data will be recorded digitally during each interview. All data will be stored electronically in a data file on the password protected computers of the principal investigator. No one other than myself will have access to those computers. Electronic files will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study. In the course of my paper and research, I may quote participants directly but will not reveal their identities in any way. To that end, I will either assign a pseudonym (alternate name) or ask you to select your own pseudonym at the time of our interview. Please be aware that information transmitted via online methods (Skype or email) may not be 100% secure.

Risks: I will protect your confidentiality as detailed above. Risk of participation in this study is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the survey, please contact me at 419.308.1641 (cfboggs@bgsu.edu) or contact my advisor, Dr. Bruce Collet, at 419.372.8448 (colleba@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), with questions or concerns about participant rights.
## APPENDIX F: CODING SCHEME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Level Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Major Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War in Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>Reasons for Coming to Italy</td>
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<td>Economic Difficulties</td>
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<td>Available Jobs</td>
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<td>A Better Life</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan schools competitive</td>
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<td>Citizenship/EU</td>
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<td>Learn English</td>
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<td>International School</td>
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<td>Inexpensive</td>
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<td>Study Hard</td>
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<td>Don’t Like Italian Schools</td>
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<td>Tutors</td>
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<td>“Hoped we went abroad”</td>
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<td>International School</td>
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<td>Go anywhere in the world</td>
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<td>Leaving Italy</td>
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<td>Better Future</td>
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<td>Encouraged by family</td>
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<td>“You can do anything”</td>
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<td>Pick a career you like</td>
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<td>Financial Support varies</td>
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<td>Pressure to Conform</td>
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<td>Parents think like Sri Lankans</td>
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<td>Levels of Trust</td>
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<td>Cross-cultural experiences</td>
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<td>Helpful/Caring Teachers</td>
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<td>Invested in Students Lives</td>
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<td>Like Family</td>
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<td>Support Circle</td>
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<td>Encouraged Student Voice</td>
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<td>“Don’t have favorites”</td>
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<td>Diversity</td>
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<td>Strong Friendships</td>
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<td>Supported Each Other</td>
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<td>Acculturation Factors</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>Tools for a Better Future</td>
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<td>Conservative/Less Freedom</td>
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<td>Close-minded</td>
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<td>View Italian Culture as Inappropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;A weight&quot;</td>
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<td>Backstabbing/Psychological Bullying</td>
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<td>Rules (dress/curfew/behavior)</td>
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<td>Scrutiny/Judgement</td>
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<td>Jealous Sri Lankans in Italy</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan Culture Is Restrictive</td>
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<td>Enriching (language/cuisine/perspective)</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan Cultural Dance</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan Music Class</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan Weekend Gatherings</td>
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<td>Feels Like Home</td>
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<td>Best friends are Sri Lankan</td>
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<td>Liberal/More Carefree</td>
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<td>Open-minded</td>
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<td>Always Out Having Fun</td>
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<td>Don't Care What Others Think</td>
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<td>Direct/Ask for What They Want</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;So much freedom&quot;</td>
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<td>Time for Self/Family</td>
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<td>Defend Against Racism</td>
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<td>Liberal/More Carefree</td>
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<td>Italian Language Eases Access</td>
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<td>&quot;If I was Italian&quot;</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan vs Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Italy is home&quot;</td>
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<td>Appreciation of Both Cultures</td>
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<td>Up to Us to Choose Our Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;It's not easy/It's a little bit hard&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;You need to be yourself&quot;</td>
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<td>Multilingual (Italian/English/Singhalese)</td>
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<td>Pressure/Responsibility</td>
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<td>Sri Lankan Mentality</td>
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<td>Parents think like Sri Lankans</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;We had to be the good guys&quot;</td>
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<td>Limited Outside Friendships</td>
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<td>Self-conscious (who is watching)</td>
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<td>Self-conscious (who is watching)</td>
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<td>Can't be Italian with Sri Lankans</td>
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<td>Can't be Sri Lankan with Italians</td>
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<td>Cultures Are Opposites</td>
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<td>Themes</td>
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<td>Italian School Limits Opportunities</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Educational Challenges</td>
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<td>Doesn't Accept ICA Credentials</td>
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<td>Also Complete Italian Secondary</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;It's not fair&quot;</td>
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<td>Cost Is Prohibitive</td>
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<td>Italian-Language University Intimidating</td>
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<td>Never Planned to Attend Italian University</td>
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<td>American University in Rome</td>
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<td>Am University Cost Prohibitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I got a little sick of the Italian system and the Italian government&quot;</td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>Ease of Access to Citizenship</td>
<td>Italian Factors</td>
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<td>Too Much Corruption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Born in Italy but Ineligible for Citizenship</td>
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<td>Red Tape/Immigration Roadblocks</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;It's a mess. It's really a mess.&quot;</td>
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<td>Born in Italy and Citizenship Process Easy</td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>Ease of Access to Citizenship</td>
<td>Italian Factors</td>
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<td>Younger Women</td>
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<td>Citizenship Allows for Family PR</td>
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<td>Citizenship Allows for EU Access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy and the Recession</td>
<td>Economic Opportunities</td>
<td>Lack of Economic Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Opportunity for Advancement</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Jobs Available</td>
<td>Economic Opportunities</td>
<td>Lack of Economic Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;If there were jobs and good education&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racism/Discrimination</td>
<td>Racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>First-Level Coding</td>
<td>Axial Coding</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Major Categories</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Decide How to Live Your Life</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong Female</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mom as a Strong Figure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Independence and the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mom Not in the Picture</td>
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<td>Desire for Adventure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doesn't Need to Bother Parents for Money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shy/Sheltered</td>
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<td>Going Overseas a Good Experience</td>
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<td>Adventure</td>
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<td>&quot;Building our own lives here&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wanted the Adventure</td>
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<td>Never Lived without Family/Parents</td>
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<td>International Experience</td>
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<td>Pursuing Dreams</td>
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<td>Study Medicine</td>
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<td>Education &amp; Career Plans</td>
<td>Moving Towards a Better Future</td>
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<td>(Nursing/Pediatrician/Pediatric Nurse)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Job that Satisfies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of Position (in Rome)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I chose.&quot;</td>
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<td>Financial Considerations</td>
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<td>English as an Advantage</td>
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<td>Working in Rome</td>
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<td>Straight to Work</td>
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<td>Returned to Work</td>
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<td>University Abroad (Sri Lanka/England/Australia)</td>
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<td>Future Travel/Study Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports Family in Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siblings Have Joined</td>
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<tr>
<td>Works with Father on Sri Lankan Cultural Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married with a Daughter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understands Importance of Family More On Her Own</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hopes for Family to Join Her</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving Back to Sri Lankan Community in Rome</td>
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<td>Dual-Citizenship/Sri Lanka</td>
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APPENDIX G: HSRB APPROVAL FORM

DATE: July 20, 2015

TO: Christy Boggs
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [759704-1] Where do we go from here? The impact of immigration on the educational pathway of Sri Lankan women growing up in Italy

REFERENCE #: 

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: MODIFICATIONS REQUIRED

DECISION DATE: July 20, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE: July 19, 2016

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has determined that the following MODIFICATIONS are REQUIRED in order to secure approval:

1. Since you are seeking verbal consent, the signature lines are not necessary in the consent document. Please remove.

2. You indicate in the application that participants will be provided an information sheet detailing information about the study. Please provide this information sheet for the Board to review.

In order to facilitate the review of your responses to modifications required, provide a cover letter along with your revised documents that describes how you addressed the HSRB’s concerns and where those changes can be found within the revised documents.

Research activities in accordance with this submission may not begin until this committee has received a response to these conditions and issued final approval.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hrsb@bgusu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board’s records.