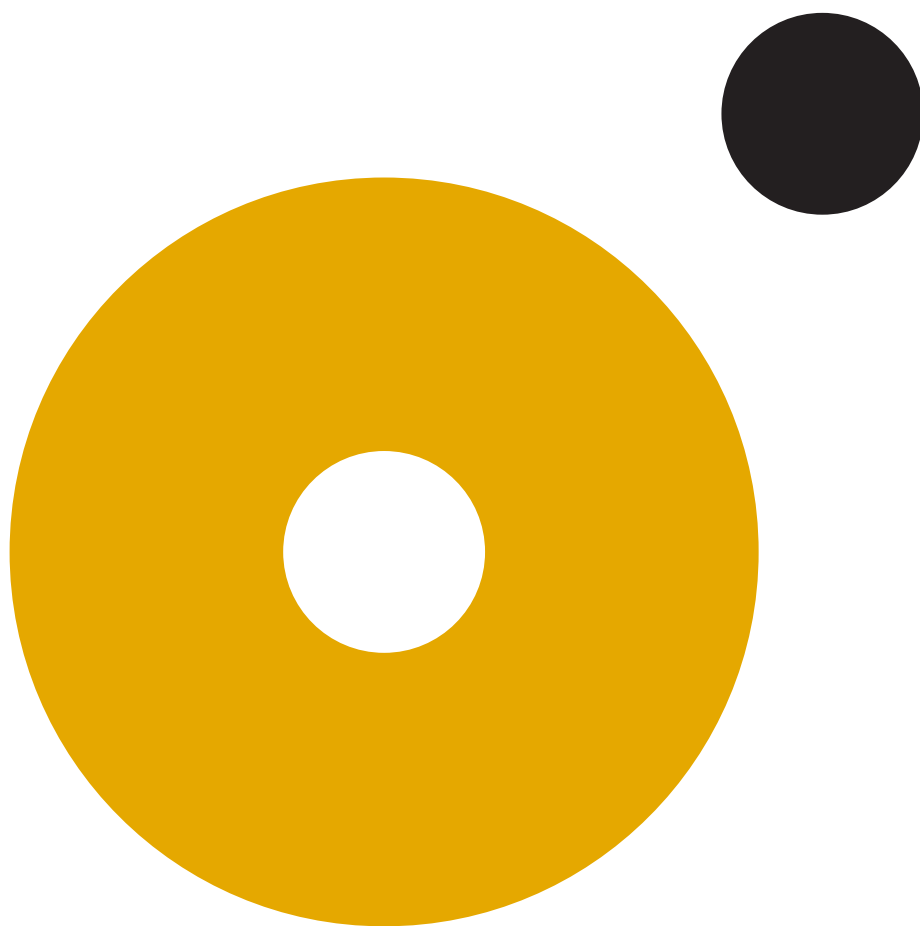


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**



# **The School and Its Many Pasts**

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani





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These volumes contain the official proceedings of the International Conference «The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation» (Macerata, 12-15 December 2022), organized by the University of Macerata in partnership with the Catholic University of Sacred Heart of Milan, the University of Florence and the University Roma Tre.

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# **The School and Its Many Pasts**

## **I: The Different Types of School Memory**

edited by Lucia Paciaroni



# Introduction to the Different Types of School Memory

Lucia Paciaroni  
University of Macerata (Italy)

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “school memory” became the subject of studies of considerable interest in the field of educational-historical research, both in Ibero-American countries and in the Anglo-Saxon world and, later, also in Italy. Among the historians of education who first began to investigate this theme are Agustín Escolano, Antonio Viñao and Pierre Caspard. Scholars from the Iberian area, in particular, initiated pioneering reflections on the complex relationship between “educational memory” and “school culture” that Dominique Julia had placed at the centre of the historical-educational debate in 1995 and that gave rise to a veritable historiographical revolution that pushed educational historians to investigate a wide range of new sources.

The Spanish scientific community began to investigate in depth the individual school memory, to which Agustín Escolano attributed a central role. According to the scholar, careful and in-depth research on it, and thus on the individual memories of the actors of school life contained in diaries and autobiographies, but also shared through oral testimonies, could reveal the real educational practices carried out in the classroom as well as the school rituals and the disciplining practices used by teachers. This could, therefore, highlight what really happened in the classroom<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, innovative avenues of research have been pursued on the subject of “school memory”: scholars, through the analysis and interpretation of the various forms of school memory, have attempted to investigate the school past in greater depth, in an attempt to decipher that “black box of school” to which educational historiography has referred several times in recent years.

A rather significant occasion for discussion on the topic of school memory was the international symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues”, held in Seville in 2015, at which Juri Meda and Antonio Viñao defined school memory as «the individual, collective and/or public practice of recalling a common school past»<sup>2</sup>. On that occasion, the epistemological foundations of the historiographical reflection inherent to school memory were explored in depth and a first systematic reflection on the topic was draft-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Escolano Benito, *Más allá del espasmo del presente: la escuela como memoria*, «História da Educação», vol. XV, n. 33, 2011, pp. 10-30.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memories: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, p. 5.

ed, defining some general theoretical frameworks, providing methodological criteria and suggesting possible intersections with the anthropology of education and the sociology of cultural processes.

This meeting marked a significant turning point for educational-historical research: school memory, from that moment on, constituted an interpretative category that drew the attention of educational historians who included it in the historiographical reflection of the educational-historical field on an international level. Italian educational historians have also recently started timely research on school memory considering it in its various meanings. Of particular importance for the dissemination of studies on the subject was the Project of Significant National Interest, “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”<sup>3</sup>, in which over fifty scholars and young researchers from fourteen Italian universities participated<sup>4</sup>.

On the basis of the new types of sources considered by the scholars and an interdisciplinary methodological approach, the research units involved in the project investigated the models of schooling, teaching, learning and scholarship emerging from individual memories as well as the representation of these models by the information, communication and cultural industries.

At first, as already mentioned, the focus was on individual school memories, i.e., on the self-representation provided by former teachers and former school administration officials, as well as by former pupils within oral and written testimonies. In order to reconstruct school history, educational historians have started to consider new types of sources to analyse the real experiences of its protagonists, going beyond a purely historical-legislative approach. As is well known, studies and research based on oral testimonies but also on diaries, autobiographies and memoirs in general have become widespread, bringing to light many different school histories that tell us the fundamental impact that the exercise of the profession even by apparently “anonymous” teachers had on the lives of individuals and the communities in which they worked.

In recent years, however, educational historians have also begun to investigate the other two forms of school memory, the public and the collective, which, for a long time, were not considered historiographically relevant.

Public school memory consists of the representation of schools and teachers in official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions on the basis of a precise policy of remembrance, i.e., a public use of the past aimed at acquiring consensus and strengthening the feeling of belonging to a specific communi-

<sup>3</sup> The Project of Significant National Interest “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)” (prot. no.: 2017STEF2S), of three-year duration, was approved by Decree of the Director General for the Coordination, Promotion and Enhancement of Research of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (no. 226 of 12 April 2019) and, subsequently, admitted for funding by the same Ministry with D.D. no. 984 of 21 May 2019. On the project, see R. Sani, J. Meda, «*School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation*». *Un progetto di ricerca innovativo e a marcata vocazione internazionale*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26.

<sup>4</sup> The project involved scholars from the University of Macerata (lead partner), the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, the University of Florence and the Roma Tre University, as well as aggregate members from other Italian universities.

ty. Research has thus focused on gravestones, monuments, stamps and coins relating to educators and teachers working in Italian schools of all levels, but also to pedagogues, headmasters, school managers and officials of central and local administrations. This category also includes honours awarded to exponents and institutions in the realm of schools and education. Collective school memory, on the other hand, is made up of the many representations that the cultural industry (literature, film, music, etc.) and the world of information have offered over time of schools, teachers and students themselves. It is, in fact, a «social reconstruction of the past that results from the fusion of the ‘experienced school past’ (recalled by direct participants) with the ‘constructed school past’ (recalled by observers, readers and spectators)»<sup>5</sup>. Scholars then began to investigate the products of the various cultural promotion and dissemination agencies that were capable not only of preserving but also of constructing a shared memory, and then highlighted the fact that the representation of the school on the small and big screen – but also in works of art in illustrations and literary works – has undoubtedly contributed to forming in viewers, observers and readers «*clichés* or, in any case, specific images of our teachers – and therefore of the school – aimed at nurturing and, in some cases, even redefining the collective memory of Italians of the last century»<sup>6</sup>.

As a demonstration of the innovative and thorough research promoted on the topic of school memory in recent years, this publication presents a series of investigations conducted by young educational historians with the intention of contributing to promoting a broad methodological and historiographical comparison on the issues concerning the study of school memory and, at the same time, to initiate an organic comparative reflection on the same topic.

The scholars’ essays were presented at the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation” (12-15 December 2022)<sup>7</sup>, during which historians – from Italy, Brazil, France, Switzerland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Hungary, Serbia and Israel – met. The contributions offer the opportunity to enrich the reflection on the topic, to establish valuable synergies and further forms of research collaboration and to give an authentically international scope to the in-depth study of a strand of investigation – that relating to school memory – which still has many stimuli and suggestions to offer to educational historians. The contributions highlight the heuristic potential of sources such as literary works, films and documentaries and photographs, but also of oral testimonies, diaries, school architecture and furnishings as well as gravestones, medals and awards of

<sup>5</sup> Meda, Viñao, *School Memories: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando editore, 2019, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> The contributions were presented at the pre-conference “*Work in progress*”. *Research of Young Scholars on School Memories* on 13 December 2022. For a chronicle of the international conference, see L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, V. Minuto, *The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation. Un recente convegno internazionale di studi*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 1, pp. 509-526.

distinction. The researchers also offer a timely reflection on the reconstruction and enhancement of school memory and the discovery of multiple interpretations of the school past. Indeed, there is no single school past, but there are multiple ones, sometimes non-conforming to historical reality but nevertheless real insofar as they are able to influence the vision that individuals or communities have of that past.

The book, therefore, aims to stimulate new and significant avenues of research so that a real qualitative leap can be made in studies aimed at delving into school memory, and therefore offering a genuinely comparative reading capable of accounting for contexts and scenarios that are not limited to the national or even the continental European sphere, but open to a truly global dimension.



# The Future of Memory: Initial Steps in a Research Career and Emerging Historiographical Perspectives

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## *Introduction*

Embarking on a research career is an exciting adventure driven by a personal desire to expand knowledge and delve deeper into a subject. However, it is not without its challenges. The early stages of a research career can be filled with uncertainties. Yet, the effort invested is worthwhile, as young memory researchers represent our future. They are the voices of the present and future, responsible for documenting our educational past, and therefore, they deserve special attention.

This paper aims to highlight this reality, describing the different scenarios involving research in the field of school memory, trying to answer to three questions: What is needed to study in more detail the past of education? How to orient oneself in the study of school memory? What inspires a research approach and what could be the new historiographical perspectives in the study of school memory?

To answer these questions, the first objective is to establish the foundational elements of research and explore the possibilities that can contribute to its success, while acknowledging the inherent challenges in historical research. The second objective is to provide guidelines in the form of a “logbook” for aspiring school memory researchers, forming the basis for their future work. This section will examine crucial aspects to consider when approaching the study of school memory. Additionally, it will highlight the difficulties that may arise along the journey. Lastly, as a conclusion, the article will reflect on future possibilities for studying the past, analysing new and potential perspectives that currently shape the study of the history of education.

The intention of this article is to provide a new roadmap, recommendations, and reflections that can help guide young researchers on their path.

## 1. *What is required to study the history of education in greater detail?*

Two types of conditioning factors influence research approaches: external and internal. When focusing on internal factors, it is important to recognize that a research career

is not a linear path but rather a curved or circular one, where progress sometimes leads back to the starting point. Within this career, three key factors or pillars are necessary to undertake any research: creativity, rigor, and motivation.

Research stems from a need, a question, a concern, or a problem. It requires a specific order to determine what needs to be done and when. As a subjective process, creativity plays a crucial role in prompting questioning, thinking critically, and fostering curiosity. It is a determining factor in knowledge generation. Additionally, it is necessary to acknowledge that, during the research process, there will be times when control is lost, and chaos must be embraced to recognize the unexpected phenomena that emerge during fieldwork, as Levalle refers to them. In other words, despite having a systematic research methodology, predefined hypotheses, and objectives, the element of surprise is important as it allows us to shift focus from the academic approach and raise new questions that may prompt a revaluation of our initial research framework<sup>1</sup>.

Secondly, the social sciences have long debated how to ensure rigor in qualitative research, given that it involves working with context-bound, local, and situation-bound data sets<sup>2</sup>. Assuming the subjective and dialogical nature of knowledge generation, it makes it difficult to determine criteria of rigour that can be easily accepted as relevant and transferable. But rigour, and more specifically when we enter the study of the past of education, does not only point to techniques and methods, but more fundamentally to questioning the particular features of knowledge generation<sup>3</sup>, and this question will be highly relevant in the study of school memory, as will be discussed below. Rigour will be defined as the establishment of parameters that allow access to and ensure the credibility, authenticity, trustworthiness and integrity of research outcomes. Research is like exercising a craft, which requires patience and is grounded in practice. Each process is unique, and needs a good companion: a director or mentor with whom to learn and discuss each step, with respect and intellectual freedom.

Thirdly, personal motivation is a decisive element that drives research and gives it meaning. To delve into motivation, two important questions arise: Why pursue research? And for what purpose? Aligning personal desires with these questions serves as an excellent starting point. By making oneself aware of the personal and social context that shapes the desire to study a particular topic, researchers are less likely to be swayed by the allure of those who have been studying the same topics for years.

Regarding external factors, universities are well-known for their functions of teaching, research, culture, and knowledge transfer. In terms of research, various public funding schemes exist, both domestic (through ministries, local or regional governments) and international (such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Cost). These fund-

<sup>1</sup> S. Levalle, *Investigación e imaginación: incitaciones creativas para la producción de tesis en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, «Praxis educativa», vol. 26, n. 3, 2022, pp. 1-19.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bergman, A. Coxon, *The Quality in Qualitative Methods*, «Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research», vol. 6, n. 2, art. 34, May 2005, pp. 1-20, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/> (last access: 06.02.2023).

<sup>3</sup> M. Cornejo, N. Salas, *Rigor y Calidad Metodológicos: Un Reto a la Investigación Social Cualitativa*, «Psicoperspectivas», vol. 10, n. 2, 2011, pp. 12-34.

ing opportunities primarily support the development of R&D projects, training, and the mobility of pre-doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, as well as the acquisition and improvement of infrastructure. Support is also available to encourage collaboration among research teams at national and international levels, along with grants aimed at enhancing interdisciplinary teamwork. However, compared to the experimental sciences, research in history and education is often undervalued in terms of its contributions to society and other fields, resulting in comparably low funding allocation.

Therefore, it is crucial to demonstrate how research in the history of education can be applied to society through national and international funding proposals. Higher education institutions should strive to ensure that teaching and research provide solutions to social, political, economic, and other issues, both within and beyond their spheres of influence, by facilitating knowledge transfer. Social Sciences and Humanities possess the potential to become significant agents of change and drive social transformation<sup>4</sup>. In the context of the history of education, what can researchers transfer?

Within our field, the primary element to transfer is knowledge – specific or general – accumulated through years of research and experience<sup>5</sup>. This knowledge can be transferred through some of these activities that benefit society and different stakeholders:

1. Publication of teaching materials, establishment of educational history museums, advice on the setting up of exhibitions, development of educational activities to interpret the study of the history of education, etc.
2. Participation in agreements and/or contracts with non-profit organisations or public administrations for activities with a special social value.
3. Creation of databases, repositories, software applications and forms of expression or presentation (including photographs, etc.)
4. Publication of research findings (books, book chapters, or papers), dissemination of historical-educational research through audio-visual media, and professional outreach.
5. Creation of international networks to promote, discuss, share and disseminate the history of education research outcomes.

Therefore, a crucial aspect to consider when transferring knowledge from the history of education is to focus on the objectives of the research projects themselves, particularly with regards to the level of reflection and motivation regarding the social and/or economic relevance of the research to be conducted. In other words, researchers should ask themselves: who will benefit from what I know and what I am studying, why is it important, and for what purpose can it be useful<sup>6</sup>. These questions should guide the purpose of studying school memory.

<sup>4</sup> E. Armendariz-Nuñez, J. Tarango, F. González-Quíñones, *Transferencia de conocimiento en docentes universitarios y su aplicación en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, «Telos», vol. 24, n. 2, 2022, pp. 329-343.

<sup>5</sup> E. Castro, I. Fernández de Lucio, M. Pérez, Marián, F. Criado, *La transferencia de conocimiento desde las humanidades: Posibilidades y características*, «Arbor: Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura», vol. 184, n. 732, 2008, pp. 619-636.

<sup>6</sup> Armendariz-Nuñez et alii, *Transferencia de conocimiento en docentes universitarios y su aplicación en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, cit., p. 340.

## 2. *How to orientate oneself in the research of school memory?*

Navigating the universe of school memory is a very enriching, stimulating and constructive experience. However, certain precautions are to be taken. Borrowing from the marine world, two voyages are proposed: knowing how to distinguish and relate memory and history, on the one hand, and questioning why it is relevant to study school memory, on the other. Finally, and almost inevitably, it is necessary to warn of the cautions and risks of approaching its study.

Ramos, in a paper published in 2021, suggested among many other interesting considerations that «memory and history are two dimensions of the same activity, and this activity is historical thinking»<sup>7</sup>. But, although these two concepts are clearly interrelated, they are not the same thing. It is a complex, ancient, constantly evolving relationship, which is at the same time highly topical. Much research has focused on establishing the links between memory and history, with the book coordinated by Pierre Nora, *Le lieux de mémoire*, perhaps being the one that in the 1980s led to a boom in work linking memory and history<sup>8</sup>. From then on, there has been much debate about the possibilities and limitations of making memory a historiographical subject.

The following is a basic (not comprehensive) conceptual approach of the most basic elements in which memory and history converge, as well as the main elements that differentiate them, with the sole purpose of clarifying at all times what we are facing in historical-educational research when we set out to study school memory.

In relation to convergences, both share an ontological dimension because they deal with the same object: the past. Memory and history are *representations of the past*, in the same way that oblivion<sup>9</sup> and recall are. Both are constructed from the present, have to do with the past and are drivers of the future. And both history and memory share, albeit at different levels, a certain social tension in disputing the spaces and meanings of the past, in defining and considering the interpretations and visions of the past as hegemonic. From this notion, that is, from the meaning given by both memory and history, that the past is continually being constructed and that it is not closed, emanates a note of optimism that both share: «the future is not finished or written: it is human action that drives it»<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, if we consider the approaches of some authors, such as Philippe Ariès, history would be made up of two spheres: one visible and the other invisible. The first would focus on the study of the history of thought, politics, social relations, literature, ideology, culture, science that is, the domain of clear consciousness. The other, the

<sup>7</sup> S. Ramos, *Debates sobre la Memoria y la Historia de la Educación en el siglo XXI*, «Social and Education History», vol. 10, n. 1, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> J. Aróstegui, *Retos de la memoria y trabajos de la historia. Pasado y Memoria*, «Revista de Historia Contemporánea», vol. 3, 2004, pp. 5-59.

<sup>9</sup> Ramos, *Debates sobre la Memoria y la Historia de la Educación en el siglo XXI*, cit., pp. 22-46.

<sup>10</sup> E. Jelin, *La historicidad de las memorias*, «Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez», vol. 50, n. 1, 2020, Last update: 15.03.2020, <http://journals.openedition.org/mcv/12902> (last access: 08.04.2022).

invisible, would be made up of that which has been ignored by historians until recently<sup>11</sup>. This would refer to the area of representations, experiences and lived memories, of what is hidden, of what is secret in the memories of both individual and collective memory, related to the unconscious. Studying memory is making these traces of the past visible. It is necessary to consider memory to write history, but memory cannot be the only source of history<sup>12</sup>.

But if we speak about differences, we can say that there is no single memory, we should rather speak about memories in plural, because no society has a single memory. However, it could be said that there is a history in the singular. History seeks to construct itself as a critical discipline focused on the knowledge of human experiences in the past, it is epistemologically considered as a unitary knowledge, whose social processes require a plurality of methodological supports capable of responding to its diverse contents<sup>13</sup>.

Memory is an individual or collective reconstruction of the past; history is a scientific field of knowledge that attempts to explain and interpret facts, processes, continuities and changes in a consistent and logical manner<sup>14</sup>. Thus, and connecting this social reconstruction of memory with the social tension for disputing the spaces and meanings of the past, memories of the past are usually represented in strongly confrontational scenarios. It is therefore up to historians to carry out the important task of studying, contrasting and approaching what has happened from a historical research perspective.

On the other hand, history as a scientific-research activity is not identified with memory<sup>15</sup>. The historical method calls for knowledge produced based on a systematic and rigorous method<sup>16</sup>. The same is not required from the study of memory. Both respond not only to different social uses of the past in terms of the way they are approached, but also in terms of their content and purpose. In terms of purpose, history provides critical knowledge of social experiences and processes in the conviction that human reality is subject to change. Memories are created and constructed as a way of justifying or explaining by a group in order to argue its present without the pretending to conform to critical truth criteria.

<sup>11</sup> D. Betancourt Echeverry, *Memoria individual, memoria colectiva y memoria histórica: lo secreto y lo escondido en la narración y el recuerdo*, in R. Ávila Penagos et alii, *La práctica investigativa en ciencias sociales*, Bogotá, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2004, pp. 125-134.

<sup>12</sup> Aróstegui, *Retos de la memoria y trabajos de la historia*. *Pasado y Memoria*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> E. Manzano Moreno, *La memoria, el olvido y la historia*, in J. Pérez Garzón, E. Manzano Moreno (edd.), *Memoria histórica*, Madrid, CSIC, 2010, pp. 71-96.

<sup>14</sup> A. Viñao, *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42.

<sup>15</sup> A. Viñao, *Presentación*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», vol. 1, 2015, pp. 9-20.

<sup>16</sup> H.I. Marrow, *El conocimiento histórico*, Barcelona, Labor, 1968.

### 3. *Why studying school memory?*

In this second undertaking, it's important to clarify the significance of studying school memory. To do so, let's begin by defining the concept of school memory.

Viñao and Meda have identified two interpretations of the term "school memory". First, it can be seen as an «individual form of reflection on one's own school experience, independent of self-reconstruction». Autobiographical accounts and narratives, found in sources like diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, and correspondence, are valuable in this regard. Additionally, school memory can be gathered from oral testimonies, autobiographical interviews, life stories, and more, all centered around personal experiences in the social and educational context<sup>17</sup>. In all cases, these instruments are centred on our own personal and life experiences and knowledge in the social and school context, which help us to become aware of how we construct and reconstruct our identity<sup>18</sup>.

Secondly, school memory can be understood «as the practice of individual, collective and/or public evocation and recreation of a common school past». This would be the representations that individuals, communities and society have constructed and transmitted about the school world through other social and cultural media such as commemorations, literature, cinema, television, the popular press and other informal media, such as social networks, etc. With this, the great challenge will be to arrive at the analysis of «how the perception of the public status of education has evolved, as well as the public image of the school and the education system»<sup>19</sup>.

With the concept defined, we can address the question that underscores the importance of studying school memory: why should we study it?

Beyond the evident emotional aspect of memory study, when considering the benefits it provides to historical-educational research, we can outline the following reasons:

- Recovering Forgotten History: Studying school memory sheds light on a neglected, silenced, forgotten, or denied part of educational history that coexisted with the structural aspects. This neglected history deserves attention comparable to educational policies, records, and archives.
- Influence on Identity: Education is an integral part of both individual and collective societal history, contributing significantly to identity formation. Exploring school memory fosters common spaces for sharing experiences and perspectives, reinforcing collective identity through endeavors like scientific societies, journals, conferences, etc.
- Recognition of Overlooked Figures: Studying school memory dignifies individuals who played roles in historic moments often ignored by official history. It offers a platform for those who witnessed educational history to have their voices heard<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>18</sup> F. Hernández, M. Rifa (edd.), *La investigación autobiográfica y cambio social*, Barcelona, Octaedro, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Meda, Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, cit.

<sup>20</sup> M. P. González, J. Pagés, *Historia, memoria y enseñanza de la historia: conceptos, debates y perspectivas europeas y latinoamericanas*, «Historia y Memoria», vol. 9, 2014, pp. 275-311.

Giving Voice to Artifacts: School materials, images, engravings, and other educational artifacts from specific timeframes offer insights into teaching practices, methodologies, and the daily life of education from diverse viewpoints. These elements are crucial in shaping identities and ideologies.

Broadening Historical Scope: As a source, school memory expands the scope of educational history studies, raising questions that drive further inquiry. Memories can challenge existing historical knowledge, influencing both present and future perspectives.

Enhancing Education: Researching school memory enriches the teaching of history of education, contributing to the development of critical, responsible, and engaged citizens. It also underscores the significance of memory-related institutions like educational museums and commemorations.

Undoubtedly, recovering school memory is a great challenge from the perspective of the hypothesis that the past of education is different from what the official sources have told us, and from the perspective that there is a wide range of opportunities inviting us to debate it and drive joint research by national or international research groups, as well as its development from the academia. But as Primo Levi, a leading scholar of historical memory, warned, we must be cautious in working with memory. Some of these caveats will be discussed below<sup>21</sup>.

In the realm of history, memory can be examined through three distinct perspectives: analytical, critical, and strictly historical. The analytical standpoint regards memory as a resource for research, a means of gathering historical data. The critical perspective delves into the role of history in rectifying erroneous or false memories. Lastly, the historical perspective treats memory as a subject of study and research, focusing on how memory is constructed regarding past events, such as representations of history in literature or film<sup>22</sup>.

From all three perspectives, the use of school memory has some drawbacks linked to the particularity of the vehicle of analysis. The most representative is the use of memories. In the case of oral or written testimonies, it is true that these memories are a tool for reconstructing the events of the past through a look at the present, but in any case we cannot forget that memory in its essence is an element heavily loaded with subjectivity and with a great symbolic capacity, whether individual or collective. In historical-educational research, we must be extremely cautious about how this part of history is studied and analysed.

Furthermore, Roberto Sani, in relation to the interpretation of historical-educational heritage, warned of the need to place a kind of methodological bias at the centre of reflection, namely in the consideration of placing the emphasis on a precise reference to the historiographical approach, because «only a truly historical reading of school and educational heritage can give us back the most authentic sense of such heritage»<sup>23</sup>. As

<sup>21</sup> P. Levi, *Los hundidos y los salvados*, Barcelona, Muchnick, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> E. González Calleja, *Memoria e Historia. Vademecum de conceptos y debates fundamentales*, Madrid, Catarata, 2013, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> R. Sani, *L'implementazione della ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia: itinerari, priorità*,



scholars of school memory, we cannot stop at the simple act of remembrance. The role of the researcher requires, therefore, to turn memory «into an anonymous memory or objectified memory through historiographical operations»<sup>24</sup> that will determine its degree of reliability.

Additionally, it's important to acknowledge that memory is selective and often intertwined with an inclination to forget, dismiss, or overlook. As Viñao aptly notes «what is remembered or preserved is always a tiny part of what happened or was produced»<sup>25</sup>.

Hence, several methodological precautions should be heeded when exploring school memory. Commencing with the identification of memory as a suitable source, the process demands «comparison, temporal contextualization, relativization, objectification, and the formulation of a discourse grounded in methodology»<sup>26</sup>. In this endeavor, the role of the educational researcher remains pivotal.

As this exploration draws to a close, it is incumbent upon future historians to chart a new course and steer the course of our endeavors in studying school memory. With this in mind, one last question remains to be pondered: what inspires a research approach and new historiographical perspectives for studying school memory?

#### 4. *Finding Inspiration for Exploring School Memory*

The foundational element that sparks any research endeavour undoubtedly lies in comprehending the existing body of knowledge and ongoing work on the subject. Therefore, to determine the most fitting approach for studying school memory, it becomes essential to read and engage with individuals who have contributed to the history of education in this particular field.

In recent years, an extensive and diverse literature focusing on the study of school memory has emerged, addressing each dimension outlined in the definition, offering insightful and thought-provoking perspectives on the educational realm. Within the domain of History of Education, attention toward studying school memory started to take shape in parallel with the evolution of policies concerning historical memory recovery and the public utilization of history. Simultaneously, there has been an increasing interest among general historians in delving into new historiographical dimensions.

In the context of Spain, this movement was sparked by the discourse surrounding the connection between school memory and school culture, initially introduced by Julia at

*obiettivi di lungo termine*, in S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla, L. Pomante (edd.). *La Práctica Educativa. Historia, Memoria y Patrimonio*, Salamanca, FahrenHouse, 2018, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Ramos, *Debates sobre la Memoria y la Historia de la Educación en el siglo XXI*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Viñao, *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Aróstegui, *Retos de la memoria y trabajos de la historia. Pasado y Memoria*, cit., p. 35.



the ISCHE in 1993. This discourse was spearheaded by Escolano<sup>27</sup> and Viñao<sup>28</sup> more than twenty years ago. As these two authors are essential reading for beginners in the study of school memory, and being aware that there are also other works of reference, we will only highlight the publications of the main collective works, mainly in Spain, and focusing on the study of memory from a general perspective, where a researcher can find intriguing ideas for approaching the study of school memory.

The initial collective work in Spain was the monograph that Escolano coordinated on *La memoria de la escuela* in «Vela Mayor. Revista de Anaya Educación» (1997). This work showcased the future of memory by illustrating how narrative practices extend the virtual nature of school memories. Within its twelve contributions, diverse subjects were explored, including the historiographical value of school memory, the post-war school's material and moral environment, lived experiences within schools, the historical omission of women's experiences during the Franco era, school ethnography, and the "ghosts" that haunt the school's history.

Subsequently, the work by Hernández Díaz and Escolano Benito (2002)<sup>29</sup> introduced, in addition to the school memory-culture debate, other topics such as: school museums, oral history, life stories and images as sources, and the narrative of the school. The historiographical possibilities of school memory were thus expanded, introducing not only critical analyses of the possibilities of memory, but also other spaces of memory, such as school museums.

While several important works were presented in the ensuing years, a notable collective work emerged in 2011, almost a decade later. This is the publication by Lomas<sup>30</sup>. This is a work organised around two large blocks: "Education, between memory and oblivion" and "The education of memory and the learning of memory". In this Book, it is worth highlighting the reflection that takes place around the unwillingness to remember and the definition of the "school memory" construct in the field of the history of education. There is also a work on literature in the context of history and school, and a new reflection on women's memory of education.

Subsequently, in 2015, something that could be considered a milestone in the study of the memory of education in Spain took place, namely the creation of the journal «Historia y Memoria de la Educación» as an instrument of scientific dissemination, *with a* clear international vocation, and published by the Spanish Society for the History of Education (SEDHE). The work of bringing to life the proposal fell to Viñao, who coordinated a commission to draw up the aims and structure of the new journal. The result

<sup>27</sup> A. Escolano Benito, *La memoria de la escuela*, «Vela Mayor, Revista de Anaya Educación», monographic issue, IV, n. II, 1997, pp. 7-14; Id., *Memoria de la educación y cultura de la escuela*, in A. Escolano Benito, J. M. Hernández Díaz (edd.), *La memoria y el deseo. Cultura de la escuela y educación deseada*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2002, pp. 19-42.

<sup>28</sup> A. Viñao, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», vol. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

<sup>29</sup> J.M. Hernández Díaz, A. Escolano Benito (edd.), *La memoria y el deseo: cultura de la escuela la y educación deseada*, Valencia, Tirant Lo Blanch, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> C. Lomas (ed.), *Lecciones contra el olvido. Memoria de la educación y educación de la memoria*. Barcelona, Ediciones Octaedro, 2011.

was the launch of a periodical publication that should defend two principles, expressed by Viñao himself in the presentation of the first issue: the title states that

[...] history is made from individual, collective, social and institutional memory, from that incorporated into all kinds of objects and documents, and from that deposited in specific places; and that, in turn, the writing of history, the historical operation, works and (re)constructs such memory.

And, on the other hand,

[...] although history as a scientific-research activity is not identified with memory - nor the latter with the former - it is not possible to make history if it is not based on memory(ies) and without, at the same time, (re)constructing it (them); that is, without creating memory(ies)<sup>31</sup>.

From that moment on, a form of school memory became institutionalised. Sixteen issues have been published since then, where the initiated researchers of school memory can find reference articles.

Following this event, another major proposal came to encourage discussions on the study of school memory at international level, and this was the holding of the International Symposium «School Memory. New trends in historical-educational research: heuristic perspectives and methodological issues», held in Seville on 22 and 23 September 2015. This meeting led to the collective publication *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*<sup>32</sup>.

This work brings together renewed, new and inviting themes for the study of school memory, such as: postcards, photographs, teachers' diaries, autobiographies, engravings and paintings, institutional publications, oral testimonies, gravestones, cinema and television. All this in an attempt to reveal the *untold* story and to give an account of the image of it that has been recorded in the realities of many different countries. And not only from the experiences or perceptions of school experiences in the individual sphere of the protagonists of the educational process (individual memories), but also as part of a collective experience (collective memory), or through the representations of the school itself promoted by institutions on the basis of a specific memory policy (public memory). All this, in addition, by studying and reporting on the places of school memory (evoking Pierre Nora in his work *Les lieux de mémoire*).

A year later, an additional significant contribution arose from international collaborative networks following an international congress of the GEDHE and CESCO research groups in 2018, held in Palma de Mallorca. This contribution was the collective work by González, Meda, Motilla, and Pomante<sup>33</sup>. This volume aimed to share new knowledge and perspectives on various themes, including the material and immaterial aspects of educational practice, texts on educational practice, oral testimonies, visual memory of educational practice, and the challenges of conserving and disseminating historical-ed-

<sup>31</sup> Viñao, *Presentación*, cit., pp. 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit.

<sup>33</sup> S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla, L. Pomante (edd.), *La Práctica Educativa. Historia, Memoria y Patrimonio*, cit.

educational heritage. It also introduced didactic guidance workshops, offering practical approaches for engaging with school memory through oral sources and historical-educational heritage.

Also in 2018 came out the publication by González Pérez<sup>34</sup>. This work seeks to construct an inclusive historical imaginary that gives a voice back to those who have been silenced, and highlights the presence of their heroes, in an attempt, in the words of the author, «to provide a succinct vision of memory and education, with the political and historical invariant of educational practices». In this work, some attractive themes are addressed, such as the challenges of memory in the educational past and present, memory and education renewal, and politics as an active form of education.

Turning to Italy, the web portal *memoriascolastica.it* is noteworthy. Created as a result of the research project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1961-2001)”, approved by the Ministry of Education of the University and Research in 2019, and made up of several Italian universities and athenaeums in recent years. The project is an important reference in studies of school memory understood as individual and collective practice, and of public memory for the recreation of the educational past, and it focuses on the image of the school imprinted in the collective imaginary, analysing the feelings about school by both individuals and groups of the different social stakeholders.

In recent years in Italy, it is worth highlighting as further collective works of reference with a generalist nature, those produced by the project: the monograph that the journal «History Education & Children's Literature», devoted to *Memories and public celebrations in education in contemporary time*, coordinated by Meda, Pomante, and Brunelli in 2019; *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, by Ascenzi, Covato and Meda; and *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary* recently published in 2022 by Alfieri and Garai<sup>35</sup>.

##### 5. *The future of studying school memory holds numerous possibilities for new historiographical perspectives*

All these works give due account of the possibilities that the study of school memory offers to the history of education, and its critical study is necessary to redefine the way of constructing the history of education. Therefore, it could be said that none of the topics that have been worked on in the field of school memory have been exhausted.

<sup>34</sup> T. González Pérez (ed.), *Entre el olvido y la memoria. Educación, mitos y realidades*, Valencia, Tirant Humanidades, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli (edd.), *Memories and public celebrations in Education in contemporary times*, «History Education & Children Literature», vol. XI, n. 1, 2019; A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, eum, 2020; P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando editore, 2022.

To begin with, the very sense that the school past is constructed and changing through memory allows us to continue producing individual and collective reconstructions of the past. But, I reiterate, not through the simple individual or collective evocation of the school's past, but by emphasising its role in the socio-cultural construction and delving into the meaning of the collective representations and imaginaries that have been displayed in this regard. Therefore, the use of oral sources, the history narrated through diaries and memoirs, etc., in spatially and temporally diverse contexts, are categories that should continue to be studied in order to reconstruct the history of education. It would be worthwhile in this area to focus our analysis on other less studied actors, such as the administrative and service staff of schools, the people who ran the schools, or the role of parents in the school environment.

On the other hand, it is necessary to continue delving into the representations of the school past that the cultural industry provides us with, «imprinting indelible stereotypes on the collective imaginary». Works such as that of Borruso (2021)<sup>36</sup> on education, memory and childhood, or Alfieri (2019)<sup>37</sup> on the images of our teachers through Italian cinema and television, to give just a few examples, bear witness to this. In this field of cultural representations, we cannot ignore the fact that contemporary technologies have for years been favouring the emergence of new models of educational interaction<sup>38</sup>. It is certainly an emerging field of study, but it would be worthwhile to delve into the universe of social networks to find out what representations are being produced in the school environment.

Educational historiography, on the other hand, evidences that the study of historical-educational heritage has proliferated all over the world, based fundamentally on the recovery and exhibition of the material and immaterial culture of the school through, fundamentally, education museums. Heritage, as Viñao points out, is something valuable that needs to be preserved and protected, it can be applied to an individual and a social group, and it carries with it the fact that it wishes to «become a place of memory and a place to deposit the memory, something to remember that makes us remember»<sup>39</sup>. For this reason, places of memory continue to constitute subject of study and analysis that is more than relevant in the field of the study of school memory. From this perspective, it is worth exploring not only new approaches, such as the one proposed by Escolano<sup>40</sup> on the emotions of the subjects in the processes of construction of narrative identity and the new therapeutic perspectives of heritage education, but also in the identification of other places that help us building it, such as the Internet<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> F. Borruso (ed.), *Memoria, infanzia, educazione. Modelli educativi e vita quotidiana fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, RomaTre Press, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> C. Brooks, C. Gibson, *Professional Learning in a Digital Age*, «Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology», vol. 38, n. 2, 2012, pp. 1-17.

<sup>39</sup> Viñao, *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, cit., pp. 17-42.

<sup>40</sup> A. Escolano, *El giro afectivo en la historia de la formación humana. Memoria de la escuela y emociones*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», vol. 7, 2018, pp. 391-422.

<sup>41</sup> M. Brunelli, *Sapshots from the past: School Images on the Web and the construction of the collective memory of schools*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 47-64.

A further opportunity offered by the study of school memory leads us to broaden the field of study. A new challenge for historians of memory is to take the study of memory beyond the school. Universities, education in non-formal educational settings (adult education, special education, lifelong learning, etc.), open up a universe for the study of memory in the history of education. This would probably lead us to redefine – or maybe not – the very conceptual construct of “school memory”, since it was been born and defined around the school as a setting, with “school” being understood mostly as relating to the primary and secondary school years.

Finally, to suggest some further possibilities, in the consideration that there is a historical present based, fundamentally, on the possibility of the confluence of the living memories and the acquired memories of the coexisting generations, it would be worth pointing out other themes that have marked, or are defining, the field of the history of education, for which school memory will be a determining element in its construction. Examples of this would be the school’s treatment of climate change, the war in Ukraine, bullying, or examples such as the great global COVID-19 pandemic, about which our ever-pioneering teachers (as Escolano, 2020) have already ventured to write<sup>42</sup>.

Certainly, there are so many *contents* of school memory that can be studied that we could talk about it for as long as memory, as the brain’s sentinel, allows us to do so. But with the confidence and certainty that the study of school memory is worthwhile, young researchers of the future of school memory should consider that «it is the only paradise from which we cannot be expelled»<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> A. Escolano, *O COVID-19 e a educación escolar: Unha reflexión desde os estudos de Historia da Educació*, «Revista Galega de Educación», vol. extra, 2020, pp. 53-54.

<sup>43</sup> Sentence attributed to the German writer Jean Paul in J.P. Weiss, *In Search of an Identity*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2000, p. 5.



# Images of the Changing School in Luigi Comencini's Television Documentary "I bambini e noi" (1970)

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## 1. «*This place in the sky called Turin*»

During the 1970s, the city of Turin was not only a concrete place, but it also was an intensely imagined place, which lived through the narratives proposed by television, movies, and songs. A place full of implications for the national imaginary, for at least two reasons. First because Turin was home to FIAT; the epicentre of industrial production during the "Italian economic boom" of the 1950s and 60s as well as theatre of conflicts between capital and labour culminating in the so-called "Hot Autumn" of 1969<sup>1</sup>. Second because Turin had been, from the mid-1950s onwards, the destination of a massive emigration of labourers from Southern Italy who got visibility and prominence in the workers' struggles of the 1960s<sup>2</sup>, definitely changing the connotations of the Piedmontese capital and turning Turin into the third largest city in the South after Naples and Palermo, in terms of geographical origin of its inhabitants<sup>3</sup>.

By the early 1970s, the time was ripe for Turin to become a privileged vantage point for observing the country's news. From there, in fact, it was possible to better observe the condition and the lifestyle of the working class transfigured by the experience of the protests as well as to discern the historically complex relationship between North and South, which revealed unprecedented forms of interdependence but also of subordination. Valuable historical evidence of this process is provided by the numerous representations of the city that flourished in the first half of the decade. Such representations help to give an immediately recognizable form to «this place in the sky called Turin» on which Lucio Dalla in the song *L'auto targata «TO»* casts the anguish of a migrant family travelling

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the history of Turin after World War II, see in particular N. Tranfaglia (ed.), *Gli anni della Repubblica*, in *Storia di Torino*, vol. IX, Torino, Einaudi, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Compare with what Fabio Levi argues: «The presence of immigrants – especially those from the South – on the Turin scenario began to manifest itself in the mid-1950s [...] until, in the late 1960s and throughout the first half of the 1970s, the new labor recruited from the rest of Italy came to impose itself as one of the decisive subjects of the social clash taking place» (F. Levi, *L'immigrazione*, in N. Tranfaglia (ed.), *Gli anni della Repubblica*, cit., p. 159).

<sup>3</sup> P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988*, New York, Palgrave, 2003.

«from Scilla to Turin»<sup>4</sup>. The latter thus turns out to be precisely a «place in the sky», full of nightmares and desires, or the mirror in which to reflect the novelties of a rapidly changing national identity.

Despite the variety of media and registers, the representations of Turin produced in the first half of the 1970s agree on the centrality assigned to a new character in the city life at the time, the worker of southern origin. Dalla refers to it extensively in the trilogy of records made between 1973 and 1976 in collaboration with former partisan, poet, and librarian Roberto Roversi<sup>5</sup>. The latter, who authored the lyrics, well describes the suffering of the youngest workers whose life aspirations clash with the harshness and repetitiveness of the chain work<sup>6</sup>. While, in the dreams of those who leave, Turin is «where there is a mountain / that leads to the moon»<sup>7</sup>, those who arrive often end up feeling enclosed between «bars and chains»<sup>8</sup> or «alone like a dog in a corner / inside a cellar»<sup>9</sup>, living on the razor's edge between the coveted redemption and the risk of sinking into social marginality.

A seed of hope, which at least partially compensates for the bitterness of emigration, can be found in two splendid almost contemporary movies: Lina Wertmüller's *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore* (1972) and Ettore Scola's *Trevico-Torino. Viaggio alla Fiat-Nam* (1973). Both the protagonists of these two movies are factory workers who meet, outside the factory, two young women from the North with whom they will try out new and unprecedented forms of understanding, both sentimental and political. To portray the picaresque adventure of Sicilian factory worker Carmelo Mardocchio, Wertmüller uses the register of the comic and the grotesque. As the director herself recalls,

the premiere of *Mimi* was held in Turin in a three thousand seat cinema that I think was called "Ideal". We were terribly afraid. The auditorium was full of steelworkers and factory workers, mostly from the South. The lights went out and the screening began. Roars of laughter. *Mimi* had immediately become their hero. [...] Finally relieved of anxiety, we sank into our seats and enjoyed ourselves along with the spectators<sup>10</sup>.

Similar effects of truth and recognition are pursued by Scola in *Trevico-Torino*, which however combines fictional elements with documentary ones and won the award given by

<sup>4</sup> L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *L'auto targata «TO»*, in Idd., *Il giorno aveva cinque teste*, Roma, RCA Italia, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> The trilogy of records made by Dalla in collaboration with Roversi consists of the following albums: *Il giorno aveva cinque teste* (1973), *Anidride solforosa* (1975), and *Automobili* (1976). Another songwriter who addressed the theme of working-class emigration to Turin is Rino Gaetano, with his 1974 debut album *Ingresso libero*.

<sup>6</sup> Compare with what Guido Crainz argues: «The professional and cultural potentials and social demands of millions of young people come [...] into explosive contradiction with the exhausting chain work, the daily suffered injustice, humiliation, and discrimination» (G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta*, Roma, Donzelli, 2003, p. 323).

<sup>7</sup> L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *Mela di scarto*, in Idd., *Anidride solforosa*, Roma, RCA Italia, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *L'auto targata «TO»*, cit.

<sup>9</sup> L. Dalla, R. Roversi, *L'operaio Gerolamo*, in Idd., *Il giorno aveva cinque teste*, cit.

<sup>10</sup> L. Wertmüller, *Arcangela Felice Assunta Job Wertmüller von Elgg Espanol von Brauchich cioè Lina Wertmüller*, Milano, Frassinelli, 2006.



the International Federation of Film Critics precisely «for its documentary authenticity in depicting a working-class destiny». Co-author of the screenplay was Diego Novelli, then editor of the communist newspaper «l'Unità» and future mayor of Turin since 1975. He recalls how director Scola first came to Turin with the goal of telling «the story of a boy from his village», Trevico in the province of Avellino, and with a subject of «just a few lines»: «The story of Fortunato, a young southerner, hired by the big factory to produce cars»<sup>11</sup>.

Entirely original is the portrait of Turin proposed instead by another director coming from the «Italian-style comedy», Luigi Comencini. If in the 1975 crime thriller *La donna della domenica* Comencini turns his gaze beyond the river Po, which separates the working-class city from the hill, where the factory owners live anything but happily, in the TV documentary *I bambini e noi*, produced by the Italian state broadcaster RAI in 1970, the director tackles the theme of emigration from the peculiar point of view of the migrant children, thus giving voice to the sons and daughters of factory workers such as Mimì or Fortunato. The fifth episode of Comencini's documentary, entitled namely *Papà lavora* [*Dad Works*], opens in Monte Sant'Angelo in the province of Foggia where almost all the children's fathers work far away and ends in Turin where the director notes how «in the fabulous North, differences are consolidated: those from the South remain those from the South and the elderly immigrants live on memories and *nostalgia*»<sup>12</sup>. The sixth and final episode, on which this essay will focus, it is significantly titled *Qualcosa di nuovo* [*Something New*] and moves rather from the observation of how Turin has become a city of adoption for the children from the South; «there they want to come forward, despite the barriers, despite the different dialect». Faced with this new reality, Comencini asks: «what does the school want and what can it do?»<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. In these schools «something new» is going on

In the episode *Qualcosa di nuovo*, Comencini presents its protagonists through a kind of *progressive focus*, revealing an almost narrative approach to the documentary genre which brings this work closer to his fiction movies. Walking along Corso Racconigi, where the Cenisia local market is held, the director notices a banner that reads «The children invite the neighborhood» and asks shopkeepers for more information. Then, Comencini enters the still-empty «Gabrio Casati» primary school, where children will perform in the afternoon. Passing through a heavy iron gate that seems to mark the entrance to a new dimension, he soon realizes that here «things are allowed that are forbidden and not done elsewhere»<sup>14</sup>. In the courtyard, he pauses to observe the painted walls and some

<sup>11</sup> Novelli's words are quoted in V. Zagarrò (ed.), *Trevico-Cinecittà. L'avventuroso viaggio di Ettore Scola*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> L. Comencini, *Papà lavora*, in Id., *I bambini e noi*, Italy, 1970. In this case, as also in footnotes 13, 14 and 15, the words in quotation marks are by the director's voice-over.

<sup>13</sup> L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, in Id., *I bambini e noi*, cit.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

objects made by the children themselves, including papier-mâché puppets, collages, and «cheerfully decorated»<sup>15</sup> rubbish bins; these are the signs that herald, with an almost fairy-tale-like pace, that something *extraordinary* is about to happen.

## 2.1 *The experience of the animazione teatrale*

Franco Passatore was an actor and a theatre director, as well as the creator of an original proposal of *animazione teatrale*<sup>16</sup> for school children in Turin. His figure represents an essential turning point in the documentary, not only because it introduces an important first movement in its quasi-narrative structure, but also because it was Passatore's fame that brought to Turin Luigi Comencini<sup>17</sup>, who probably identified with his attempt to give voice to children through theater<sup>18</sup>. It is significant, moreover, that Passatore's role as an *animator* of initiatives and projects was acknowledged by the children themselves, as it is clear from reading the class newspapers of those years. In fact, his arrival at school always seems to be accompanied by unexpected and exciting events, such as the visit from Comencini himself with his *troupe*, and this is perhaps why in a child's poem he is suggestively referred to as «the man / of our new game»<sup>19</sup>.

The origin of the *animazione teatrale* can be dated back to January 1969, with the debut of the «satirical cabaret show» *Ma che storia è questa?* and the beginning of Passatore's partnership with his fellow performer Silvio Destefanis. The show, produced in collaboration with the Education Department of the City of Turin and performed in fifty elementary schools in the city, had no curtain, no stage and was programmatically open to audience participation. As Passatore himself declares,

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> «Animazione teatrale» is the name Passatore himself gave to the original theatrical workshops he held for children from the late 1960s onwards. The proposal was developed practically and then described in F. Passatore, S. Destefanis, A. Fontana, F. De Lucis, *Io ero l'albero (tu il cavallo)*, Rimini, Guaraldi, 1972 and F. Passatore, *Animazione dopo. Le esperienze di animazione dal teatro alla scuola, dalla scuola al sociale*, Rimini, Guaraldi, 1976.

<sup>17</sup> Compare with Fiorenzo Alfieri's memory: «Comencini had heard of Franco Passatore and his workshop activities in schools. He therefore came to film one of his performances at the "Gabrio Casati" school [...]. Two "Nino Costa" classes were performing there, mine and my colleague Ridolfi's. These two classes had been meeting Passatore once a week in the afternoon for some time. Comencini was very impressed by the way the boys and girls behaved and he decided to change the production schedule by coming to see them at their school» (F. Alfieri, S. Della Casa, *La città che non c'era*, Roma, Dino Audino Editore, 2012, pp. 18-19).

<sup>18</sup> Comencini has shown interest in the world of children since his film debut, *Children in the City* (Italy, 1946). For this reason, he has often been referred to by Italian critics as «the children's director». Compare with what the director himself states in his autobiographical work *Davvero un bel mestiere! Infanzia, vocazione, esperienze di un regista*, Milano, Baldini & Castoldi, 1999, p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> Class V A of teacher Daria Ridolfi, *A Franco Passatore*, «Festa», vol. 5, n. 3, 1970 (in Istoretto Archive, Torino, «Tempo pieno» Repository, «Fondo Ridolfi Daria» [IT-C00-FA18127]).

with *Ma che storia è questa?* a new experience has begun for us theater people. [...] We have left the traditional theater environments to go to classrooms, gymnasiums, hallways, refectories, courtyards, that is where school life takes place daily. In the children's environment, where they operate all the time and where it is possible to create a simple and direct relationship, fostering from the very beginning a learning exchange between us and them<sup>20</sup>.

The encounters arising during the tour of the show and the desire to deepen the relationship with children and teachers led in the following months to the consolidation of «a permanent hypothesis of theatrical and educational research»<sup>21</sup>, through which the former theatre *for* children was gradually replaced by a theater made *with* children, a «theater of life [...] where each individual is author and interpreter of himself and interlocutor of the other»<sup>22</sup>. After an initial phase of experimentation and study, at the beginning of the 1969-1970 school year, «Centri di ricerca espressiva» [«Expressive Research Centers»] were consequently established at the “Gabrio Casati” and “Nino Costa” primary schools; the centers were so called because they were open to a plurality of expressive forms, which included not only dramatization, but also painting, sculpture, singing, and the production of audio-video content<sup>23</sup>. The workshop activities conducted by Passatore and Destefanis involved more than three hundred children and ended in June 1970 with a festival entitled «L'albero più grande del mondo» [«The Largest Tree in the World»], which took place at the “Gabrio Casati” school and was filmed by Comencini whose commentary voice-over observes:

these children's theater is not meant for an audience, it is theater for themselves, theater for those who make it. When children play, they invent characters, situations, but they do it in secret, almost ashamed. Here they come out and play, using rags, cardboard, microphones, and topics provided by adults<sup>24</sup>.

Interviewed during the festival, the headmaster Gianni Dolino himself confirms the educational purpose of the many activities carried out by the children, who are in the meanwhile busy painting the walls of the school. Dolino will be the future City Councilor for Education of the left-wing council that will govern Turin from 1975, proposing a generalization of the experience of animation, no longer just theatrical, through a project named «La città ai ragazzi» [«The City to the Kids»]<sup>25</sup>. According to him, expressive activities should be considered a sort of «compensation», both practical and symbolic, offered to the child to reward him/her at least in part for the limitations imposed in

<sup>20</sup> F. Passatore, *Teatro nella scuola. Un anno di attività svolta per incarico dell'Assessorato all'Istruzione da Franco Passatore e Silvio De Stefanis*, 1970. This unedited recording was kindly granted by the Passatore family, to whom I extend my gratitude.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> F. Passatore, S. Destefanis, A. Fontana, F. De Lucis, *Io ero l'albero (tu il cavallo)*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> The activity of the «Centri di ricerca espressiva» is reconstructed in Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (ed.), *Il lavoro teatrale nella scuola*, «Quaderni di Cooperazione educativa», n. 5-6, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1970, pp. 45-53.

<sup>24</sup> L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the «La città ai ragazzi» project and the educational activities by the city council led by mayor Diego Novelli, see the very detailed book G. Parena (ed.), *La città e il bambino. L'intervento del Comune di Torino sulla scuola dal 1975 al 1980*, Torino, Comune di Torino, 1981.

the context of the industrial metropolis, where otherwise s/he risks living like «a bird in a cage»<sup>26</sup>. «Compensation» is even more necessary and urgent for those boys and girls from the countryside, whose families in those years came *en masse* to Turin in response to FIAT's production needs.

## 2.2 *The full-time school*

After showing the experience of the *animazione teatrale*, the narration moves to the far suburbs of Turin, namely to the newly built Vallette district, whose tall council houses were home mainly to workers of southern origin<sup>27</sup>. «A true ghetto», according to the definition of the same local neighborhood committee, where «there are no libraries, sports or cultural centers» and «the nearest emergency room is five kilometers away»<sup>28</sup>. Yet right here, where the “Nino Costa” primary school was based and some teachers of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* worked, Comencini would find new signs of *something new*.

On the occasion of the festival organised at “Gabrio Casati”, the director meets a group of children from the “Nino Costa” school who are also involved in the project of the *animazione teatrale* and decides to visit them to spend an entire school day together. Their teachers, Daria Ridolfi and Fiorenzo Alfieri<sup>29</sup>, helped establish the Turin group of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* in 1964 and have been experimenting with a new full-time school for the past few months. Full-time school is one of the first important novelties which Comencini discusses with the founding teachers; it concretely manifests itself at lunchtime, when the boys and girls of the two classes leave the school, without backpacks since, as they state, «we will be back this afternoon, at half past two»<sup>30</sup>.

The campaign for full-time school had been launched by the city group of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* since January 1970, when five teachers from two schools, the “Nino Costa” and the “Pestalozzi”, agreed with families and spontaneous neighborhood committees to pursue teaching even in the afternoon, doubling their

<sup>26</sup> Gianni Dolino in L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

<sup>27</sup> Compare with what Andrea Coccorese reports: «The Vallette hosts a majority of families originating from the South, in particular from Sicily, Apulia and Calabria (out of the first 561 households assigned 82.6 per cent come from the South) and of working-class extraction (in the 1971 census, 76 per cent of those employed were workers while the city average was 54 per cent)» (A. Coccorese, M. Romito (edd.), *Sì, sono delle Vallette, c'hai problemi? Autobiografia di un quartiere*, Torino, Centro di documentazione storica della Circoscrizione 5 della Città di Torino, 2011, p. 22).

<sup>28</sup> Comitato di S. Caterina, *Lavoro di quartiere alle Vallette – S. Caterina*, «Cooperazione educativa», vol. 19, n. 6, 1970, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Daria Ridolfi, teacher at “Nino Costa” until the 1990s, was long active in the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*, of which she was honorary president. Fiorenzo Alfieri was teacher at “Nino Costa” until 1975, when he was elected to the city council in the lists of the Italian Communist Party. He became later city councilor for Youth and Sport in Novelli's council, from 1976 to 1985. On his experience as a teacher, he wrote *Il mestiere di maestro. Dieci anni nella scuola e nel Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1974.

<sup>30</sup> Children interviewed in L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

working hours for political reasons and without any pay<sup>31</sup>. Shortly thereafter, in mid-February, the Education Department of the City of Turin intervened by funding full-time education in six schools in the city's suburbs, for a total of thirty classes, thus anticipating and helping to create the conditions for the approval of Law No. 820 of 1971, which established full-time school nationwide.

The primary school acquired a new prominence in the city's public debate, also because of the municipal election to be held in June, and the city council repeatedly claimed its intervention on full-time. The Christian Democrat mayor Giovanni Porcellana even went so far as to state that

in my meetings with teachers, but especially with people in the districts, I realized that unfortunately our school is a class-based school, where the poor man's child is really in an inferior condition compared to the rich man's child. Just look at the number of dropouts in Vallette and Crocetta [Ed. note: the latter is the city's middle-class neighborhood]. [...] A situation that we need to get out of [...] [by] making sure that the school can function full-time<sup>32</sup>.

These words reveal the surprising hegemonic capacity brought to bear by the promoters of the full-time campaign, who for their part aimed to counter the «class-based selection» operated by the school by exercising what was then called «workers' control»<sup>33</sup>. In other words, in a city that had almost doubled its population since 1945 due to internal immigration<sup>34</sup>, they claimed to find solutions to welcome the children of southern workers to school, who instead were often rejected, placed in the so-called *classi differenziali*<sup>35</sup> or involved in after-school activities intended only for the needy, which ended up ratifying their status as social outcasts.

Above all, the after-school institution, which had been established by Law No. 1859 of 1962 on the new Italian middle school with the goal of supporting struggling students, was then widely perceived as inadequate and counterproductive<sup>36</sup>; this helps explain the sudden success of the full-time school proposal. In this regard, Anna Maria Cappelli<sup>37</sup>,

<sup>31</sup> The initial phase of the campaign for full-time school is amply documented in Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (ed.), *Settorialismo*, Conegliano, Edizioni MCE, 1970.

<sup>32</sup> Giovanni Porcellana interviewed in *I grandi problemi di Torino che attendono una soluzione*, «La Stampa», 30<sup>th</sup> May 1970.

<sup>33</sup> Compare with the documentation included in Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (ed.), *Settorialismo*, cit.

<sup>34</sup> The data is reported in F. Levi, *L'immigrazione*, cit., p. 163.

<sup>35</sup> *Classi differenziali* were special education classes established in the Italian school system at the beginning of the twentieth century. On the correlation between special education classes and immigration in Turin after World War II, see G. De Michele, *Anti-Southern Racism and Education in Post-War Italy*, New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 103-157.

<sup>36</sup> See B. Ciari, *Tempo pieno: pieno di che?*, in Id., *La grande disadattata*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1973, pp. 134-149; G. Cives, *Scuola integrata e servizio scolastico*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> Anna Maria Cappelli has been active in the Turin group of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* since 1965. She taught at the "Pestalozzi" primary school from 1967 to 1981 and in January 1970 she was among the five teachers who experimented with full-time school on a voluntary basis. In 1981 she was appointed headmistress in San Mauro Torinese, where she remained until her retirement in 2005.

an activist in the early stages of the full-time campaign and a teacher at the “Pestalozzi” primary school, recalls:

When the exit bell rang, two lines were always formed: one line went out and the other went down to the cellars. What was in the cellars? In the cellars was the soup dish for the poor, which were kept until 4:30 p.m. by seasonal teachers<sup>38</sup>.

### 2.3 *A cooperative school with an activist imprint*

Upon entering one of the “Nino Costa” classrooms, Comencini immediately notices «a different way of doing school»<sup>39</sup> than the traditional one shown in the previous episodes of his TV series. After all, the full-time proposal, at least in the intentions of the teachers who first experimented with it, was linked not only to the idea of a *quantitative* expansion of school hours but rather to that of a *qualitative* change in the way of doing school. It was precisely the desire to renew teaching practices that had been the core around which had been formed the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* in the 1950s; a direct political commitment to the reform of school structures was only made later, after the troubled afterthoughts that followed the protests of 1968<sup>40</sup>.

From the very start, the organization of the classroom as well as the organization of teaching activities reveal to the viewer a school based on the principle of cooperation, both between classmates and between teacher and students. To begin, desks are not lined up in rows, but rather organised in clusters to encourage group work. Next, the teacher does not sit at her desk but moves instead among children thereby facilitating their work. Finally, the teacher corrects but does not punish, because she believes that students’ well-being is a basic condition for learning. It is a conception very far from that of those who, in those years, still used the rod to inflict corporal punishment, as documented for example by teacher Albino Bernardini in his 1976 text *La scuola nemica*<sup>41</sup>.

The new school model becomes concretely visible in the eyes of the audience. The director intervenes to highlight and deepen some of its aspects, listening to the voices of the children and questioning the teachers, who are considered as «reflective practitioners»<sup>42</sup> whose task it is to explicate and motivate their methodological choices. Comencini asks, for example, how the choice of historical topics to be covered takes place and teacher Alfieri clarifies how his working method is geared toward fostering a research attitude in children:

<sup>38</sup> A.M. Cappelli, Oral History Interview by Davide Allegra, Turin, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

<sup>39</sup> L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

<sup>40</sup> An organic and comprehensive history of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* can be found in R. Rizzi, *La cooperazione educativa. Per una pedagogia popolare*, Parma, Edizioni Junior, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> A. Bernardini, *La scuola nemica*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1976, pp. 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> D. A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*, New York, Basic Books, 1984.

The foundation of our work is conversation. [...] This way the needs for in-depth study arise; they can be historical or geographical, most of the time it is very difficult to distinguish them. Based on these real needs, these interests, documents are sought and topics are further explored<sup>43</sup>.

At one point in the documentary, the panoramic gaze adopted up to that time is narrowed around a single character, who takes a prominent role. In fact, after discussing with the students of some classes, the director interviews outside the classroom a child originary from Brindisi, whom Comencini will accompany home asking his father for permission to take him to lunch at a *trattoria*. In a story full of intensity and delicacy, the child recalls how in the previous school, where he failed twice, «we never spoke, whoever spoke got a five or a four», while in the new school «the more I speak, the more I can find words»<sup>44</sup>. Through these words the child very effectively summarizes both the method and the purpose of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*'s pedagogical proposal, which has a clear activist imprint and aims to place the creative activity of students at the center of the educational process.

Perhaps the greatest value of Comencini's work lies in his ability to establish an empathetic and confidential relationship with the universe of childhood. As the director himself declares recalling the making of his documentary:

It was like the discovery an unknown continent [...]. One has to venture very cautiously into unknown continents; the subjects are delicate and sensitive, and for a trifle they close in on themselves and give no more truth but only affected attitudes. So it is with children: as soon as they feel that you want to discover their secret life, they shut up like hedgehogs, but if you win their trust, they will be the most generous interlocutors you can find<sup>45</sup>.

Comencini's commitment to listening to and giving voice to children perfectly echoes the linguistic education that the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* drew from Célestin Freinet, which was based on teaching techniques such as free text, class newspaper printing, and inter-school correspondence. Indeed, the pedagogical proposals of both the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* and the *animazione teatrale*, as well as Comencini's own poetics, come together in their attempt to promote public use of language from early childhood. One cannot help but be surprised by the effectiveness with which the children interviewed by Comencini in *Qualcosa è cambiato* take the floor in public, feeling finally empowered to express their own point of view through theater, class newspaper, and even television, thus directly participating in the construction of a public discourse on the issues that concern them most.

<sup>43</sup> Fiorenzo Alfieri in L. Comencini, *Qualcosa di nuovo*, cit.

<sup>44</sup> A child from Brindisi in *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> L. Comencini, *Davvero un bel mestiere! Infanzia, vocazione, esperienze di un regista*, cit., pp. 122-123.





# The Infant School on Set. The Film “Chiedo asilo” by Marco Ferreri and the Educational Imaginary in 1970s Italy

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## 1. *The social and school contexts*

The 1960s and 1970s in Italy were characterised by an increasing social turmoil, where the school system was at the core of a large critical reformation movement that sprung from the dissatisfaction towards an institution that was perceived as inadequate to foster a fair growth among the layers of society across the country<sup>1</sup>. Such context provided the premises for a series of pivotal reforms, among which the introduction of the state infant school.

The evolution of the Italian infant school, which began in the aftermath of the Second World War, rooted itself in the principles of equal social dignity, democracy and liberty of teaching listed in the Constitution. At the same time, it had to face the «new role of women in society outlined by feminism; non-directive pedagogies; anti-authoritarian and spontaneous turns proposed by educational movements inspired by psychoanalysis and the critical approach to the bourgeois society; the challenges in a globalised, technological society prone to a high degree of symbolization»<sup>2</sup>. Such aspects were crucial in the debate around the role of preschool education. Up to that point, childhood was considered a period of preparation, an interval, where the educational and caring role of parents weighed over the need to open up to the outside world and to learn the basics of knowledge.

At the beginning of the 1970s the Italian politics had to come to terms with the urgent issue of providing a legislative definition to the state infant school. Despite opposing sides, debates and criticism, the law number 444 was approved on 18 March 1968 and marked the birth of state infant school. For the first time the Italian state took over the responsibility of infant education, meeting a growing need that so far had been covered by private institutions. This responsibility was taken over only in part, because

<sup>1</sup> C. Crivellari, *I precari di ieri. I giovani supplenti nella scuola degli anni '70-'80*, in L. Bellina, A. Boschiero, A. Casellato (edd.), *Quando la scuola si accende. Innovazione didattica e trasformazione sociale negli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, Verona, Cierre Edizioni, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bobbio, *I servizi educativi per l'infanzia. La scuola materna statale nel secolo del bambino*, in M. Gecchele, S. Polenghi, P. Dal Toso (edd.), *Il Novecento: il secolo del bambino?*, Reggio Emilia, Junior, 2017, p. 398.

private institutions continued to be present and active in this context. The state infant school, not compulsory and free of charge, was born with the objective of promoting the development and education of children between three and six years of age, in view of their passage to primary school and the compulsory education system. This school, created in highly urbanized areas characterised by a considerable increase in birth rates and female occupation, had to remain open for at least ten months a year, with a daily schedule of no less than seven hours.

The *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali* [Educational activity guidelines in state infant schools] written in September 1969, far from being «a detailed didactic grid to be adopted with a rigid and schematic approach»<sup>3</sup>, focused on the specific educational needs of children that the infant school was called to satisfy. The same Guidelines dated 1958 presented a very different image of the child: a human being that could find his/her identity only with if inscribed within their family, and especially with their mother, lacking any specific intellectual activity. It seems evident that social, cultural and economic transformations between the 1960s and 1970s also changed the perception of children, their needs and educational opportunities in a society that was undergoing a period of remarkable change.

In the first half of the Guidelines in 1969, after the presentation of the objectives of infant school education and of the context in which the school was to operate, the text describes the psychological profile of the child. Special attention is given to the training of female educators, who not only had to possess general cultural knowledge and specific psycho-pedagogical competence, but also had to show self-control, emotional balance and optimism, as well as a natural predisposition to create an empathic relation with the child.

In the second section of the Guidelines were also included specific indications for furniture and equipment, with reference to hygiene standards and health education. For example, special relevance was given to the spaces dedicated to outdoor playtime, to gardening, and other similar activities. In line with the statement that emphasized how the infant school had to be more focused on play than on specific disciplines, the Guidelines did not include programmes of study, yet mentioned some subjects like religious education, affective education, linguistic and intellectual education, free graphical expression and painting, music education and physical education<sup>4</sup>.

Law no. 444 approved in 1968 and the Guidelines of 1969 marked an important institutional and pedagogical shift. The infant school took on a primary social function: all children, without discriminations and respecting the psychological and cognitive development of each individual, could and had to benefit from extra-familial experiences to boost their expressive and creative skills, guided by properly trained educators. It is precisely this shift in the approach to children of infant schools, and broadly to students, brought about a redefinition of the teaching staff. The teaching profession had always

<sup>3</sup> G. Cives (ed.), *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai nostri giorni*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. DPR 10 September 1969, n. 647 *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», Serie generale n. 249 del 01.10.1969.

been put under constant pressure and torn between the two extremes of tradition and innovation. The figure of the authoritarian teacher that imparts culture was put under scrutiny by the establishment of an education system based on multiple standpoints, which determined the need to update their professional competence<sup>5</sup>.

On a final note, it should be mentioned that the Italian school system was characterised by a strong presence of women in the teaching staff. Such phenomenon stemmed from the belief that women were somehow “born” to teach especially children. This belief dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where women had to fulfil their mission as saviours for their family, and for society at large. Instruction and education were considered a natural extension of their maternal role, just as all other social care professions that were generally left in the hands of women<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Pedagogical aspects

The school image offered by the film and television industry emphasised educational practices, teaching methodologies, values and habits that can often be found in a shared school memory. Many film representations of the male teacher figure focus on primary school. The majority of novels and films narrating the role of male and female teachers concentrate on compulsory school<sup>7</sup>. Two reasons account for a lack of proper representation of the infant school: the first is that nursery schools, which became infant schools later on, were a relatively recent social phenomenon if compared to primary school, the second is its non-compulsory nature.

One of the very few examples of films with the infant school as main protagonist is *Chiedo asilo* [*Seeking Asylum*] released in 1979<sup>8</sup>. The director Marco Ferreri<sup>9</sup> also directed other awarded films, such as *Ciao Maschio* (*Bye Bye Monkey*, awarded the Grand Prize of the Jury at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival), *Tales of Ordinary Madness* (awarded the David di Donatello in 1982 for best script and best director) and *The House of Smiles* (Golden Bear at the 1991 Berlin International Film Festival).

Ferreri's first cinematic experiences involved the Castilian screenwriter and novelist Rafael Azcona, a collaboration that resulted in the release of three Spanish comedies: *El pisito* (1958), *Los chicos* (1959), and *El cochecito* (1960). Some underlying features were to become a leitmotif in Ferreri's films: a harsh critic of the bourgeois society, sarcasm

<sup>5</sup> E. De Fort, *Gli insegnanti*, in G. Cives (ed.), *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai nostri giorni*, cit., p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. C. Covato, *Educata ad educare: ruolo materno ed itinerari formativi*, in S. Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, pp. 131-146.

<sup>7</sup> See P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the film, see L. Zambotti, *Chiedo asilo*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/917, published on 25.11.2021 (last access: 05.02.2023).

<sup>9</sup> See A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, Milano, Editrice Il Castoro, 2004.

and the grotesque. His first Italian feature film was *The Conjugal Bed* (1963), followed by *The Ape Woman* (1964), *Marcia nuziale* (1966), *L'harem* (1967), all depicting marriage as a fight between men and women. With *Dillinger is Dead* (1969) Ferreri opens up to another recurring topic in his production: the solitude and alienation of contemporary human beings in mass society. *Il seme dell'uomo* (1969) is an investigation on the future of society, *L'udienza* (1972) can be interpreted as a harsh critic towards the Catholic world, in *Liza* (1972) an impossible peace is sought. *La Grande Bouffe*, released in 1973, is a ritual of degradation and death through food excess, a topic that obsessed Ferreri to the point that he worked further on it in *Los negros tambien comen* (1988), *La carne* (1991), and in other French documentaries. In *Don't Touch the White Woman!* (1974) the problem of the degradation of urban spaces is addressed, which from a broader perspective represents social degradation. With *The Last Woman* (1976) Ferreri continues his exploration of the relationship between men and women, and the self-destruction of the human being. Also in *Bye Bye Monkey* (1978) the male figure loses its centrality within the couple and in society. At this point, in 1979, *Chiedo asilo* is released. This film is different, with minimal traits of black humour, but imbued with topics already presented by Ferreri in his previous movies. More specifically, there is a critical stance towards social institutions and traditional marriage, and the redefinition of gender in the contrast between men and women.

The film revolves around the figure of the young teacher Roberto, interpreted by a twenty-seven-year-old Roberto Benigni<sup>10</sup>. At the end of the 1970s, following the opening of public competitions for teachers at infant schools also to men, Roberto begins his job as first male teacher in Corticella, in Bologna province, at the Bentini infant school. Alberto Scandola, in his book on Marco Ferreri, attentively describes the context in which the school is located: «The Corticella neighbourhood, presented to the viewer through slow panning shots showing apartment buildings, represents the zero degree of History a few miles away from a city that – on the contrary – is full of History, but remains largely invisible to us in this place»<sup>11</sup>. The streets that Roberto treads every day to go to school are deserted and all alike, no sound is to be heard except for an accordion playing *La Cumparsita*. On the outside, the infant school is plunged into concrete, but on the inside the rooms are very colourful, the music of *La Cumparsita* fades into the voices of the teacher and the children. Thus, the director creates a sharp contrast between the monotony of the environment and the school, a green oasis where children can play, right in the middle of the grey cement of the Corticella neighbourhood. As Alberto Scandola mentions, «it is the duty of pupils in an infant school in Bologna to destroy the script by

<sup>10</sup> Roberto Benigni is an Italian actor and film director. He rose to fame with his role in *Berlinguer, I Love You* (1977) and in *Chiedo asilo* (1979). He began his career as director with *Tu mi turbi* (1983) and then with *Nothing Left to Do But Cry* (1984), where he also acted together with Massimo Troisi. With *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) he won three Academy Awards (best foreign-language film, actor, original score). More recently, Benigni experimented other expressive means, with conferences on Dante that inspired the theatrical show *Tutto Dante* (2006-2007). In 2016 he was awarded the Globo d'Oro for his career together with his wife Nicoletta Braschi, in 2017 the David di Donatello and in 2021 the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement.

<sup>11</sup> See A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 130.

filling the school's indoor walls with their unclear and mixed voices, weighted only by the live recording of these sounds»<sup>12</sup>.

The young teacher manages to build good relations with his female colleagues right from the beginning, but it is with the children that he successfully creates a special rapport by listening to their needs and triggering the children's hilarity with his goofy behaviour. The pupils appreciate the unusual presence of a man in the teaching staff, especially because he proves to be very active and ready to play with them at any time. On the first day at school, for example, Roberto is waiting hidden in a cupboard for the children to get to class, then he shows his presence by cutting through a drawing that covers a hole in the cupboard. He puts his face through the hole and shakes hands with each child. Roberto introduces himself as "the new female teacher" (6') and later on he would get to school with a fake pregnant belly and asking each child to help him to choose the name for the newborn. The children immediately doubt whatever he says, showing that they have already been instructed towards a clear-cut definition of gender roles, and to differentiate the male body from the female body. In these first scenes the teacher does not offer a defined male identity but welcomes the children's confusion and emphasizes it by adopting female communication standards.

Roberto's educational methods are unconventional and inspired by wild freedom. He builds a confidential relationship with his pupils, sitting among them on the small chairs in the classroom, but also taking them outside the school, for example, to visit a factory where some of the pupils' parents work. The young teacher's teaching approach is innovative, light, spontaneous, based on the experience of things as they come and not on imposed behaviour rules. One of the first scenes of the film is particularly relevant, when Roberto weighs the pedagogy books he studied, he reads their titles aloud (*Experiments on Visual Perception, The Technology of Teaching, From Childhood to Adolescence, Why Teachers?*) and then he makes them fall heavily on the table before choosing to bring with him at school only a recorder and a cassette that he would use to record the naïve and bizarre dialogues among children.

The first child that Roberto gets to know is Gianluigi, a pupil who refuses to speak and eat due to his behavioural difficulties. The two meet while the child is inside a toy house, and the teacher tells him about his own house and invites him over. Since the child does not speak, Roberto asks him if he forces himself to mutism and, as the child keeps his silence, the teacher says «Well, there's really nothing wrong with this» (5'), thus avoiding any judgemental attitude towards the child's behaviour. It is precisely the teacher's empathic stance that he displays from the beginning that allows him to build a trusting relationship with Gianluigi, which survives even when the child is hospitalized due to his health conditions.

Daniele is another "outsider", a young violinist who fled from home that Roberto meets during the end-of-the-year party in the garden. Daniele represents the dissident artist who chooses freedom. Maurizio Grande argues that Daniele, just like Roberto and Gianluigi, tries to find an alternative path to survive the discomfort he experiences in

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

his everyday life<sup>13</sup>. The police, who came to take Daniele back home, seem completely indifferent to the pain that the child is going through, as reflected in the commissioner's comment: «without physical abuse, I can't intervene. To be completely honest, there isn't even a case here» (70'). The teacher's reply makes the police behaviour appear cold and insensitive:

You stay here just a couple of minutes, you make him undress and say that everything is fine, but we've been talking a lot over the past few days. He's not well, he doesn't want to stay with his parents, and we must let him get out of that house. He's literally seeking asylum, you must give me permission to take him out of his house. (71')

Because of this reaction, and for Roberto's past militancy in the revolutionary syndicalism, the teacher is brought to the police station where he is interviewed by the commissioner in the most paradoxical way. This scene, like the reference to the teacher's past, shows the marked ideological attitude of the time. It is common knowledge that, following the students' movement in 1968, rooms and whole school buildings were occupied. This form of protest though did not involve infant schools, but the teacher in *Chiedo asilo* refers to it during an assembly with parents, personnel, and students:

You know what? We're staying here, since we've spent some good time together: we've had food and drinks, we have toilets, beds, more food, women, children, elderly people, living people. We're all staying here, we ask for the Municipality to send us food for the canteen, we have an assembly like this every day, we have dessert and everything is free of charge. The school is occupied. (58')

For the sake of this analysis, it is worth mentioning the production designer Giancarlo Basili's comment on the film. He felt that his work on *Chiedo asilo* was particularly important for him:

He asked us to build this huge character [UFO Robot Grendizer] for a film that he was working on in Bologna, in the Corticella neighbourhood. Roberto Benigni was to be the protagonist. Ferreri wanted to make this huge robot appear outside a nursery school, so together we imagined a 10-metre-high robot. I took care of the whole realization. After that, he wanted me to take care of the whole film. Thanks to *Chiedo asilo*, in 1979, I understood the difference between cinema and theatre, where I came from<sup>14</sup>.

The image of the colourful robot among the grey buildings is iconic in the film: the quest for playful and fantastic elements in a society that appears alienated and unable to grasp the spontaneity of children and the games they play. Even the trip that Roberto organizes in a factory (the Montedison petrochemical factory in Ferrara) clearly shows the contrast between the liveliness of children and the place that symbolizes industrialization. Miriam Ridolfi, back then President of the neighbourhood and mother to one of the children in the film, remembers that the film crew was invited to stay inside the school

<sup>13</sup> See M. Grande, A. Canadè (edd.), *Marco Ferreri*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> F. Brunamonti, *Giancarlo Basili, i luoghi e gli oggetti che fanno la storia del cinema*, «La Repubblica», 27 August 2013.



under condition that everything was to stay as it was: «meaning that Benigni had to be a male teacher among our female teachers, nothing had to be fake and we would have spent that month in our lives together»<sup>15</sup>. Miriam Ridolfi also remembers how in the scene where the children must go and see their parents working as factory workers nearby, her son exclaimed: «Where's my mom? She doesn't work here!» (55'), and this reaction was included in the film as evidence of the spontaneity of children that was deeply appreciated during the filming phase.

The second part of the film is staged in Sardinia, near Sassari, in a place that seems lost and isolated from the city and its contradictions. Together with a group of children that includes Gianluigi, Roberto followed Isabella, his life companion, to the place she chose to give birth to the son they were going to have together. The village is inhabited by elderly people, «this is a moment [in the film] that shows the relation with the previous generations in a continuum that also clarifies gender roles»<sup>16</sup>. When Isabella is close to giving birth, she is assisted by the elderly people of the small village, once a mining and marine centre. Roberto and the children cannot stay in the room because «it's a matter for women, not for children» (98'), so they all go to the beach. In the end, the film hints at a newly found dimension in complete harmony with nature: Roberto and Gianluigi, who now eats and talks, run towards the sea and disappear from the camera as they go back to the origin of life just as the newborn child of Roberto and Isabella cries for the first time. The sea has a crucial symbolic charge because it «becomes the obsessive landing for all wanderers, the ancestral call that can soothe anguish with the rhythm of the waves silently dissipating on the sand»<sup>17</sup>.

Gabriella Seveso provides an interesting view on the comments from the critics reviewing the film on its release. Stefano Reggiani on *La Stampa* writes that «it is a film “with a sussultatory movement” that approaches recurring themes in the director's work»<sup>18</sup>. In *Chiedo asilo* there are different themes that Marco Ferreri already explored in his career: the relation between individual and society, the alienation of contemporary human beings, repressive institutions. The child becomes an opportunity to introduce a simple way of life that finds happiness in small things. Even though children are meant to help strict social rules survive, they still represent the inkling of hope. The film expresses the need to rebuild an environment that is able to save and welcome all those who are disoriented by the contact with society, and are subject to fear and pain every day of their life. Despite the fact that the film is seen from a perspective that may seem outdated and far away from today's standards, the polemical intention towards the rigidity of the school institution and of traditional family is clearly expressed. Roberto Benigni, with his typical immediacy and spontaneity, perfectly communicates the shock of the male infant school teacher trying to give simplicity and spontaneity back to children. As Scandola

<sup>15</sup> Benedetta Cucci interviews Miriam Ridolfi, in *Roberto Benigni e i bimbi di 'Chiedo asilo' di nuovo insieme 40 anni dopo*, «Il Resto del Carlino», 16 January 2019.

<sup>16</sup> G. Seveso, *La figura dell'educatore d'infanzia dopo il '68. Il caso del film Chiedo asilo*, in T. Pironi (ed.), *Autorità in crisi. Scuola, famiglia, società prima e dopo il '68*, Roma, Aracne editrice, 2020, p. 335.

<sup>17</sup> A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> G. Seveso, *La figura dell'educatore d'infanzia dopo il '68. Il caso del film Chiedo asilo*, cit., p. 334.

comments, «Benigni's alter ego transforms [...] the four narrow walls of the school in a window open to the world»<sup>19</sup>. Roberto the teacher clearly understands the difficulties that children go through when they experience school for the first time, because he feels outside of his comfort zone too, in a school that represents a small version of society. Through his playful behaviour and his extravagant initiatives, he states the impossibility of homogenizing with the common dominating values, all typical characteristics also present in Roberto Benigni the actor, who highly appreciated Marco Ferreri's direction. In the documentary *La lucida follia di Marco Ferreri*, directed by Anselma Dell'Olio in 2017, Benigni says: «Just to say his name today makes my heart and soul vibrate. Marco Ferreri... It wasn't Italian comedy, or Neorealism, Nouvelle Vague, Post Vague, it was Marco Ferreri himself, the author par excellence»<sup>20</sup>.

The innovation and the extraordinary brought inside the Bentini school in Corticella by teacher Roberto are welcomed with curiosity by children and adults alike. Benigni interprets a male teacher and from his first surprise encounter with children it is obvious that his teaching method is going to disrupt existing schemes, starting from the fact that he is a man, contrary to what was the norm in Italian infant schools at the time. The comments from other adults on Roberto and the boy he chooses as his assistant, Luca, are harsh, blunt, and focused on the surface of things. Roberto is advised against resorting to Luca as assistant because he is "different". Luca, on the other hand, is firm in his choice and states: «I just wish to do all the wonderful things I haven't been able to do or that I've done late in life» (16'). In general, the other female teachers gravitate outside the universe that Roberto built for the children, because they either represent the traditional female role, and also contribute to create the institution that teacher Roberto wishes to dismantle. Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention a comment from one of the women, part of the school personnel, who at the end of the school year, admits and praises the wind of innovation brought about by Roberto:

This year we've had a male teacher among us. For us, the personnel and me as school worker, it's been a very positive experience. And also for the boy, we've seen his happiness. I mean we've seen, in the context of life, of the nursery school we live every day, the presence of a daddy, so to speak. For you, as parents, it's been harder to get used to it. (58')

It should be mentioned that during the time period depicted in the film, men could access the teaching profession by law, but the infant school personnel had always been primarily female because of the equivalence teacher-mother, but also for the high number of women that chose the teaching path. As already suggested, the *Guidelines* in 1969 were also innovative in the way they outlined the figure of the female educator. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of the female teacher was associated to that of the mother: the Teaching Curricula of 1914 mentioned a "teacher-mother" that taught among children, not sitting at the teacher's desk. The *Guidelines* in 1945 and 1958 still mentioned the teacher-mother and also invited to consider the infant school as a copy

<sup>19</sup> A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> *La lucida follia di Marco Ferreri* (Anselma Dell'Olio, 2017).



of the family environment. In the 1969 *Guidelines*, on the other hand, there is a more complex definition of the role of the female educator that is no longer an imitation of the mother role but is mainly based on psycho-pedagogical, and cultural competence.

One last comment should be dedicated to the children in *Chiedo asilo*, the last standing barriers against an alienated society. Throughout the film, the motto “Ora e sempre resistenza” (Resistance now and forever) is often repeated, the teacher passes it on to children not only to recuperate the spirit of revolutionary syndicalism, but also to push them towards spontaneity, seen as the only way to escape from a society that is perceived as hostile. Therefore, the need to approach the infant world with respect emerges, but also the awareness that the first encounter of a child with social life needs to be grounded in trust from adults in the child him/herself and his/her own skills. Ferreri argues that the children up to two years of age can fully participate in the flow of life precisely because they are not forced to live inside the boundaries of models and schemes imposed by society. Gianluigi refuses to speak, his communication is based on another kind of language. The boy does use nonverbal communication with facial expressions and body language. According to Maurizio Grande, this type of communication is clearer and far more essential than verbal expression<sup>21</sup>. The body mythology is called upon with Gianluigi’s character, Ferreri considers the childhood phase as the moment when the child is robbed of his/her own freedom. For example, he/she is taught that when they need to pee or defecate they must do this in hiding, thus taking away from them a revolutionary revelation, when food takes on a different shape<sup>22</sup>. Both the teacher and children explore the body dimension in ways that are different from social laws and obligations. Through the opposition between the teacher’s and the other adults’ behaviour (Irma, Paolo, Isabella, the school and factory personnel and managers, the elderly people in Sardinia), the film emphasizes the difficult transition from childhood to social life. Gianluigi symbolizes this difficulty, the first child in Roberto’s class that is shown to the audience.

The most peculiar trait of children in *Chiedo asilo* is spontaneity. In the director’s intentions there was the will to emphasize this contrast with the alienation of adults. As Stefania Parigi states: «Ferreri does not show the work of cinema but cinema at work»<sup>23</sup>, so that the children called to “perform”, those in the Bentini school of Corticella, between three and five years old, behave spontaneously and are filmed as free animals in the wild<sup>24</sup>, untouched by the full conquest of language that would lead them to the world of adults. Alberto Scandola explains that: «The child makes me think at what a man could be. We do not know. We do not know what kind of distorting work is carried out on children so that they begin to speak once they turn thirteen months old. That is when they are done for, they start to become slaves of the words whispered by their mother and father». And then, quoting Ferreri’s words, adds: «I did write something, but then the children swiped away almost everything. And that is all right, after all. What good could one of my stories

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. M. Grande, A. Canadè (edd.), *Marco Ferreri*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> S. Parigi, *Le immagini di Marco Ferreri*, in G. Azzaro, S. Parigi (edd.), *Marco Ferreri. Un milanese a Roma*, Roma, Tienellemedia, 2007, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. M. Grande, A. Canadè (edd.), *Marco Ferreri*, cit.

be compared to the real life of a two-year-old human being?»<sup>25</sup>. The language used in the film is extremely simple, the teacher never completes his sentences, children speak through slogans and are allowed to speak freely for the rest of the time. Also Benigni's acting is frequently spontaneous and fragmented, it blends in with the editing rhythm, which eliminates dead times in the film: «scene changes occur when the previous scene is not yet concluded, and this seems to preserve the energy that is used to make the next scene blossom»<sup>26</sup>.

The presence of many children, which would have made the traditional management of a film impossible, actually determined a revolution in time and spaces, everything is designed at child-level, the teacher leaves them to conquer the world in the way they see fit. The underlying message is to make children grow outside all repressive structure: the filming done inside the classroom are very few compared to those carried out outside or anywhere else. The factory is shown under its most negative aspects, it is a sort of dangerous cage that keeps parents locked away from their children; the family itself, the traditional family, is presented as a rigid, unmanageable structure.

Therefore, the film represents the pure at heart: Roberto, Luca, and the children. But it is also critical of ruthless institutions. Ferreri criticizes the stiffness of real school by imagining a school where not only children, but the teacher himself is an ode to spontaneity. The real co-star in the film is young Gianluigi, a strong image of nature that does not want to be tamed by social rules. To give humanity back to the human species it is necessary to start with a renewed relation with childhood. Predictions on the future of mankind are mainly catastrophic, but there is an inkling of hope: the value of innocence must be recalled, go back to living like children do before they are moulded by society. Children, far from the repressive role of institutions and the myth of progress, are the last existing oases of fantasy and imagination.

<sup>25</sup> A. Scandola, *Marco Ferreri*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

# Pupils and Teachers at School: Memories and Social Imagination through Cinema

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## 1. *Cinema, History and Education*

Cinema is one of the main means of construction of our socially shared imaginary. Filmic narratives work at building our cultural perception of past and present societies. Our idea of a period of time is silently and constantly affected by different media, among which cinema stands out for its visual potential in constructing social memories<sup>1</sup>. Through cinema, the experience of an individual or a group of individuals becomes a public narrative, a symbol or a marker of a specific society in a specific era<sup>2</sup>. The relationship between cinema and History is complex<sup>3</sup>. Most of the studies agree to state that cinema is a strong tool to connect contemporary spectators to past times and places, working in parallel with History: «Cinema neither replaces History as a discipline nor complements it. Cinema is adjacent to History, just like other forms of expression that link us to the past, such as memory or oral tradition»<sup>4</sup>.

However, cinema can hardly offer an impartial representation of History. Films are constantly conditioned by different filters. Therefore, we might wonder whether it is possible or not to tell a completely neutral story, to give back a neutral image of History. Films that aim to realistically reproduce past times (i.e. documentaries) are often influenced by some subjective or social factors, such as the time in which a historical period is recounted, the values and models that are conveyed, the director's personal choices, the audience's interpretation or perception of the work, and so on<sup>5</sup>. Thus, if on the one hand cinema works on the social construction of memory and creates historical awareness or testimonies, on the other hand, it can seldom be a pure, direct account of the past. Even when describing realistic facts, cinema constructs fictional narratives,

<sup>1</sup> I. Dussel, K. Priem, *Images and Films as Objects to Think with: a Reappraisal of Visual Studies in Histories of Education*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. LIII, n. 6, 2017, pp. 641-750; E. Colledemont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. XXVIII, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156.

<sup>2</sup> S. Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, in P. Malavasi, S. Polenghi, P.C. Rivoltella (edd.), *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005, pp. 19-52.

<sup>3</sup> R. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> R. Rosenstone, *The Historical Film as Real History*, «Journal of Film Studies», vol. 9, n. 1, 2018, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> D. Forni, *Children's Literature across Media: Film and Theatre Adaptations of Roald Dahl's 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'*, Pisa, ETS, 2020.

it “makes” history through a distinct interpretation of the past. So, cinema occupies a liminal space between historical reality and narrative fiction.

For what concerns historical films, temporal relations have to be considered to detect possible bias in the objective or subjective representations of a period of time. Films on history may be based on multiple historical frames, offering a dual perspective built on two main levels. The first one – the representative level – regards the past moment portrayed in the work, while the second one – the interpretative level – concerns the historical context in which the work is elaborated. These levels interact, giving life to different relations between the object and the period of time in which the object is approached and depicted. A particular moment in History can be represented in a work created synchronically or in a subsequent period of time. The historical framework in which a film is elaborated is not a secondary element as it may give a specific interpretation of the past, following social trends, cultural perceptions and sensibilities related to that specific moment.

Moreover, cinema has a strong educative potential. History of Education is nowadays transmitted through different media and textual sources have lost their central position in favour of polyphonic means of narration<sup>6</sup>. Cinema does not simply inform its viewers, giving new knowledge to spectators, but it also demonstrates a deeper and more collective educative function as it preserves and transmits historical memory through the involvement of a wide and heterogeneous audience<sup>7</sup>. Quoting Edgar Morin, cinema involves its spectators through their perceptions and their emotions, generating feelings such as empathy, identification, and emotional involvement. This phenomenon strengthens our social memory thanks to an affective connection established with the fictional characters presented in a film<sup>8</sup>.

## 2. *School memories in cinema*

Taking into account cinema related to school memories<sup>9</sup>, films give voice to children and teachers and transmit different experiences of schooling, different points of view

<sup>6</sup> Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, cit.

<sup>7</sup> F.M. De Sanctis, F. Masala, *Pubblico e cinetecche. Nuove frontiere del lavoro educativo all'uso del cinema*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1983; A. Agosti, *Cinema ed educazione. Percorsi per la formazione degli adulti*, Padova, Cedam, 2001; E. Mancino, *Pedagogia e narrazione cinematografica. Metafore del pensiero e della formazione*, Milano, Guerini, 2006, pp. 161-170.

<sup>8</sup> E. Morin, *Il cinema o l'uomo immaginario. Saggio di antropologia sociologica*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; R. Sani, *Education, school and cultural processes in contemporary Italy*, Macerata, eum, 2018; G. Bandini, S. Oliviero (edd.), *Public history of education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2019; J. Meda, *The 'Sites of School Memory' in Italy between memory and oblivion: a first approach*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 25-47.

throughout history. Thus, films create or support perceptions, ideals and canons related to school life and young identities, building collective narratives and memories.

The representation of school or educational contexts activates processes of strong identification as the narrative retraces, even when set in different ages, common life phases. Films can show the educational practices, the pedagogical approaches, the values and norms that are part of the school routine of a given era<sup>10</sup>. Thus, cinema can be considered an influential tool to reinforce or revise our social perception of schools, sometimes fueling stereotypes and prejudice, sometimes deconstructing them. Cinematic school memories may fall into representations that are not entirely neutral, biased or influenced by several aforementioned factors<sup>11</sup>.

Cinema has historically represented school and education: school cinema has been tracking social and educational changes for more than a century. Today, we have numerous film repertoires that represent (or re-elaborate) the educational practices that characterized different times. The social narrative of schools and educational contexts have changed over time, generating diversified social perceptions of educational institutions. The idea of school is therefore contaminated by the intersection of various narratives – some based on reality, others on fiction – and by the influence of our collective memory<sup>12</sup>.

To being with, school memories are presented both in films *for* children and *about* children, but these two macro-categories work at different levels as they address a different audience in their account of childhood. Again, this creates a double perspective based on the target audience and puts on screen different elements, topics and approaches. Cinema *for* a young audience usually tells stories about children aimed at giving viewers the chance to identify with the protagonists of the storytelling. However, cinema *about* children not always addresses young audiences: in some cases, it might target an adult audience that looks back at childhood from a different, more mature perspective. These products equally represent and explore present and past times, but their depiction of childhood reach different levels of interpretation. Both cinema for children and for adults aim to represent and explore (and sometimes criticize) past or contemporary school systems and/or social experiences taking place in schools.

Cinema on schools and students is often based on a series of recurrent approaches. Here, four lines will be explored: the realistic and documentary approach; the critical approach; the melancholic approach; and the literary approach. Firstly, the realistic and documentary approach wants to represent a specific period of time through an objective lens. As stated in the first paragraph, a completely neutral approach is not easy to find as some personal and cultural factors constantly influence even realistic or documentary works. A fictional element, even in non-fictional films, cannot be avoided.

<sup>10</sup> P. Ortoleva, *Testimone infallibile, macchina dei sogni: il film e il programma televisivo come fonte storica*, in M. Gori (ed.) *La storia al cinema, ricostruzione del passato, interpretazione del presente*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> C. Shaw, M. Chase (edd.), *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989.

Secondly, the critical or satirical approach aims to shed light on specific issues: it invites the audiences – usually, but not necessarily, adult spectators – to reflect on specific themes and to take into account particular problems related to schools. Even when offering a critical approach related to past times, its critique might often refer to contemporary issues as well, connecting long-lasting difficulties between two eras.

Thirdly, the melancholic approach acts between social criticism and nostalgia for the past. This line is usually selected when representing past – but not too distant – times, so as to generate melancholy in adult audiences that directly or indirectly experienced those times. Sometimes, the nostalgic approach looks back highlighting positive situations worsened in present times, but in other cases melancholy may be associated with a soft criticism of past methods, institutions, and habits.

Finally, the literary approach may in some cases overlap with previous lines as it is based on the production of a film following a literary source<sup>13</sup>. In this strand, the main aim is to create a reproduction of literary works and to present their contexts and experiences. However, sometimes the director may construct personal interpretations starting from a literary source, for instance contextualizing the story in different periods of time or inserting events that give the audience a different perspective on its main issue.

### 3. *Analysis of some case-studies*

The paper offers a preliminary qualitative investigation of the representation of young pupils and teachers in school cinematic memories. It considers a variety of popular and international films about (and sometimes for) children set in school or educative settings and produced from the last years of the Fifties to the end of the Century. A film for each decade will be presented, so as to give a first overview of the evolution of schools and pupils in our collective, cinematic imaginary. In particular, the following four works will be presented: *The 400 Blows* (1959) by François Truffaut; *Amarcord* (1973) by Federico Fellini; *Stand by me* (1986) by Rob Reiner; *Matilda* (1996) by Danny DeVito.

The films mentioned in the following paragraphs were selected as they were considered significant for what concerns their representation of schools, pupils and teachers and for their popular relevance. Popularity is a key aspect in considering the potential influence of films on a large audience. The study has no claim of exhaustivity and is carried out in a comparative approach, detecting the abovementioned approaches and trends. In addition, a gender-sensitive perspective is included in order to notice differences and transformations in the representations of boys and girls at school. The final aim of the analysis is to give a first overview and to create a pilot taxonomy on the topic, trying to trace transformations and recurrent trends and themes related to schools and schoolchildren.

<sup>13</sup> M.T. Trisciuzzi, *La scuola e i maestri narrati attraverso le rappresentazioni della letteratura per l'infanzia*, in G. Elia, S. Polenghi, V. Rossini (edd.), *La scuola tra saperi e valori etico-sociali. Politiche culturali e pratiche educative*, Lecce, PensaMultimedia, 2019, p. 1073; A. Antoniazzi, *La scuola tra le righe*, Pisa, ETS, 2014.

Films are explored as instructional, educative, and formative means of narration, but also for their emotional and entertaining potential<sup>14</sup>: all of these elements are fundamental in the construction of collective school memory through storytelling.

### 3.1 *The Fifties and Sixties*

With Italian Neorealism and French Nouvelle Vague, but also in some later films of the 1970s, the themes of childhood and education became predominant in film narratives. These topics were developed through a rather realistic approach and within a harsh critique of society. It is precisely the plausible narrative of these cinematographic trends, although mixed with fictitious narratives, that allows these works to be considered a valuable – albeit not totally neutral – historical source, a view on a past era focused mainly on the everyday life routine of ordinary people.

A key example is *The 400 Blows* (1959) by François Truffaut. The director recounts France at the end of the Fifties through the point of view of Antoine Doinel, a twelve-year-old boy who is disillusioned with his family, with the adult world, and with the educational system: his father is depicted as a broken man, his mother originally wanted to terminate her pregnancy and has an extra-marital affair, while teachers ignore the boy and are unaware of his torments. So, Antoine commits some minor crimes and is sent to a reformatory, where he suffers an extremely rigid and violent education. The boy decides to escape from the school to admire the sea at the highly significant end of the film. Antoine's experience serves as an expedient to tell the story of France and Europe between the 1950s and 1960s, denouncing juvenile conditions, the instability of the educational system, and the adult world's superficial or violent attitude toward childhood. Children are represented as ignored or subjected to overly restrictive rules, they are often educated through guilt and fear and through the use of violence. Truffaut's critique hits several categories of adults, especially teachers or parents. Specifically, two contrasting figures of teachers appear in the film, representing two opposing social attitudes: the teacher Petit, who is authoritarian, stern, and inflexible, and the teacher Richet, who is kind-hearted and gentle with his pupils.

In *The 400 Blows* a realistic and critical approach is selected consistently following Nouvelle Vague's most common style. The film narrates contemporary events: it first works as a direct social critique in the Fifties and Sixties, while today acts as a testimony of that period of time, still offering important opportunities for reflection related to contemporary times. Moreover, the film selects the child's perspective to underline the faults of educational systems, considering both schools and families. This choice allows the child's voice to be heard, the child's identity to be placed at the centre of a socio-educational debate involving childhood itself. In this case, the focus is mainly on male

<sup>14</sup> C. Secci, *Cinema, educazione e memoria storica*, «Educazione Aperta», n. 3, 2018, pp. 97-115.



identity (Antoine Doinel), without fully capturing female voices in the construction of a historical memory capable of embracing multiple points of view, multiple experiences.

### 3.2 *The Seventies*

Considering the Seventies, a significant example is Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), a film that gives its viewers a melancholic picture of educational contexts and childhood. The plot takes place in an unspecified period of time in the Thirties: the film follows the course of a year and narrates the events of a fictitious village in Romagna, Italy. The title recalls the importance of personal and collective memory: *a m'arcord* means *I remember* in the Romagnolo dialect. Titta – one of the key characters, a young boy who represents the director himself – clearly symbolizes the troubles of youth and the disenchantments of adulthood during the Thirties. In addition, the flaws of the school system emerge as well: teachers are characterised by the constant desire to appear respectable, predilecting charmless, rigid, notional lessons. As a consequence, students do not feel involved and interested in the lessons and prefer to spend school time amid mockery and boredom. The film highlights teachers' superficiality as they are often oriented towards old educational methods which are directly mocked by the director. So, *Amarcord* is a historical testimony that partly acquires the traits of caricature, retracing key moments in Italian history by representing them on an ideal level which is the result of the filter of collective memory. This collective ideal is juxtaposed to concrete problems that students, teachers and families had to face, for instance introducing Fascist overtones and popular rhetoric.

Thus, *Amarcord* looks back at the Thirties in a biographical representation of the past, recounting historical events, habits, traditions, archetypes. The film selects a melancholic approach, that looks at past events idealizing them but also underlining their flaws and problems. Considering the representation of gender identity, pupils are portrayed in mixed classrooms, but identities adhere to precise standards related to femininity and masculinities, developed as two opposing poles with specific features. Moreover, male figures are more commonly presented as central both in the classroom and outside educative spaces. Two main female figures emerge, Gradisca and Volpina, and they incarnate the stereotype of the *femme fatale*, as opposed to respectful and strict female teaching figures not able to impact the collective imagination associated with the film so strongly. The adult female figures are thus placed between two opposite poles, between vices and virtues without nuances, while the youngest female figures are lost in a class represented by a male perspective and focused on male figures, resulting in boys at the forefront of greater activity and initiative.



### 3.3 *The Eighties*

Films produced in the Eighties are characterised by great diversity. Several films are constructed as transposition of literary works, and many of them are addressed directly to child audiences: the child viewer began to be seen as an active, chief spectator and therefore many works are not only conceived as films about children, but also for children<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the line between young and adult audiences blurs as some films address both children and adults through multiple levels of interpretation.

An emblematic film is *Stand by Me* (1986) by Rob Reiner, based on Stephen King's short story *The Body* (1982). *Stand by Me* is set in 1959, in Oregon, and tells the story of four twelve-year-old boys who set off in search of the body of a missing child. The journey is an opportunity for growth, for confrontation, for the construction of long-lasting bonds: these elements are not created by the guidance of adult figures or scholastic institutions, but rather through their non-appearance, through freedom and autonomy. The school is therefore significant in its absence: the boys grow and mature because they are not pupils, but individuals that venture into authentic life experiences. Significantly, the work is set in summer, represented here as a light-hearted time spent away from school obligations. The film thus focuses on a common feeling drenched in melancholy as it depicts summer holidays as a suspended time, apart from ordinary school-life.

Moreover, the film is an insight into that delicate life phase that lies between childhood and adulthood. The story is presented in a narrative framework that features an adult narrator who looks back at his childhood through autobiographical narration. This choice underlines the importance of memory: a personal memory that is made collective and becomes the voice of one or more generations. In these memories innocence and the desire to grow up result in a multifaceted adolescent voice, capable of capturing in an intimate way the turmoil of those years. As in *Amarcord*, *Stand by me* also looks back at the past in a process of idealisation and nostalgic revision that, however, does not omit its faults and difficulties. Again, as in the previous films, a masculine narrative is favoured by telling the adventures of four boys in the world outside. The decision not to include female characters in the journey is significant as it operates a strong gender distinction during the construction of one's own identity and the creation of a group of friends, which are exclusively male. Besides, it relegates girls to the domestic or civic space, letting the boys – and just the boys – venture into the outside world and take advantage of opportunities that are concretely formative.

<sup>15</sup> M.T. Trisciuzzi, *Letteratura, cinema e animazione per bambini e ragazzi*, in S. Barsotti, L. Cantatore (edd.), *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Forme, temi e simboli del contemporaneo*, Roma, Carocci, 2019.

### 3.4 *The Nineties*

Following the Eighties' trends, the Nineties further develops films targeting children starting from literary sources. The child viewer is more and more at the center of cinematic narratives and his/her importance becomes crucial. An example is *Matilda* (1996), directed by Danny DeVito and adapted from Roald Dahl's book *Matilde* (1988). The story involves Matilda, a little girl with supernatural powers who lives in an unloving family which is not able to understand her potential.

The film shows a cheerful classroom of the Nineties: classes are colourful, lively spaces filled with posters, drawings, and artworks created by students. Pupils are depicted while collaborating altogether on large wooden tables in a cooperative and mutually supportive educative method. Miss Jennifer Honey, who is represented in close relation to the original work by Dahl, is portrayed as a kind, empathetic teacher who tries to understand her pupils' feelings and needs. A symbol of her kindness is the flower she uses to indicate specific points on the blackboard. Another significant element is her approach during Matilda's first day of school, when the teacher reminds her classmates of the excitement and fear of their first day, inviting them to create an empathetic contact with the girl. The teacher is juxtaposed to calm, obedient, understanding boys and girls, perhaps unreal in their perfection, but certainly presented as an ideal model to be followed by girls and boys. The teacher is contrasted with the antagonist of the story, Miss Trunchbull, the school headmaster. She is an unpleasant woman both considering her temperament and her appearance: she has strong, rough, authoritarian manners, prefers violent punishments and moves as she was acting in a military camp rather than in an educational context<sup>16</sup>. Her character is cleverly juxtaposed with the grace and kindness of Miss Honey, so that the characteristics of both of them are reinforced in the contrast. This contrast reminds us of the scholastic and educational changes that have occurred in recent decades and thus it counterpoints the fear and unpleasantness of a figure anchored to the past with the benefits of a teacher oriented towards the future.

In *Matilda*, the setting is built on real and fantastic elements, but it presents a verisimilar, plausible context that is close to young viewers. The film, therefore, selects a realistic and critical approach starting from a literary source. The film narrates contemporary events which are constructed as both for and about children. Moreover, the film presents numerous and variegated female portrayals: firstly, a young female protagonist depicted with characteristics that are partially out of the ordinary in relation to gender canons. Matilda is a bold, active, curious, stubborn child. Similarly, Miss Honey, while maintaining characteristics linked to the female standard (she is quiet, beautiful, kind, good, and patient) offers an important opportunity for female protagonism on a cinematic level, renewing the image of the female teacher<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, Miss Trunchbull,

<sup>16</sup> D. Forni, *Bambine e ragazze a scuola. Rompere gli schemi dell'istruzione femminile nei romanzi per ragazzi degli ultimi 150 anni*, in F. Borruso, R. Gallelli, G. Seveso (edd.), *Dai saperi negati alle avventure della conoscenza*, Milano, Unicopli, 2023, pp. 151-164.

<sup>17</sup> A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, ETS, 2019; S. Olivieri, *Donne e scuola. Per una storia dell'istruzione femminile in Italia*,

despite its caricatured portrayal, offers new opportunities to re-evaluate the female sphere through a representation that is far removed from the affable and graceful model that often typifies female portraits. Miss Trunchbull mixes masculine and feminine characteristics, deconstructing the norm but, given her role as an antagonist and her despicable actions, failing to create empathic contact or identification and thus remaining a negative model not to be imitated, even in her pioneering experimentation with identity.

#### 4. Discussion

Some recurrent themes and trends can be detected in films regarding childhood and schools. Five main thematic lines emerge in the analysis of the case studies: the need for educational revolutions; the key role of the teacher; a criticism to violent education; the process of growing up; the issue of gender identity.

Firstly, a topic at the center of different narratives on childhood and schooling is the need for both pedagogical and educational “revolutions”. An example is the need for an education system that supports the pupils’ requests and creates a sincere, direct dialogue with boys and girls, highlighting the need to overcome old conceptions of the school system (*The 400 Blows*).

Secondly, the role of the teacher as an educative actor is another fundamental and recurrent element: teachers are usually shaped in a binary approach that sees the good teacher contrasted to the bad teacher. This simple, and sometimes one-dimensional, vision of educative figure encloses teachers in specific roles that seldom present multifaceted, round characters (*Amarcord*; *Matilda*).

Thirdly, violence often emerges in school narratives for/about children. Violence can be displayed both as verbal/psychological or physical. In some cases, violence is perpetrated by children on children, but in other situations, teachers, parents or educating adult figures act violently against children, using violence as a pedagogical or socializing tool (*The 400 Blows*; *Matilda*). This choice is usually represented through a critical approach, so as to encourage a reflection on past or present educative methods that do not simply belong to fictional worlds.

The topic of growing up is another key aspect that emerges in childhood’s narratives. Children and teenagers are usually looking for their identity, trying to understand who they want to become, what values and models they want to follow, what stereotypes they want to deconstruct to find their personal path. However, in some films schools and educative figures are not a reference point for children (*The 400 Blows*; *Stand by me*). In these cases, the young protagonists are educated in other contexts (orphanages, families, and so on), but school is presented as a fundamental tool even when not depicted. The

absence of paramount educative contexts highlights the importance, for children, to find staples and supportive figures during their growth.

Finally, another recurrent element is the construction of gender dichotomies that portray little boys and girls in different roles, contexts, facing different life experiences. Some of the films represent a strong binarism due to effective social differences of the past, so a sexist representation often goes back to a real depiction of past social perceptions related to gender (*Amarcord*; *The 400 Blows*). However, even in more recent works some of these dichotomies persist and only a few films manage to portray innovative identities related to femininity and, most of all, masculinity (*Matilda*).

### *Conclusions*

Because of its capabilities and its universal and intersectional nature, cinema is a useful medium in the construction of collective imaginaries. However, film and social imagery on a variety of topics, including schooling, does not necessarily reflect historical facts, but still establishes a collective memory, a shared “feeling” that is transmitted and becomes an indicator of the historical periods involved. Therefore, through the study of school memory and historical-educational heritage, we can understand how the past is read and, more importantly, interpreted and transformed in present times. Our collective imaginary is not necessarily faithful to historical facts as it is more often shaped by different means of symbolic representation within the popular narrative. The study of the historical-educational heritage can thus unfold on two opposing levels, both of which are rich and multifaceted: the real and the imaginary, which is to say, history and the collective feeling or perception that history has left us with. And, considering education, school as it actually was and school as we visualize it by looking back to the past. Cinema is thus an extremely effective and direct vehicle for the study of collective memory, but it should be cautiously approached, so as to understand which elements are part of an ungrounded or stereotype-based popular imagination and which ones relate to precise historical moments, contexts, and dynamics.

# Between School Memory and Visual Culture: the Photo Albums of the Porta Romana Art Institute in Florence (1939-1962)

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## *Introduction*

This contribution brings together the results of a PRIN research segment focused on a number of school photographic archives held in Florence and aimed at investigating school memory in relation to photographic culture<sup>1</sup>. After exploring and ruling out the possibility of a sweeping census of the city's existing photographic heritage, the work focused on identifying and delving into a number of case studies<sup>2</sup>.

As we shall see, some interesting and substantially unpublished material has been brought to light from the photographic collection held in the historical archive at the Porta Romana Art Institute (since 2010, Art College), which constitutes not only a case study, but also a *taste case*.

The photographic collection, kept within the school's historical archive, features various photographic objects, including series of both film negatives and prints from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. However, as it is neither ordered nor catalogued, it poses a number of problems related to its preservation, protection and knowledge, making its study somewhat fragmented. Nevertheless, by cross-referencing the photographic material with information from archival documents, it is possible to identify pieces of a puzzle that have yet to be defined as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> For an initial contribution on the results of the research, cf. C. Naldi, *I patrimoni fotografici delle scuole di Firenze, temi e metodo di una ricerca in corso*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 9, n. 2, 2022, pp. 63-74.

<sup>2</sup> I had initially planned to carry out a survey of the collections and compilations of photographs in the city's secondary schools, as this has never been done and is a necessary exercise, especially from a conservation and cognitive point of view, but unfortunately, out of 32 secondary schools contacted, only five archives could be consulted.

### 1. *The Porta Romana Art Institute and its historical archive*

The Institute was founded in 1869 in the district of Santa Croce as part of the technical culture of grand-ducal Florence and stimulated by the economic interests of the Florentine woodcarvers, who founded the “School of Woodcarvers, Cabinetmakers and Woodworkers” with the aim of educating pupils from the artisanal class to become skilled workers<sup>3</sup>. From the outset, the industrial school’s attitude was to engage with the international scene, to the extent that it presented material at the Paris Exhibition of 1878 demonstrating the technical quality of its pupils’ woodcarving work, to boost industrial competitiveness<sup>4</sup>.

In 1880, it became the “Scuola professionale di Arti Decorative e Industriali” (Professional School of Decorative and Industrial Arts). In 1919, a royal decree elevated the former Professional School for the Decorative Arts to the highest level in the school system, the “Regio Istituto Artistico Industriale” (Royal Industrial Art Institute), an institution supported by the Ministry for Industry, Commerce and Labour, the City Council, the Province and the Chamber of Commerce of Florence. Organised on three levels, the training programme consisted of a four-year “manual workers’ course” with three hours of study a day in the hours free of industrial workshops; a four-year standard course with eight hours of study a day and workshops on decorative arts, painting, visual arts, mobile architectural design, etc.; and, finally, a one-year master’s course for teaching art subjects<sup>5</sup>.

From 1923, with the Institute’s move to its current location in Porta Romana – a monumental building inside the Parco della Pace built to house the Royal Stables of the Royal Palace of Palazzo Pitti – and with the reorganisation following the Gentile Reform, a phase of considerable vivacity was ushered in on a cultural and educational level. The directors of the three Italian art institutes (Naples, Venice and Florence), Lionello Balestrieri, Marco Salvini and Ferruccio Pasqui, worked together on a new system for art institutes – an intention already in place thanks to a long initiative led by Ugo Ogetti since 1920. During this time, the Minister of Public Education and the Undersecretary of Fine Arts had set up a commission on the reform of art schools, whose central aim was to overcome the separation between the “arti minori” (minor guilds) and the “arti maggiori” (major guilds), and between fine art and industrial art – schools whose main purpose would be to create original works of applied art<sup>6</sup>. During those years, art

<sup>3</sup> M. Branca, A. Caputo, *Le arti decorative a Firenze. Il patrimonio storico dell’Istituto d’arte 1869-1940*, exhibition catalogue (Gallery of Modern Art, Florence, 17 December 1994 - 26 February 1995), Livorno, Sillabe, 1994, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> The volume *Disegno lineare e di Applicazioni alle arti* and the *Raccolta di ornamenti scolastici*, in which a theory of ornamentation led by Antonio Salvini was developed.

<sup>5</sup> V. Cappelli, S. Soldani, *Storia dell’Istituto d’Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, Firenze, Olschki, 1994, p. 76. Other contributions on the history of the Institute: *L’Istituto d’Arte di Firenze centoquattro anni dalle sue origini 1869-1973*, Florence, Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, 1973; *L’Istituto Statale d’Arte di Firenze: un grande passato, un presente di crescita, quale futuro?*, proceedings of the conference (6 July 2005, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence), Firenze, Polistampa 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell’Istituto d’Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., pp. 79-85.

teaching was at the centre of a fruitful debate on bringing the major guilds closer to the minor guilds, presided over in a special ministerial commission by Ugo Ojetti, who, from 1920 onwards, was also head of the Florentine school<sup>7</sup>. In the years that followed, the Florentine institute became an educational and cultural model that was admired even abroad: inspired by the Renaissance workshop in which an artist teacher, with a studio next to the workshop, gave lessons, allowing continuous contact between teacher and pupils, the vocational division became the fulcrum of teaching<sup>8</sup>.

This model transformed the Porta Romana school into a major urban and national cultural hub – an educational-cultural paradigm for the emerging artistic and artisanal Florence in the global market of mass tourism. To fully understand the cultural and educational political character of the Art Institute, we cannot disregard the more general urban context whereby Florence, which in the liberal age and still in the early post-war period was asserting its national cultural dimension as the «Athens of Italy», reflected a close relationship between artists and craftspeople. This relationship was evident in the exhibitions that, from 1922, were held in a building specially constructed to bring together the various cultural and artistic initiatives in a single urban space, with the aim of gathering «the genius of our masters of every art and the hand and intelligence of our craftspeople and artisans», as the manifesto «Italiani, Toscani, Fiorentini» wrote<sup>9</sup>.

With the first National Crafts Fair held at the Parterre in 1931, the link was forged between Alessandro Pavolini's cultural-political initiative and the artistic identity of the Art Institute, which aimed to carve out a space for itself in public commissions, such as the artistic decoration of the works of the regime<sup>10</sup>. Thus began a process that was to characterise much of the second half of the 1930s, in which the administrative

<sup>7</sup> Ugo Ojetti (Rome 1871-Fiesole 1946) was a leading figure in the Italian cultural milieu of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: an influential journalist and writer and a successful critic of the figurative arts, he was a collector and talent scout, and held various positions in the preservation of monuments and cultural commissions of the time, convinced that works of art fitted in perfectly with the spirit of the age, cf. F. Amico, *Il ruolo di Ugo Ojetti nella vita culturale italiana della prima metà del Novecento*, «Luk», n. 20, 2014, pp. 109-23. The numerous contributions on Ojetti also include: I. Calloud, *Ugo Ojetti e le esposizioni: un'anagrafe digitale dal fondo della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*, «Studi di Memofonte», n. 6, 2011, pp. 53-61; G. De Lorenzi, *Ugo Ojetti critico e collezionista d'arte*, in G. De Lorenzi, *Da Fattori a Casorati*, Viareggio, Centro Matteucci, 2010, pp. 17-29.

<sup>8</sup> L. Felici, *I laboratori dell'Istituto d'Arte di Porta Romana, 150 anni di formazione artistica a Firenze (1869-1919)*, Firenze, Edifir, 2019, pp. 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> The organisers of the exhibitions included the Provincial Council of the Corporate Economy (which had absorbed the Chamber of Commerce), the Independent Fascist Federation of Artisans of Italy, the National Board for Small Industries; in addition, it is worth noting that in 1923, the Board for Tuscan Activities was founded to promote artistic and cultural activities in the region, and in 1931, the Independent Tourist Board was established. Cf. F. Tacchi, «A fianco degli artigiani stanno e devono stare gli artisti». *La Mostra dell'artigianato nella Firenze fascista (1931-1942)*, in C. Giometti, *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 111-126.

<sup>10</sup> Alessandro Pavolini (Florence 1903-Dongo 1945), elected secretary of the provincial Fascist federation in 1929, was a promoter of the artisanal turn of the attractive city as a tourist hub, cf. F. Tacchi, «A fianco degli artigiani stanno e devono stare gli artisti». *La Mostra dell'artigianato nella Firenze fascista (1931-1942)*, in C. Giometti, *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 114, for a broader overview of Fascist Florence, see M. Palla, *Firenze nel regime fascista (1929-1934)*, Firenze, Olschki, 1978.



normalisation proceeded with the growing ideological normalisation of the Institute, and the most important new developments in the school concerned the re-founding of Florence as «the most artisanal city in Italy», in which economic interests were united, reasserting the supremacy of Florence's trades and workshops<sup>11</sup>. In the pages of *Il Bargello*, Pavolini urges us to «use the press, photography and cinema not as a mirror in which to gaze complacently at ourselves, at what we have done, but as a megaphone in which to repeat to the world: Florence, Florence, Florence»<sup>12</sup>.

The relationship between the policy of the regime and art education was consolidated with the exhibition ardently supported by Bottai in Rome in 1939: the «Mostra degli Istituti d'istruzione artistica» (Exhibition of Art Education Institutes) was inaugurated at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in the presence of Mussolini, Minister Bottai and the highest officials in the National Fascist Party and the Ministry of National Education<sup>13</sup>. In the vision of Bottai, who had recently published his School Charter, the renewal envisaged introducing manual labour into every level and grade of education, supporting applied art and breaking away from the centrality of the classical secondary school, which still dominated since the Gentile Reform of 1923<sup>14</sup>.

The works submitted by the Florence Art Institute were selected in quantity and quality, affirming the school's leadership. The school, directed by Ferruccio Pasqui, exhibited at the Triennials of 1930, 1933, 1936 and 1940<sup>15</sup>.

## 2. *The School of Photography*

It was within this political and cultural framework that, as engineer Vincenzo Balocchi wrote in a letter in spring 1937, «thanks to the involvement of the Ministry for Press and Propaganda, a photography course was set up at the city's Royal Institute of Art», which was inaugurated on 18 April in the presence of the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai<sup>16</sup>. The Institute's School of Photography opened with the financial contribution of the Independent Tourist Board of the Province of Florence,

<sup>11</sup> Pavolini's economic and social project focused on the political and propagandistic reorganisation of the National Fascist Party, which had been imposed as a matter of urgency in Florence after the squadrist phase and the anti-worker and anti-socialist repression of the 1920s. New forms of domination were needed to transform the state into an increasingly authoritarian and centralised form. The project for an artisanal and touristic Florence was also promoted through the pages of the periodical «Il Bargello». M. Palla, *Firenze nel regime fascista (1929-1934)*, cit., pp. 231-233. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between fascism, propaganda and figurative art, see L. Malvano, *Fascismo e politica dell'immagine*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> A. Pavolini, *Bilancio della Primavera*, «Il Bargello», 5 July 1931, cited in Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> D. De Angelis, *Bottai e la Mostra dell'Istruzione Artistica del 1939*, Roma, Gangemi Editore, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> V. Balocchi, 29 March 1937, handwritten letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence. See also Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., pp. 98-99.



with the stated purpose of tourism-related advertising and propaganda for the regime. According to the archival documentation, the School of Photography, like the other workshops, also supplied photographic material externally, thus fulfilling a dual role of teaching and service. A particular focus was placed on the sights of Florence and Tuscany for the promotion of tourism, so the school was required to send these photographs to the Independent Tourist Board every month<sup>17</sup>.

In a letter to Bottai, Ojetti praised the initiative for «drawing the public's attention to the importance that this ensemble for artists and craftsmen presents for the purposes of cultural and practical propaganda on the natural and artistic treasures of Italy»<sup>18</sup>.

The initial core of the Institute's photographic collection consisted of the photographs donated by shareholders Brogi and Alinari<sup>19</sup>, later supplemented by the acquisition of administrative, technical and scientific materials from the "Società Fotografica Italiana" (Italian Photographic Society), an organisation that supported photography following the model of international societies, which had opened its doors in 1889 and ceased its activity in 1915<sup>20</sup>.

In 1924, with the expansion of the teaching equipment, 360 slides were purchased for the teaching of Art History<sup>21</sup>. For the most part, the collection comprises the in-house photographic production of the photography course.

Among the material collected, the first to catch the eye is a series of seventeen bound albums containing 24x18 cm gelatine-silver prints. Organised thematically and asynchronously, a visual journey unfolds from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, in dozens of photographs that reveal not only the documentary intent but also a specific taste in image composition and the rendering of the various components, from the figures and machinery present to the study of light. The subjects depicted include the pupils at work in the various printing, weaving, bookbinding, engraving, sculpture, painting and ceramics workshops, the artefacts produced, the entries in national exhibitions – highlighting the externalisation and dissemination of the knowledge and achievements of the art institute – and, finally, the interiors of the school building.

<sup>17</sup> *Azienda autonoma del turismo al R. Istituto d'arte*, 18 February 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence. See also A. Caputo Calloud, *Il fondo di fotografie dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze. Profilo per una storia istituzionale della Società Fotografica Italiana*, «AFT-Archivio fotografico toscano», n. 16, 1992, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ojetti a Bottai*, 8 January 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence.

<sup>19</sup> These are at least 181 photographs of ornamental motifs, taken from the 1882 inventory, cf. Cappelli, Soldani, *Storia dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze (1869-1989)*, cit., p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> A. Caputo Calloud, *Il fondo di fotografie dell'Istituto d'Arte di Firenze. Profilo per una storia istituzionale della Società Fotografica Italiana*, cit.; F. Strobino, *La doppia anima della Società Fotografica Italiana (1889-1915)*, «Rivista di Studi di Fotografia», n. 5, 2017, pp. 82-101; T. Serena, *Le proiezioni pubbliche di fotografia a Firenze all'inizio del Novecento*, in C. De Benedictis, R. Roani, G.C. Romby (edd.), *La Palazzina dei Servi a Firenze*, Firenze, Edifir, 2014, pp. 125-128; E. Puorto, *Fotografia tra arte e storia, il "Bullettino della Società Fotografica Italiana" (1889-1914)*, Napoli, Guida, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Filza 1929, A.I.S.A., Florence.



Fig. 1. Some photographs from the albums of Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

For the first two years, the school was directed by engineer Vincenzo Balocchi, a photographer of considerable significance in the history of Italian and international photography. Known in the 1930s as a modernist photographer, he also worked as director of the Fratelli Alinari studio. For the following three decades, the teaching was then handed over to Renzo Maggini<sup>22</sup>.

In Italy too, the search for a photographic “specificity” developed mainly between the two world wars, when photography emancipated itself from painting, with which it had chosen to identify itself, turning to more modest things and beginning to isolate the subject, which at this point needed to stand out in the composition of the image. Despite the constraints imposed by Fascist rhetoric on iconographic models, the debate on photography developed and a new kind of photography emerged, derived also from technical advances such as small-format cameras (Leica) and film coatings, and nourished

<sup>22</sup> Vincenzo Balocchi (Florence, 1892-1975) left Fratelli Alinari and founded the Istituto Fotocromo Italiano in the late 1920s, specialising in the reproduction of works of art. In 1936, he founded the Gruppo Fotografico Fiorentino; the studio was razed to the ground by a fierce bombing but the photographs were saved, V. Balocchi, *Idea e forma nella fotografia di Vincenzo Balocchi*, Firenze, Fotostudio, 1984. The Balocchi collection now is the subject of an enhancement project by the Tuscany Region, cf. <https://www.alinari.it/it/news/archivio-balocchi> (last access: 10.02.2023).

by the linguistic experiments of the Bauhaus in Germany or Edward Weston and Paul Strand in the United States<sup>23</sup>.

If it is possible to identify strands in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century photography, these would include photojournalism and avant-garde photography, which mingled with the artistic avant-garde and itself became a means of expression in its conception of modernity, necessarily involving the use of modern media<sup>24</sup>.

### 3. *Photographic Library and visual culture*

The historical archive of the Art Institute was initially approached through the photographic objects, observed somewhat randomly at first because, as already mentioned, they are not in any order. It immediately became clear, however, that the photographs had been taken not only with technical skill but also with attention to composition, poses and lighting. The cultural gaze of the photographers is evident, probably also derived from the use of cultural models and references in circulation at the time, such as trade magazines. It was therefore interesting to trace in the school's archival documentation the organisation of a Photographic Library, concomitant with the opening of the photography course in 1937 and into which the books, periodicals and pamphlets inherited from the Italian Photographic Society became incorporated<sup>25</sup>, to which were then added purchased texts and subscription magazines<sup>26</sup> including: «Corriere fotografico», «Progresso fotografico», «Note fotografica», «Pagine fotografica» and «Galleria», along with the «Domus» series, with which they collaborated as Gio Ponti, architect and editor-in-chief of the magazine, supported the cultural achievements of the school by publishing photographs of the artefacts; likewise the magazines «La ceramica» and «Il vetro», house organs of the «Federazione nazionale fascista degli industriali del vetro e della ceramica» (National Fascist Federation of Glass and Ceramics Industrialists)<sup>27</sup>. Subsequently, in 1942, we

<sup>23</sup> For a general overview of the photographic culture of the period, see J.C. Lemagny, A. Rouillé, *Storia della fotografia*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1988, pp. 103-157.

<sup>24</sup> The aesthetic values on which Balocchi's photography is based and which initially set the tone for the School of Photography at the Art Institute, are the narrowing of the visual field, fragmentation, in search of stable geometric elements, following models such as the photographers Moholy-Nagy, Weston, Kertesh, Steichen.

<sup>25</sup> Transfer to the Art Institute of the material stored at the Leonardo da Vinci Institute after the liquidation of the Italian Photographic Society in 1913. *Pasqui a Pachò*, 31 May 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 II, A.I.S.A., Florence; *Elenco materiali ricevuti dalla Leonardo da Vinci*, 8 June 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 II, A.I.S.A., Florence.

<sup>26</sup> V. Balocchi ai direttori delle riviste specializzate, 29 March 1937, typescript letter, Filza 1937 I, A.I.S.A., Florence. In this letter addressed to the editorial directors of the magazines, Balocchi asks to receive the magazines free of charge for educational use in the School of Photography.

<sup>27</sup> Il direttore della rivista *La ceramica* al R. Istituto d'Arte, 20 December 1939, typescript letter, Filza 1939 II, A.I.S.A., Florence. For an in-depth study of photography magazines, see I. Zannier, *Leggere la fotografia: le riviste specializzate in Italia (1863-1990)*, Roma, La Nuova Italia, 1993.



Fig. 2. School of Photography, (*Girl at the loom*), 1939 ca., gelatin silver print, 24x18 cm, Album 9, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence



Fig. 3. Harold Cazneau, *Behind the bamboo shutter*, table 8 published in Achille Bologna, *How to photograph today*, Milano, Hoepli, 1935, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

find a request for specialist manuals in exchange for a subscription suspended by the periodical «Corriere fotografico» of Milan and published by the same company<sup>28</sup>.

Through these materials, the students on the photography course were able to engage with the current trends in taste and keep abreast of technical developments in the medium of photography.

A notable aspect of the Art Institute at the time, and of which the practice of photography is an essential tool, is the full connection with the outside world – an all-embracing school, participating in and influencing cultural dynamics and the craft industry, not least through its avid participation in National Exhibitions such as the Milan Triennial and the exhibitions organised in Rome by the Fascist regime such as the Autarchia and Art Institute exhibitions or the Crafts Exhibition in Florence.

<sup>28</sup> The books requested were: *Per riuscire in fotografia* by Giuseppe Castruccio (first edition 1913), *Vademecum del fotografo* by Rodolfo Namias, 1911, *I fondamenti della Fotografia* by C. E. K. Mees, 1923, *La fotografia degli oggetti a colori* also by Mees, *La fotografia in pratica di Photophilus* by Photophilus, 1919, *La fotografia durante l'inverno all'aperto e in casa* by Gincastra, 1920, *Il ritocco dei negativi e dei positivi fotografici* by Peirano, 1917. Cf. 7 May 1942, typescript letter, Filza 1942 I, A.I.S.A., Florence.





Fig. 4. School of Photography, (*Students in rubble*), 1945 ca., gelatin silver print, Album 18, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence

These are just a few comparisons, somewhat instrumental, that help us to understand the visual imagery in which this photographic production of a scholastic and institutional nature appeared – a visual culture that certainly teachers but also pupils could observe in its dissemination in specialist magazines and exhibitions.

One of the most striking images in terms of composition and interpretation of light among those kept in the Porta Romana albums is undoubtedly *La ragazza al telaio*, which brings to mind photographs that had already introduced a new interpretation of the photographic medium, such as Alfred Stieglitz's *Sun Rays*, *Paula*, taken in 1889 and only exhibited and published from 1921 onwards<sup>29</sup>.

An example of the handling of lighting effects can be found in one of the practical photography manuals available to the school's students, the Hoepli manual *Come si fotografa oggi* (How to Photograph Today), published in 1935 and among the study materials of the students of the school; the photography is by Harold Cazneaux (1878-1953), titled *Dietro la persiana di bambù*.

<sup>29</sup> One of the best-known photographs that reveals the modernist impulses of Stieglitz, one of the greatest innovators of photographic aesthetics in the transition from pictorial to straight photography. Photograph by A. Stieglitz, *Sun rays-Paula*, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.35206.html> (last access: 30.01.2023).

One particularly unusual subject found in the Porta Romana albums is that of children amidst the rubble of the Second World War, in a photograph depicting middle school pupils inside the Art Institute, in a composition reminiscent of pictorialism.

The children are sitting on the rubble like little Rodin thinkers, in an image that brings to mind the much better-known photograph taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson in Spain in 1933, while still in his surrealist phase<sup>30</sup>.

One last example is a carefully thought-out composition with close-up framing of the subject: the act of writing by a small pupil and well-known cultural references, such as the bust of Giuseppe Garibaldi, reminiscent of a painting by Telemaco Signorini depicting the same subject<sup>31</sup>.

These juxtapositions, devoid of a cause-effect relationship, reveal the cultural gaze of those who took the photographs kept in the Porta Romana albums – photographs that do not so much deal with the illustration of the school as with its representation. As historians, we have the opportunity to consider these photographs in terms of their documentary value, as sources for school history; however, although we can recognise practical aspects of school activities, from teaching to workshops, these photographs seem to deal more with gestural portraiture. The photographer's intention to depict the gestures of the student as they use their tools in the workshops and learn a trade is a predominant feature. It is therefore a visual representation of the school in its development rather than an illustration of its institutional and educational characteristics, which can now be consulted from a critical and historical perspective.

I therefore feel that the most interesting aspect of these photographs – which until now have remained confined to the private setting of the school and were taken in-house, both for the purpose of learning the medium of photography and for documenting and constructing a visual memory of the school – is that, in terms of visual culture, they are part of the dynamics of the taste and photographic trends of the time, albeit dealing with an individual and specific segment in the panorama of educational history. The circulation of the Institute's photographs in specialist architecture and craft magazines confirms this.

<sup>30</sup> Photograph by H. Cartier-Bresson, *Seville*, 1933, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283312> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>31</sup> Painting by T. Signorini, *Bambina che scrive*, 1880-1890, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/opere-darte/bambina-che-scrive> (last access: 30.01.2023).

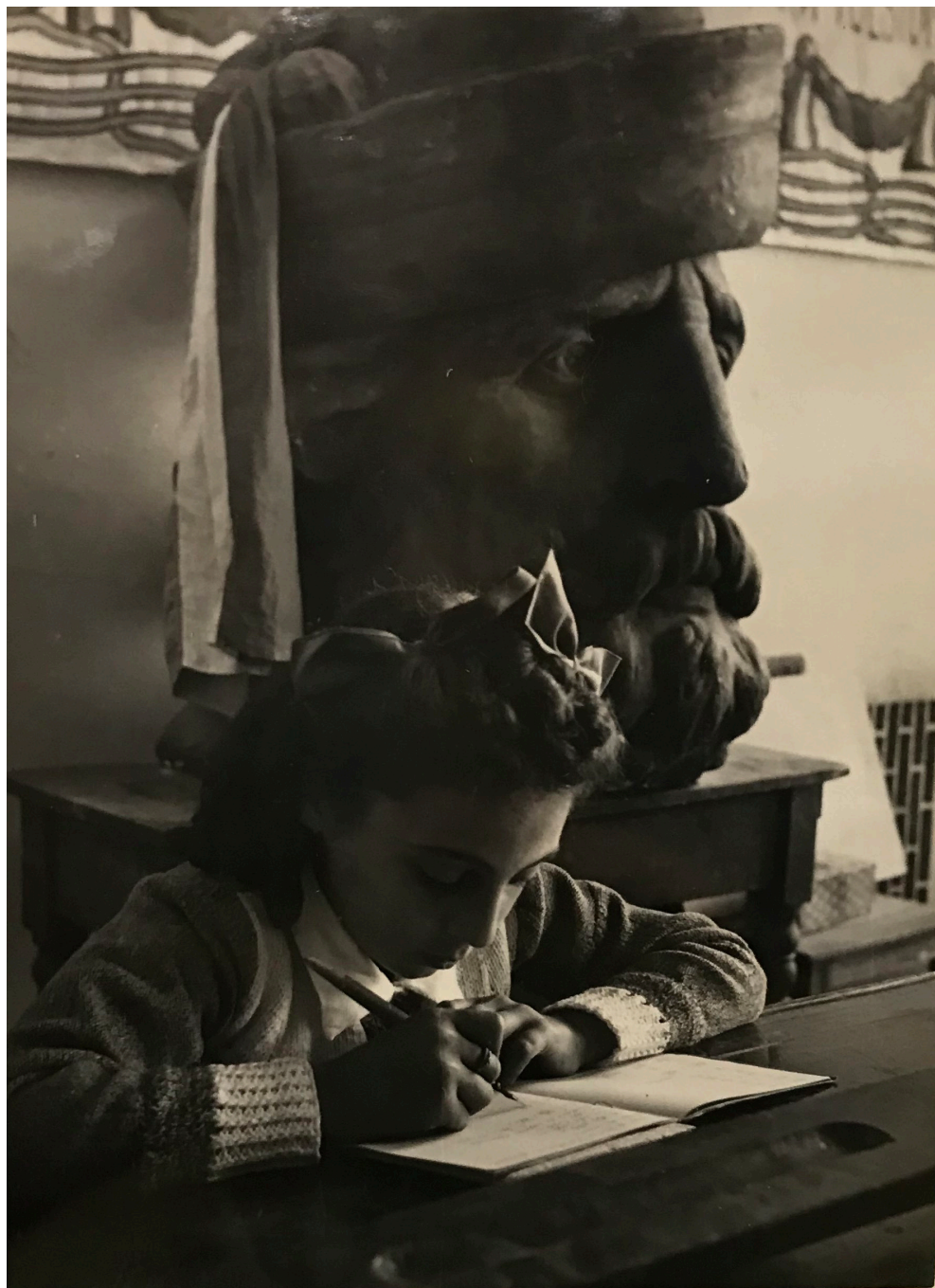


Fig. 5. School of Photography, (*Little girl writing*), 1945 ca., gelatin silver print, 24x18 cm, Album 18, Photo Archive A.I.S.A., Florence





# School Life Representation in the Photographic Images of the Dossier Series “Biblioteca di Lavoro” by Mario Lodi

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## 1. Biblioteca di Lavoro: *purposes and structure*

*Biblioteca di Lavoro* was an innovative editorial project directed by Mario Lodi with a group of avant-garde educators, members of Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (MCE)<sup>2</sup>, published in Italy between 1971 and 1979 by Luciano Manzuoli, a Florentine printer. The dossier series was accompanied by black and white photographs depicting, among many other images, various moments of school life.

These photographic images are examined in this essay as historiographical sources contributing to a school visual history. Images are, in fact, significant sources in the historical studies in education, as Gustavo E. Fishman, Roberto Farné and Liborio Termine's studies confirm<sup>3</sup>. The photographic images collected here show the authentic educational practices used in MCE classrooms in this historical period, the teaching methods adopted and everyday schoolwork. The photographs are thus historical evidence of a collective imagery of school and reveal the pedagogical and social climate of the time<sup>4</sup>.

*Biblioteca di Lavoro* was born from a profound debate on traditional schooling which did not correspond to MCE's pedagogical ideas and, more importantly, to the Italian Republic's constitutional principles<sup>5</sup>. In 1975 Lodi wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Silvia Pacelli is the author of the first and third sections of this essay and Valentina Valecchi wrote section two.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1951, MCE is an Italian association of teachers connected to the Federation Internationale des Mouvements d'École Moderne. For a more in-depth study of MCE's origins, see: A. Pettini, *Origini e sviluppo della cooperazione educativa in Italia. Dalla CTS al MCE (1952-1958)*, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1980; E. Catarsi (ed.), *Freinet e la pedagogia popolare in Italia*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> This particular aspect will be dealt with in section two.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetti (edd.), *Memorie ed Educazione Identità, Narrazione, Diversità*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2020, pp. 25-35.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Masala, *Mario Lodi maestro della Costituzione*, Trieste, Asterios, 2022 and the preface by F. Tonucci, *Non ditemi che è difficile*, in M. Lodi, *Cominciare dal bambino* (1977), Milano, Bur Rizzoli, 2022, pp. 5-12.

Once upon a time there was a single textbook and it played an important role in school life. This was once a school of imitation. The teacher talked and talked, putting forward certain ideas for assimilation. The students listened and watched, and if they spoke at all it was only to show that they had, indeed, assimilated these ideas and had, in fact, adopted the appropriate behaviour<sup>6</sup>.

This short quote summarises the main target of the criticisms of Lodi and MCE teachers in the 1970s: the single textbook, the dominant role of teachers in class, student passivity, a competitive and standardising model of school. The ultimate purposes of *Biblioteca di Lavoro* were, consequently, to replace the single textbook with a plurality of material and stimulate critical thinking and cooperation with new experiments and activities in class.

In his preface to the volume *Mario Lodi e la Biblioteca di Lavoro*<sup>7</sup>, Meda emphasises that this collection was one of the greatest and most composite alternatives to the school textbook in Italy, but it has, all the same, been the subject of very few history studies. Maria Rosaria Di Santo recent work<sup>8</sup> is, for example, one of very few monographs on the series.

*Biblioteca di Lavoro* is a collection of 130, sixteen or thirty-two pages, dossiers printed in an easy-to-handle size of 15x20cm. The volumes were written by some of Italy's greatest educators, such as Fiorenzo Alfieri, Tullio De Mauro, Caterina Foschi Pini, Palmira Maccarini, Francesco Tonucci and many others. They were supplemented by Ivo Sedazzari masterful illustrations, original children's drawings and black and white photographs as visual documentation.

The editorial collection's role was a twofold one. On one hand, it was designed to provide teachers with a new methodological tool, to inspire and support a new way of teaching. On the other hand, the idea was that students themselves would be able to consult it for research work in class. For this reason, the dossiers were divided up into three main categories: Documents - research sources containing authentic testimonies; Readings - brief stories on social and environmental issues too; and Guides - practical examples of activities already tested in the author's classrooms. In addition to this there were the half-yearly Newsletters, explaining the principles and goals behind the series, and a Register, an operational tool usable in the classroom.

Another innovative feature of the collection was that its dossiers were not classified by student age. In fact, they were intended for every school level, including workers' courses for the "150 hours" with no rigid distinction being made. Teachers were free to choose the right dossier and activity based on the topic dealt with and on students' maturity levels. Contemporary social and political problems were present in many dossiers, and this is further reason for *Biblioteca di Lavoro*'s significance as a source in the historical

<sup>6</sup> M. Lodi, *Schedario*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», n. 4, 1975, p. 2 (translated from Italian by the author).

<sup>7</sup> J. Meda, *Prefazione. La Biblioteca di Lavoro di Mario Lodi tra ortodossia freinetiana, indipendenza intellettuale e specificità culturale*, in M.R. Di Santo, *Mario Lodi e la "Biblioteca di Lavoro": una proposta didattica alternativa ancora attuale*, Bergamo, Edizioni Junior, 2022, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Di Santo, *Mario Lodi e la "Biblioteca di Lavoro": una proposta didattica alternativa ancora attuale*, cit.

and educational field. The volumes testify the profound social changes and are a clear expression of them.

The Seventies were, as a matter of fact, a time of great social and political transformation which also involved school. In 1967, the publication of Don Milani's book *Lettera a una professoressa*<sup>9</sup> had a profound influence on public opinion and became a benchmark for the school renovation process. In 1973 *Diario di un maestro* (De Seta) was broadcast on television to great acclaim. Education was considered key to social emancipation and school was central to the political and social debate, especially after student protests in 1968. Having experienced Fascism, MCE's teachers were convinced that school was fundamental to disseminating democratic values and training future citizens and their critical thinking<sup>10</sup>. Italy was now a Republic but its authoritarian teaching and traditional values had not substantially changed<sup>11</sup>. Textbooks, in particular, continued to convey common places, as an Italian research made clear<sup>12</sup>, and were full of notions students were to commit to memory. The purpose of such textbooks was to educate a passive, uncritical youth capable of rote learning ideas, but incapable of interpreting social and political issues. Lodi himself considered the single textbook to be a tool with which to perpetuate the idea of a pre-organised culture, as something already existing outside students: «like in a department store, the school program is sliced up and cut up into bite-sized chunks, packaged up into chapters in units called "school subjects". All teachers had to do was to get the dose and instructions right, and that was that»<sup>13</sup>. Textbooks were one of the cornerstones of traditional education, based on front-of-class lessons and selection: questioning these meant questioning the entire school system.

The advent of citizenship rights and Italian school reforms (e.g. law no. 820/1971 on full-time schooling, the 1974 delegated decrees for a more participatory school system and law no. 517/77 which sanctioned school integration) were just some of the major changes triggered by a strong social mobilisation. It was, as Lodi wrote, a true «Copernican revolution»<sup>14</sup>. Educators shed the requirement to represent the establishment and became cultural organisers, freeing up children's logical, expressive and creative abilities. MCE led this social movement and the ideas previously reported necessarily permeated *Biblioteca di Lavoro*'s pages and photographs.

A careful analysis of the collection confirms that the dossiers constitute a visual summary of the ideas expressed by Lodi in his books and the MCE's «deconstruction techniques». The photos illustrate the action and activities narrated in Lodi's diaries, such

<sup>9</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1967.

<sup>10</sup> See J. Meda, *Gli esperimenti scolastici di Barbiana e Vho. La scuola come luogo di inclusione e come spazio di crescita civile e democratica*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Inclusione e promozione sociale nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità a oggi*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2020, pp. 97-101.

<sup>11</sup> On the Italian school system in the Seventies also see M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017, pp. 183-218.

<sup>12</sup> An inquiry on the textbook was conducted by a group of Genoese teachers and collected in A. Alberti et alii, *I libri di testo della scuola elementare*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> M. Lodi, *Il paese sbagliato. Diario di un'esperienza didattica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1970, p. 22 (translated from Italian by the author).

<sup>14</sup> M. Lodi, *Muore la Biblioteca di Lavoro*, «LG Argomenti», vol. 4, 1980, p. 11.

as *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*<sup>15</sup> and *Il paese sbagliato*<sup>16</sup>: collective conversations, group activities, outdoor trips, the unusual classroom arrangement and the use of new materials.

## 2. *Photography as a source*

As we have seen, photography can contribute in retracing a specific historical and social context, as a number of interesting studies have noted, when it is viewed as a fragment of collective memory<sup>17</sup>.

In retracing school life and the use of the various aids to teaching, photographic sources are an especially valuable source<sup>18</sup> as they constitute direct testimony, «'traces' of the past in the present»<sup>19</sup> as Peter Burke defined them, capable of providing clues regarding the intentions of those who took them too<sup>20</sup>.

From this perspective, the black and white photographs of school scenes presented in various issues of *Biblioteca di Lavoro* can be seen as important evidences, useful in constructing school memories to the extent that they:

1. show the pedagogy methods applied, in a concrete way, in every day practice;
2. show moments of a different but feasible school;
3. unhide a common school-related imaginary.

As far as this latter point is concerned, the persistence of a shared idea of school is tangible: the idea of the school desk in a dominant position, desks lined up in rows, the blackboard as the focus of attention for explanations and oral tests<sup>21</sup>. As Roberto Farné has noted, images of school taken without advance planning or transformed into rituals are, in fact, very rare<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, educational phenomena are very often hidden from public view and the school building can come across almost as an “impenetrable fortress”<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> M. Lodi, *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*, Torino, Einaudi, 1963.

<sup>16</sup> Lodi, *Il paese sbagliato. Diario di un'esperienza didattica*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> See P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Use of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaction Books, 2001; A. Mignemi, *Lo sguardo e l'immagine. La fotografia come documento storico*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> On this subject, see: E. Colledemont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156; G.E. Fischman, *Reflections About Images, Visual Culture, and Educational Research*, «Educational Researcher», vol. 30, n. 8, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Use of Images as Historical Evidence*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> See P. Mottana (ed.), *L'immaginario della scuola*, Milano, Mimesis, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> See R. Farné, *Pedagogia visuale*, Milano, Cortina Raffaello, 2021, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> See M. Depape, F. Simon, *Is there any place for the history of "education" in the "history of education"? A plea for the history of everyday reality in and outside schools*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. XXXI, n. 1, 1995, pp. 9-16.

An historical enquiry using this type of source clearly needs to bear in mind the peculiarities of photography itself. Photography is an ambiguous source needing interpreting simultaneously on the *information* and *representation* planes<sup>24</sup>.

Roland Barthes, in his famous work *Camera Lucida*, defines it as «a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time»<sup>25</sup>. According to Barthes, the photographic message can be summed up as a relationship triangle, between the photographer, the spectator and the photo itself. In reading and interpreting photography, moreover, Barthes argues that two elements exist: the *studium*, i.e. the contents of the photo, what it represents, and the *punctum*, that which strikes us on a visual level<sup>26</sup>.

Photography's objectivity is purely fictitious. Its reality is determined by the way both spectator and photographer look at it.

«Reading a photograph is an action in which it is not only the reader who interacts with the image. To what extent is the photographer present?», writes Manuela Cecotti<sup>27</sup>.

On the subject of the photographer's selective act, John Berger, a further writer known for his interesting theoretical studies on images and vision, has said:

Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight: his sight was selected from an infinity of other possible sights. [...] The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject<sup>28</sup>.

The author's non-neutrality is tangible in the photographic documentation work in educational contexts, too. The vision of those taking photographs of school episodes inevitably betrays a vision of childhood, school and the educational experience.

At the same time, whilst the black and white photos present in certain files come across as exceptionally spontaneous if compared to the usual school photos, they contain covert programmatic choices all the same.

Returning to Farné's comments on the subject of visual pedagogy:

In making learning contexts and processes visible, photography also contains an idea of childhood and the educational institution bound up with the vision of educators, an inevitably selective and interpretative vision. This is not a limitation on visual pedagogy, but rather a value because it makes visible not only the learning experience but also the purposes of those who put the experience in place and have no intention of hiding it<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> See P. Ortoleva, *Una fonte difficile. La fotografia e la storia dell'emigrazione*, «Altretalia», vol. 5, 1991, pp. 120-158.

<sup>25</sup> R. Barthes, *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, Seuil, 1980; engl. transl. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Barthes, *La Chambre Claire. Note sur la photographie*, cit., pp. 25-27.

<sup>27</sup> M. Cecotti, *Fotoeducando*, Parma, Edizioni Junior, 2016, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Farné, *Pedagogia visuale*, cit., pp. 90-91.

From the starting point of the assumption that photography never entirely corresponds with reality, but is rather a personal representation of it, in examining the BL files as a historical source the focus was on the image of school the photographers were trying to get across in their photos. What did the photographer focus on? What educational climate was they attempting to bring out?

Echoing the title of a famous essay by Mitchell<sup>30</sup>, we thus did not simply observe the individual details of the images in question but asked ourselves what do the images present in the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* want? What do they intend to represent and, subsequently, what thoughts are they capable of provoking regarding legacies and topical issues for today's schooling, fifty years on?

## 2.1 *Analysis of the Biblioteca di Lavoro images*

Following on from a general analysis of each separate file in which photographs of school from the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* were selected, observation concentrated on the aspects below:

1. the activity taking place in the image;
2. the educational space and setting;
3. what those shown are wearing;
4. proxemics and the gestures shown;
5. the focus of the photo's attention;
6. the relationship that links the image to the others and to the text;
7. the message the photo is trying to get across.

Let us take a file dating to 1973 such as *Il tempo pieno, per affermare una scuola al servizio dei lavoratori* as an example<sup>31</sup>, one of the most significant for the purposes of this research. Here the purpose of the photos is to document the value of the full time experience, considered one of the school reform's most significant aspects: the idea of a new school, the outcome of democratic debate and sharing, is evident right from the cover image which captures a moment of debate between adults in a circle.

Subsequent photos depict the multiplicity of activities offered to children and designed to get them actively involved and motivate them to learn: writing essays, stories and poetry, plays in costume and a great deal more.

The image captions are also interesting: «Children come to school dressed as they choose. While they work their posture is their own choice»<sup>32</sup>. In fact, pupils look “free” at all times and were even free to strip off on the grass, sunbathe and behave as their natural aptitudes.

<sup>30</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Turin teachers (edd.), *Il tempo pieno, per affermare una scuola al servizio dei lavoratori*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», vol. I, n. 18, 1973.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.





Fig. 1. *Il tempo pieno: per affermare una scuola al servizio dei lavoratori*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», I, 18, 1973, cover image

It is also interesting to note that the focus of attention is never, as according to the collective imagery we might expect, namely the teacher's desk or the blackboard in a dominant position. The children are always looking at multiple points, concentrated on the various types of activities going on at the same time in the various classroom spaces. At the same time the focus of the camera lens is not one directional. It is virtually never focused on a single subject but rather takes in the dynamic nature of the school situation.

The intention of the file, taken as illustrative of the others in the *Biblioteca di Lavoro*, seems to be demonstrating the potential bound up with an alternative type of school, a break with the past but one which, although used only by a minority of teachers, was considered possible, feasible, one in which children finally played a centre stage role.

In historical analysis terms, an observation and comparison between the photos in the various files effectively convey the idea of childhood and school espoused by Lodi and his colleagues as well as the educational milieu of the day. The key aspects which emerge from an observation of the images are:

- 1) the importance of children working together — virtually all the photos show them working in groups, independent and involved in activities whose starting point is their questions and curiosities.
- 2) A democratic vision of school life, in accordance with the social movements of the day. The photos repeatedly show children raising their hands to vote in order to take



Fig. 2. *L'unione fa la forza*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», I, 16, 1971, p. 13

collective class decisions. In *L'unione fa la forza*<sup>33</sup>, for example, the pupils are shown deciding together to set aside part of their school kitty to support striking workers.

«It is not the teacher who decides what to do. When a decision needs to be taken a class assembly is called and it is discussed. One child is chairperson and anyone raising their hand can speak»<sup>34</sup>.

3) The class is organised like a self-managed community, founding cooperatives, discussing social problems together and finding solutions and strategies. It is open to the local area, the city, breaking out of the confines of the classroom. The school community is an organism which is built and grows over time.

Overall there are many photos depicting children outside the school building, in the open air, in the belief that it is the social context which generates thinking and enquiry insights. The idea in the titles of one of the files, *Una grande scuola: la città* – a great school: the city – gets this across very well<sup>35</sup>.

4) The children depicted are active, in the centre of the educational process, engaged in highly variegated creative experimentation.

5) Promoting a questing approach; for Lodi school was to foster children's need to explore and find out and give it continuity. Researching, for him, had great educational value, it opens the mind and frees children of conditioning.

In the MCE vision, this is as true of teachers as it is of pupils. Cooperative research was viewed as the basic precondition for professional growth: documenting the experiences proposed and making one's own work available to others – the idea underlying the BL itself and the images in it – is a full-blown “researcher” mindset.

<sup>33</sup> Collective text, *L'unione fa la forza*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», vol. I, n. 16, 1971.

<sup>34</sup> Turin teachers (edd.), cit., p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> F. Alfieri (ed.), *Una grande scuola: la città*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», vol. VII, n. 88, 1978.



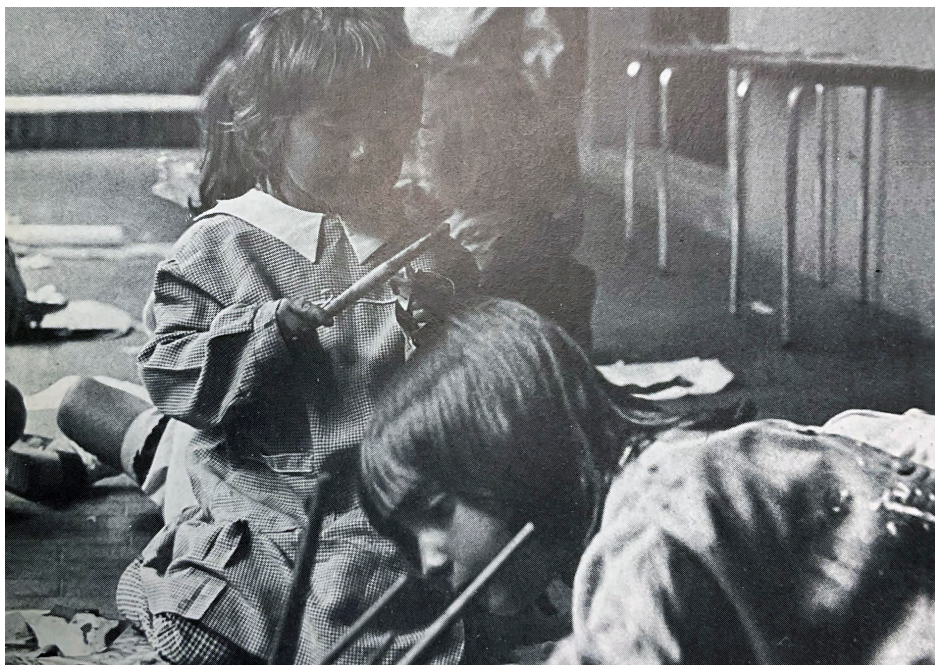


Fig. 3. *Prima dell'ABC*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», V, 56, 1976, p. 7



Fig. 4. *Dall'alfabeto al libro*, «Biblioteca di Lavoro», VIII, 94, 1979, cover image

6) Using new materials and techniques to ensure that children can truly express themselves freely and experiment at school: browsing through the photos brings out the great many ateliers developed and for which the classroom space was restructured in a way which was functional to the various painting activities, text printing with a limograph, cooking and much more.

To this end, in the preface to Lodi's book *Cominciare dal bambino*, Tonucci states: «I have always thought that [Lodi's school] felt less like a classroom than a craft workshop, with many corners and resources (...). In this stimuli and potential packed environment each and every pupil could find the activity most congenial to them and devote themselves to that with special interest and commitment»<sup>36</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The absence of the teacher emerges strongly from an observation of the photos, with these never being photographic subjects. Most of the time the author of the image was the teacher himself, who left his or her desk and stood behind the camera to record classroom activities: teacher became a witness to children's learning process. Aside from the practical details, however, this was certainly a meaningful aspect corroborating the vision of school deliberately passed on by the entire dossier series. Children are the true focus of the images and the educational process as well. In Lodi's published diaries, the educator is similarly invisible, encouraging the students to speak but remaining a step back, with children's discoveries and thoughts centre stage.

Whilst the photographs can, to some extent, be considered illustrative of the intentions behind this specific editorial project, this complete change of perspective is a significant clue to the social and pedagogical changes then underway and an important addition to the school memories discourse.

An idea of school which focused more on experiences and students' natural aptitudes and less on handed-down knowledge still seems a long way away today, verging on the utopian. MCE's educational ideals then clashed with 80s' disillusionment, as Lodi himself commented: teachers had created a few «happy islands»<sup>37</sup>, based on democracy, in a society still oppressive to childhood.

Even though the idea of school the dossiers bring out did not have the desired effects and the classroom shown remained a minority experience, the *Biblioteca di Lavoro* legacy is still significant: the photos allow observers to reflect on a school based on cooperation rather than competition and on critical thinking in the face of contemporary challenges. Photographs are a visual inspiration for a creative and truly inclusive teaching and learning approach. These aspects are now more important than ever and the methodological insights of this period may perhaps provide answers to current school difficulties.

<sup>36</sup> Tonucci, *Non ditemi che è difficile*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Lodi, *Cominciare dal bambino. Scritti didattici, pedagogici e teorici*, cit., p. 19 (the expression was translated from Italian by the author).

# Representing the Institutions between 1968 and Coming-of-age Novels: the “Educational Video Memories” Database

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## 1. *The terms of a problem: from narrative to reality, back and forth*

If there was no football or other things [to not to do], the things that I can remember are these: hunting, as we were the boys of the via Pal, hunting lizards to cut off their tails [addressing Alessia Bacigalupo, who is interviewing him], you are laughing, but [...] lizards, if you cut off their tails, the lizard runs away, it doesn't die, the tail continues to hop around, alive, I don't know for how many hours [...] you see? or if not, again like the boys of the via Pal, even worse, we would hide behind the cabins of the guards who were attending at the barracks, which was a wall; we would get behind these sort of cabins, and on that other side in the middle of the camp we would throw stone after stone after stone!<sup>1</sup>

Extrapolated from a context apparently alien to reading, the words with which Giulio Olmastroni evokes his own childhood pastimes constitute a tangible demonstration of how much narrative models and signifies our own experiences. Narration is an indispensable component of human life, as has been asserted by vast currents of international studies<sup>2</sup>. We are immersed in narrative from the moment we fall asleep, in our dreams, to when we wake, signifying and classifying our present or future events within patterns already read and known; we were this way as children, when we devised horrific stories full of monsters or natural disasters and so were our most distant ancestors, when, in glimpsing the traces of a prey on the ground of the Savannah, all the possible trajectories made by it were foreshadowed<sup>3</sup>. The adaptive abilities provided by narrative are fundamental for the human species: abilities to adapt to natural adversities and the harshness of social life, as suggested by the current of *Darwinist Literary Theory* inaugurated by the works of Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottshall, or of control of one's anxieties and anguishes, as suggested instead by the *Cognitive Literary Theory* of Nancy Easterlin<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> C. Martinelli, “My mother laughed because a teacher said a teacher”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/la-mamma-mia-rideva-perche-diceva-un-maestro-un-maestro> (last access: 23.06.2022).

<sup>2</sup> J. Bruner, *La fabbrica delle storie. Diritto, letteratura, vita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> J. Gottshall, *L'istinto di narrare. Come le storie ci hanno reso umani*, Milano, Bollati Boringhieri, 2014, pp. 26, 51-2; S. Calabrese, *Neuronarrazioni*, Milano, Bibliografica, 2020, pp. 14-7.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gottshall, *L'istinto di narrare*, cit., pp. 66-74; N. Easterlin, *The Functions of Literature and the Evolution of Extended Mind*, «New Literary History», vol. 44, n. 4, 2013, pp. 661-682.



Usually, however, human narrative modes have been studied on classical sources – tangible and immutable sources, such as writings, novels and diaries. Until now, the oral word of speech and dialogue has not been considered, which even, in its being a more immediate medium and one that is less subject to reworking and rethinking, could give us the opportunity to understand how the narratives influence the folds of our thoughts<sup>5</sup>. Particular attention, in our context, will be paid to the coming-of-age novel, a narrative genre that, as evocatively argued by Franco Moretti in the now classic *Il romanzo di formazione*<sup>6</sup>, has photographed, in the years of its greatest consolidation – that is, between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries – the need, for the individual person who desires a calm and socially recognised life, to acclimatise to the desires and rules of the social assembly<sup>7</sup>. It is a task that is all the more intriguing if we pause to reflect on the very structures of life memories, which do not fail to configure themselves as “coming-of-age novels”, *building romance*, in which the author signifies and contextualises his or her experiences according to the goals accomplished and the results achieved<sup>8</sup>. Investigating the mix between children’s literature and historical vicissitudes is therefore all the more compelling as it allows us to detect the influences between readings and testimonies, between novels and processes of construction of one’s own identity<sup>9</sup>. A process that was all the more delicate in transition periods, where social, cultural and mental transformations suggested new ways of interfacing with reality, and where readings could indicate new personal trajectories or point to unprecedented behavioural modalities. Among these, as evidenced by numerous essays, are the sixties and seventies, where student protest constituted only the most evident part of a radical cultural or, as it has been defined, transpolitical revolution<sup>10</sup>.

This is the purpose that we propose to achieve with this contribution: our source will be the vast database accumulated by the “Educational memories in video” project, which was one of the areas of development of the PRIN 2017-2020 “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation”<sup>11</sup>. The project, which involved numerous

<sup>5</sup> See for these considerations J. Dewey, *Comunità e potere*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1971, pp. 168-70.

<sup>6</sup> F. Moretti, *Il romanzo di formazione*, Milano, Garzanti, 1999; M. de Bernardi, *Il cassetto segreto. Letteratura per l’infanzia e romanzo di formazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> However, there are many doubts about the Moretti partition, in that several scholars argue both the presence of the coming-of-age novel in ancient, medieval and early-modern times and its persistence, albeit in ways and measures renewed, after the First World War: cf. M. Domenichelli, *Il romanzo di formazione nella tradizione europea*, in M.C. Papini, D. Fioretti, T. Spignoli, *Il romanzo di formazione nell’Ottocento e nel Novecento*, Pisa, ETS, 2007, pp. 11-37; G. Barracco, *Vocazioni irresistibili, vuoti vertiginosi*, Roma, Studium, 2019, pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. di Pasquale, *Antropologia della memoria. Il ricordo come fatto culturale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, pp. 65-66.

<sup>9</sup> H.H. Ewers, *Lo sviluppo storico della letteratura per l’infanzia dell’epoca borghese dal Settecento al Novecento. L’esempio tedesco*, in E. Becchi, D. Julia (edd.), *Storia dell’infanzia 2. Dal Settecento a oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996, pp. 409, 426.

<sup>10</sup> F. de Giorgi, *La rivoluzione transpolitica. Il ’68 e il post-68 in Italia*, Roma, Viella, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. Sani, J. Meda, “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation”. *An innovative research project with a strong international vocation*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26; L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica: a proposito del primo seminario nazionale PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 1047-53; L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica: a proposito del secondo seminario nazionale PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XV, n. 1, 2020, pp. 809-16.

Italian universities (including the Universities of Macerata, Florence, Campobasso, Milan Cattolica and Roma Tre), resulted in the creation of the portal [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it), within which we can also find the “Educational memories in video” data bank.

The latter, compiled by the University of Florence, currently consists of 250 videos (September 2022), developed by the students of the degree course in Primary Education Sciences for the teaching of “History of education”. During the lessons, students were invited to interview an acquaintance about their memories of childhood and school experience. Among the submissions, it was explicitly required that the product lasts at least forty-fifty minutes: most of the files, however, contain longer recordings, sometimes exceeding two hours. The birth cohort, initially restricted to the years 1945-1962, was subsequently extended in the term *ad quem* until 1989; only exceptionally, however, were interviews with people born in the 1930s allowed, people whose childhood memory was very often marked not by the experience of school, but by war. The database allows the disaggregation of interviews on a temporal and spatial basis. From the point of view of the decades considered, we are witnessing a pyramid trend, with a concentration of sources between the Sixties and Eighties: and in fact, the Thirties are covered in two interviews, the Forties in twenty-two, the Fifties in fifty-six, the Sixties in eighty-six, the Seventies in one hundred and eighteen, the Eighties in eighty-one, the Nineties in thirty-three<sup>12</sup>. Twenty-one, finally, is the number of interviews that cover the noughties: of the latter, however, only two are related to childhood memories: the remaining nineteen concern professional memories, made by teachers, educators and secondary school teachers. From a geographical point of view, the preponderance of Tuscan school experiences (87% of the sample) over those held in other Italian regions is clear. As for gender, however, students (who, in most cases, are female) preferred to interview a woman: of the 250 interviews, in fact, 188 were directed at a female person.

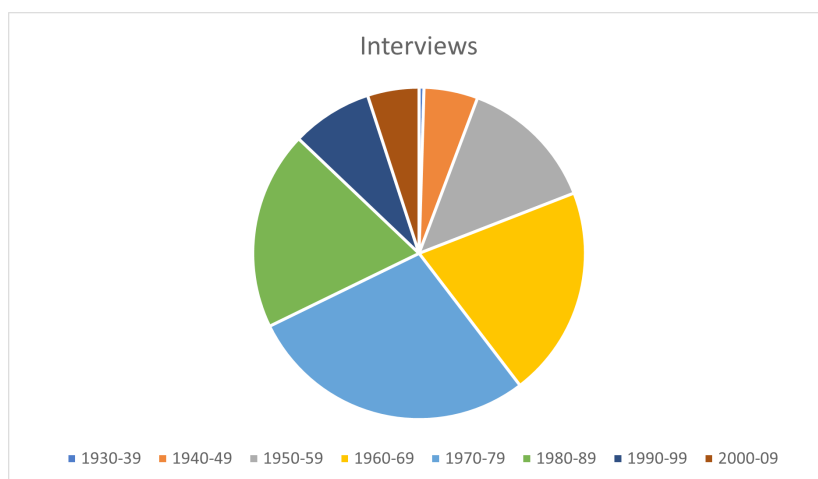


Fig. 1. Breakdown of interviews by decade covered

<sup>12</sup> Bear in mind that, normally, an interview spans several decades.

## 2. *Coming-of-age literature as a channel for other narratives*

After defining the sources in our possession, we can return to the terms of the problem. What is the presence of literature, and coming-of-age literature, in the childhoods of the interviewees? Some distinctions are necessary. Distinctions of social class and schooling, in the first place: because, for witnesses who grew up in the Forties and Fifties, the way in which their approach to literature is described is different. Books as a means of evasion and escape from reality dominate the accounts of respondents who were able to embark on a prolonged school path (until, at least, the completion of what we would now call upper secondary schools); reading as a channel of self-learning and emancipation instead characterises the discourse of those who were not able to continue beyond primary school or lower secondary school. «I read a lot, because I liked it, because it was the only way to escape, that is, to imagine a different reality», recalls Claudio Calugi (Cerreto Guidi, b. 1946)<sup>13</sup>. A bulimic reading, especially in the post-war campaigns, where the availability of books and bookstores was rare<sup>14</sup>. Claudio Calugi, who spent his childhood in Empoli, for example, read «Anything, anything I could get my hands on»<sup>15</sup>. «He read what he found» was also the case for the father of Gastone Milani (Fiorenzuola, b. 1937) who, to satisfy his interest, borrowed «L'Osservatore romano» from the parish priest<sup>16</sup>. A non-selective activity, which involved the use and reuse of the same, few volumes available. In this regard, Lia Rubechi (Arezzo, b. 1949) dedicates a clear memory to the only book in the house, an edition of *Little Women* given by a teacher and which was consumed in dozens and dozens of readings<sup>17</sup>. Reading, moreover, was configured as the only activity that, in those years, people could carry out alone. Only in the Eighties, with the spread of television sets into children's bedrooms, did television guarantee an equal intimate and private dimension: like the one sought by Simonetta Soldani (Florence, b. 1942) in her secondary school years, who remembers her Sundays spent reading the affordable classics of Bur literature<sup>18</sup>.

Different perceptions of people characterised by a temporally short schooling, at least for the Forties and Fifties. Graziella Bartolini (Scarperia, Florence, b. 1945), who, like many girls in her cohort, interrupted her studies in the aftermath of Year 6 (the school

<sup>13</sup> C. Martinelli, «*Accidenti a tutte queste rose*». *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/accidenti-tutte-queste-rose-memorie-dinfanzia>, (last access: 10.07.2022).

<sup>14</sup> T. de Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, pp. 118-119.

<sup>15</sup> Martinelli, «*Accidenti a tutte queste rose*», cit.

<sup>16</sup> C. Martinelli, «*Da cassetta per le munizioni a cartella*». *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/da-cassetta-le-munizioni-cartella-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 10.07.2022).

<sup>17</sup> C. Martinelli, «*Le proteste dei genitori, ancora le sento*». *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/le-proteste-dei-genitori-ancora-le-sento-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

<sup>18</sup> C. Martinelli, «*Per fuggire dal qualunquismo*». *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/fuggire-dal-qualunquismo-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

obligation up to the age of fourteen sanctioned in 1923 by the Gentile Law was, in fact, merely formal)<sup>19</sup>, recalls daily and continuous reading of books and newspapers: a practice that, recommended by her teacher, according to Bartolini allowed her not to lose the skills acquired in the five-year primary school period<sup>20</sup>. Amelia Gambicorti (Chianni, Pisa, b. 1945), who also began to learn a trade at the age of ten or eleven, describes herself during her adolescence as a girl who was hungry for knowledge, intent on creating small encyclopaedias with newspaper clippings on which she affixed mottos such as «I have not studied, but I want to know»<sup>21</sup>.

In order for respondents to systematically begin to describe a different approach to reading, it is necessary to wait for the cohorts that grew up in the 1960s, enrolled in school at a time when respect for compulsory schooling had become more widespread until the age of fourteen. In the latter, the spontaneous account of the readings addressed in those years emerges more frequently, without the intervention of specific and detailed questions by the interviewers. In this regard, the gender gap is clear. Coming-of-age novels dominated by external actions, explorations and adventurous protagonists characterise the male testimonies, reluctant to correlate historical moments and reading habits. This is, for example, the case of Vincenzo Marsicovetere (Viggiano, Potenza, b. 1966), who claims to have mainly read

books about adventure generally; I read a lot of [Emilio] Salgari and Mark Twain, maybe those were the books that were the most formative for me, they gave me something that movies couldn't. I really liked to read because books in any case develop the imagination, you can imagine the scenes; in short, I like and I have always liked reading more<sup>22</sup>.

Reading is understood as an activity of imagination and construction of another reality: those cited are coming-of-age stories in which the energies of the protagonists are “externalised”, aimed not at the analysis and transformation of one's character and relationships with others, but at the discovery and action on a largely unknown world. This aspect was also highlighted, symptomatically, by Alessandro Lapini (Greve in Chianti, b. 1961), who, when asked the question «What were you reading?» replies:

the classics, I remember... [Emilio] Salgari, Jules Verne, then, I remember Moby Dick, but you know they were books that were taken from the library and then read among all the other books, yes surely the ones I remember the most are those of Jules Verne and Salgari, the ones that I remember that left a more important mark because, of course, I was a country boy, now we have a thousand means to

<sup>19</sup> Cf. L. Borghi, *Educazione e scuola nell'Italia d'oggi*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1958, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> C. Martinelli, “*Mi disse di leggere, leggere sempre*”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/mi-disse-di-leggere-leggere-sempre-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 10.07.2022).

<sup>21</sup> C. Martinelli, *Non ho studiato ma voglio sapere*. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/non-ho-studiato-ma-voglio-sapere-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 10.07.2022).

<sup>22</sup> C. Martinelli, *La camera oscura*. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/la-camera-oscuro-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

explore the world but in those times there were not as many, and these books made you dream, these places, these explorations, “From the earth to the moon”, “Twenty thousand leagues under the sea”, “Around the world in eighty days”, “The pirates of Mompracem”, “The pirates of Malaysia”, in short, they were simply books that captured my imagination<sup>23</sup>.

The dimension of emulation, inherent in the coming-of-age novel that sees an often young reader consider literary characters close to them in age, is underlined by Riccardo Rossi (Prato, b. 1956), who, symptomatically, associates both volumes cited with the phrase «go to conquest», which implies *ipso facto* an external projection:

it almost seemed to open a door to a world of beauty or pleasant experiences of which you heard a book speak, to open one by one; you opened it and went to see it [...] it was a continuous discovery of beautiful things [...] it captured my imagination, it gave me certainty, if you read the “Red and Black” you wanted to be like the young man from “Red and Black”, the young man who sets off in the conquest of love, or if you read Balzac you wanted to be like the young Rastignac, to go off in the conquest of society<sup>24</sup>.

From this point of view, it is in female memories that literature refracts the problematic in the relationship with institutions. The latter perspective is not coincidental in a context in which it was especially girls who experienced, in the years of protest and in the years immediately following them, the increasingly accentuated discrepancy between a family structure still linked to traditional dictates and a school that, albeit in a rhapsodic and leopard-spotted form, saw a progressive change in the relationship between teacher and student. It is in this perspective that the coming-of-age novel seems to acquire its most compelling value, both from an “externalising” perspective and from an “internalising” perspective. Externalisation in that, thanks to it, it seems easier to perceive the connection between personal events and historical events; internalising in that the readers, in retracing anxieties and anguishes to their allies between the pages of a volume, build and define an identity that is often not aligned with the female canons then in force. For Anna Brancolini (Pistoia, b. 1953), who was a secondary school student in the years of the youth protest, coming-of-age novels contributed, in a broad sense, to a better understanding of the dilemmas of her time, because

their reading does not occur without leaving marks and then at those times it was very beautiful, that is, we lived in a period in which I felt the sense of history was being breathed and therefore also reading the works of the neorealists, okay, or the works of Vittorini or Pavese, immersed you in a historical substrate that has always fascinated me particularly<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> C. Martinelli, “Non sembrava una scuola ma un magazzino”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/non-sembrava-una-scuola-ma-un-magazzino-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 11.07.2022).

<sup>24</sup> C. Martinelli, “radioso per tutti”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/radioso-tutti-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 13.07.2022).

<sup>25</sup> *Memorie d'infanzia*, interview with Anna Brancolini, <https://youtu.be/1i-uPEoQCqc> (last access: 2.09.2022).



But reading could also be a way to imagine a different feminine identity from the one that, exclusively anchored to the needs of the home and the family, was offered to girls of the Sixties. Reading, for example, recalls Concetta Guida (Naples, b. 1960)

As soon as I started reading, it was one of my main activities because, I repeat, there were no alternative activities [...], back home, you were with your family, both in the family unit and in the extended one, and so I started reading just probably to relate, you know? with the characters, I loved reading a lot and in fact whenever I received gifts they were books and I was very happy and so I read the books of the time, who of my age has not read “Little women” and all the books, “Good wives”? Who has not become attached to Jo, who for us represented coming out of the shell of the family and becoming autonomous?<sup>26</sup>

«Who hasn't read *Little Women*?» Guida asks emphatically, and not by chance: unlike the heterogeneity provided to us by male memories, the female testimonies of the fifties and sixties almost all revolve around this book<sup>27</sup>. We have already mentioned the readings and rereadings dedicated to it by Lia Rubechi; but May Alcott's volume is cited as the main reading undertaken in the primary school years by most of the interviewees who elaborate on their readings, such as Sandra Pratesi (Rosignano Marittimo, b. 1954), Letizia Ignesti (Florence, b. 1954), Beatrice Poggesi (San Giovanni Valdarno, Arezzo, b. 1970)<sup>28</sup>. Far away, therefore, seem the times when *Piccole donne*, in the first Italian translation of 1908, appeared on the national market with a preface that advised girls not to read “alone”<sup>29</sup>. It is worth noting, however, the marked narrative homogeneity offered to girls, who, in addition to the novels by May Alcott, usually cite two “classic” readings for primary schools, namely “Cuore”, and “Pinocchio”. The narrative availability for their male peers seems much more heterogeneous, who, in their memories, can count on a much more varied book selection to refer to. But being able to read more volumes necessarily entailed having more narratives from which to draw in order to be able to signify one's own reality and one's own life path; more destinies to choose from, unlike those narrower ones that were destined for the female gender.

Let us therefore dwell on what the plot of this novel, which is so often cited, may have signified in the narratives of female witnesses. The different characters of the four

<sup>26</sup> C. Martinelli, *Un ambiente protetto e controllato. Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/un-ambiente-protetto-e-controllato-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 12.07.2022).

<sup>27</sup> See also M. Bernardi, *Il cassetto segreto. Letteratura per l'infanzia e romanzo di formazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2011, pp. 118-9.

<sup>28</sup> C. Martinelli, “Pagate intere”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/pagate-intere-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 23.06.2022); C. Martinelli, *I sei anni che ci differenziano. Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/i-sei-anni-che-ci-differenziano-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 23.06.2022) and C. Martinelli, “Ascoltare, ascoltare, ascoltare”. *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/ascoltare-ascoltare-ascoltare-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 25.06.2022).

<sup>29</sup> M.I. Palazzolo, *Editoria e cultura: il caso Alcott in Italia*, in C. Covato, M.C. Leuzzi (edd.), *E l'uomo educò la donna*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1989, pp. 111-127; F. Borruso, *L'infanzia tra rappresentazioni sociali e violenze educative. Un itinerario storico-educativo*, in E. Zizioli, M.L. Sergio (edd.), *La Convenzione ONU sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza tra storia e futuro: le ragioni di un anniversario*, Roma, Roma Tre Press, 2020, p. 39.

protagonists, the attention to family relationships and friendship, the modest social conditions of the March family that forced them, in a similar way to many Italian families of those years, to limit their expenses, undoubtedly constituted a reason for reflection for the young readers; but the continuous tension that, during the novel, is maintained between Jo's aspirations and the demands of the society surrounding her probably contributed to strengthening their cogency<sup>30</sup>. The second of the four March sisters, Jo structurally expresses her discomfort with her social and gender condition: she wants a freedom of movement and action granted only to men, dreaming of being able to live without the conventions that limit her, both because she is a woman and because of modest social conditions. She already knows that her character will have to be tamed and limited to respond to the duties of society: and, although there is a destiny of relative female emancipation awaiting her – work as a teacher, marriage to a much older man – this will be achieved at the price of conforming to the values and dictates of the social assembly. It is a discomfort that we find in the female memories of the sixties, focused on the desire for greater freedom of movement or for the possibility, as for Gisella Bacci (Florence, b. 1956) to be able to access the same educational opportunities offered to male peers:

We had the apron, us girls, the black apron and the boys no, that is...we always had the apron - you couldn't not have it and then practically what I regretted was that in certain subjects... apart from gymnastics, for which there were two gyms, and there was the gymnastics teacher, a male physical education teacher for the boys and a female teacher for the girls, and there were separate gyms; we alternated between the small gym and the big one in turn, it was easier that the big one was always used for the boys [...] but then there was also another subject, technical applications, which was very different: there was the female teacher for girls and the male teacher for boys and even we girls were made to stay in the classroom and the boys went to the laboratory, and they could do very interesting activities, because they were taught technical drawing, they even designed a boat, a small Viking boat and [Bacci increases the emphasis] they made it! Precisely with the materials, even the journalists of the "Gazzettino toscano" came to interview them, they did a whole broadcast because it was a beautiful thing, and we girls, on the other hand, the first thing that the female teacher gave us [Bacci laughs sarcastically] was a recipe for custard<sup>31</sup>.

Growing up, however, in classic coming-of-age novels seems to mean coming to terms with the surrounding social structures, and repressing the motions of indignation and discomfort that can characterise the years of childhood and adolescence. The acceptance of context marks both the conclusion of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Goethe and of coming-of-age novels aimed specifically at children, such as *Pinocchio* and *Good Wives*: and it is no coincidence, in fact, that with the turn of the seventies and eighties the incidence of these volumes dwindles, and they arise less and less in the citations of witnesses.

<sup>30</sup> M. Bernardi, *Il cassetto segreto*, cit., pp. 109-111.

<sup>31</sup> C. Martinelli, "E così mi mandarono al classico". *Memorie d'infanzia*, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/e-cosi-mi-mandarono-al-classico-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 3.07.2022).

# The Construction of an “Archive of Memory”. School Memory through the Voice of Its Protagonists in 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Molise

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## 1. *Oral sources within the new historiographical frame of reference*<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2011 in Brixen at the 14<sup>th</sup> *International Symposium for School Life and School History Collections*, one of the first interesting discussions took place between scholars on the topic of the heuristic potential of oral sources in the field of history and education. The research group of the Documentation and Research Centre on the History of School Institutions, School Books and Children's Literature (Ce.S.I.S.) of the University of Molise participated with a paper entitled “*School memories*”. *Oral sources in the history of schools and educational institutions* which illustrated “some working hypotheses” conducted as part of a “publishing project” aimed at setting up an audio-visual archive through the collection of oral testimonies of former teachers and pupils, in order to highlight the development of schooling processes and teaching experiences carried out in some areas of southern Italy between the 1930s and the 1980s. «The aim of the project» – as Alberto Barausse reiterated the following year at the conference entitled *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi* (Educational History Research Today) held in Lecce – was to «focus and develop some initial considerations on oral sources and their possible use within the new fields of investigation identified by educational historiography»<sup>2</sup>.

This statement expressed an attempt to legitimize the use of oral testimonies in the historical-educational field in the wake of the broader reflection triggered by the historiographical revolution initiated in the late 1990s by the French social historians Dominique Julia and André Chervel<sup>3</sup>, which saw a shift from the history of schooling

<sup>1</sup> The present contribution is the result of the joint work of Valeria Viola author of paragraph 1, and Rossella Andreassi, author of paragraph 2 and 3. The conclusions were co-written by the two authors.

<sup>2</sup> A. Barausse, “E non c’era mica la bic!” *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, in H.A. Cavallera (ed.), *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un confronto di metodi, modelli e programmi di ricerca*, vol. II, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2013, p. 543. For the report of the Brixen conference, see P. Zamperlin, *Le fonti orali e i Musei dell’educazione*, «Studium Educationis», vol. XII, n. 3, 2011, pp. 147-149.

<sup>3</sup> D. Julia, *Riflessioni sulla recente storiografia dell’educazione in Europa: per una storia comparata delle culture scolastiche*, «Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», vol. 3, n. 3, 1996, pp. 119-147; A. Chervel, *La culture scolaire. Une approche historique*, Paris, Belin, 1998.

based on pedagogical ideas and theories to that of «tangible culture»<sup>4</sup>. This «passage from the ideal to the real», as Carmela Covato has pointed out, has given “document citizenship” to any element that bears within itself the traces of man’s actions over time, regardless of the reasons for which it was created and the use to which it was intended. It thus becomes a source in its own right. Thus it is for oral sources<sup>5</sup>. From that moment on, in Italy the process of cultural affirmation and legitimisation of the use of oral testimonies within historical-educational research has accelerated, as demonstrated by the increase in dedicated projects launched at the many documentation and research centres in the field, that are part of the Italian Society for the Study of Historical Educational Heritage (SIPSE)<sup>6</sup>. In recent years, in conjunction with the Molise series, other projects focusing on oral memory have been launched, which, for reasons of editorial economy, will only be listed briefly here: the project of the University of Florence coordinated by Gianfranco Bandini and Stefano Oliviero<sup>7</sup>; the project of the Department of Education Sciences of the University of Padua led by Fabio Targhetta; the initiative of the Faculty of Education Sciences of the Free University of Bolzano and the Swiss High Pedagogical Schools (*Pädagogischen Hochschule*) of the Grisons and the Canton Valais, under the scientific coordination of Annemarie Augschöll Blasbichler; the one curated by Mirella D’Ascenzo of the University of Bologna; the History of Education and Children’s Literature workshop of the Master’s Degree Course in Primary Education Science at the University of Turin; the one at the University of Foggia recently launched by Antonella Cagnolati and Barbara De Serio; the “Paolo and Ornella Ricca School Museum” project at the University of Macerata. These are diverse initiatives involving researchers, students and the community in different capacities, for the analysis of which we refer to the recent work by Lucia Paciaroni, which is the first dedicated monograph within the still limited bibliography on the topic of oral sources. The belated publication of a study devoted entirely to oral sources in the field of educational history reflects the difficulty in the process of liberating them from the marginal position they had long occupied within the research field. Until the late 1960s, in fact, the use of interviews encountered strong resistance in most areas of school and educational history research; only the social sciences that dealt with popular culture used it to give voice to the «lower and unlettered classes»<sup>8</sup>. In particular, in the 1950s, it was mainly scholars such as Rocco Scotellaro, Danilo Dolci and Ernesto De Martino who made use of oral testimonies to bring out those typical aspects of popular culture belonging to ordinary people that eluded official documents. Later on, the cultural changes that took place during the last decades of

<sup>4</sup> R. Sani, *L’implementazione della ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia: itinerari, priorità, obiettivi di lungo termine*, in S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla, L. Pomante (edd.), *La práctica educativa. Historia, memoria y patrimonio*, Salamanca, FahrenHouse, 2018, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> A. Barausse, J. Meda, C. Covato (edd.), *Scuola, memoria, storia. A proposito di un recente volume*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020, p. 757.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. Brunelli, *La recente costituzione della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico Educativo (SIPSE)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XII, n. 2, 2019, pp. 653-655.

<sup>7</sup> L. Paciaroni, *Memorie di scuola. Contributo a una storia delle pratiche didattiche ed educative nelle scuole marchigiane attraverso le testimonianze di maestri e maestre (1945-1985)*, Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 39-49.

<sup>8</sup> Barausse, “*E non era mica la Bic!*” *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, cit., p. 544.

the last century, focusing attention on aspects such as «traditional work practices, the experience of small business, daily life and the family, the collective experiences of local history, resistance to fascism, and gender history»<sup>9</sup>, also prompted a re-evaluation of the interviews. As far as the field of educational history is concerned, on the other hand, the use of such sources is only documented from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Spain and France; in the Anglo-Saxon world, on the other hand, their use coincided with the greater attention paid to the sphere of the subjectivity and the individual. The first approaches to oral sources in the educational-historical domain in Italy came fairly late. Apart from the 1994 work by Marcello Dei, who observed the teaching profession between the turn of the century and the post World War II period “from an eminently sociological perspective”, there had been no interest in this type of source for several years, unlike the Anglo-Saxon and North American contexts such as the one promoted by Philip Gardner and Peter Cunningham<sup>10</sup>. The reasons for this delay are to be found not only in the Crocian prejudice, but also in the caution of Italian researchers to perceive in interviews the same degree of reliability in terms of data retrieval as compared to official “maps”, as they are «considered subjective and changeable depending on the interviewer, the context of collection, and the time interval elapsed between the experiences lived and their re-evocation»<sup>11</sup>. Juri Meda emphasized that even within this «strenuous historiographical campaign» conducted by the strand of tangible culture studies that aimed to lengthen the list of sources to interview, the inclusion of oral testimonies required a greater effort<sup>12</sup>:

It is as if historiography's growing interest in “educational materiality” has somehow penalized the exploration of the heuristic potential of intangible sources', such as the memories of former teachers and former pupils in the school of a given historical period, which are able to provide us with fundamental information on the “real school” that is often hidden behind the “legal” one prescribed by school legislation and informed by pedagogical doctrines<sup>13</sup>.

A mistrust that did not allow historians to provide a detailed reading of significant aspects of the history of national education that the interrogation of oral sources allows, instead.

Oral sources, in fact, are perhaps the only ones that allow the historian access to the educational routines carried on by inertia beyond their natural end of decay, to the conscious breaches of prohibitions imposed by school authorities, to the ideological non-conformities and resilience of teachers in the face of radical school reforms and pedagogical taboos of all kinds, in other words, to all the most exceptional information preserved within the black box of schooling referred to by Depaepe and Simon<sup>14</sup>.

A turnaround has taken place since the international symposium *School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Barausse, Meda, Covato, *Scuola, memoria, storia. A proposito di un recente volume*, cit, p. 761.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 762.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 761.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

*Issues*, held in Seville in 2015<sup>15</sup> which has the merit of having acknowledged to ego-documents, within which oral memories are included, a strategic role within the process of constructing the forms of school memory<sup>16</sup>. This theoretical and methodological approach, by glimpsing heuristic possibilities not only in the tangible but also in the intangible elements belonging to and witnessing the school's past<sup>17</sup>, called for a review of the tools and methodology of interview construction in order to ensure the most impartial and objective reading possible. This contribution, in particular, aims to focus the role that school museums<sup>18</sup> have played in the genesis of such research projects based on the collection of oral testimonies by illustrating the experience of the Museum of School and Education of the University of Molise (MuSEP). Like all the museums of the same kind, the MuSEP, since its formal establishment in 2013, has not limited its mission to a mere exhibition of objects, but, inspired by the suggestions of the ecomuseum and critical museology, has positioned itself as a point of connection between conservation, education, research and the dissemination of results at the service of the community in a mutual exchange relationship, meeting the needs dictated by the practice of the third mission required of universities. This "exchange" has made the Molise museum a strategic place where researchers can be brought into contact with former teachers and former pupils who have been involved in initiatives for the construction of the editorial series in question. Through a varied series of activities ranging from the presentation of children's literature books, reading workshops, conferences and seminars, to recreational/educational activities aimed at local schools of all levels<sup>19</sup>, the MuSEP has positioned

<sup>15</sup> There, the Molise research group presented a report entitled *When I used the trumpet to call up the schoolkids». The use and value of oral memories in the historical-school research* which illustrated the theoretical, historiographical and methodological premises underlying the project launched in 2012 to create the audiovisual series "La voce dei maestri".

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. Viñao Frago, *La Historia de la Educación ante el siglo XXI: tensiones, retos y audiencias*, in *Repensar la historia de la educación: nuevos desafíos, nuevas propuestas*, in M. Ferraz Lorenzo (ed.), *Repensar la historia de la educación nuevos desafíos, nuevas propuestas*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2005, pp. 147-166; Id., *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33; Id., *Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao Frago (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Sani, *La ricerca sul Patrimonio storico-scolastico ed educativo tra questioni metodologiche, nodi interpretativi e nuove prospettive d'indagine*, cit., p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> R. Andreassi, *I centri di ricerca e i Musei della scuola indicatori di sviluppo del rinnovamento storiografico*, in Cavallera (ed.), *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un confronto di Metodi, Modelli e Programmi di ricerca*, vol. I, cit., pp. 175-192; M. Brunelli, *L'educazione al patrimonio storico-scolastico. Approcci teorici, modelli e strumenti per la progettazione didattica e formativa in un museo della scuola*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2018, p. 15; A. Ascenzi, M. Brunelli, J. Meda (edd.), *School museums as dynamic areas for widening the heuristic potential and the socio-cultural impact of the history of education. A case study from Italy*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 57, n. 4, 2021, pp. 419-43; A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> In this respect, please refer to: A. Barausse, R. Andreassi, *Il Museo della scuola e dell'educazione popolare dell'Università degli Studi del Molise tra internazionalizzazione della ricerca e percorsi di educazione al patrimonio storico educativo*, in V. Bosna, A. Cagnolati (edd.), *Itinerari nella storiografia educativa*, Bari, Cacucci, 2019, pp. 155-185; A. Ascenzi, M. Brunelli, *I musei universitari del patrimonio storico-educativo e la Terza Missione: una sfida o un'opportunità? Riflessioni dal Museo della Scuola dell'Università di Macerata*, in A. Barausse, T. de Freitas



itself as a favorable place for dialogue and collaboration between the community and the research group, contributing in a crucial way in making the historical-scholastic heritage a fundamental sequence of the cultural and identity code of the history of each individual and of the community to which they belong, and in encouraging them to contribute with their own testimonies to its reconstruction.

The contribution proposed here, therefore, aims to illustrate the Molise project updated in both theoretical and methodological terms upon the reflection on the relationship between individual school memory and oral sources that emerged during the Spanish symposium and was further developed recently within the PRIN "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)"<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. The "Memory Archive" project: methodologies and tools

As stated above, oral testimonies, as «egodocuments», are being more and more used as sources in the field of educational-historical research, in order to obtain a "subjective" representation of the school for the reconstruction of "school memory"<sup>21</sup>. Their use, however, poses a number of problems, most of which can be traced back to the fact that they are "imperfect" because they are sources of memory and memory is a reservoir in constant flux, a transforming archive where corrections, revisitations and rewritings take place alongside rejects<sup>22</sup>.

Ermel, V. Viola (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul Patrimonio Storico Educativo. Atti dell'incontro Internazionale di Studi. Campobasso 2/3 Maggio 2018*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, pp. 237-246; R. Andreassi, A. Barausse, *Il «Museo della scuola e dell'educazione popolare» nel Sistema Museale dell'Università del Molise: tra pratiche storiografiche. Terza missione e sperimentazione didattica*, in *ibid.*, pp. 271-298; R. Andreassi, V. Viola, *Percorsi per la conoscenza partecipata della Storia della Scuola: l'esperienza del Ce.S.I.S. e del Museo della scuola dell'Università degli Studi del Molise*, «Glocale», n. 8, 2014, pp. 231-241.

<sup>20</sup> For details of the PRIN, please refer to the webpage: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/il-progetto> (last access: 07.03.2023) where the full description of the thematic bibliography produced during its lifetime is also available. <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/il-progetto> (last access: 07.03.2023). Among them, for the purposes of this reflection, the following contributions should be noted: G. Bandini, S. Oliviero (edd.), *Public History of Education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze, FUP, 2019; J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli, *Memories and public celebrations of education in contemporary times. Presentation*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019; J. Meda, *Memoria magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in S. Polenghi, G. Zago, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memoria ed educazione. Identità, narrazione, diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2021, pp. 25-35; A. Barausse, *Gli "archivi della memoria" e il rinnovamento del fare scolastico*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 33-48.

<sup>21</sup> Barausse, "E non era mica la Bic!". *Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> Interesting observations by Giovanni Contini are provided in the article of G. Nataloni, G. Venerucci, *Lo sguardo della storia orale: il percorso delle fonti orali nella narrazione storica*, «Storia e Futuro, rivista di Storia e Storiografia», n. 28, febbraio 2012, [http://www.storiaefuturo.com/it/numero\\_28/memoria/](http://www.storiaefuturo.com/it/numero_28/memoria/) (last access: 5/03/2023). See G. Contini, A. Martini, *Verba manent. L'uso delle fonti orali per la storia contemporanea*, Roma, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1993; C. Bermanni, *Considerazioni sulla memoria, la storia e la ricerca sul campo*, in C.

In addition to these critical aspects, there are also those attributable to the strictly methodological sphere such as: the unlikely neutrality of the interviewer, the physiological process to which memory is subjected, the processes of transformation of memories<sup>23</sup>.

It therefore happens that one must somehow interpret a memory that, from a certain moment onwards, can no longer be exact and is full of gaps. Any interview given, moreover, depends heavily on the “point of view” expressed by the witness, his personal interpretation of his past, his self-representation<sup>24</sup>.

It is therefore crucial to be aware of these shortcomings or reinterpretations of individuals, and to use the necessary tools to access other historical information through comparison with other sources, in order to reconstruct a well-founded and verifiable historical process.

Many other elements have to be taken into account in the production but also in the interpretation of an oral source. Fundamental are: the place where the interview is carried out, the relationship established between interviewee and interviewer, the instruments used (video cameras, recorders), the presence of various types of audience (video operator, relatives, various listeners), the type of questionnaire (open/closed/free). We will then try to explain and briefly motivate the choices made within the Ce.S.I.S./MuSEP *Memory Archive* project.

The *Memory Archive* project started in 2012 and was promoted by the Centre for Documentation and Research on the History of School Institutions, School Books and Children's Literature (Ce.S.I.S.) and the Museum of School and Popular Education (MuSEP) of the University of Molise. It includes a publishing project consisting of an audio-visual collection “School Memories”<sup>25</sup>, which is currently divided into «The voice of the teachers» and «The voice of the pupils», and consists of about 50 video interviews collected through the specific methodology of oral sources, with the involvement of teachers, school managers and former pupils. The project is continuously growing; it is at present made of 13 interviews collected by school historians and professionally edited thanks to the support of the audio-video technician of the University of Molise, and of about 40 more interviews that were conducted by university students as part of their History of School course project, in line with the others carried out at a professional level.

Bermani, A. De Palma (edd.) *Fonti orali, istruzioni per l'uso*, Venezia, Soc. Mutuo Soccorso, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> R. Andreassi, *The museum and the individual memory for a reconstruction of the rural schools for didactic purposes*, in P. Dávila, L.M. Naya (edd.), *Espacios y patrimonio histórico-educativo*, Erein, Donostia, 2016, pp. 1119-1131.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. Contini Bonacossi, *La fonte orale tra la storiografia e l'archivistica*, in L. Borgia (ed.), *Studi in onore di Arnaldo D'Addario*, Lecce, Conte, 1995, pp. 43-58.

<sup>25</sup> The project is conducted under the scientific supervision of Alberto Barausse, director of Ce.S.I.S. and MuSEP. The interviews were carried out and supervised, in addition to Alberto Barausse himself, by Rossella Andreassi, head of the Museum and Cultural Heritage Resources Sector and Valeria Viola, an adjunct lecturer at the University of Molise, with the collaboration of Michela D'Alessio of the University of Basilicata. For the technical realisation, the project relies on the contribution of Giorgio Calabrese (Relations and Communications Office of the University of Molise). For the transcription of the interviews, in addition to Emilia Ciaccia, various civil service volunteers collaborated, but in particular the Unimol civil service volunteers “ME.TE.CO. Memories, TEcnologies, COmunities. MuseUnimol and intangible cultural heritage” 2019-20, in particular Angela Colonna, Pamela Lustrato, Caroline Vitone.



There have been many issues that the research team had to deal with, in relation to the collection and use of oral sources.

The first element is the identification of the witnesses: the interviewees were chosen using the principle of heterogeneity and aiming to have a significant sample in both temporal and spatial terms. Some interviewees were not chosen but were referred to by word of mouth among the teachers or former students themselves. The interviews conducted covered a sample of 50 units, where the following indicators were taken into account: age, period of training, period of employment and spatial indicators. Also, the interviewees were: teachers of both sexes, retired, aged between 68 and 95, former teachers in schools of southern Italy, with preference being given to teachers from Molise. The other regions represented in terms of territorial proximity, but to a much lesser extent, are Campania, Puglia and Lazio. Considerable space was also given to experiences carried out in the countryside (rural schools) or in municipalities located in the mountains.

Another element to keep in mind is the relationship between interviewee and interviewer between whom it is necessary to establish a climate of trust and listening but also of empathy. Some scholars think that the role of the interviewer should be almost invisible so as not to influence the narrative. In reality, the role of the interviewer is decisive because if he or she were not there, the oral source that is constructed together at the time of the interview would not exist. As Lucia Paciaroni recalls<sup>26</sup> «It is believed that one of the main characteristics of oral testimonies, and one that distinguishes them from others, is precisely the fact that they are the product of the encounter of two people who, together, through question and answer, give life to that source». Contini, too, recalls the fundamental role of the interviewer not only in the interview collection phase but also in the subsequent transcription, reinterpretation and writing phases of a historiographical text<sup>27</sup>. The interviewee must let himself or herself be guided through the flow of questions, and the interviewer must be able to prompt memories, collect insignificant details to trigger other memories: there must be constant interaction between the two. To enable this, the interviewees were always met a few days beforehand to get to know each other and view the questions together and eliminate any doubts or misinterpretations of the questions. Moreover, on this occasion, it was possible to view the materials kept by the teacher and also bring back dormant memories of those years. When it was not possible to meet beforehand, a preparatory phone call or at least a short interview before the video filming took place.

Another element that greatly influences the course of the interview is the place where it is conducted. Often the interviews were recorded at the witness's home: this allows the interviewee to feel comfortable and more casual, but sometimes conducting the interview in the museum or in the school that the interviewee attended may be more evocative. Over time, it was also noted that there are variations in self-representation depending on the presence or absence of an audience during the recording. The presence of the

<sup>26</sup> Paciaroni, *Memorie di scuola. Contributo a una storia delle pratiche didattiche ed educative nelle scuole marchigiane attraverso le testimonianze di maestri e maestre (1945-1985)*, cit., p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Contini, Martini (edd.), *Verba Manent*, cit.

audience tends to give the memories a more ordered but also sweetened form, precisely because they tend to give the best self-representation.

The focus has also always been on the use of personal semiophore items (photos, notebooks, teaching materials, report cards, diaries, etc.) either personal or belonging to the museum, which help the witness to go back in memory to the school moments experienced and that he or she will tell about<sup>28</sup>.

Another fundamental element is the choice of the recording mode. MuSEP favored the video-recording mode because it also helps to reinterpret non-verbal communication, which is very often rich in elements and references. Only in the event that the interviewee explicitly wished not to be filmed did we switch to the audio-only recording mode. The editing of the interview also involved a number of considerations. It was decided to keep a complete version of the original interview in the archive and also to produce a version that could also be enjoyed by the museum public, with editing of the images and minimal cuts of the video (especially of parts that were difficult to understand). An attempt was made to remain as faithful as possible to the original footage.

The interviews are also carried out following a pre-set questionnaire with questions guiding the interviewee by inquiring mainly into 4 macro-areas (1. Training as a child and as a teacher 2. Inside the classroom (smells, sounds, timing, teaching etc.) 3. Exercise of the profession, 4. There is also a free space where the interviewee can talk about his or her memories more freely). To allow comparability of the interviews, the same questionnaire structure is maintained, varying only a few questions according to the year of birth and the period in which the profession was exercised. Obviously, the order of the questions can vary depending on the course of the conversation and you can choose not to propose all the questions or insert new ones. It should be a guiding tool, but also a flexible one.

Although the questions are repeated almost the same in the different interviews, the length is variable (30 to 90 minutes) because it basically depends on the relationship between interviewee and interviewer but also on the different eloquence of the protagonists.

It was deemed more appropriate to have the 13 sample interviews conducted by experts in the field of school history who could better guide the flow of memories by having an in-depth knowledge of the relevant historical contexts. Similarly, it was deemed useful to proceed with the editing by a professional technician; during filming, the various documentary sources (notebooks, books, diaries, photos, teaching materials, etc.) that the interviewees brought with them were filmed and included in the video montage.

The scientific research work also involved the complete transcription of the text, including the questions, which are considered essential for understanding the narrative. Many scholars tend to eliminate the questions asked, in order to try to give a sense of spontaneity to the narrative, but this in our opinion and as also considered by Contini<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> R. Andreassi, *I centri di ricerca e i musei della scuola indicatori di sviluppo del rinnovamento storiografico*, in H.A. Cavallera, *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un confronto di metodi, modelli e programmi di ricerca*, Lecce, PensaMultimedia, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 175-192.

<sup>29</sup> Contini, Martini (edd.), *Verba Manent*, cit., pp. 12-14.

and Portelli<sup>30</sup> turns out to be a manipulation of the source because it does not let one understand what stimulus the interviewee responded to. A faithful transcription was also made of the spoken word, reporting the dialectal parts and speech and idioms that are not always understandable. An abstract and keyword choices were made for each interview, useful for indexing. Each interviewee also has his or her own biographical sheet (with data also framing autobiographical and family aspects) and a release for the use of the interview.

It was also decided to place online<sup>31</sup> extracts of the 13 interviews on the MuSEP website, each accompanied by a short abstract, to make them accessible to a wider audience.

### 3. *First analysis of historical data from the sources produced*

The administration of the same specific questionnaire to the various interviewees made it possible to compare the information provided by teachers and pupils and to reconstruct the different historical frames of reference, as well as to have a spatial snapshot of school environments in southern Italy, with particular attention to the reality of Molise.

The collection of oral sources mainly concerned a territorial area, Molise, which experienced a socio-economic development with rhythms and timescales quite different from those experienced by the northern areas of the country in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which strongly conditioned the schooling processes.

The oral sources collected made it possible to compare the different situation of the schools located in the municipal rural areas with those in the hamlets and villages<sup>32</sup> from the 1930s and 1940s until the 1980s, with elements of long-standing and persistent difficulties and precariousness of the structures. In addition, a great deal of information emerged on the social situation of the pupils and information on the poverty of the families and the consequent phenomenon of emigration. Another interesting piece of information was the relationship that the teachers had with parents.

The interviews are based on the experiences of teachers born in the 1920s who attended primary schools as pupils in the 1930s and had their first professional experiences during the last years of Fascism and during post-war reconstruction, within a territorial context that was in any case marked by a substantial delay in economic development.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. A. Portelli, *Sulla diversità della storia orale*, «Primo Maggio», n. 13, 1979, pp. 54-60; A. Portelli, *L'uso dell'intervista nella storia orale*, in E. Cento, L. Di Ruscio (edd.), *Didattica della storia dell'800 e del '900. Un modello per la fruizione e la valorizzazione delle fonti documentarie*, Corazzano (Pisa), Titivillus, pp. 58-67.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://musei.unimol.it/musep/home-musep/collana-audiovisivi/> (last access: 09.03.2023).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. V. Viola, *Un problema di "spazio". Alcune riflessioni storiografiche sull'edilizia scolastica in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, in Barausse, de Freitas Ermel, Viola (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul Patrimonio Storico Educativo*, cit., pp. 471-494.

The picture that emerges from the sources obtained<sup>33</sup> is that of a small central southern region of Italy that was marked very slowly by the gradual transition from a profoundly rural society to an industrial society and, finally, to a service society. As Gino Massullo points out in his studies on Molise from the socio-economic point of view, the evolution can be, briefly, summarized in three moments. The first is that which goes from Fascism to the end of the 1960s, a phase in which the process of Molise's economic, social and cultural isolation and depression was completed; the second is that between the 1970s and the end of the 1990s, during which the region, having acquired its institutional autonomy from Abruzzo, went from being an island to a periphery of the Italian economic system. The third and last period is the most recent, collected between the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s.

In the memoirs, there are frequent references to the condition of economic, social and cultural isolation and depression in Molise and to the widespread condition of structural poverty that characterized the life of so many small municipalities and that would be recorded by the National Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. The oral testimonies bring to light the situation of a profoundly rural world crossed by phenomena widespread in much of southern Italy and expressed through precise recollections such as depopulation due to emigration, pauperism in childhood, and particular working conditions. The questions provide information on various topics. Those most investigated at the time were those concerning the characterisation and differentiation of rural and urban school spaces; the social situation of pupils and the school's relationship with parents; social poverty and emigration.

There are many other topics that can be analyzed through oral sources, starting with the teaching practices in use, the teaching materials used, participation in political and associational life, information on salary, sanitary conditions, inspection visits.

The publishing project will soon make it possible to consult the interviews in their entirety and to have an additional wealth of useful sources for historical-educational research.

### *Conclusions*

This rapid examination is coming to an end. On the one hand, it intends to contribute an update of the Molise project in the light of the revaluation of oral sources recorded by the school memory strand of studies, and on the other hand, to reaffirm their usefulness in completing and comparing the data coming from the analysis of the other tangible and intangible sources contemplated in the sector research. The contribution, in fact, intends to highlight the heuristic potential of oral testimonies, but if they are constructed by adopting those methodological expedients that are constantly being revised, functional to confer them an objectively greater degree of reliability. Their inclusion within the

<sup>33</sup> Barausse, *"E non era mica la Bic!". Le fonti orali nel settore della ricerca storico scolastica*, cit.

range of sources admitted by the field research, continues to require their verification for those aspects such as the subjectivity of the interviewee and interviewer, removals, lability, distortion of memories.

In conclusion, the intention is to contribute to the reflection on the topic after taking up the solicitations coming from the field studies conducted in recent years, in order not to give up further that glimpse of national school history that emerges from oral sources, full of those aspects linked to the everyday life and humanity of its protagonists and that official records do not reveal.



# The School of “Fascism in Crisis” through the Memories of Pupils of the Time

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## *Introduction*

In the historiographical debate in the historical-educational field, the study of school memories is now a consolidated trend thanks to which it is possible to shed light on a series of dynamics that have remained in the shadows in the political-legislative reconstructions of the school of the past and partly also in the reconstructions that are more attentive to social history. Certainly, the proliferation of studies on educational and scholastic heritage has, over the course of the last few decades, made a notable contribution to the investigation of everyday school life and of the aspects of material culture. To name just a few: *Gentile e il fascismo*<sup>1</sup> and *Il regime degli editori: libri scuola e fascismo*<sup>2</sup> by Monica Galfrè, *Le parole educate: libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*<sup>3</sup> by Davide Montino, *La scuola fascista. Istituzioni, parole d'ordine, luoghi dell'immaginario*<sup>4</sup> by Gianluca Gabrielli and Montino, *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria esperienze e prospettive*<sup>5</sup> by Anna Ascenzi, Carmela Covato and Giuseppe Zago, *La ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia*<sup>6</sup> by Roberto Sani and *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*<sup>7</sup> by Juri Meda.

In this regard, the study of video testimonies on school and childhood memories between the 30s and 40s, collected between 2019 and 2022 for the PRIN project School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001), no doubt making a valuable contribution by providing unedited insights. In particular,

<sup>1</sup> M. Galfrè, *Una riforma alla prova: la scuola media di Gentile e il fascismo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> M. Galfrè, *Il regime degli editori: libri scuola e fascismo*, Roma, Laterza, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> D. Montino, *Le parole educate: libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, Milano, Selene, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> G. Gabrielli, D. Montino, *La scuola fascista: istituzioni parole d'ordine e luoghi dell'immaginario*, Verona, Ombre corte, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago, *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive. Atti del II Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo Studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Padova, 7-8 Ottobre 2021)*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> R. Sani, *La Ricerca Sul Patrimonio Storico-educativo in Italia*, «Linhas (Florianópolis)», 2019, pp. 53-74.

<sup>7</sup> J. Meda, *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017.



we are interested in investigating the school memories surrounding some of the years of the Fascist dictatorship, to better understand the totalitarian dynamics in schools.

### 1. *Oral history and school memories*

Since the end of the 1990s, educational historians have begun to study «school memories» by bringing the debate on oral sources and memory as an interpretative category, which for several decades had already been open to broader level of historiography, within their scientific community<sup>8</sup>.

History, as Giovanni De Luna<sup>9</sup> rightly points out, appears increasingly characterised by the ability to use new sources and materials, thus expanding the territory of the historian and the possibilities of expanding knowledge of human facts of the past through their traces. This great revolution also affects interdisciplinarity, the quantitative expansion of sources, and the possibility of also taking into account the subjective factors of human beings.

Oral memories of school memories are linked to oral history, which mainly uses sources produced – and recorded – by a dialogue between two or more subjects, who relate according to the typical codes of orality. The use of oral sources makes it possible to overturn the «top-down» view that is typical of traditional historiography, in favour of a «bottom-up» approach focused more on the events and culture of ordinary people and subaltern or marginal groups. Choosing to use these sources for a historiographic study means exploiting their specific potential on two levels: the level of personal events and experiences, and that of subjectivity and memory. As far as the first level is concerned, oral sources have the ability to shed light on important aspects of the past that it would often be difficult to reconstruct effectively only through other kinds of testimony. In fact, they can fruitfully compensate for documentary gaps or integrate information from other sources. Moving on to the second level, these testimonies are of great use for exploring individual memory, collective memory and common sentiment. These sources enable us to grasp the deepest aspects of subjective experience and to focus on the meaning that the interviewees attribute to their past experiences and how they interpret them when they are asked to speak about them<sup>10</sup>.

As oral testimonies, the individual school memories allow us to explore even more deeply – and from a different perspective than the one offered by traditional historical-

<sup>8</sup> J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetti (edd.), *Memorie ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020; B. Bonomo, *Voci della memoria. L'uso delle fonti orali nella ricerca storica*, Roma, Carocci, 2013; G. De Luna, *La passione e la ragione: Fonti e metodi dello storico contemporaneo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2001; M. Bloch, *Apologia della storia: o mestiere di storico*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996; Id., *Storici e storia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> De Luna, *La passione e la ragione: Fonti e metodi dello storico contemporaneo*, cit., p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Bonomo, *Voci della memoria. L'uso delle fonti orali nella ricerca storica*, cit.

educational investigation practices – the years of Fascist schooling, teaching and its educational models, but they could also shed light on aspects not considered by the scientific community or that are still under study, such as for example the children's consumption and the effectiveness of indoctrination.

School memory – like memory in general – can therefore be used, as well as to study the past, also to define how it is seen, perceived, interpreted and even reinterpreted in the present. In this sense, as stated by Juri Meda and Antonio Viñao<sup>11</sup>, «from a historical-educational point of view, school memory interests us not only as a means of accessing the school of the past, but also as a key to understanding what today's society knows, or thinks it knows, about the schools of the past, and how close this is to the truth or is the result of prejudices and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in the common mentality and are difficult to eradicate» And it is possible to add the statement that «The object of the historiographical investigation, therefore», according to Giuseppe Zago, «no longer consists simply of the school as it really was, but also of the complex process of defining the idealised image of that school that has been elaborated over time on an individual and collective level, initially on the basis of real school experience and subsequently on that of other social and cultural agents – which I will mention later – which have contributed in part to redetermining it<sup>12</sup>».

Juri Meda<sup>13</sup> has highlighted the existence of three schools: the «legal» one, codified by legislative norms and pedagogical theories, the «real» one, shaped by the actual educational practices carried out in the classroom and by the material conditions inside the school, and the «ideal» one, constructed by the common mentality, imagined and represented by the cultural industry and subject to the distortions of personal memories and collective memory. The story of the Fascist school is, in practice, the story of a legal and real institution, rather than an ideal one. Studying the methods of symbolic and, indeed, ideal representation of school, schooling and teachers over time through the memories of the protagonists can reveal the overall cultural dimension of this historical phenomenon: the school seen «from the outside» as well as «from the inside».

However, the study of collective memory involves numerous analytical risks and difficulties. It must therefore necessarily be studied as a complex process, since it consists of a social reconstruction of the past, which arises from the fusion of moments experienced by a multitude of actors and the memory in the present that they have of those events and in which a combination of factors – often political – shape, modify and reconfigure it<sup>14</sup>.

When dealing with memory, it is therefore essential to move with precision and awareness within the dimension of recollection and the mental processes that are involved in the selection of information to be conserved, changed or deleted. Indeed,

<sup>11</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School memories: new trends in the history of education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> L. Agostinetto, S. Polenghi, G. Zago (edd.), *Memorie ed educazione: identità narrazione diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, cit.

<sup>14</sup> Agostinetto, *et alii*, *Memorie ed educazione: identità narrazione diversità*, cit.

it is these «interferences» that, produced by factors internal and external to the subject, allow images and interpretations of past experiences to become fixed in the interviewee's memory. These are inputs of various kinds which are absorbed over time by the subject and which, added to the well-known natural and automatic process of forgetting, modify the memory and therefore the interpretation of the event in the present<sup>15</sup>.

In short, what the eyewitnesses remember and speak about is not what exactly happened and should not, therefore, be accepted as the indisputable representation of an event. The reworking of memories over time, their reinterpretation and therefore their change is an automatic, natural and unconscious process. In fact, even if the interviewee witnessed an event firsthand, the details will begin to fade over time. But, above all, the recall and reworking of that moment will undergo transformations together with the changes in the person themselves or in the surrounding context or in various factors that contribute to shaping a different image in the mind, including the circulation of a collective historical memory, which will always have political connotations<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, it should be noted that this specific school memory does not refer to the «memory transmitted by the school», but to the «memory relating to the school», i.e. the memory that individuals, communities and society have built based on the realm of school and on the educational process in a given period<sup>17</sup>. It is no coincidence that more and more historians of education are interested in a conception of memory as the practice of individual or collective recollection of a common scholastic past, based on the analysis of the self-representation that pupils and teachers have made of it in their individual experiences, on the representation of the school and the teaching offered by the cultural industry, conveyed through literary and popular fiction<sup>18</sup>, through theatre and cinema<sup>19</sup>, as well as, more generally, through the images<sup>20</sup> conveyed also obviously by the means of information and communication<sup>21</sup>, together with that developed from the official commemorations promoted by public institutions<sup>22</sup> with respect to a specific policy of memory and public use of the past<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> C. Papagno, *Come funziona la memoria*, Roma, Laterza, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cabrera, *et alii*, *School memories: new trends in the history of education*, cit.

<sup>18</sup> A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù: la maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, ETS, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> L. Girotti, J. Meda, E. Patrizi, *La figura dell'insegnante nel cinema italiano e straniero: modelli e stereotipi a confronto*, in M. Corsi (ed.), *La ricerca pedagogica in Italia. Tra innovazione e internazionalizzazione*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2014, pp. 481-489.

<sup>20</sup> E. Colledemont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156.

<sup>21</sup> D. Crook, *Viewing the past: the treatment of history of education on British television since 1985*, «History of Education», vol. 28, n. 3, 1999, pp. 365-369.

<sup>22</sup> P. Cunningham, *Making use of the past: memory, history and education*, «History of Education Society Bulletin», n. 66, 2000, pp. 68-70.

<sup>23</sup> Cabrera, *et alii*, *School memories: new trends in the history of education*, cit.

## 2. *The interviews and their contributions*

The PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861–2001)”, on the basis of new sources for the history of education and a methodological approach that requires an interdisciplinary point of view, has explored among other things the models of school, teaching, learning and education that emerge from the memories, ultimately aiming to outline the evolution of the collective perception of the role and purpose of education.

Within the project, the research unit of the University of Florence has edited the Video–testimonies database<sup>24</sup> (within the Memoria scolastica website<sup>25</sup>), which stores a digital repertoire of video testimonies from teachers, pupils, educators, educational directors and school inspectors, as well as other school and educational operators who were some of the main subjects of the scholastic sphere from the end of the Fascist period to the present day. The interviews were collected mostly by students on the History of Education courses. Some of those used for this study – which, I point out, is only in its initial phase – are not present in the Memoria scolastica portal, but their creation followed the same construction procedures as the source.

The quality of the contributions varies greatly from interview to interview, but it must be pointed out that in various cases they are well-constructed sources, which manage to delve deeply into the topics covered. As far as the subject of this contribution is concerned, i.e. the Fascist school in its final years, it is currently possible to consult the testimonies of former pupils who attended primary schools at least until the fall of fascism in the Memoria scolastica portal. It is evident that such a number of sources does not allow us to fully develop any theme that revolves around school during the regime. However, what is emerging suggests that, in perspective, the potential of these oral sources may make an important contribution to historical-educational research around the years of the Fascist regime. It would therefore be worthwhile to collect new interviews, intercepting other eyewitnesses born in the 1930s, and to refine the tools. By expanding the number of eyewitnesses and entering to a greater degree into the specifics of everyday school life, we will be able to gather new ideas, which will supplement what the school historiography has already widely recounted. Above all, we hope to contribute to the debate on the Fascist influence on schools and on the indoctrination of the young generation, since the oral sources offer the possibility of seeing the classrooms of Fascist Italy from within, colouring their details and shining light on areas that have remained dimly lit.

«Historiography has wondered a lot about the effectiveness of [fascist] propaganda mechanisms and the construction of consensus on the two sides of teachers and pupils. Detailed work still remains to be done<sup>26</sup>». In the course of the studies we are conducting, the use of memories of former pupils offers food for thought and further study, especially

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>26</sup> F. Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, in F. De Giorgi, F. Pruneri, A. Gaudio (edd.), *Manuale di storia della scuola italiana: dal risorgimento al XXI Secolo*, Brescia, Scholé, 2019, p. 143.

in terms of the issues of fascistisation and indoctrination in primary school during the final phase of the Fascist dictatorship. With the video testimonies available, it is possible to isolate some recurring themes in the direction of that «detailed work».

### 3. *Fascist influence on schools, indoctrination and the ONB in the memories of the eyewitnesses*

In the midst of the «policy of adjustments» to the Gentile reform and later in the 1930s, the succession of Ministers of Education, as is well known, were particularly concerned with elementary school, developing the «cooperation» between the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) and schools, introducing strong and omnipresent propaganda and revising the curricula<sup>27</sup>, but above all both the militarisation of schools and the Fascist indoctrination were accentuated<sup>28</sup>.

In the academic year 1930-31, the state book was introduced for the first and second elementary classes and differentiated texts for the following three<sup>29</sup>. These texts were written with the aim of «promoting a purely Fascist education and culture among children; to offer a stimulus to develop the heroic side of children; to form the religious spirit; to keep them away from all false sentimentality and all exaggerated pietism<sup>30</sup>». «We had only one book in which there was only mathematics and Italian (24:52)<sup>31</sup>» (Tonina Lari).

In the following years, the process of politicising the topics continued – topics that themselves were linked to the religious content defined as fundamental to school life. «It was all mixed up with the Bible (33:31)<sup>32</sup>» (Fabiola Di Maggio). This culminated in the almost sacred representation of Mussolini and his political decisions<sup>33</sup>. The pupils then began to participate – led by their teachers – in the celebrations of the nation by

<sup>27</sup> S. Santamaita, R. Laporta: *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, Milano, Pearson, 2021; M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017; Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, cit.

<sup>28</sup> C. Spiti, «Santi italiani» e culto della patria nella scuola elementare fascista, Doctoral Thesis, Università degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata, (Supervisor: Tommaso Calì), 2015-2016; Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, cit.; Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, cit.; Santamaita, Laporta, *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, cit.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*; M.C. Morandini, *Vita scolastica e pratiche pedagogiche nell'Europa moderna*, Milano, Mondadori, 2021; A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo l'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, Milano, V&P, 2005; A. Barausse, *Il libro per la scuola dall'unità al fascismo la normativa sui libri di testo dalla Legge Casati alla Riforma Gentile (1861-1922)*, Macerata, Alfabetica, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=genN3DOMWKE> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>32</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAk\\_4NRJjJU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAk_4NRJjJU) (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>33</sup> C. Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1984; M. Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, Bari, Laterza, 1983; C. Spiti, «Santi italiani» e culto della patria nella scuola elementare fascista, Doctoral Thesis, Università degli studi di Roma Tor Vergata, (Supervisor: Tommaso Calì), 2015-2016; Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

joining the ranks of the ONB. These mass demonstrations and the remaking of the elementary curricula were aimed at shaping and perfecting the «new Italian», strong in Fascist morality and knowledge<sup>34</sup>.

Almost thirty years ago, Charnitzky<sup>35</sup> observed that «while it is true that the analysis of textbooks and curricula is capable of illustrating both the intentions of the regime and the manner and extent of the ideologisation of educational content, it cannot, however, say anything about their reception». He adds, and this is of particular interest for the subject of this contribution, that «given the complex and heterogeneous reality of the Italian school, the testimonies should be supplemented by “micro-stories”». Here, then, is where oral sources assume decisive importance in trying to answer this basic question.

In this regard, Marcello Coli in his video testimony says that «the teachers propagated the regime (29:58)<sup>36</sup>» and that, according to Gabriella Corsi «teaching was influenced by the Fascist regime, there was a lot of rhetoric in the books (17:13)<sup>37</sup>», and even the same rhetoric «after the war too». Finally, Fabiola Di Maggio recalls that «the teacher was very strict. [...] fascism was dominant: there was discipline, discipline, and more discipline». For the eyewitness, the memories of her elementary school years «are not memories filled with joy. [...] discipline was an obsessive thing (1:47)<sup>38</sup>».

But there are also eyewitnesses who go against the trend of the memories presented above or who seem to have erased the boulder of fascism and the school of the regime from their memory<sup>39</sup>. In reality, this occurs in many cases when dealing with memory linked to traumatic or highly politicised events<sup>40</sup>.

With specific regard to the Opera Nazionale Balilla, from 1924 onwards, the socialisation of boys began to assume a decisive importance. fascism tried to attract young people, who not only represented useful supporters of the future, but also important vehicles in the present to get through to families, especially those who were adverse to the regime<sup>41</sup>. In this regard, the ONB was founded in 1926 «for the assistance and for the physical and moral education of youth<sup>42</sup>», defined by Antonio Santoni Rugiu<sup>43</sup> as «the most congenial pedagogical policy intervention to the new regime» and by Carmen

<sup>34</sup> Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.; Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, cit.

<sup>35</sup> Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6n-OLrZScE> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>37</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNDYuDkvgZg> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>38</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAk\\_4NRjJjU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAk_4NRjJjU) (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>39</sup> Marisa Billi, Arturo Amoroso, Eva Iafolla, Francesca Pinzauti e Giuliana Vangi.

<sup>40</sup> G. Gribaudi, *Testimonianze e testimoni nella storia del tempo presente*, Firenze, Editpress, 2020; F. Focardi, *La guerra della memoria: la Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi*, Bari, Laterza, 2020; L.P. D'Alessandro, *Il fascismo l'antifascismo e la società italiana: un problema aperto*, «Studi Storici», vol. 55, n. 1, 2014, pp. 197-211.

<sup>41</sup> Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.

<sup>42</sup> Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit; Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

<sup>43</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Storia Sociale Dell'educazione*, Milano, Principato, 1987.



Betti<sup>44</sup> as «the true school of Fascism». Jurgen Charnitzky<sup>45</sup> points out through the words of the Fascists themselves that in the mid-1920s they saw it as the flagship of the regime and the most grandiose attempt at state education of youth in history.

The ONB's plans were very fluid and included physical, moral and pre-military education, cultural education and technical-professional education, as well as religious assistance. This particular interference in scholastic activities allowed the Fascist Party to exercise strict surveillance over the scholastic world, also concentrating its propaganda and indoctrination in extracurricular activities<sup>46</sup> which, it should be remembered, were «prescribed». The new organisation attempted to combine politics with school life in an ever closer relationship, since, with the Gentile reform, this combination had been erased practically in every aspect<sup>47</sup>.

But, despite the extensive promotion of the new organisation and the numerous recreational activities, when the war became total and the fate towards which Italy was heading appeared clearly on the horizon in the early 1940s, the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio, like all organisations created by fascism, melted like snow in the sun and soon even the memory of the great parades and exercises disappeared<sup>48</sup>.

The memories collected in the Memoria scolastica portal seem to confirm this scarce moral participation. Marcella Dei, for example, while drawing on her memories with extreme lucidity, only remembers that «on Saturday afternoons, we had to go to the assembly [...]. During breaks there was also a moment of preparation for the assembly overseen by the teacher: that is, lining up two by two and marching (42:04)<sup>49</sup>». The eyewitness, in the course of her story, links this memory to the intrusive propaganda placed by the regime inside the schools. Marcello Coli states that he recalls in detail the demonstrations in which he participated in Balilla «almost as a sympathiser [...] seeing myself dressed as Balilla thrilled me (31:26)<sup>50</sup>» and that «on Saturdays we didn't go to school, we all gathered in the square, dressed strictly in Fascist uniform, and paraded as if we were an army (30:10)», but despite this, he does not elaborate on the story. Other eyewitnesses speak of physical activity in school as «simple movements next to the desk (22:38)<sup>51</sup>». In other cases even stating that «we didn't do physical education». This happened in the countryside and in areas where school buildings were arranged and used only up to the second grade.

<sup>44</sup> Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.

<sup>45</sup> Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola: la politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit.

<sup>46</sup> G. Zanibelli, *Scuola e sport in Italia durante il ventennio fascista. Un profilo storico-istituzionale*, «Intus - Leggere: Historia», vol. 11, n. 1, 2017, pp. 75-97; Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.

<sup>47</sup> Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista*, cit.; Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, cit.; Pruneri, *La scuola elementare*, cit.; Santamaita, Laporta, *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, cit.

<sup>48</sup> Zanibelli, *Scuola e sport in Italia durante il ventennio fascista. Un profilo storico-istituzionale*, cit.

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/questo-e-stato-il-mio-primo-incontro-con-la-scuola-memorie> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6n-OLrZScE> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>51</sup> Marisa Billi, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/lavorare-dopo-il-matrimonio-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access: 02.09.2023).



From these interviews, food for thought and questions arise on the effective spread of the ONB and on its subjugating force in the final years of the Fascist period. The fact that the interviewees make only a few mentions of what should have been a «powerful tool» for indoctrinating young people leaves one bewildered to say the least. In a subsequent phase of the research, this aspect will certainly have to be investigated in depth, since it was a much more complex phenomenon, which has remained imprinted in the cultural history of the country.

### *Conclusions*

The potential of school oral memories would also make significant contributions in the further consideration of objects of study that have been less well represented in the historical–educational debate. These include, for example, what Juri Meda calls the «mass media of education»<sup>52</sup> or the consumption of pupils both inside and outside the classrooms, understood in terms of their complex and polysemic nature<sup>53</sup>. To give just a hint, in some interviews, the eyewitnesses talk about snack time: «I remember envying the snacks, but not the objects: they were all on the same level» recalls, for example, Gabriella Corsi. Or «Those who had no food were given castor oil and a peppermint candy (40:38)<sup>54</sup>» (Marcella Dei). Furthermore, aspects of the dismal state of the classrooms emerged, as testified by Giuliana Vangi: «We brought a piece of wood from home to keep warm».

To conclude, as Gabrielli and Montino<sup>55</sup> have already underlined: «Looking [at the history of the Fascist school] from other points of view, gives a different picture. And it is, in addition to a question of approach, a question of sources». The rereading of the political and scholastic dynamics of the twenty–year period of Fascist rule – in particular of the Thirties – initiated at the end of the last century has allowed us to focus on new fields of investigation. The results that have gradually emerged from the contributions in the research on the social roots of the regime have highlighted the dimensions, complexity and modernity of the mechanisms of persuasion, but also of repression, in which scholastic historiography is collaborating enormously<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> J. Meda, *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> S. Oliviero, *Educazione e consumo nell'Italia repubblicana*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/questo-e-stato-il-mio-primo-incontro-con-la-scuola-memorie> (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>55</sup> Gabrielli, Montino, *La scuola fascista: istituzioni parole d'ordine e luoghi dell'immaginario*, cit.

<sup>56</sup> L.P. D'Alessandro, *Il fascismo l'antifascismo e la società italiana: un problema aperto*, «Studi Storici», vol. 55, n. 1, 2014, pp. 197–211; A. De Bernardi, *Una dittatura moderna: il fascismo come problema storico*, Milano, ESBMO, 2006.



# Learning Memory. The Impact of the Racial Laws on Three Roman High Schools: between Oblivion and Remembrance

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## 1. *The Italian* *Giorno della Memoria: the school remembers the school*

The establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day or *Giorno della Memoria* in Italy (Law 211 of 20 July 2000) was motivated by the «widespread absence of historical memory among citizens, especially young people»<sup>1</sup>, and the school was identified as a strategic place for its celebration. Memory became a school subject and the Italian school *a remembering school*. The school was also given a privileged role in official ceremonies that represented the transmission of remembrance from the Republic – embodied by its over-50-year-old president – to young citizens. In fact, President Ciampi invited the latter to «keep alive [...], in your memory, our memories»<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, with the commemoration of the racial laws, the school – where they were applied first – became a subject of remembrance in itself: *a remembered school*. In this sense, *the school remembers the school*, delineating itself as the object and subject of a politics of remembrance that was promoted from above but animated from below.

The memory of educational institutions is, however, a multifaceted phenomenon. School is a crucial stage of life in which one's identity is defined in an environment shared with peers of the same generation. It is a physical place that one ends up feeling as one's own, but also an institution, entrusted with the task of transmitting a cultural heritage to new generations. The school is thus a framework in which different identities (i.e. personal, generational, national) contaminate each other.

The elaboration of a school memory of the racial laws affects the dialectic between the three main dimensions of school memory itself<sup>3</sup>: the *individual memory* of the people who were expelled, nowadays called upon to testify; the *collective memory* that took root in the public imagination of the post-war period; and the *public memory* that was pro-

<sup>1</sup> Motion 1/00092, 10 February 1997, [dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic1\\_00092\\_13](http://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic1_00092_13) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>2</sup> Speech by President Ciampi, 27 January 2002, [presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/182942](http://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/182942) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

moted by law in the new millennium. It is worth studying this dialectic through the case of three Roman classical high schools (“Visconti”, “Tasso” and “Giulio Cesare”), starting with a number of publications about these institutions<sup>4</sup>. These texts originated in an institutional environment: published with the patronage of the headmaster and mostly commissioned by alumni associations, they were written by teachers or former students of the relative high school. The books thus have an official status and are direct sources of the “bottom-up” production of a school memory. The three high schools have an old elitist vocation and a strong identity that is reflected in the prestigious buildings where they are located, long family traditions and alumni associations. Consequently, they have always had a large Jewish presence: if studying is a fundamental element of Judaism, the classical high school – which allows access to university and the professions – was considered a privileged channel of redemption ever since the liberal age. The racial laws, then, left a deep wound whose memory is now an integral part of the schools’ identities. Nevertheless, «even the ways in which memory was reactivated has a history»<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. *The experience and memory of the expelled students*

In the autumn of 1938, almost 600 Jewish students were expelled from secondary schools, gymnasiums and high schools in Rome, which prompted the Jewish Community to set up a school specifically for them, first in a rented small villa in Via Celimontana and then in buildings owned by the Community, which remained open until the German occupation. The largest nucleus of the 400 enrolled students was the classical school<sup>6</sup>, where students from “Visconti”, “Tasso” and “Giulio Cesare” ended up sharing desks.

The expulsion profoundly marked the students’ destiny. The older ones were excluded from university studies or entered the “Clandestine University” or the Pontifical University, without being able to choose an institution according to their inclinations. Many were forced to abandon their studies for economic reasons<sup>7</sup>. Some of the youngest returned to a state school in 1944. Others ended their days in Auschwitz, like the siblings Enrico and Luciana Finzi, who were expelled from “Giulio Cesare”. Either way, once the Nazi

<sup>4</sup> F. Mazzonis (ed.), *Un liceo per la Capitale. Storia del liceo Tasso (1887-200)*, Roma, Viella, 2001; L. Fulci, *Le centomila e una storia del Giulio Cesare. Cronistoria di un Liceo romano*, Roma, Progetto Cultura, 2018; R. Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata. Le leggi razziali del 1938 e il liceo “E.Q. Visconti”*, Milano, Biblion, 2021. See also S. Haia Antonucci, G. Piperno Beer, *Sapere ed essere nella Roma razzista. Gli ebrei nelle scuole e nell’università*, Roma, Gangemi, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> W. Barberis, *Storia senza perdono*, Torino, Einaudi, 2019, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> B. Migliau, M. Procaccia, *La documentazione della scuola media ebraica di Roma del 1938*, in M.B.C.A., *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei nell’Italia unita 1870-1945*, Roma, Pubblicazione degli Archivi di Stato, 1993; D. Fishman, *Le classi invisibili. Le scuole ebraiche in Italia dopo le leggi razziste (1938-1943)*, Milano, Il Prato, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> F. Tagliacozzo, *Gli ebrei romani raccontano la “propria” Shoah*, Firenze, Giuntina, 2010, pp. 85-86; Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., p. 137.

occupation was over, «there was not one family who had not suffered some serious loss», and «death was becoming familiar among young people»<sup>8</sup>.

The first extensive, public re-evocation of the events of the Jewish Community's school is a book published in 1969 by Fabio Della Seta, *L'incendio del Tevere*, in which the author plunges back «into an era and events that», he says, «I do not say have been forgotten, but whose memory I feared would resurface». The novel focuses on the formation of a group of friends brought together by exceptional conditions «during three years of war – the exact length of the high school cycle», but which grew stronger through adolescent discoveries. These boys «could never be separated», and so «new friendships were born, an ever more festive and human atmosphere was created as the days went by», which however «remained limited to the very small circle of the parastatal Jewish school». On the outside, «the atmosphere was becoming increasingly tense», but «we were no longer ashamed of being Jewish». Moving the school to the Community buildings strengthened «the kinship with the old Jewish quarter», bringing «the students closer to their earliest origins, from which their fathers had so painstakingly separated themselves». For these boys, the expulsion from school coincided with the search for a personal, conscious answer to the question of what it means to be Jewish. The book, then, tells the story of a condition of isolation that is simultaneously an act of sharing and something that produces identity, conveying a choral atmosphere and turning the events into collective memory<sup>9</sup>. The distance between the events and the book's publication, which long remained the only one on the topic<sup>10</sup>, thus raise the question of how this memory was preserved and transmitted.

As Raffaella Di Castro wrote in 2010, «it may seem unbelievable in the current era of remembrance days, but no less than ten years ago [...] many Roman Jews had never told their stories of persecution to anyone»<sup>11</sup>. This fact also applies to the Jewish school. What emerges from the accounts that Romana Bogliaccino gathered among the few former «Visconti» students who were still alive and their relatives is that, when they grew older, they maintained a profound reticence about the school period even within their families<sup>12</sup>. It represented both a carefree and a painful chapter of their lives, capable of forging an intimate bond between those who had lived that experience but which they did not necessarily want to remember. Luciano Coen recalled that, in the Jewish school, there was

<sup>8</sup> F. Della Seta, *L'incendio del Tevere*, Trapani, Celebes, 1969, pp. 189, 191.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, for citations pp. 5, 128, 117, 39, 40, 27. Cf. G.J. Piperno, *Frammenti di vita giovanile ebraica a Roma durante il periodo delle leggi razziali e dopo la liberazione della città*, in D. Carpi, A. Milano, U. Nahon (edd.), *Scritti in memoria di Enzo sereni*, Milano-Gerusalem, Fondazione Sally Mayer-Scuola Superiore di Studi Ebraici, 1970; L. Coen, *La scuola di via Celimontana nei ricordi di un suo allievo*, in L. Di Ruscio, R. Gravina, B. Migliau, S. Terracina (edd.), *Identità, diversità, memoria*, S.I., S.n., 2009; E. Castelnovo, *L'Università clandestina a Roma: anni 1941-'42 e 1942-'43*; G. Fiorentino, *I ricordi di un ex-studente della «università clandestina»*, «Bollettino dell'Unione Matematica Italiana», vol. IV-A, n. 1, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> An important exception is G. Piperno, *Frammenti di vita giovanile*, cit.

<sup>11</sup> R. Di Castro, *Presentazione. Le fonti e l'esperienza del «Fondo Svizzero»*, in Tagliacozzo, *Gli ebrei romani raccontano la «propria» Shoah*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit.

an «atmosphere that we jealously remember and that resurfaces every time we meet»<sup>13</sup>. The protagonists' memories thus remained limited to their intimacy and personal relationships. Gino Fiorentino, who seems to have been very reticent about his experience of those years<sup>14</sup>, made the following statement: «With fellow students, when we meet, it is as if we had met yesterday, even if we have not seen each other for 30 years»<sup>15</sup>.

The defensive oblivion of the Via Celimontana students obstructed the intergenerational transmission of the memory of this experience, which only slowly resurfaced in public. Bice Migliau denounced an «almost total absence of studies and publications on the subject» even in 1988, and together with the Centre of Jewish Culture in Rome, she organised the first gathering of the “1938 kids”, precisely to «collect testimonies [...] on the experience of families and young people faced with [...] marginalisation from public school»<sup>16</sup>. However, in the absence of a public memory, archival research in the Community's records and school registers was necessary to find the 400 participants. It was the first stage of a long work of rediscovery that gave the Jewish school a place in official memory at the beginning of the new millennium.

A key moment in this convergence was the unveiling in 2008 of a plaque in memory of the Jewish school in Via Celimontana, in the presence of President Napolitano, Mayor Alemanno, surviving students and Emma Castelnuovo, the only teacher of the school to still be alive<sup>17</sup>. A single ritual thus brought together several elements: the Quirinale, in its role as guardian and master of commemorative ceremonies of the Republic; the protagonists' personal memories, made public in the official liturgy of the State; the publication of Coen's lecture – printed for this occasion – at one of the meetings of the “1938 kids”, thus making it public, reproducible, citable and hence lasting. The plaque, finally, signalled that it was there that discrimination had taken place, redefining the position of the small villa in the urban fabric, so much so that the University of Notre Dame – which is now based there – claims «a special connection to the historical heritage of the Jewish presence in Rome since [its] acquisition»<sup>18</sup>. The following year, for the celebration of International Women's Day in the Quirinale, President Napolitano appointed Castelnuovo Grand Officer, presenting her as an example that «reminds us of the Resistance to Fascism that, in addition to depriving women of fundamental and elementary rights, forced those who were Jewish, through the infamous racial laws, to abandon public schools along with their colleagues and students, bravely taking refuge in the experiment of an exclusively Jewish private school»<sup>19</sup>. Thanks to the 2008 ceremony, then, the separate memory of the “1938 kids” became an official memory of the city and the Republic.

<sup>13</sup> Coen, *La scuola di via Celimontana*, cit., p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., p. 284.

<sup>15</sup> Antonucci, Piperno Beer, *Sapere ed essere nella Roma razzista*, cit., p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> Migliau, Procaccia, *La documentazione della scuola media ebraica*, cit., p. 453.

<sup>17</sup> P. Brogi, *Alemanno: mai più discriminazioni*, «Corriere della Sera», 25 November 2008.

<sup>18</sup> See [rome.nd.edu/news-stories/news/the-rome-gateway-commemorates-the-international-holocaust-remembrance-day/](http://rome.nd.edu/news-stories/news/the-rome-gateway-commemorates-the-international-holocaust-remembrance-day/) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>19</sup> *Napolitano: “stupro infame”*, «La Stampa», 7 March 2009.



### 3. *The ostentatious and tangible memory of schools*

But what happened in the schools that expelled the Jewish students?

The establishment of “Visconti” – the capital’s first high school – coincided with the opening of the nearby ghetto. Here the racial laws led to the expulsion of a teacher, Maria Piazza, and 58 students, who nearly all enrolled in the Jewish school. Their traces were quickly lost; before Bogliaccino’s recent study, neither «the individual identities [...] nor the [...] total number» of the expelled were known. It was only in 2019 that, in the presence of the few surviving protagonists and their relatives, a plaque with their names was unveiled in the high school courtyard, in a ceremony that – according to the headmistress Rech – «wanted to celebrate the vitality of their memory in the school that was thus returned to them and that once again welcomed them»<sup>20</sup>.

Founded in 1887, in the 1930s, “Tasso” was chosen by Mussolini for his sons’ education, whereas 42 Jewish students were expelled from it. In 2001, a book conceived by the headmaster and the “Amici del Tasso” association was published, titled *Un liceo per la Capitale. Storia del liceo Tasso*. Featuring essays and personal accounts by former students and teachers, it was presented at the Campidoglio by Mayor Walter Veltroni and the Minister Maurizio Gasparri, in the presence of «numerous other former pupils who have become prominent figures in the cultural, professional and scientific world, in politics and show business»<sup>21</sup>. The historian Filippo Mazzonis – a former student and editor of the book – said that he had had to deal with «the century-old history of an “institution”» as it had been «passed down orally, from one generation to the next», and this feeling was confirmed by the volume. However, if «the Fascist *ventennio* [...] is of considerable importance in the history of the Institute»<sup>22</sup>, the almost complete absence of references to the racial laws’ impact on the school community is surprising, especially if we compare it to the ample space devoted to antifascism, hence another aspect of those same years<sup>23</sup>. This absence is even more evident if we consider the fact that the pillars of “Tasso” in the post-war era – repeatedly mentioned in the text – contained some of the main teachers of the Jewish school in Via Celimontana, (which is, instead, never mentioned): Lidia Horn, Enzo Monferini and Emma Castelnuevo. Furthermore, none of the expelled students are among the witnesses. Two years before the book came out, “Tasso” had organised a study day titled *Scuola e leggi razziste*, promoted also by the “Amici del Tasso” association. During the meeting, Micaela Procaccia listed «the names that many former students of the Tasso are familiar with: Emma Castelnuevo, Enzo Monferini, Lidia Horn». Another speaker, Giacomo Seban, told the students that «your high school has a certain relationship with the facts» and again mentioned Castelnuevo. The proceedings of the study day were «belatedly but very conveniently published» in 2003 (hence after the publication of

<sup>20</sup> Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., pp. 128, 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Nota informativa per la stampa*, [www.amicideltasso.it/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2001-11-19-Presentazione-di-Un-Liceo-per-la-Capitale.pdf](http://www.amicideltasso.it/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2001-11-19-Presentazione-di-Un-Liceo-per-la-Capitale.pdf) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>22</sup> F. Mazzonis, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Un liceo per la Capitale*, cit., p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> The only direct testimony is that of Prof. Maria Adelaide Garaguso, who had married a Jewish doctor and experienced anti-Jewish legislation first-hand, but without any consequences for her own work.

the above-mentioned book and when Giorno della Memoria was in full swing), to show the students that the racial laws «took place among the same desks and in the same classrooms that we have all [...] known»<sup>24</sup>. Until then, knowledge of the racial laws' impact on "Tasso" had not produced any awareness of the facts. Furthermore, it was not until 2007 that the students requested a plaque in memory of the expelled students<sup>25</sup>, while their names – of which no trace had been preserved – have only recently been identified «through the meticulous work» of a teacher<sup>26</sup>.

The Fascist building that hosts "Giulio Cesare" was inaugurated by Mussolini and Bottai in 1936. The Aula Magna now bears a plaque dedicated «to the memory of the students and workers expelled from the school by the racial laws of 1938». It was unveiled in 2008, in the presence of the Mayor Veltroni, the President of the Jewish Community of Rome – and former student of the school – Leone Paserman, the president of the Alumni Association Tullio De Mauro, and some former, expelled students<sup>27</sup>. As one teacher explained, «it was very difficult to draw up a complete list of the names of the former students», which was only made possible by consulting the archives of the Jewish school<sup>28</sup>. A second plaque, located in the courtyard, is dedicated to the aforementioned Finzi brothers, whose name is also linked to an award instituted in 2012 by the Alumni Association to turn them into «the emblem of the persecution of all Italian Jewish students»<sup>29</sup>. The effects of the racial laws have furthermore been addressed in a documentary made by the former student Antonello Sarno, titled *Giulio Cesare - Compagni di scuola* (2014), and in a recent book on the school's history by Ludovico Fulci, a former student and teacher of the high school as well as a member of the Alumni Association<sup>30</sup>, commissioned by the Former Students' Association and sponsored by the headmistress. Finally, in 2016, a solemn ceremony was held in the school's courtyard to plant an olive tree from Israel – in memory of the Finzi brothers – and place another plaque, with the following inscription: «The school educates to memory. May the olive tree be a warning to future generations. Lest we forget the Jewish teachers and students who were expelled under the racial laws»<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> M. Procaccia, *A scuola nel '38: identità celate, identità ritrovate*, in M. Benvenuti (ed.), *Scuola e leggi razziste. Pomeriggio di studi tenutosi il 23 marzo 1999 presso l'Aula Magna del Liceo ginnasio statale "T. Tasso" di Roma*, Roma, Associazione "Amici del Tasso", 2003, p. 32; G. Saban, *Le leggi razziali nell'esperienza di un ebreo italiano all'estero*, p. 27; M. Benvenuti, *Prefazione*, pp. 13-14, in Benvenuti (ed.), *Scuola e leggi razziste*, cit.

<sup>25</sup> Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, *Linee guida nazionali "Per una didattica della Shoah a scuola"*, 2018, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> W. Veltroni, *Walter Veltroni 50 anni dopo tra i ragazzi (inascoltati) del Tasso*, «Corriere della Sera», 2 February 2019.

<sup>27</sup> E. Sassi, *Il sindaco ricorda gli studenti ebrei cacciati nel '38*, «Corriere della Sera», 31 January 2008.

<sup>28</sup> L. Mari, «Quando il preside disse: voi ebrei via dalla classe», «la Repubblica», 30 January 2008.

<sup>29</sup> See [www.assogiuliocesare.it/joomla/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=211](http://www.assogiuliocesare.it/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=211) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>30</sup> Fulci, *Le centomila e una storia del Giulio Cesare*, cit.

<sup>31</sup> See [www.miur.gov.it/-/giornata-della-memoria-domani-il-ministro-giannini-al-liceo-giulio-cesare-di-roma-per-la-cerimonia-di-piantumazione-di-un-ulivo-in-memoria-delle-vitti](http://www.miur.gov.it/-/giornata-della-memoria-domani-il-ministro-giannini-al-liceo-giulio-cesare-di-roma-per-la-cerimonia-di-piantumazione-di-un-ulivo-in-memoria-delle-vitti); [www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/shoah\\_piantato\\_ulivo\\_cortile\\_liceo\\_giulio\\_cesare-1495655.html](http://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/shoah_piantato_ulivo_cortile_liceo_giulio_cesare-1495655.html) (last access: 29.03.2023).

#### 4. *A long school amnesia: the silence of walls and people*

This conspicuous memory was preceded by decades of amnesia. In the accounts collected by Bogliaccino, the indifference of the schoolmates who remained in the “Aryanised” classes emerges very clearly. Their reactions were very different, and one of them was even awarded the title of Righteous among the Nations. However, this account by Gino Fiorentino is emblematic:

The reaction to our expulsion of the non-Jewish schoolmates was one of absolute indifference. I never saw or heard from them again. In 1956, my classmates organised a dinner, which I went to. It seemed like nothing had happened, [and] I was greeted as if we had gone through our studies together, amicably, but with such indifference.... I could not help thinking that it was the same indifference with which they had reacted to our expulsion in 1938. [...] The professors had also disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again<sup>32</sup>.

That school cycle ended for everyone, be they expelled or not, but even subsequent generations continued to breathe a climate of amnesia. Enrico Girmenia, a former “Giulio Cesare” student, recently published his youth diary. Talking about his first day of high school in 1970, he mentions the expulsion of the Jewish students and the Finzi brothers. «No one talked», he recalls, «about any of these things when I was at Giulio Cesare. [...] All my teachers in high school had participated in the war» and described a few episodes, but «our teachers never discussed the subject of the racial laws»<sup>33</sup>. Yet, only the previous year, the aforementioned novel by Della Seta – another former student at this school – had come out.

The walls of the school buildings also remained silent. In the aftermath of the First World War, they were covered with plaques dedicated to fallen students and teachers. In her contribution to the aforementioned book about the “Tasso”’s history, Alessandra Staderini called for the restoration of one of these plaques, which had been defaced by offensive inscriptions. If it shows an intention to preserve the memory of such a disruptive event, the will to remember, with a plaque, another dramatic event such as the expulsion of other students from the same school was yet to come<sup>34</sup>.

In the case of “Visconti”, the former students who died in the war were almost as many as those expelled in 1938, and a plaque was dedicated to them, too. In the following years, two more plaques were placed in the atrium: one with Armando Diaz’s *Bollettino della Vittoria*, the other with a quote from Mussolini on the tasks of the Fascist school. Immediately after the liberation of Rome, the headmaster proposed to remove the latter (although it is still there today) and replace it with one dedicated to the regained freedom, as well as to affix two other plaques dedicated to the school’s Resistance martyrs (Raffaele

<sup>32</sup> Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit., p. 278.

<sup>33</sup> E. Girmenia, *Liceo Giulio Cesare. Una storia degli anni Settanta*, Roma, Il Filo, 2022, ch. *Liceo Giulio Cesare*.

<sup>34</sup> A. Staderini, *La costruzione di una identità prestigiosa*, in Mazzonis (ed.), *Un liceo per la Capitale*, cit., pp. 50-52.

Persichetti and Romualdo Chiesa)<sup>35</sup>. Finally, “Giulio Cesare” was established after the First World War but it was only in the twenty-first century that all three schools decided to inscribe the memory of the expulsion of Jewish students and teachers on marble.

While the initiatives described above demonstrate that the high schools were able to react immediately to the need to remember tragedies experienced by the school community, they also confirm that the amputation of this community following the Jewish students’ expulsion was not considered a tragedy worthy of indelible remembrance, so much so that their names have remained unknown for decades. The story of the plaques thus seems to be the marble translation of the behaviour described by Girmenia, corroborated by bureaucratic acts.

Piazza left at least two written traces of the persecution she had suffered in the archival sources of “Righi” (her school during the post-war period): she wrote in the staff register that she had been rehired following the repeal of the racial laws and applied for benefits for those persecuted for racial reasons. Yet, upon her retirement in 1964, the headmaster – in a letter of commendation addressed to the Superintendency, in which he accurately described Piazza’s career so that she would receive a distinction – mentioned neither that she had been a victim of racial persecution nor that she had taught at the Jewish school, even if the latter had been recognised by the Ministry. The various school authorities, then, shared the will to forget this chapter of history, and Piazza’s appointment in 1965 as a *Commendatore* thus took place in a very different setting from that dedicated to Castelnuovo<sup>36</sup>.

The normalisation of collective school oblivion also concerned the figure of the teacher. A fundamental point of reference for the former students emerges from the testimonies collected in the publications considered in this contribution: Professor Enzo Monferini. Originally from Piemonte, Monferini was an atheist of Jewish background who taught history and philosophy at the Jewish school and subsequently at “Tasso”. All witnesses describe him as a person of extraordinary intelligence and exceptional humanity, capable of guiding students in their cultural discoveries and helping them to identify their human and professional path, hostile to traditional pedantry and keen on developing extracurricular relationships with his students. He plays a primary role in *L’incendio del Tevere*, where Della Seta even defines the novel’s protagonists as «Monferini’s kids», but also – in the guise of Aldo Camerini – in *Tra noi due* by Elisabetta Rasy, a former “Tasso” student<sup>37</sup>. However, if the way Monferini was described by the “1938 kids” is almost identical to the image conveyed of him by the 1968 generation, the latter did not mention two events that he had, instead, shared with the former: persecution and attendance at the Jewish school. While the difference may be due to Monferini’s reticence<sup>38</sup>, the two generations met thanks to him. He died in 1969 and, according to his wish, his – strictly

<sup>35</sup> Bogliaccino, *Scuola negata*, cit.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> E. Rasy, *Tra noi due*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2002. Cf. V. Zincone, *Altro che 3i. Il nostro liceo ci ha insegnato a vivere*, «Sette», n. 42, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Confirmed by Rasy’s portrait and personal communication by Giovanna Bonasegale (2.1.2023).

secular – funeral was held at “Tasso”<sup>39</sup>. It was «attended, with an incredible crowd, by the generation of ‘38 and that of ‘68», although the former did so as individuals, hence not necessarily recognisable to those who ignored them<sup>40</sup>. The only witness who mentions this detail is Procaccia, who had known Monferini as a student and has studied the Jewish school as an archivist. Although they had shared the same professor and met in 1969, the school memories of these two generations of students remained separated for another three decades.

### 5. *Oblivion, heroes, victims and the Righteous: teaching and remembering State racism in the Republican Era*

These microprocesses of individual and collective suppression feed into broader processes of public amnesia and vice versa. «Oblivion and [...] even historical error», Renan wrote, «are an essential factor in the creation of a nation» whose «social capital» consists of «a heroic past, great men, glory»<sup>41</sup>. Heroism and oblivion were crucial also in the post-war period. «Precisely in the countries tainted by the disgrace of the agreement with the Nazis [...] a new national narrative had taken root, that of the antifascist epic»; in Italy, the emphasis on the Resistance «ended up covering all the spaces of memory»<sup>42</sup>. Already during the war, the myth of the “good Italian” and the Resistance as a “second *Risorgimento*” fought against the “bad German” – who was held responsible for the war and the crimes against the Jews – began to impose itself<sup>43</sup>.

This approach also influenced historiography and, subsequently, history education. The problem of teaching recent history had already arisen during the Resistance, with the aim of making schools the training ground for a new idea of citizenship<sup>44</sup>. The introduction of recent history in high school programmes reached a milestone in 1953, when Luigi Salvatorelli’s *Venticinque anni di storia (1920-1945)* was published at the instigation of the Ministry. Salvatorelli wrote the following about Fascist racial policy: «In imitation of the Nazis, the Fascist government too adopted anti-Semitic measures, [albeit] more moderate ones than those of the Germans (autumn 1938)». In a paragraph called *L’armi-*

<sup>39</sup> G. Bonasegale, *Per Enzo Monferini e per Carla Guglielmi*, in Mazzonis (ed.), *Un liceo per la capitale*, cit., p. 275.

<sup>40</sup> Migliau, Procaccia, *La documentazione della scuola media ebraica*, cit., p. 462, and Procaccia’s personal communication (28.12.2022).

<sup>41</sup> E. Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation ?*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1882, pp. 7, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Barberis, *Storia senza perdono*, cit., p. 5; E. Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2003, p. 162. Cf. G. De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un’Italia divisa*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> D. Bidussa, *Razzismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Ontologia e fenomenologia del “bravo italiano”*, «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel», vol. 58, n. 3, 1992, pp. 1-36; F. Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione della Seconda guerra mondiale*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> A. Ascenzi, *Metamorfosi della cittadinanza. Studi e ricerche su insegnamento della storia, educazione civile e identità nazionale in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata, eum, 2009.

*stizio italiano. L'Italia divisa in due*, he made no mention of the round-ups, massacres and deportations of 1943–45<sup>45</sup>. As some surveys have shown, this remained the dominant approach of history textbooks until the end of the century<sup>46</sup>. Even for historiography itself, things only started to change in the late 1980s<sup>47</sup>.

The unanimous decision to create the Giorno della Memoria was part of the development of a new republican pact of remembrance that derived from the disappearance of the ideological and international reference points of Italian political parties of the “constitutional arch” and the search for a new position by the post-fascist Right. The pact depended on the mutual legitimisation of ex-Communists (considered alien to the Atlantic democracies that had won the Cold War) and ex-Fascists (considered alien to the constitutional pact on which the Republic was based), and was part of a broader European framework in which the memory of the Shoah was «elected as the cornerstone of liberal ethics», in a process of defining «a Europe as the champion of human rights»<sup>48</sup>.

In the official commemoration, which the president of the Republic periodically celebrates in the company of schoolchildren, the condemnation of what he unfailingly describes as the «perverse», «shameful» and «infamous» racial laws is constantly flanked by the memory of the «numerous» Italian Righteous, including Fascists, who through their «epic deeds [...] also saved our conscience»<sup>49</sup>. The collective redemption guaranteed by the individual Righteous thus enriched the treasure of satisfactions already provided by the Resistance. President Ciampi recalled that his generation, which «experienced the shame of the racial laws», also «knew how to find in itself the strength to oppose, resist [and] fight for freedom», redeeming the homeland. His successor, Napolitano, was even clearer: «We Italians settled accounts with Nazi-Fascism and our darkest past by fighting the war of Liberation and giving ourselves the Republican Constitution. [...] And on misdeeds such as the racial laws of 1938 and their application, we have made the hard truth known in recent years as never before»<sup>50</sup>. The wound of anti-Jewish State persecution was re-evoked only to be instantly soothed by a reminder of the redemption guaranteed by the Righteous and the Resistance<sup>51</sup>. Remembrance refers almost exclusively to victims and heroes, and thus to the morally positive aspect of national history – that which gives shape to an edifying memory.

<sup>45</sup> L. Salvatorelli, *Ventique anni di storia (1920-1945)*, Firenze, Scuola e Vita, 1953, pp. 50, 68-70.

<sup>46</sup> G. Belardinelli, *Il fascismo nei manuali di storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, in G. Bosco, C. Mantovani (edd.), *La storia contemporanea tra scuola e università*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2004, pp. 61-81; G.B. Novello Paglianti, L. Wofsi Rocca, *Lezione di storia: le leggi antiebraiche nei manuali degli anni Ottanta*, «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel», n. 1-2, 1988, pp. 495-500.

<sup>47</sup> V. Galimi, *La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia (1938-1943). Note sulla storiografia recente*, «Contemporanea», n. 3, 2002, pp. 587-596.

<sup>48</sup> V. Pisanty, *I Guardiani della memoria e il ritorno delle destre xenofobe*, Milano, Bompiani, 2020, pp. 9 and 32.

<sup>49</sup> Speech by President Napolitano, 24 January 2008, [presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54346](http://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54346) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>50</sup> Speech by President Ciampi, 26 January 2006, [presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/183384](http://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/183384); speech by President Napolitano, 27 January 2012, [presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54898](http://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54898) (last access: 29.03.2023).

<sup>51</sup> See the remarks of B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, London-New York, Verso, 1991, on the above-mentioned passage by Renan.



## 6. *Learning by heart: the invention of a public school memory of the racial laws*

To conclude, at the beginning of the new millennium, the school was defined as the crucial ground for a policy of remembering racial persecution that was activated from above and animated from below. In reality, though, the school has overlooked this important chapter in its history, transmitting and consolidating oblivion for decades, to the point that it became common sense: *the school has forgotten the school*. Studying the events of three prestigious high schools allows us to see how, for half a century, different levels of school oblivion (i.e. individual, collective and public) intertwined and reinforced each other. The painful silence of the Jews who were expelled from the schools was counter-balanced by the general reticence of former classmates and schools that – albeit proud of their prestigious tradition and role in the collective imagination – let the names of the expelled quickly fall into oblivion. The few school memoirs of the Via Celimontana students that were published remained isolated. The temporal distance from the events subsequently normalised the amnesia, consolidating collective oblivion as part of the image that successive generations had of their school. Finally, the institutions helped to remove the racial laws' impact on schools from both history education and public memory.

Giorno della Memoria is, then, not the transfer of a living memory from a generation full of memories to one that tends to forget, but the construction of something that was deliberately and tacitly forgotten. It evokes a memory that has never been a common heritage, to be rebuilt *from scratch* by an educational policy aimed at creating a new collective *ethos* after the end of the “age of extremes”. Welcoming the first celebration of the new anniversary, Enrico Deaglio effectively described the norm that had instituted it, calling it «a fine law: a bit like going back to school, when the teacher told you to “learn something by heart”»<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> e.d., *Questo numero*, «Diario della Memoria», 27 January 2001.



# Rebuilding and Enhance Memory. The Activity of the Lower School “G. Perotti” of Turin

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Lucanian Deputation of Homeland  
History (Italy)

The study of the individual local schools is the subject of growing interest by general and gender historiography because it allows an increasingly thorough process of valorization of the specific experiences so as to rise «a key to understanding the most general cultural and social processes»<sup>1</sup>. The historical-educational heritage of schools, that is the enormous amount of tangible and intangible assets produced by each school, represents a rich source for original research that allows not only the reconstruction of the profits of hundreds of students over a given space and time frames<sup>2</sup>, but provides information on the working conditions of their families and their origin, on the educational aspects, on the strategies used over time by schools to address topics such as child labour, migration flows (from Southern Italy first, from foreign countries today), disability, «all issues that, moreover, intersect with the wider problems of general history»<sup>3</sup>. In essence, the study of the educational realities of cities and municipalities is «an approach “from below”» that using the most varied school material allows «to return the piece of a story, which accompanies and reflects the most general transformations of society»<sup>4</sup>.

In the wake of these convictions, the “G. Perotti” Middle School in Turin, from the 2020-21 school year that became the “Perotti-Toscanini” Comprehensive Institute, has started a rich and challenging program aimed at rebuilding and safeguarding his memory. A path that has the abbreviation in its history now almost centenary, outlined below in its essential features.

<sup>1</sup> G. Bonetta, *Note sul ruolo della scuola nei processi di formazione al Sud (1860-1970)*, in G. Bonetta, S. Santamaita (edd.), *Scuola ed emancipazione civile nel Mezzogiorno*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1992, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> J. Meda, *La conservazione del patrimonio storico educativo. Il caso italiano*, in A.M. Badanelli, J. Meda (edd.), *La historia de la cultura escolar en Italia y en Espana, balance y perspectivas. Actas del I Workshop Italo-Espanol de Historia de la cultura escolar (Berlanga de Duero, 14-16 de Noviembre)*, Macerata, eum, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> D. Nardelli, *Introduzione*, in D.R. Nardelli, M.C. Giuntella (edd.), *La ricerca storica e l'uso delle fonti*, Foligno, Editoriale Umbra, 1988, p. VII.

<sup>4</sup> E. De Fort, *Prefazione*, in R. Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino. Dai saperi pratici all'istruzione triennale unica*, Potenza, EditricErmes, 2017.

Law No. 8 of 7 January 1929 established the Secondary School of Beginnings to Work, called, from 1932, Secondary School of Vocational Introduction<sup>5</sup>. It was created to «provide compulsory post-primary education up to the age of 14 [...] and to provide a first secondary education for the preparation of various trades, the practical exercise of agriculture, and to the clerical functions of exclusive order in industry and commerce»<sup>6</sup>.

It was with this measure that after a few years was established the Royal School of Initiation to Industrial Work, then Secondary School of Vocational Female “Santorre di Santarosa”, located in via Montenegro 70. In the school year 1932-33, the first of operation, the Vocational “Santorre” counted a total of 103 students, 75 of whom were promoted<sup>7</sup>; almost a decade later, in the school year 1940-41 the number of enrolled was more than doubled, for a total of 284 registrations<sup>8</sup>.

The years of the Second World War proved particularly hard for Turin, which suffered violent and continuous attacks by Anglo-American forces. The building of the “Santorre”, bombed on 18 November 1942, was evacuated in the autumn of the following year and the school moved temporarily in some makeshift premises in Via Palmieri, until in the autumn of 1944 it was located in Corso Peschiera 230, in the premises of the “Local fascist group Amos Maramotti”<sup>9</sup>.

After the failed parenthesis of fascism, the advent of the Republic, however, did not determine in the educational field, until the sixties, particular changes in the field of lower and upper secondary schools<sup>10</sup>.

At the “Santorre” the major novelty concerned a growth in the student population that gradually increased its numbers for a total of 239 pupils in the school year 1946-47; 310 in 1951-52; 302 in 1955-56; 323 in 1962-63. This phenomenon reflected the more general demographic context of the city. In fact, after the Second World War, Turin, among the main industrial centres of the peninsula, was at the center of a substantial migratory flow, coming mostly from Southern Italy, continued at least until the mid-seventies. In this way the Piedmontese capital went from 753 thousand inhabitants in 1953 to 1 million 114 thousand in 1963<sup>11</sup>.

The year 1962 represented a fundamental watershed in the history of the Italian school. Until that date, post-elementary studies were divided into different paths, and the choice of one or the other was mainly dictated by their presence or not in the residential

<sup>5</sup> Regio Decreto n. 491 del 22.04.1932. R. Gentili, *Giuseppe Bottai e la riforma fascista della scuola*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1979, pp. 42-43. On the school policy of the regime, reference is made, inter alia, to the work of J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> L. Borghi, *Educazione e autorità nell'Italia moderna*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1974, p. 301.

<sup>7</sup> Historical Archive “IC Perotti-Toscanini” di Torino (abbreviation: ASPTT), «Registro generale 1932-34»; *Ibid.*, «Protocolli 1933-36»; Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti”*, cit., pp. 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> The subjects studied were as follows: conduct, Italian language, history, geography, French language, hygiene, mathematics, elements of science, ornamental design, professional, choral singing, religion, physical education, home economics, women's work. ASPTT, class records.

<sup>9</sup> ASPTT, «Rendiconti 1944-45», «Protocolli 1.10.1942 - 4.07.1947», acts n. 252 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See T. Tomasi, *La scuola italiana dalla dittatura alla repubblica*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1976.

<sup>11</sup> G. Fofi, *L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1975; F. Levi, *L'immigrazione*, in N. Tranfaglia (edd.), *Storia di Torino. IX. Gli anni della Repubblica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999, pp. 157-179; F. Levi, B. Maida (edd.), *La città e lo sviluppo. Crescita e disordine a Torino, 1945-1970*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2002.

areas where students resided, the attendance costs and social background of the pupil's family of origin. With measure n. 1859 of 31/12/1962, the Single Middle School was established, with a new compulsory course of study of eight years, including a first elementary cycle and a subsequent three-years<sup>12</sup>.

With this law, which abolished Vocational Introduction, the "Santorre di Santarosa" became a middle school and the 1963-64 school year, the first of the reform, recorded the presence of 9 first year classes for a total of 225 pupils; in the school year 1966-67, instead, it changed name. We read in the explanatory statement written in extraordinary session by the teachers: «Currently in Turin there are three schools with the same titles» so «by invitation of the Provveditorato agli Studi di Torino and for obvious reasons of opportunity», as «the common name has brought and brings considerable confusion both in correspondence and in the very identification of the three schools, it was considered necessary to change the title». The report states that the sitting was lively but orderly. The majority of professors are inclined to propose names of illustrious Piedmontese personalities<sup>13</sup>. The choice, with as many as 27 preferences out of 49, fell on Giuseppe Perotti, General of the Army, engineer of the Engineer, leading exponent of the Piedmontese CLN, killed by the fascists at the Martinetto shooting range in 1944<sup>14</sup>.

In the school year 1967-68, the total number of pupils of the "Perotti" reached 691, which increased to 794 two years later: despite the opening of 4 branches, a part of the students was still forced to double shift due to the lack of classrooms<sup>15</sup>.

However, something seemed to move in positive for the immediate future, so much so that the same manager with optimism announced: «the situation will be changed from 1 October 1971, the date on which the new building in Via delle Tofane should be ready»<sup>16</sup>, as actually happened. The year 1972-73 probably represented a record for the middle school "Perotti": the total amount of the enrolled students was 1025 divided into 41 classes; while the following school year recorded for the first time the full-time experimentation with flattering results confirmed by both teachers and parents of the pupils involved<sup>17</sup>. In the following school years there was a physiological decline in the enrollment of "Perotti", dictated by the birth of new institutions that led to a more equitable distribution of the student population: so in the school year 1985-1986 the total number of pupils was 569, rising to 359 in 1995-96<sup>18</sup>.

Starting from the school year 1999-2000 the school of via Tofane has incorporated a new branch: the Middle School "Felice Maritano" located in via Marsigli, 25. The latter was born in 1974 from a splitting of the "Perotti" itself and had taken the initial name of "Scuola media di via Monte Ortigara", from the heading of the road where it was located,

<sup>12</sup> F. Sisinni, *La scuola media dalla legge Casati ad oggi*, Roma, Armando, 1982, pp. 100-101.

<sup>13</sup> ASPPT, «Report, 15.11.1966», «Registro dei verbali dei consigli di classe, 1950-1970», pp. 23-24.

<sup>14</sup> For its history, see G. Pansa, *Viva l'Italia libera. Storia e documenti del primo Comitato militare del C.L.N. regionale piemontese*, Torino, Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Piemonte, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Labriola, *La scuola media "G. Perotti" di Torino*, cit., pp. 35 ss.

<sup>16</sup> ASPPT, «Headmaster's report 18.03.1970», «M-2, elenchi alunni».

<sup>17</sup> ASPPT, «Rendiconti from 1968-69 to 1972-73».

<sup>18</sup> ASPPT, «Class records» of the years mentioned.

and had had inherited from “Perotti” 599 students. In 1975 it was named after Felice Maritano<sup>19</sup> and from the school year 1977-78 it moved its headquarters to via Marsigli, 25<sup>20</sup>.

In more recent times, between 1975 and 2000, the “Perotti” has recorded an average of 576 enrolled pupils per school year, of little advanced to the fifteen years 2000-2015, that was 544. Drawing on profit figures for promotions, their share has grown considerably since the mid-1970s, when only in few circumstances it fell below 90%. On the contrary, it was reached only once during the Fascism (1941-42) and even on no occasion in the following twenty years where, on the contrary, 80% was reached at most and on only four occasions. In the most recent period, finally, the school in question has proved to be far more “severe” than the regional average: 10.71% against 6.4% in 1991-92; 6.7% against 4% in 1996-97<sup>21</sup>.

The reflection on the possibility of reconstructing and enhancing the history of the “Perotti” was born almost randomly, when in 2012 the Headmaster Davide Babboni and the Administrative Director Domenica Polimeni, following an infiltration of water in the premises of the archive, took the decision to arrange and put order between the papers that had accumulated for decades. However, we were not indifferent to the emergence of a very rich documentation dating back to the thirties and which also reported denominations of schools other than the current one, symptom of an intricate, long and fascinating history, but also of difficult inquiry<sup>22</sup>.

With the leadership of Simone Paiano, PhD in the field of philology and sensitive to the above-mentioned issues, the aforementioned path has resumed. Between April and June 2015, the “Project Archive” began, aimed at the recovery and cataloging of all this material: in a first phase on-site inspections have been made in order to know the consistency and type and this activity has been carried out in both the current locations of the school, the one of via Tofane and the other of the branch in via Marsigli. The next phase concerned the rejection of a part of the files of which only a few sample years have been preserved; finally, the phase of the census, namely to determine the type of materials, their consistency and their extremes chronological. Daniela Marendino, professional archivist, has therefore catalogued the entire documentation, creating a complete and exhaustive information file<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Policeman, member of the Special Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Judicial Police set up by General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, Maritano took a decisive part in the investigations that led to the capture of Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini, historical leaders of the Red Brigades. In yet another risky anti-terrorist operation, Maritano died on October 15, 1974. ASPPTT, *Felice Maritano. Maresciallo maggiore dei Carabinieri medaglia d'oro al V. M. e medaglia d'oro al V. C. Alla Memoria*, Torino, 1981; F. Paterniti, *Tutti gli uomini del generale. La storia inedita della lotta al terrorismo*, Torino, Melampo, 2016, pp. 60-66.

<sup>20</sup> ASPPTT, «Maritano», «Rendiconti, 1995-2001».

<sup>21</sup> Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino*, cit., pp. 39-43; Cgil Scuola Torino Piemonte, *La formazione e la scuola di fronte al cambiamento nella società (Convegno di Studi, Torino, 2-3 dicembre 1987)*, Torino, Formazione 80, 1988, p. 6; Osservatorio Istruzione Piemonte, *Rapporto 2009*, Torino, Ires Piemonte, 2010, p. IX; Osservatorio Istruzione Piemonte, *Il sistema istruzione in Piemonte. Le tendenze degli anni Novanta dalla scuola materna all'Università*, Torino, Ires Piemonte, 1998, pp. 63-64.

<sup>22</sup> S. Paiano, *Introduzione*, in Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino*, cit., pp. 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> P. Galliano, *Nella rete dei musei*, in R. Labriola (ed.), *La Scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino tra storia e*

At the same time as this work of reorganization, after having received the enthusiastic approval of the Manager, I began the study of the papers aimed at providing a reconstruction of the events of the “Perotti” that initially took shape in a small article on-line<sup>24</sup>. However, the amount of documentary resources available and the approaching 60-year anniversary of the school’s naming by General Giuseppe Perotti, represented an occasion too greedy not to try to carry out a more organic and detailed study. In 2016, the volume *La scuola media «G. Perotti» di Torino. Dai saperi pratici all’istruzione triennale unica* took shape, published by the EditricErmes house of Potenza, for the editorial of which I made use of the valuable suggestions of Ester De Fort, professor at the University of Turin, which has, by the way, drawn up the preface. The book was presented on November 15, 2016, exactly 60 years after that college of teachers that had decided to change the name of the school. The rich day of celebration has developed in the morning through some initiatives at the branch “Maritano”. In the afternoon, in the headquarters of the “Perotti”, moderated by Liliana Campia, there was a large conference with the interventions, among others, of the Head Master, Paiano, who outlined the activities carried out to safeguard the historical heritage of the school; Luciano Boccalatte, director of the Historical Institute of the Resistance of Turin, on the figure of General Perotti; of Merandino on the work of reorganization of the archive; of myself on the contents of the book; of Pizzigoni, of Indire, on the role and function of the school museums; of Carla Perotti, descendant of General Perotti himself.

On the same occasion the historical archive of the school was inaugurated, which was decided to be named after Eulalia Mantovan, the student of the “Perotti”, then still “Santorre di Santarosa”, who tragically lost his life in an aerial bombardment in the night between 19 and 20 November 1942 along with forty other Turin citizens. Eulalia, nicknamed “Vanni”, was killed with her mother and her one-year-old sister. The news, laconically reported in the class register of the time, aroused such fear in the other students of the “Santorre” that from that day, next to the name of 230 out of 300 of them, it turned out the annotation: «leaves the school because of enemy raids»<sup>25</sup>. In memory of Mantovan’s tragic death, a commemorative plaque was put at the entrance of the archive. Returning to the book, we had the opportunity to present it also at the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Book Fair in Turin, which took place between 9 and 13 May 2019<sup>26</sup>: for the occasion Lucio Attorre, professor of History of the School at the University of Basilicata, spoke too.

In 2016 the “Perotti” joined the project, proposed by the city of Turin in 2007, “Do you want to build your School Museum?” conceived by museiscuol@ of the Archives

*pedagogia*, Potenza, EditricErmes, 2020, pp. 79-82; D. Marendino, *Poveri ma belli. Gli archivi delle scuole: un Vademecum*, Torino, Istituto Piemontese per la Storia della Resistenza “G. Agosti”, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Storia-della-scuola.pdf>. (last access: 20.02.2019).

<sup>25</sup> ASPTT, «Registro di classe 1942-43»; Labriola, *La scuola media “G. Perotti”*, cit., pp. 18-19; see also, on line, the historical archive of «La Stampa», 27.11.1942.

<sup>26</sup> See <https://consiglio.basilicata.it/archivio-news/detail.jsp?otype=1120&id=3436671#.Y15GZnbMLIU> (last access: 10.01.2019).



Service, Museum and Cultural Heritage of the City of Turin and by the Cultural Association Strumento Testa, with the scientific advice of INDIRE - National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research<sup>27</sup>. The project, which is part of a work of a European program, "Comenius Regio" (2009-2011), has recorded excellent acclaim and so on 2 November 2015 five schools, in which the first museums were born, signed a "Network Agreement" to develop and support the School Museums; On 21 November 2016, the City of Turin and the Network of School Museums signed a memorandum of understanding with the aim of strengthening the project "Do you want to build your school museum?" and increasing the number of participating institutes<sup>28</sup>. After two years of collaborations and through a long work transversal and interdisciplinary teachers and students of "Perotti" have created their own museum, the thirteenth of the above project, christened "a school... many stories" (and whose logo was made by the students themselves through a competition), which was inaugurated on 21 May 2018. The permanent exhibition of the "Perotti" is divided into two environments: there is a historical laboratory that contains teaching materials of the past (registers, books, etc.) and a time line created by panels composed of images and descriptions that reconstruct the long history of the school. There is also a scientific laboratory with numerous current and historical teaching materials, divided into thematic areas, from chemistry to physics, from biology to anatomy. The description and cataloguing of the objects present in the latter environment have been patiently carried out by groups of students, who have also created QR Codes, with their recorded voices, that illustrate everything present in the museum<sup>29</sup>.

The day of presentation began with the ritual greetings of Director Paiano, who focused on the important historical-pedagogical-educational function of the program; continued with the interventions of Paola Galliano, head of the museum, by Francesca Leon, Councillor for the City of Turin, Francesca Troise, District 3, Nunzia Del Vento, manager of the comprehensive "Gabelli - Pestalozzi" and contact person of the network of School Museums, by Simona Ricci, director of the Associazione Abbonamenti Musei and finally of myself. After the screening of a video curated by Sabrina Cugliero, who told the steps of the realization of the exhibition, the students of some classes, instructed by Galliano, accompanied on his visit the speakers and the many guests intervened<sup>30</sup>.

As Francesca Pizzigoni of Indire pointed out, «The School Museum proposes itself as a space of support and enhancement to training that represents the transition from the classroom to the learning environment, creating a "permanent laboratory" that is a place of participatory learning and inclusion, and a gym for study through sources»<sup>31</sup>. A "good

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/propostemusei/toeprov/scuola-secondaria-di-primo-grado-g-perotti.shtml> (last access: 10.11.2022).

<sup>28</sup> See [http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/forma/biblio/biblio\\_base/rete-scolastica-dedicata-al-tema-dei-musei-scolast.shtml](http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/forma/biblio/biblio_base/rete-scolastica-dedicata-al-tema-dei-musei-scolast.shtml) (last access: 10.11.2022).

<sup>29</sup> See [https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/?page\\_id=400](https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/?page_id=400) (last access: 13.10.2022).

<sup>30</sup> See [https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/?page\\_id=487](https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/?page_id=487). The event was also reported in some newspaper articles, in particular «La Stampa» and «la Repubblica» both on 19 May 2018 (last access: 13.10.2022).

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.indire.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Pizzigoni-Contributo-Scientifico-MUSEI-SCOLASTICI.pdf> (last access: 13.10.2022).

practice to propose as a model to encourage the rediscovery of the history and identity of your school, where students are the active protagonists of learning». Thus starting from the historical-didactic heritage of each institute, with a path of work based on sources, we arrive at the creation of new laboratory spaces created by themselves. Permanent places at the service of daily, interdisciplinary and inclusive formation and, at the same time, spaces for active citizenship, open to the whole community»<sup>32</sup>.

As part of the continuation of this rich collaborative synergy with the relevant bodies, in the school year 2018-19 the “Perotti” participated in the PON/FSE 10.2.5 FSEPON-PI-2018-5, dedicated to “Strengthening education in cultural, artistic and landscape heritage” project to which more than a dozen Turin schools have joined. Specifically the school in question, through the form «How do I interrogate an archive?» was intended to work on the enormous documentary heritage preserved in it. The results were presented on 22 May 2019 as part of a public ceremony that took place in the large rooms of the “Perotti” gym, in the presence of a rich audience of teachers, students and parents. The program was briefly introduced and outlined by myself, tutor of the course PON, followed by the greeting of the school authorities in the person of the manager, Paiano, who focused on the importance of promoting and enhancing those historical peculiarities-artistic-scientific that schools often retain, but do not value adequately. The word then passed to the talented teachers of the course, Franca Treccarichi and Francesca Ortolano, officials of the municipality of Turin, who outlined the various stages of work of the students, the novelties and curiosities of the latter in addressing a new topic and little known as the archive: its functions, its usefulness, its composition and, above all, the way to make it better known and usable, to the outside world. In this direction have done their excellent work 20 enrolled in the course, who were the protagonists of the continuation of the beautiful initiative, showing the contents of their final product made through a paper production (panels, labels) electronic (power point) and guided tours to the public present<sup>33</sup>.

The reconstruction of the historical memory of the “Perotti” continued alongside the analysis of its current role in the educational context of Turin. To this end, the last initiative in order of time concerned the publication of a second book that combines the interest for what has already passed, even the most important for the present and for the immediate future, in view of the new and diversified needs arising from a society in continuous development and change<sup>34</sup>.

The volume, which saw the participation of 15 authors also intended to give voice to all the components of the school: this explains the participation of teachers, students and

<sup>32</sup> See <https://www.indire.it/2018/05/21/inaugurato-il-tredicesimo-museo-scolastico-alla-scuola-perotti-di-torino> (last access: 13.10.2022).

<sup>33</sup> The realization and the success of the project could count on the collaboration, in different ways and stages, of colleagues Paola Galliano, Mario Palazzolo, Daniela Fedeli, Patrizia Aliberti, Paola De Stefanis, Mariacristina Tisi, Rosanna Arena, as well as the official of Aschettino's secretariat. For details of the final product realized: see <http://www.comune.torino.it/museiscuola/esperienze/primopatrimonio-siamo-noi-.html> (last access: 20.10.2022).

<sup>34</sup> Labriola (ed.), *La Scuola media “G. Perotti” di Torino tra storia, cit.*

parents. The historical essays of the undersigned and the director, Simone Paiano, focus on the typology of students enrolled in the now ninety years of the history of “Perotti” and the peculiarities of their profit. These elements have been strongly influenced by many factors: from emigration to the many legislative changes that have involved education in Italy, not least the birth of the single Middle School. Several points of discussion emerge that lead to reflection on the role and functions of the three-year period of middle school, a time span that plays an important and delicate role in the path of growth not only intellectual of adolescent pupils. Along the same lines, some works reconstruct the biographies of protagonists of national history and culture who have linked their personal lives in different ways to the school in question: the writer Giovanna Righini Ricci and the heroine of the Piedmontese Resistance Frida Malan, who taught there; General Giuseppe Perotti to whom the school is named (Flavia Harabagiu, Martina Paternò and Carlotta Tango). The wealth of educational heritage preserved at the “Perotti” finds ample space in the works on the construction of the school museum (Paola Galliano) and on the analysis of a magazine published by the school for over twenty years from the nineties (Benedetta Comes and Giorgia Piccolo).

Basic are the comparisons between the staff of the school and the parents of the students with regard to aspects and issues fundamental for the proper performance of each educational institution: one of the contributions of the volume, by Nunzio Di Bartolo, parent and former President of the School Council of the school, offers just such a cross-section of such decision-making moments. In a current perspective and with clear pedagogical intentions are the issues related to the inclusion of foreign students and those with Special Educational Needs, analyzed by Cinzia Gallo Picard, Maria Perosino and Laura Grosso; Similar to the projects and activities aimed at initiating the most disadvantaged students to certain learning paths and work together, with a view to a more immediate and effective employment, have inspired the essay by Anna Climaco. Again, two studies, one on the statistics of the choices after middle school (by Stefania Burdino) and the other on the results of the tests Invalsi (by Mariacristina Tisi), compared, like the previous essays, to the national context, questions and let the expectations and the degree of preparation of the students shine through. The book, with the intervention of some of the authors, was presented at the headquarters of the “Perotti” on 17 May 2022 under the patronage of the Salone del Libro<sup>35</sup>. In addition, on the same date, the “International Museum Day 2022” (IDM ICOM 2022) did not fall by chance. So with the accession to the the initiatives of “The Week of the Turin School Museums 2022”, the “Perotti” has once again intended to provide its significant contribution to activities aimed at safeguarding the educational heritage. Mariacristina Tisi, a member of the Executive staff of “Perotti-Toscanini”, Paola Galliano, contact person of the School Museum, Franca Treccarichi and Francesca Ortolano, representatives of the Culture Area, Archive, Museums and Libraries of the City of Turin. Skilfully moderated by Angelo

<sup>35</sup> Salone Off 2022 (34° Salone internazionale del libro di Torino). The book has been reviewed by Ester De Fort in the journal «Studi Piemontesi», giugno 2021 and by Stefano Garzaro in «La voce e il tempo», 03.01.2021.

Ciotola, the day continued with the intervention of the well-known writer and journalist Stefano Garzaro, who through a jump in history has evoked events, characteristics and curiosities of the Pozzo Strada district where the “Perotti-Toscanini” is located. Moreover, the activities also saw the protagonists of the students of class 2E, who skilfully instructed by Elena Dini, referent of the school’s historical archives, illustrated the results of the project: “An archival survey”. Finally, the students of classes 1E, 1F and 2E, prepared by Paola Galliano, guided guests and speakers to discover the wonders of the school’s Archive and especially the museum, describing with skill and abundance of details the glorious tradition of our Institute<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.icperottitoscanini.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/relaz-conclusiva-evento-17-maggio.pdf> (last access: 20.11.2022).



# The Collodi School. Educational Atmospheres in the Work of Carlo Lorenzini

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## 1. *The two schools, by child and by adult: Collodi expert on pedagogical issues*

Carlo Lorenzini, better known under his pseudonym Collodi, author of one of the most original literature classics for adults and children, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, was also a journalist, caricaturist, music and theatre critic, playwright, fairy tale translator and school reader, and text and guide compiler. Might he also be defined as an educationalist or a scholar of educational issues? What is certain is that his ideas on schooling were clear and courageous. Collodi's focus was on practice rather than theory. His systematic interest in school dates to the advent of his shrewd observation of the problems of Unified Italy and he did so as a sceptical, ironic and always lively lampoonist until he was no longer content with acting as straightforward observer and commentator on schooling, but decided to enter the classrooms in person. And what better way could there be than to «make himself a child amongst children», a «rascal amongst rascals», by writing a series recounting the adventures of Giannettino and his friends. He thus explored the school world from a range of angles and perspectives: both adult and child over the same years, with his characteristically acute tone and biting satire as common denominator. His aim was to mock certain social devices and a post-unification schooling lacking in identity and replete with backwardness, immobilism and chronic and recurrent ills. I will attempt here to reconstruct Collodi's school adventure from the starting point of the adult journalist, the alarmed and critical chronicler, a man who worked in satirical journalism for over forty years. As such, in the light of the ability to get acquainted with an issue which is characteristic of journalists, it can be argued that Collodi acquired a full knowledge of the facts regarding the internal Italian situation, one in which «while huge sums were put into the army and navy (and then overseas lands and colonial adventures), whilst grandiose, deceptively opulent and unproductive public works were indulged in (such as a full-blown “marble homeland”) with a rail network used for electoral purposes, money for education was scrimped and saved»<sup>2</sup>. Collodi's spotlight shone, in particular, on the school bureaucratic and legislative apparatus, longue durée he school as an offshoot of the state, not primarily as a place of education and necessary means with

<sup>1</sup> Simone di Biasio wrote sections 1 and 4; Teresa Gargano wrote sections 2 and 3.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bertacchini, *Collodi educatore*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1964, p. 45.

which to build educational processes. Collodi was well aware that measures requiring mandatory schooling (the Casati Law of 13 November 1859 and then the Coppino Law of 15 July 1877 no. 3691)<sup>3</sup> were not accompanied by socio-economic action designed to effectively ensure lower class access to education, with the poor frequently obliged to take their children out of the 6 to 9 years of mandatory schooling required in order to work and earn money. Lorenzini certainly did not keep his views to himself and expressed them firmly and with “serious humourism”, offering a valid critical vision of the relationship between school and material needs. After the Coppino Law came into force, literacy rates remained low and school non-attendance remained high. One of the factors keeping literacy rates low was the anything but marginal problem of child labour. In a letter published on 23 February 1884 in the Florentine newspaper «La vedetta. Gazzetta del popolo» entitled *Pane e libri (A S. E. il Ministro Berti e C.)* later added to the *Note Gaie* collection published in 1892 by Giuseppe Rigutini, two years after Carlo Lorenzini's death, the latter, while conscious of the need for education, continued to criticise the mandatory education programme in its current form. His views were based on the belief that «before all else men need food and drink, protection from the elements and a roof over their heads after their patiently endured everyday hard work. Then, and only then, will they be in a state of mind enabling them to listen to their consciences and feel the ambition to improve themselves»<sup>4</sup>. He threw his weight strongly behind the idea that before universal education could be achieved, what was needed were measures appropriate to the country's real social and economic state of affairs to guarantee, first and foremost, fundamental respect for human dignity. Only later would it be possible to move in the direction of «“national” and politically unifying education»<sup>5</sup>. This respect, as he saw it, did not exist even for teachers and Collodi condemned this in a satirical and fictitious letter sent directly to Minister Coppino written ironically in the name of Florentines alarmed as soon as the minister «hinted that... he was thinking» of a mandatory education law, later conserved in the imaginary archive, *Società degli ultimi fiorentini*<sup>6</sup>. In his letter, Collodi sees primary school teachers as nineteenth century Count Ugolinis, in his wise satirical style: «A count, if you like, without a county, without Gaddi, without Anselmucci and without Archbishop Ruggeri, eating the back of his skull. But in exchange that eternal joker, nature, gave him a stomach so ravenous that he would eat even the school's benches, which for him means hunger»<sup>7</sup>. The first task of the mandatory school teacher was counteracting illiteracy. Once again, in his letter to

<sup>3</sup> G. Ricuperati, *Storia della scuola in Italia: dall'Unità ad oggi*, Brescia, La scuola, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> C. Collodi, *Note gaie*, Firenze, Bemporad & f., 1893, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> Bertacchini, *Collodi educatore*, cit., p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> The letter he sent to Minister Coppino is present in the story entitled *Gli ultimi fiorentini* in the *Occhi e nasi* collection that came out for the first time in 1881. The outcome of a reworking of earlier writings this book – mainly satirical tales and articles on costumes, physiology, caricatures and vignettes – is made up of seventeen stories delineating character-types in their natural context. *Gli ultimi fiorentini* is structured into various short chapters, including *Come studiavano i fiorentini*, in which Collodi starts from a vision of young people's education in Grand Duchy Florence with insights into the education status quo in post-Unification Italy using the expedient of the satirical letter sent to Minister Coppino after the mandatory education law.

<sup>7</sup> C. Collodi, *Occhi e nasi*, in Id., *Opere*, D. Marcheschi (ed.), Milano, Mondadori, 1995, p. 319.



Minister Coppino, after an ironic side swipe against the succession of duties forced on citizens, he «called for respect for the illiterate», in a sarcastic condemnation around the demoralising and urgent issue of illiteracy which, a few years before the taking of Rome, had been intolerably high:

Your excellence, if we do not block the hole in the dyke, with all this overflowing of mandatory laws we will, one day, end up drowning our much vaunted freedom, that freedom which cost us so much and which, God free us, we have not yet finished paying for. [...] And then it is reasonable to ask: why bully these poor illiterates! Some time ago illiterates were counted and the abacus of government statistics showed us that they had reached the respectable figure of seventeen million. All this showed that the Kingdom's educated people numbered barely a third of the population. How is it then that the few presume to lord it over the many and impose their will on them? Let us remember, your Excellency, that the universally accepted principle of respect for the majority, is the cornerstone on which the whole ingenious institutional mechanism – which, if a name must be given it, is to be called liberal – rests<sup>8</sup>.

## 2. *On the schoolchildren's side*

His school-related journalism, like most of his publishing work, can, given the right interpretation, be seen as focusing on and feeding into the debate around the government's measures and certain neglected, awkward and sometimes even dangerous matters. By means of paradox and comic flair, Collodi's articles on school touched on matters of importance and constituted a courageous condemnation of the system's structural defects. Carlo Lorenzini never threw off his journalistic garb and this backdrop – drawn from his experience as sceptical and sometimes controversial chronicler and humourist – continued to come to the fore whenever he touched on the school universe. He believed that children could not be educated passively by rigidly imposing norms on them, but that they needed to take an active part in the educational process capable of inspiring their interest in education. It was, in fact, well known that the objective of Umberto-era educational literature was to create a new Italian, a worthy citizen devoted to country and family, and that this was to be achieved via a stuffy educational dynamic consisting of imparting moral and theoretical precepts and paternalistic lectures to ignorant learners in accordance with a plastic role differentiation. Thus, translating *I racconti delle fate* for Paggi in 1876 with the precious illustrations of Enrico Mazzanti, Collodi decided to get out into the children's literature fray and contribute to the renewal of this literary genre. Adult Collodi turned child to speak to his little readers on their own level, seeking to appeal to children's psychologies by creating living characters with human characteristics. Even his puppet is less wooden than children educated in accordance with the rigid rules of bourgeois education. Pinocchio represents the full development of an industrious educational process oriented towards freedom and

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318.

resistance to ready-made norms already set in motion by Giannettino and Minuzzolo, centre-stage players in the reading book cycle. It is important to distinguish between the books designed mainly for school use such as *Giannettino* (1877), *Minuzzolo* (1878) and the whole series of adventures *Viaggio per l'Italia di Giannettino* (1880, 1883, 1886), *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* (1890), *La grammatica di Giannettino* (1883), *L'abbaco di Giannettino* (1884) and *Libro di lezioni per la seconda classe elementare* (1889), on one hand, and readers such as *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1883), *Storie allegre* (1886), *Il regalo del Capo d'Anno* and, naturally, *I racconti delle Fate* on the other. It is clear that the Giannettino series constituted a cycle of novels with a common series of elements including their central character, while what the readers share is ironic self-references and certain characters. The social status of its characters and its setting places the textbook series in the bourgeois novel category while the readers are examples of comic-parody novels<sup>9</sup>. Collodi succeeded in writing books responding to the need to educate and instruct together, and he did so thanks to a simple but brilliant intuition, namely multi-level books with an autonomous narrative framework designed to link up the various textbook notions. The links between the framework and the textbook were achieved via dialogue and interview, processes which were characteristic of journalism and thus second nature to him. Encyclopaedism alternates with the transmission of knowledge and the socialisation and genuine depiction of the everyday lives of the children in his stories, with the former often taking precedence over the latter but order always being re-established, together with certain anecdotes attracting public attention. The characters are presented in broad brushstrokes at the outset directly by the author to readers, a typical ingredient of children's storytelling designed to generate empathy and stimulate pupils' interest<sup>10</sup>. Collodi pays a great deal of attention to language and succeeds, teacher-style, in ensuring that pupils are guided to the discovery of the fundamental elements from the starting point of observation of the facts. In the textbooks, education is set in motion by observation, from sometimes painful experiences, prompting error recognition and didactic commentary. «Lessons are almost always related to the characters' real experiences: zoology lessons take place during museum visits, botany lessons during villa trips imparted by gardeners in their greenhouses»<sup>11</sup>. Irony and satire sublimate the writer's creatures: «Collodi wrote mixed language texts in which spontaneous oral language is used to knock traditional rhetoric off its pedestal: thus the most vernacular language, that of everyday communication and expression, with its

<sup>9</sup> D. Marcheschi, *Carlo Collodi scrittore per bambini*, in *Carlo Lorenzini-Collodi nel centenario*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> He addresses his readers directly right from the opening pages of his textbooks. The "boys" are there, for example, in the opening phrase of *La Grammatica di Giannettino*: «Have you boys met your friend Giannettino?» (C. Collodi, *La grammatica di Giannettino: per le scuole elementari*, Firenze, Felice Paggi, 1883, p. 5) or in *Giannettino*: «And now children, if you pay attention, I will tell you the story of Giannettino word for word» (C. Collodi, *Giannettino: libro per i ragazzi*, Firenze, Felice Paggi, p. 5).

<sup>11</sup> L. Volpicelli, *La via di Pinocchio*, in *Studi collodiani, Atti del I Convegno internazionale (Pescia, 5-7 ottobre 1974)*, Pistoia, Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia e Pescia, 1976, p. 31.

formulas and clichés, and high language generate a zesty blend of parody and comedy which is always, however, extraordinarily natural»<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. *In classrooms with Giannettino, a work without educational purpose*

After *I racconti delle fate* the intuition of the Paggi brothers that Collodi was the right man to act as mediator between united Italy's language needs and the purposes and programmes of its embryonic educational literature turned out to have been a brainwave. The result was a reading book and something of an aid for pupils, whose intention was to intercept the vitalistic impulses of the new educational thought both in classroom teaching and in a new renewed children's literature spirit. *Giannettino*, a retelling of Alessandro Parravicini's *Giannetto*, the primary educational book in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the prelude to a narrative cycle of work for children once again edited by the Paggi publishing house, within the fertile educational publishing climate of the day. This series of books is illustrative of the rapid growth of a plan by means of rereadings, additions and thematic details. As Minicucci, a scholar who has done a great deal of work on Carlo Lorenzini's handwritten papers has shown<sup>13</sup>, when Alessandro Paggi reported to Angelo Orvieto that *Giannettino* had originally simply been a children's novella with no other educational purpose, he was telling the simple truth. Collodi set to work on this manuscript and changed it, before submitting it to the publishers two months later in the final form we know it in. The work done in these two months, as the papers show, focused on the study of educational concepts, adding concepts and notions designed to reinforce the educational aspects of a work which remained rooted in the creative-narrative tradition. «*A labor improbus* for a journalist [...], dealing with educational concepts rooted in moralism, dogmatism and notions which he had little or no familiarity with»<sup>14</sup>. The results of these attempts to make an educational text of the work are tangible in the chapters focusing on the natural sciences, geology basics, geography and history, for example, using Parravicini's *Giannetto* model. All this represented a medley testifying to a moment of personal growth stretching from *Giannettino* to *La lanterna magica di Giannettino*, the last volume in the cycle written in 1890, the year Lorenzini died. Collodi's was certainly a novel idea and a new character, but the very name *Giannettino* is indicative of its traditional continuity. Collodi turned tradition on its head where «the reasons behind, and motives for, knowledge» were

<sup>12</sup> D. Marcheschi, *Dallo scrittore per gli adulti allo scrittore per i bambini*, in C. Collodi, *Opere*, cit., pp. XLVI-XLVII.

<sup>13</sup> The papers referred to are kept at Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze and the publishing house which inherited Libreria Paggi, Giunti Bemporad Marzocco. See M. J. Minicucci, *Tra l'inedito e l'edito delle carte manoscritte di Carlo Lorenzini*, in *Studi Collodiani*, cit., pp. 381-403.

<sup>14</sup> M.J. Minicucci, *Tra fantasia e didattica. Oscillazioni collodiane*, in *Pinocchio oggi. Atti del convegno pedagogico Pescia-Collodi 30 settembre-1° ottobre 1978*, Pescia, Fondazione Nazionale "Carlo Collodi", 1980, p. 225.

concerned<sup>15</sup>, but also in educational technique terms. Whilst, generalising, the subject is still the story of an irreverent rascal from an upper middle class Florentine family, who is schooled by a tutor taken on by his mother, wise Dr Boccadoro, Collodi seeks to create narrative situations in which his textbook notions are integrated more naturally and attractively into the story, not only in *Giannettino* but all the other books in the cycle too. For example, Roman history is explained by inventing a ploy involving a visit to a home gallery in *Minuzzolo* and the expedient of a journey to illustrate Italian cities fully and facilitate geography studies in *Viaggio per l'Italia di Giannettino*, a hybrid text, like most of Collodi's work, half geography literacy textbook and tourist guidebook and half children's reader. Collodi even tried his hand at grammar – at a time in which language education tools were of key importance in the dissemination of a shared language that was so crucial to educational and other debates, while the school institutions were showing themselves to be crucially important for Italianisation purposes. In this case, too, Collodi turned to the dialogue form, between Giannettino and Boccadoro, by means of functional mechanisms rather than accumulating data and rules, an exchange and a dynamic equilibrium. Collodi expertly channels his skills and mastery of language into a grammar text suitable for his target reader, namely primary school pupils in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of whom spoke dialect and were illiterate. Boccadoro and Mr Quintiliano, Minuzzolo's father, are not the only teachers. Antonio the gardener, for example, also captures the attention of Minuzzolo and his siblings, the children of his employer, with his botany lessons. Collodi's innovative intention here was to draw a complete picture of the society of the day. «Whilst the middle classes educate the lower classes, the lower classes can also educate the middle classes»<sup>16</sup>. And that's not all. A further expedient he uses is making the children themselves, those formerly bored rascals, into teachers. This is what happens in *L'abbaco di Giannettino*, in which Giannettino teaches the arithmetic basics to a carpenter, using cherries and beans for his explanations, simplifying the concepts and successfully adapting his teaching to his pupil, in contrast with the standardisation and generalisation which was the educational and school textbook norm at the time. Collodi was not, strictly speaking, an expert educator and neither was he professorial. Perhaps he was simply an instinctive teacher with a propensity for ongoing creative effort. This is why he used new and innovative technical-educational means, such as the unknown and fairy-tale tool, the magic lantern, in *La lanterna magica di Giannettino*, certainly inspiring curiosity and interest in children.

<sup>15</sup> F. Tempesti, *Collodiana*, Firenze, Salani, 1988, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Marcheschi, *Carlo Collodi scrittore per bambini*, cit., p. 85.

#### 4. La lanterna magica di Giannettino *as a visual media*

These are considered Collodi's "lesser works" and they are certainly less well known than his other books, which are 19<sup>th</sup> century children's classics and even, like *Pinocchio*, a full-blown literary masterpiece. *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* was his last work and a unique one, an extremely important legacy with a great deal to say about the role of images in narrative and, more generally, in children's literature. The period he wrote it in, 1890, was the height of a period known as "pre-cinema" or, more specifically, the "cinema of attractions", a phase which continued up to the *Belle Epoque* and, as the definition itself suggests, marked a prelude to full-blown cinema. It was a highly prolific season for the "new" arts such as photography and cinema but, more specifically, it was also a prolific "era for technical reproducibility". Collodi seems to have internalised – and this is really the right word, given the projection mechanism involved – this focus on figures right from the outset. Enrico Mazzanti illustrated this book, as he had already done with *Pinocchio*, but in this work the shift is even clearer because its words presuppose images, which are referred to in the text, and Collodi seems to have wanted to try his hand at film. It was a cinema which, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was still theatrical, a medium still imbued with fiction, tricks, magic and illusionism. Was not *Pinocchio* himself a puppet drawn from the heart of popular theatre? In actual fact, it is more exact to call *Pinocchio* a marionette but this is a mere detail. Collodi's cross-media capacity is evident and his writing is suffused with visual and theatrical profundity and an «entirely gesture-based syntax»<sup>17</sup>. In his *Guardare le figure*, it is exactly the history of "figurina" which Antonio Faeti outlines, a name for travelling "figurine" salespeople who once appealed most, but not exclusively, to children. The popular literature which took hold of the power of images in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was also called "muracciolaia": «images were often hung on walls, like lunar calendars or saint effigies. They were hung on walls and thus transmitted messages which were often very different from those passed on in establishment teaching content»<sup>18</sup>. Just as the young students who "hang" on Giannettino's lips and lantern look at the walls. In the same way that the books which perform the same function as the magic lantern are still, today, designed for walls, first and foremost those of a contemporary children's literature master such as Hervé Tullet<sup>19</sup>. Mazzanti's stylistic choices also conjure up a multi-prizewinning children's literature work such as Tom Haugomat's *A travers*<sup>20</sup>, a French artist with an extremely distinctive and hypermodern style who illustrated the life of a man through his vision, often inserting images into spheres which are also the shape of eyes, binoculars and also Collodi's magic lantern.

A key figure required for the functioning of the magic lantern show was the huckster, a role tailor-made for Giannettino who often called for attention – to watch – with a

<sup>17</sup> G.V. Paolozzi, *Letteratura per l'infanzia*, Roma, Istituto editoriale del mezzogiorno, 1964.

<sup>18</sup> A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> See H. Tullet, *Il gioco della luce*, Milano, L'ippocampo, 2019 and H. Tullet, *Il gioco delle ombre*, Milano, L'ippocampo, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> See H. Haugomat, *A Travers*, Milano, Terre di Mezzo, 2019.

«want to see this scene? Here it is in my lantern», or «no sooner said than done, it appears in the eye of the lantern». What is the role, strictly speaking, of a medium that acts as visual aid in school teaching? Faeti was well aware that the figures he liked to speak of would be replaced «by more modern and effective media»<sup>21</sup> which would generate an «iconosphere» that he saw as flatter, more standardised. Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are surrounded by the possibilities offered by virtual or augmented reality. The categories reception is analysed by are essentially the same as those used for “writing *tout court*”, for literature *tout court* and thus children’s literature – *empathy*, *escape* and *engagement*, together with *embodiment* resort to «a terminology which harks back in full to the reference points adopted by cognitivist literary criticism and widely used in campaigns promoting young people’s reading»<sup>22</sup>. More specifically, the magic lantern talked about in Collodi’s book resembles an embryonic example of what are now called *enhanced books*, books, as the word suggests, which are “augmented”, which are «read, listened to, looked at, enriched with images, cartoons and, often, games»<sup>23</sup>. It is nothing more than a trick by which to pass on knowledge and skills, which Lorenzini applied to the character of his children’s books for school. Moreover, the abilities which can certainly be acquired in this way included one that was “new” for the era in which Giannettino was written, namely visual literacy, «the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.), and that visual experience or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality»<sup>24</sup>. Collodi takes these iconic demands on board with what might be seen as precocious sensibility, but he did so – and this is significant for us – not solely in the context of personal reading, the education offered by the street (which all his characters have at their fingertips), but also the public milieu of schooling. Lorenzini is suggesting *media education ante litteram*: it is the publishing operation that is interesting to the same extent as his idea of inserting visual supports into the school classroom, also because, to tell the truth, the text does not have Pinocchio’s narrative and literary ambitions. In fact it mostly conforms to the pedagogical rhetoric of its day.

At a certain point in the story one of the young students in Collodi’s narrative asks: «“Would it be possible to ask, Mr Giannettino, how you came to learn all the wonderful things you are telling us of?” “I’ll tell you right away. Just a few days ago I was lucky enough to be able to read a book which we might truly call a golden book, written for the education of men required to live in the world. And after reading it I said to myself right away: - Why not adapt it for young people’s reading too? Why not also make it attractive to young people with a few figures? Why not make a sort of magic lantern out

<sup>21</sup> Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> L. Cantatore, *Libri, lettura e realtà virtuale: un’alleanza possibile?*, in L. Cantatore (ed.), *Primo: leggere. Per un’educazione alla lettura*, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2017, pp. 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> M. Campagnaro, *Letteratura tradizionale e letteratura digitale. Quali proposte per continuare a leggere*, in M. Campagnaro (ed.), *Le terre della fantasia. Leggere la letteratura per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza*, Roma, Donzelli, 2014, p. 224.

<sup>24</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Pictorial Turn. Saggi di cultura visuale*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2017, p. 17.

of a few figures?»<sup>25</sup> Giannettino confesses that he wants to give his lantern to the “best” of the boys, but the boy in question replies that it would be a «waste», like «giving us a book *in* which we do not know how to read»<sup>26</sup>. This choice of the preposition “in” casts light on many issues revolving around defining the role of books in school education in accordance with Collodi’s ideas: the text casts off its two dimensional quality and acquires a third dimension to get into. The book is not only to be read but also to be accessed. One must get inside it, travel through it, as Giorgio Manganelli superbly stressed in his ultra-personal *Pinocchio. Un libro parallelo*:

No book ends. Books are not long, they are wide. Pages, as their shape reveals, are none other than a door to the book below, or to a further door which leads to another. Finishing a book means opening a last door, so that neither this door nor any others we have opened thus far to cross a threshold are closed. And those which have endlessly opened continue to open up and do so in a never ending creaking of hinges. A book finished is infinite, a closed book is open. The whole of a book is gathered around us, all its pages are one page, a single door. The door is thus thrown open not only so that I can cross its threshold but the door itself is its own threshold [...]<sup>27</sup>.

The school outlined in the work analysed to date was, in the last analysis, none other than a theatre for Carlo Lorenzini. And as such, other types of show compete with it and thus, inevitably, other media. It is a theatrical space, and tricks, illusions and magic are thus used. How else might study, learning, even mnemonization, be magnificently defined? Are the literary methods adopted by writers to keep us glued to the page, to a description, to a character, the ones that have defined the diverse literary genres, not perhaps tricks? Who knows. Perhaps if we thought of school classrooms as theatres or cinemas, a Pinocchio or two less might cast them off in favour of quite different types of show.

<sup>25</sup> Collodi, *La Lanterna magica*, cit., pp. 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> G. Manganelli, *Pinocchio. Un libro parallelo*, Milano, Adelphi, 2002, p. 63.





# The Palidoro Children's House Diaries of Irene Bernasconi (1915-1916)

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## *Introduction*

I had chosen to do schooling in a place where no one wanted to go, among primitive people, in need of affection; among even dirty, barefoot, ragged children: children close to the earth. In a lost place at the bottom of some little-known valley or in an abandoned place in the desolate lands of the Maremma... and Palidoro is, according to the people of Ciociaria, the “maremmaccia”<sup>1</sup>.

This is how Irene Bernasconi (1886-1970) begins her diary when she was a teacher in one of the first two Montessori preschools opened by the *Ente scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano* (Agency for Farmers' Schools in the Agro Romano area) in 1915. Two important documents of school memory were born out of this experience: the *Diario della Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*<sup>2</sup> (Diary of the Palidoro Children's Home, 1915-1916) and the *Diario dell'asilo infantile di Mezzaselva*<sup>3</sup> (Diary of the Mezzaselva Preschool, 1917-1919). The *Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione “Mauro Laeng”* (Roma Tre University) conserves the original of Mezzaselva's diary for the school year 1918-1919 and some didactic materials made by the teacher, while numerous ego-documents (correspondence, various notebooks, notes, photos with captions, etc.) are kept by the heirs.

In this contribution we intend to present the work of Irene Bernasconi, a preschool teacher in Palidoro, where she decided to follow in the footsteps of dozens of “garibaldini dell'alfabeto” (pioneers of the literacy) who had set out to travel through the wasteland of the Agro Romano. Even though it is an official diary, compiled at the request of the Authority, it is nevertheless an historical document of great significance: it allows us, through the eyes of a teacher, alone and a foreigner, to grasp the dramatic conditions in

<sup>1</sup> E. Di Michele (ed.) *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, Foligno, Il formichiere, 2020, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Diario di una maestra, 1915-1916*, «I Problemi della pedagogia», vol. 43, n. 1-3, 1997, pp. 32-79, with an introduction by G. Alatri (pp. 29-32); an excerpt in G. Alatri, *Il metodo Montessori e gli asili rurali: Diario di una maestra*, «Centro Studi Montessoriani. Annuario 2003: Attualità di Maria Montessori», Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2004, pp. 165-181; E. Di Michele (ed.) *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, Foligno, Il formichiere, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> I. Bernasconi, *Quando i bambini non conoscevano i colori, diario scolastico, asilo infantile di Mezzaselva 1917-1918-1919*, s.l., Circolo culturale prenestino “R. Simeoni”, 1993. An excerpt for the year 1919-1920 was also published in G. Alatri, *Gli asili d'infanzia a Roma tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Unicopli, 2013, pp. 211-229.

which families lived in a social and cultural reality so different from her own. Her gaze is always respectful, even when she is dismayed at the lack of hygiene, at the ignorance of the mothers from whom she inquires about the birth of their children and possible family consanguinity, or when she is bewildered at the reactions of the children during the first days.

Thanks to the precision with which it is compiled - with mostly factual elements to account for the children's progress - the diary gives us a glimpse of a still unknown reality, filling a gap in the history of pre-schooling in general, and of the spread of the Montessori method in Italy in particular. Indeed, if the Montessori experiences promoted by ANIMI<sup>4</sup> (in particular the work of Brunella Serpe) have been the subject of several publications, the same cannot be said of the work of the *Ente scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano*. In the book on Alessandro Marcucci by Giovanna Alatri, the Montessori schools in the Agro<sup>5</sup> are only mentioned from the mid-1920s, while Erica Moretti presents the work of the Ente in a general way in her volume<sup>6</sup> on the study of Maria Montessori's pacifism.

The opening of Montessori preschools in the Agro was the result of an insight of Alessandro Marcucci<sup>7</sup>, who had to face several challenges. Thanks to Irene Bernasconi's diary, we can verify whether this insight was a response to the real needs of the children and their families. Moreover, during her experience in Palidoro, the teacher from Ticino also compiled a private diary<sup>8</sup>, albeit on a less regular basis, in which she transcribed her impressions of the place and her state of mind. This document provides useful elements to complete the reconstruction of her experience and allows us to perceive her daily life outside the school.

Here we will consider only the experience in Palidoro, which will be addressed after briefly reviewing Teacher Bernasconi's educational path.

<sup>4</sup> B. Serpe, *L'azione educativa dell'ANIMI e la metodologia didattica di Maria Montessori*, in F. Cambi, G. Trebisacce (edd.), *I 150 anni dell'Italia unita: Per un bilancio pedagogico*, Pisa, ETS, 2012, pp. 245-260; B. Serpe, *Appunti di una maestra durante la Grande Guerra: il diario annuale di Lina Sarri (1916-1918)*, in B. Serpe (ed.), *Scuola, infanzia e grande guerra*, Milano, EDUCATT, 2017, pp. 79-107; B. Serpe, *Il metodo Montessori negli asili dell'Associazione Nazionale per gli Interessi del Mezzogiorno d'Italia (ANIMI) in Calabria*, in F. Fabbri (ed.), *Maria Montessori e la società del suo tempo*, Roma, Castelveccchi, 2020, pp. 131-152; B. Serpe, *Le Case dei bambini nella Calabria di inizio Novecento attraverso l'Archivio Storico dell'ANIMI*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione» vol. 8, n. 2, 2021, pp. 97-107; F. Schirripa, *Ambienti montessoriani nei luoghi di Danilo Dolci: L'ANIMI a Trappeto (1954/1965)*, in P. Trabalzini (ed.), *Sensi immaginazione intelletto in Maria Montessori. Dimensione estetica ed espressione di sé*, Roma, Fefè editore, 2020, pp. 188-209.

<sup>5</sup> *L'intesa con M. Montessori. Gli asili rurali. I corsi professionali per le maestre*, in G. Alatri, *Una vita per educare, tra arte e socialità. Alessandro Marcucci (1876-1968)*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006, pp. 133-149.

<sup>6</sup> E. Moretti, *The best weapon for Peace. Maria Montessori, Education and Children's rights*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2021, pp. 18-30.

<sup>7</sup> Alessandro Marcucci (1876-1964) was a central inspector for primary schools. He dedicated himself to rural education through the Ente scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano. He published numerous books, including *L'apostolato educativo di Giovanni Cena* (1928), and wrote a teaching programme adapted to the rural schools.

<sup>8</sup> N. Quarenghi, «Qui... in queste terre eternamente bacciate dal sole». *Diario privato di Irene Bernasconi, maestra a Palidoro*, in Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., pp. 121-133.

### 1. *Training at the Montessori course*

Irene Bernasconi was born in 1886 in Chiasso into a wealthy family, as the second of ten children and the only daughter. She enrolled at the age of 28 in the *Corso di preparazione all'educazione infantile secondo il Metodo Montessori* (Preparatory Course for Childhood Education according to the Montessori Method) organised by the Società Umanitaria in Milan from December 1914 to June 1915. It is likely that she had become acquainted with the Montessori Method during the two-month apprenticeship she had done shortly before at a preschool in Chiasso. Indeed, since 1909 Canton Ticino had implemented the Montessori method on a large scale<sup>9</sup> thanks to the enthusiasm of the young inspector Teresina Bontempi. After attending the first course organised at La Montesca, Bontempi was called upon by the Società Umanitaria to teach at the Montessori course organised in 1911 on Maria Montessori's instructions. She also organised two courses in Bellinzona in 1912 and 1913, for which she could boast of having received unpublished lectures by Montessori. But soon the latter no longer recognised the quality of her work: «Bontempi's pupils do not apply my method at all»<sup>10</sup>. This explains why Irene Bernasconi had to travel to Milan in order to train in the Montessori method.

Augusto Osimo, secretary of the Società Umanitaria, was in constant search of qualified personnel for the various Children's Houses opened by his institution: a School for Training in the Montessori Method was therefore set up, which was to be an «observatory, laboratory, magisterial institute»<sup>11</sup>. The duration of the programme was lengthened: from the three months of the 1911 course to seven months. Again with a view to improving preparation, Osimo wished to admit people «who have completed the courses of a Scuola Normale»<sup>12</sup>. However, it does not appear that Irene Bernasconi attended a Scuola Normale: it seems reasonable to assume that Osimo's wish was not fulfilled. A total of seventy-seven people enrolled in the course, of whom Irene Bernasconi was the only one from Ticino.

This course, and in particular her encounter with Maria Montessori's thinking, marked a real turning point in Irene Bernasconi's life. In one of her notebooks of meteorological observations and surveys compiled during the summer of 1915, lost amidst sketches of natural elements, Irene wrote her reflections: «Seven months spent there in the beautiful and noisy capital city of Lombardy for a Montessori Course changed me completely». The diary that is filled in daily throughout the course almost allows us to watch the course

<sup>9</sup> W. Sahlfeld, A. Vanini, *La rete di Maria Montessori in Svizzera*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 25, 2018, pp. 163-180. In this essay Bérengère Kolly shows the complexity of the relationship between Montessori and Bontempi and the role played by the course given by Bontempi at the J.J. Rousseau Institute in the deterioration of their relationship: B. Kolly, *L'internationalisation montessorienne selon la stratégie du double gain: diffraction et problématiques de diffusion*, in R. Hofstetter, J. Droux, M. Christian (edd.), *Construire la paix par l'éducation: réseaux et mouvements internationaux au XXe siècle. Genève au cœur d'une utopie*, Genève, Alphil, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> T. Pironi, *Maria Montessori e gli ambienti milanesi dell'Unione Femminile e la Società Umanitaria*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 25, 2018, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Sahlfeld, Vanini, *La rete di Maria Montessori in Svizzera*, cit., p. 169.

from the audience's side: the succession of lessons is transcribed, sometimes with a brief summary, any assignments, incidents of Montessori chronicle, personal observations, and discomforts. It is a useful tool for tracing the path of her education, or rather her transformation: did she not approach the figure of the "new teacher" proposed by Maria Montessori?

From the very beginning, on 9 December 1914, the day of the inauguration, Irene writes that she was captivated by Maria Montessori after her brief introductory speech: «The woman's magical voice enraptured me and, I confess, I heard it, I followed it, [...] it transported me, it dazed me and awakened me, something happened in me that I cannot say». The information in the diary<sup>13</sup> makes us realise the high level of demand placed on the students. Irene devotes all her free time, even Sundays, to reading, studying, translating articles of interest to her from French, constructing activities or practising drawing. For Irene Bernasconi, Maria Montessori's thought is akin to a "Gospel", contrary to many students who seem more attracted to Maria Montessori's charismatic personality than to her educational proposal. Irene, upset, writes a dozen comments on the absences of her colleagues.

In the meantime, the concern grows in her to make this "moral charity work" reach everywhere: she has in mind the reality of many mountain villages where there is no running water. She took the opportunity of the paper on the preparation of the environment to envisage adaptations to these less affluent realities. She writes in her diary: «I described the furnishings for a Children's House in a poor village, and my findings made me a laughing stock, but, as the teacher [Anna Fedeli] said, they were fine and besides nothing was missing, everything was thought of with little expense». She suggests, for example, adding pretty curtains to the fruit boxes and using them as cupboards, or sawing a barrel in half to make a sink.

On several occasions, Irene makes it clear that this is a deeply transformative experience: «I didn't work with the goal of exams, no, I confess [...] I studied for me, forever, without the borderline point of leaving the bag, but for my own internal satisfaction, and I learnt very good things and that's enough for me». Only forty-nine students were admitted to the examinations and twenty-two passed, while Irene «[fails] the Pedagogy and Psychology exam» and commented: «What a pain!». Irene had to re-sit this exam in October.

## 2. *The opening of the first Children's Houses in the Agro*

Irene could have gone back to work in one of Ticino's many Children's Houses. This indeed she did, in Chiasso, during the school year 1916-1917 and from September 1919 to 1922, before returning to live in Mezzaselva with her husband Felice Socciarelli<sup>14</sup>, a

<sup>13</sup> Irene's diary is contained in three handwritten notebooks with a total of 480 pages.

<sup>14</sup> He published *Vita e scuola a Mezzaselva*, Roma, Associazione interessi del mezzogiorno, 1928. This book was a great success and had three editions with La Scuola. He wrote also: *Ragazzi*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1947;

primary school teacher. But a letter sent to Augusto Osimo by Alessandro Marcucci as director of the *Ente Scuole per i contadini dell'Agro Romano* changed her plans.

In October 1915, the Ente had decided to open ten preschools to improve the situation of the youngest children in the Roman countryside:

The wild children [...] live scattered and frightened around the hut, among the village huts as dark as the earth, unhealthier than a prison. The big ones work and have no time, the little ones are filthy and rustic and do not dare to go to the communal school, among the white walls and the children with their shoes, shirt and breakfast. They grow up like little bears: childhood is short, childhood is already painful, life repeats itself like an eternal sentence...<sup>15</sup>

Alessandro Marcucci, being the teacher that he was, followed «the Montessori method [...] personally to see the implementation [...] because] it seduced [himself] as an attempt in the Agro». Aware, however, that the other members of the committee board might advance some «prejudices - Rome is the characteristic city for this, but if one works with faith and modesty, one can succeed. [...] He decided, however, not to mention] the name of the method that would arouse prejudice, but one must act, indeed [we must act]»<sup>16</sup>. To ensure the success of his insight, he turned to the Società Umanitaria, in the person of Augusto Osimo, to ask if any new graduates would accept to work in the Agro. Aware of the living conditions awaiting future school teachers, Marcucci lists the elements to be taken into consideration when selecting candidates: they are required to have a «faculty of adaptation» because «the Agro has muddy and rutted roads, it requires healthy and resistant bodies». Possible candidates need «endurance, it is not trench work, but outpost work - like that of the teachers of the Agro»<sup>17</sup>. Given the many material obstacles, they need «people of sound training animated by a spirit of self-denial to create everything, the little or much that can be created from nothing». The environment is «gloomy and can be frightening», people «in love with [their] art and animated by humanitarian ideals [who want] to create life around them» are needed.

Furthermore, Marcucci is in a hurry, because he would like the preschools to open in early November when the families return. They are mostly families from Anticoli Corrado, a village in Ciociaria, who work during the cold months in Palidoro. In the second letter, Marcucci's stubbornness shines through. Not only does he have to stand up to his colleagues, but he also has to deal with a very limited budget to open ten preschools:

in three of them, because of the absolute impossibility of accommodating the teacher and because of the distance from Rome without means of transport, teachers or pseudo-teachers from the place were used and they will succeed as they will!; in two, two young ladies who had worked in the Montessori preschools of Rome, or rather in the preschools of the Case Popolari, went; in three, three nuns went, because in the Civil Organisation Committee there is a bit of everything, that is, all colours, and the

*Scuola in campagna: dedicato ai maestri e alle maestre rurali*, Roma, I Diritti della Scuola, 1946.

<sup>15</sup> G. Alatri, *Dal chinino all'alfabeto: Igiene, istruzione e bonifiche nella campagna romana*, Roma, Fratelli Palombi, 2000, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of 26 October 1915 from Marcucci to Osimo preserved in Archivio Storico Società Umanitaria (ASSU), folder 369/1-1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

dominant colour, especially in the Roman countryside, all owned by a few princes, is rather dark. Now, against the mindset of such colleagues, I had to be tenacious and a little mysterious in arguing that I wanted to have at least two posts to be entrusted to eminent willing teachers who would come from ... Milan.

Unable to ask the Committee for funds to finance the trip for these two teachers, Marcucci organised a fund-raising campaign among friends. In the meantime, Osimo, taking advantage of the second session of examinations, became Marcucci's spokesperson to the candidates who were not promoted in June. Irene Bernasconi and Maria Arnaud<sup>18</sup> from Cuneo proposed themselves.

On 26 November, Marcucci announces that the premises are ready, but there remains the problem of financing the Montessori materials<sup>19</sup>, for which he asks that payment be deferred. He also gives some additional details about the accommodation of the teacher who will go to Palidoro, in which one perceives the concern to offer decent living conditions. He emphasises the human factor: the schoolteacher will be a guest of the family renting the estate and «will live there as in a family [...] like a member of the household. And as such the hospitality will be complete, i.e. the young lady will spend nothing»<sup>20</sup>.

A month later than hoped, due to various mishaps and the difficulties in ensuring decent living conditions for the teachers, the Children's House at Palidoro opened on 9 December 1915; the teacher Irene had arrived on 6 December, a month and a half after taking the Montessori Course examination at the Umanitaria.

### 3. *A pioneering experiment*

Thanks to Irene Bernasconi's short private diary in Palidoro, we can guess the many challenges she had to face from the very first day. As soon as she stepped off the train, the peculiarities of the Agro Romano, the «people different [from us] from the north in facial features and habits»<sup>21</sup> leap out at her. If she says she is «won over» by the landscape so different from her own, with the sea, the vast horizon, the animals, she nevertheless immediately notices the net in front of the windows that «[reminds] her, that [tells] her and admonishes [her] that in the Agro Romano, in summer, malaria is a massacre». The first impression of desolation did not seem to frighten the Ticino schoolteacher: «it was

<sup>18</sup> She published *Nel paese della promessa*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1923.

<sup>19</sup> The workhouse of the Società Umanitaria manufactured the Montessori materials. Marcucci had managed to gather 400 lire to buy the materials for the several schools he planned to open, but each system cost 400 lire.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of 14 November 1915 from Alessandro Marcucci to Augusto Osimo preserved in Archivio Storico Società Umanitaria (ASSU), folder 369/1-1.

<sup>21</sup> Di Michele, *I granci della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 41.



the place for [her], what [she was] looking for.... [She said she was] lucky to have found it and [decided] to stay»<sup>22</sup>.

When it opened, the Children's House was attended by thirty-one pupils, to which were added four new arrivals from Anticoli Corrado on 25 March 1916. Irene Bernasconi was shocked by the lack of hygiene: «The Roman countryside has only the sourness of the dirt of the people and the dreaded malaria»<sup>23</sup>. Faced with the reality of the first day of school, she sets herself this goal: «[she will] try to do [her] best to instil in them even the imperious need, the necessity that the body has to keep itself clean, if it wants to stay healthy»<sup>24</sup>. After a week she witnesses a small victory: «Toto felt the need to wash his hands», but the children remain «ruthless enemies of water»<sup>25</sup>. One day when, due to bad weather, the children were fewer than usual, the teacher made up her mind: «overcoming a certain revulsion, [she] donned a kitchen apron and... go ahead! [She] washed their faces, necks, ears, hands, arms»<sup>26</sup>. Her stubbornness gradually began to bring results: «everyone asked to rinse their hands». Some children do not want to turn up dirty at school and when there is no water in their hut they go in search of some puddle to rinse their faces. But their living conditions are really difficult, and in the middle of winter Irene writes: «Poor little ones, sometimes they are really pitiful; they are there full of cold, with snotty little noses, their toes out of their *ciochie* [traditional footwear], dressed, or rather covered in cotton wool rags [...] some of them wipe their noses with their hands. It is certain that here one must overcome all repugnance, roll up one's sleeves and ... forward, forward with a peaceful heart»<sup>27</sup>.

Palidoro's diary was filled in every day from the first day of school to the last, on 29 June, with one exception: the day after Peppinella's death (the last enrolled) the diary was not filled in, the following note bears the dates 7 and 8 March, while on 9 March Irene Bernasconi wrote that «[she had] a feeling of exhaustion, [of being] shattered: Armando Bellardi, after 10 days of illness, died last night». On 13 March it was Alfredo who died and she writes that she did not go to see him because it is too sad a sight.

Irene was the doctor of the body: she detected the symptoms of various illnesses and fevers and identified the children to be examined by the doctor. During her hygiene lessons<sup>28</sup> in Milan, she had studied the symptoms and dangers of various childhood diseases and malaria. But the teacher was also a doctor of their minds: she had completely understood Maria Montessori's position on the importance of nourishing children's mental hunger when she wrote provocatively: «we believe that the child is happy when he plays: instead the child is happy when he works»<sup>29</sup>. The diary is filled with episodes of children engaged in various tasks (collecting wood, fetching water, dusting, setting the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124. It is a wordplay in Italian: "agro" means both countryside and sour.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Dr De Din taught on 6 February "Infectious diseases and school hygiene" and on 26 February "Infectious diseases at school".

<sup>29</sup> M. Montessori, *Educazione e Pace*, Roma, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, 2004, p. 120.

table...) in which they do the best they are capable of. The teacher's pride is evident when she describes these situations, as for example in April: «Today little Rosina and Armando served at the table, two little children who will be three years old in July and September; you had to see how gracefully they held the bowls and how confidently they walked».

Before Palidoro, Irene Bernasconi had only worked with children in Chiasso and during her brief internship at the Casa dei Bambini in Via Solari in Milan. She had arrived in Palidoro «driven by a humanitarian feeling», bringing with her carefully prepared material; these were «albums made with pyrographed covers, in which [she had] pasted pictures cut from catalogues, representing kitchen utensils, clothing, animals». But the children had an unexpected reaction: «what an instinct of destruction in them all! [...] and everything [was] destroyed in less than two hours. As the children tore up the sheets, their shrieks subsided...»<sup>30</sup>. After a month, however, Irene saw the group change: the «schoolchildren [were] quiet and industrious». The teaching materials did not arrive until 23 December, two weeks after the opening. The children were «stunned, dreamy, then little by little they wanted to touch everything» and when they returned to school after an illness several of them went directly to the cabinet «to touch everything and make sure it still existed».

Undoubtedly one of the first obstacles, which increased her loneliness, was the difficulty of understanding their dialect: «What phraseology do these *ciociari* use, I don't understand a thing, I remember the first days, stunned, out of my world, thrown here, I didn't know how to make sense of it, I didn't understand a jot». Nor does it make it easy to build an educational relationship with children who are afraid of being beaten by the teacher. The first days were full of their shrieks: «I looked around hoping to find someone who could translate what they were saying, the cook had a northern appearance, she looked like one of my sides, one day, in despair, I asked her: "Explain to me what this child means", but in order to explain, she repeated no more and no less than the same words to me, and I stood there with my mouth open, how could I get it right? the little ones were crying and shouting: "pizza voio", "sinale meo", "ello mi tata", and there I was, racking my brains, but how different from my dialect». In the private diary there are lists of new words with vocabulary useful for school life («sinale - apron; tenaglia - scissors; muso - face...»), or for everyday life, with the conversion of units of measurement («un paolo = 50 cents; un baiocco = 10 cents, un soldo = 5 cents, una foglietta = half a litre»)<sup>31</sup>.

She teaches the basic expressions for social life, but it will take some time before everyone is able to use the appropriate words. Irene writes that someone greets her by saying "good morning please", and when a lady comes to visit the school they greet her in chorus "good morning, Reverend!". She is surprised that the children do not know the names of colours and to enrich their vocabulary she shows them plenty of picture postcards and sings a lot.

Irene Bernasconi was a humble teacher who did not hesitate to admit that her judgement of a child had been wrong; she also wrote in her diary: «Checchinello composes

<sup>30</sup> Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-131.

words really well, yet he seemed to me a little one without initiative, so different from all the others... I was wrong; he is affectionate»<sup>32</sup>. On other occasions she acknowledges her fears and agrees to overcome them: she feared, for example, allowing the little ones into the kitchen, but then writes: «you must never be prejudiced, ever»<sup>33</sup>.

When she realised that the children preferred to draw on the blank sheet of paper instead of on the one with the outline of geometric shapes to be coloured, she insisted at first «on superior orders». She wrote this two days after the visit of Lina Olivero, on 4 February, her teacher at the course in Milan as well as director of the Casa dei Bambini in Via Solari, since it was an exercise to which Maria Montessori attached great importance in preparing the hand for writing. But when, a month later, she realises that the refusal persists («no one completes the drawing on the sheet of paper that has the outline to be coloured; they are then unhappy and in a bad mood if I insist on handing it to them»), she decides to let the children do the free drawing, which they carry out with «delicacy and commitment». She writes: «why stifle, restrict their thinking within the contours of a circle, of a triangle?». Irene demonstrates a true «Lombardian spirit»<sup>34</sup>: she had realised that Maria Montessori's pedagogical proposal is not a set of recipes to be applied, but a philosophy of life, a peculiar way of looking at the children, of seeing their potential, of encouraging them and relating to them. This is why she decides to expand the activities she proposes to the children, even if they are not provided for by Maria Montessori, because, she writes, «the safest guidance comes to me from the children». She does not hesitate to apply Lombardo Radice's suggestions, with the introduction, in addition to free drawing, of reading pictures or observing the garden. She is a teacher who asks many questions, reads a lot and compares herself with other teachers, particularly Maria Arnaud, although she writes that hers was «a strictly Montessorian experience»<sup>35</sup>.

The parents are grateful to the teacher for the transformation of their children: «she is more beautiful now that she comes to you»<sup>36</sup>, and they show their gratitude with the means they have at their disposal, some with an egg, some with an onion. The children, on the other hand, give the teacher many bouquets of flowers every day. Her care in decorating the place has infected them, they can't get to have lunch without flowers on the table. Irene Bernasconi has spared no effort and places no limits on her commitment. «The rural teacher, in practice, had to consider himself on duty from dawn to dusk and provide for everything [...] without making a distinction between his educational role in the classroom and his role in the village»<sup>37</sup>. She shows her room to the children as an example of an «oasis of peace». She welcomes a child who comes to visit her at 6.30 am asking her to button his trousers because his mother has gone to work in the fields. Irene is at the service of all: «On Sundays after mass, mothers, brides, girlfriends come to me,

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, a cura di L. Cantatore, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2022, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> M. Arnaud, *Nel paese della promessa*, Firenze, Vallecchi, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Di Michele, *I grandi della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> Alatri, *Dal chinino all'alfabeto: Igiene, istruzione e bonifiche nella campagna romana*, cit., p. 98.

I am their scrivener for the soldiers»<sup>38</sup>. She is a teacher who puts no distance between herself and the families she visits in the huts, even when this closeness is reproached by many a person: «How can you go to those people: it takes guts, with so many fleas there are. We have the appearance of being clean, graceful, but perhaps, in certain things, we are less so than they are. And then why look down on these poor, good-hearted people?»<sup>39</sup>.

#### 4. *The positive outcomes*

Alessandro Marcucci's solicitude for the preschool in Palidoro was also felt through his visits. It was a way of realising how much his audacity to open a Montessori preschool, investing funds to bring in a teacher from Milan, had paid off. He was accompanied by several members of the Committee or the American Red Cross, so as to make the very positive outcome of his idea known. Irene Bernasconi, too, did not hide her delight: «Today I was delighted to see them intent, calm and joyful, on the exercises with the Fabrics, the Pink Tower and the Stairs, the Sound Cylinders, the Spindles boxes, ... pervaded by a different contentment, as if more concentrated and aware ... Five months exactly since the preschool opened its doors!». Indeed, the children have made enormous and sustained progress, many of them make up words with the letters of the movable alphabet or even write, when they are not yet six years old. Even Irene is amazed at the small "miracles" that have happened: «It's true, I still can hardly believe it, but it happened in my Children's House!». She is amazed to see the phenomena she had heard about during the course and observed in Milan happening.

In the context of such desolation, the phenomenon of the explosion of writing, which she witnessed on several occasions, makes even more sense: «How is it that if on 23 February he could compose with the movable alphabet and yet could not write a single vowel, on 28 February, when asked by several visitors, he even writes a capital "r" in the morning with beautiful handwriting?»<sup>40</sup>. Many children are caught up in a writing frenzy, to the point of filling the floor and the door with words. And when the chalks are finished, they don't stop, they go and get «wild pumpkins» from the garden to replace them.

Alessandro Marcucci also made a few visits on Sundays, accompanied by his family. It was a way of making his caring closeness felt to the teacher who often felt the weight of loneliness: «before I look out I think I will see a person I know, and I run with that hope to the window, only to stand there with a disappointed face on the mosquito net»<sup>41</sup>.

But despite the difficulties, for Irene Bernasconi it was a very enriching experience, as the closing words of her diary show:

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> Di Michele, *I granici della Marana. Irene Bernasconi e la Casa dei Bambini di Palidoro*, cit., p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

These children, the first ones I had with me, made me learn so many things.... These little white, simple hearts, these little souls so candid and neglected are caskets full of joy, of feeling; fresh, fragrant souls, souls of poets! [...] Here, in these eternally sun-kissed lands, I returned as a 15-year-old girl; here I sang again the romances I sang at the age of 20, here I returned as a pure and holy girl [...] how much, how good it has done me; how it has changed me. I have become good, my soul is young, purer, more innocent than when I was eighteen...<sup>42</sup>

After a year at Chiasso and attending the Summer Course at the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, Irene Bernasconi returned to the Agro to carry out her important work at Mezzaselva from 1917 to 1919. It is a commitment that also deserves to be studied.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.



# “She Told Me to Read, Always Read”.

## Itineraries of Reading Education through the Oral Testimonies of Teachers and Students of Yesterday

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### *Introduction*

Reading, in its fascinating complexity, is one of the practices on which central aspects of our cultural tradition and of our emotional and intellectual life are based and the field of studies related to its history is extremely wide, articulated, diversified and rich in very heterogeneous documentary sources. Among these, the autobiographical memories of readers, their intimate, unique and subjective experiences, their individual stories that participate in a collective story can highlight the least investigated and neglected aspects, those that have to do with feelings, emotions, and ideal impulses. The practice of reading, as we know, recurs in a plurality of activities and human situations and in response to extremely heterogeneous needs, making its history and the study approaches to it numerous and colourful in a field that can seem really inexhaustible: putting the reader's experience at the centre, necessarily taking into account autobiographical sources and new survey methodologies, is one of the many viable paths as evidenced by the studies and research of Robert Darnton (1994), Martin Lyons (2010), Alberto Manguel (2014), Jonathan Rose (2022), Edmund King (2013) and Michèle Petit (1993). The pioneer of this approach was Richard D. Altick who, in his volume *The English common reader*, dated 1957, affirms in a far-sighted and emblematic way «If only I had the autobiographical work of a butcher!»<sup>1</sup>. Making a significant change of perspective that underlines the importance of diaries, memoirs and marginalia, with particular attention to oral testimonies where individual readers describe their reading habits and allow us to appreciate their enormous diversity. Little is said about these experiences today, as much as reading is one of the central practices of our emotional and intellectual life and despite the fact that the book remains among the main sources of learning that accompanies us throughout our lives, not only culturally but also socially, ethically and civically.

<sup>1</sup> R.D. Altick, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800-1900*, Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 1998, p. 5.



Based on this framework, the research aims to trace, thanks to the video testimonies contained in the “Memorie educative in video” database kept in the web portal [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it), a specific path dedicated to reading education in the school context through the point of view of teachers and former students. Topics that intersect with the pedagogical debate, educational proposals and initiatives, reflections on the textbook, and more generally with the history of the school and some of the problems that have traversed our country, including illiteracy. It is a path that certainly needs to be enriched and deepened, however, it remains to demonstrate how it is possible to build, through the use of Oral History and the return of memories and recollections, a reflection around reading, its multiple educational values with reference to one of the main contexts in which it is practiced, that of school.

### 1. *Oral sources and digital archives for the history of reading: some examples*

Contemporary historiography has re-evaluated autobiographical testimonies – diaries, memoirs, letters, oral sources – as a precious resource for historians because they allow them to “grasp” and understand the ideas and behaviours of the individuals who have produced them and to whom “official” sources often do not give a voice, which accompany and determine the course of an existence and almost always remain silent or remain closed off in family or collective memories. An approach based on the primacy of individual and collective experiences, which brings us closer to people’s thoughts, to what they have felt and perceived. The particular and rich declension that Oral History has had in Italy is certainly testimony and important outcome of this methodological approach and the new sensitivity towards all those categories of diversity that in the past have been clearly left silent. Born outside the strict academic context, orality represents – as Di Pasquale explains – a cognitive method, a source, a document and is also a new model of literary representation of history, sociology and cultural anthropology:

It is a method because the interview recorded and then transcribed arises from an oral communication that relates different people and subjectivities. It is a source because oral testimony, typically of a biographical tone, conveys a different version of historical events. It is based on a different temporal representation from the punctual and linear representation of official documents. A representation that has to do with the subjective experience, with group membership, with mentalities and emotions that escape the official written sources. It is a document because the testimony in its expressive power, in its original and realistic capacity, acquires an emblematic and symbolic value that goes beyond the contents<sup>2</sup>.

During the twentieth century oral history affirmed, not without contrasts and oppositions, its legitimacy and usefulness, focusing above all on the history from below,

<sup>2</sup> C. Di Pasquale, *Antropologia della memoria. Il ricordo come fatto culturale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, pp. 113-114, translation by the author.

of those excluded from traditional history, giving voice to the many subjects that had so far remained marginal in the Great Narratives.

The field of studies that deals with the history of the school, within the history of education (McCulloch, 2011), has also used non-textual sources, such as photographs or paintings, with increasing conviction. A small part of these studies has also discovered, albeit with some delay, the use of oral sources (Gardner 2003; Yanes Cabrera, Meda, Viñao 2017) shifting the emphasis of the studies on people's perceptions and feelings, on the internal and community aspects of social life<sup>3</sup>.

There are also scholars who have used oral sources to investigate the history of reading from the point of view of the user, a story of men and women, their gestures, attitudes, habits and feelings: «Twenty years ago, the historiography of reading scarcely existed. Many historians at that time doubted that we could ever recover anything so private, so evanescent as they inner experiences of ordinary readers in the past»<sup>4</sup>. A first emblematic example is provided by Michèle Petit (Ladefroux, Petit, Gardien, *Lecteurs en campagne. Les ruraux lisent-ils autrement?*, 1993). The anthropologist, carrying out research on reading in rural French environments in the 1980s, was surprised to find that, in certain regions, reading could prove impossible, or risky, because for many farmers it represented a kind of transgression and its usefulness was not evident. Attempting this type of research based on oral sources was also Martyn Lyons, along with the scholar Lucy Taksa in the volume *Australian Readers Remember* (1992). It is a cultural history survey based on the reading habits of sixty Australian elders, who were asked to recall and analyse their relationship with reading between the end of the nineteenth century and during the first three decades of the twentieth century. A work that offers an account of the readers' memories through oral history, examines the spread of reading and how individuals had access to it, attitudes towards books, as well as the myths and prejudices surrounding the act of reading. Similar projects are represented by "Scottish Readers Remember", "Speaking of Reading" by Nadine Rosenthal and the work led by Sarah McNicol who, using an oral history methodology, explores the memories of English childhood reading experiences during the 1940s and 1950s<sup>5</sup>. Another scholar who made use of oral sources for her research was Janice Radway, author of the monograph *Reading the Romance*, one of the most significant academic studies on popular romantic fiction in the United States that seriously evaluates the consumption of the romance novel by involving the readers themselves and deciding to go beyond the concepts of registered reader, ideal or model and to work with real subjects.

It is a small sample of examples that testify to how the history of reading increasingly makes use of oral and autobiographical sources. However, they are not always easily

<sup>3</sup> G. Bandini, A. Mangiardi, 600 maestri raccontano la loro vita professionale in video: un progetto di (fully searchable) open data, in IX Convegno Annuale AIUCD. La svolta inevitabile: sfide e prospettive per l'informatica umanistica, Milano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020, pp. 14-18.

<sup>4</sup> J. Rose, *The history of education as the history of reading*, «History of Education», vol. 36, n. 4-5, 2007, p. 595.

<sup>5</sup> S. McNicol, *Memories Of Reading in the 1940S and 1950S*, «New Review of Children's Literature & Librarianship», vol. 13, n. 2, 2007, pp. 101-116.

accessible, they are often obscure, hidden, scattered and fragmented resources and their discovery is often a matter of serendipity or the by-product of other research. How to trace the experiences of the common readers? Autobiographical and journalistic archives are a valuable aid in this regard. They constitute a particular place of collection of documents united by the will of the writer to leave a trace of their life, a testimony of their own experiences, thoughts and reflections that have accompanied particular events or simple daily life and that represent sources of research and insight into the great themes (and not only) that affect our society. In recent years, these types of archives have begun to acquire relevance in the scientific landscape, also thanks to scholars such as Philippe Lejeune, Pietro Clemente and Duccio Demetrio, who have promoted their knowledge and cultural value in countries such as France, Spain, Germany and Belgium. Among the most famous in Italy are, to name a few, the Ligurian Archive of “Scrittura Popolare”, the Historical Archive of Trento and that of the Department of Linguistic and Literary Philological Studies of the University of Rome Tor Vergata relating to Family Books, the “Archivio Diaristico” of Pieve Santo Stefano.

Within this colourful and heterogeneous panorama we also find databases reserved exclusively for reading: these are projects born especially in the Anglo-Saxon area and fortunately available online thanks to digital archives. The question of the need to create databases and web spaces dedicated solely to reading testimonies was raised by Simon Eliot, professor of the History of the Book at the University of London. The archive he devised, RED presents itself as a useful tool to help students and researchers tap into freely available resources and sources related to reading experiences in Britain over a five-century span, between 1450 and 1945. Eliot’s intuition was to suggest that the historical study of the lending registers of libraries or the sales registers of publishers and booksellers, as necessary and important, could not in itself provide an accurate history of reading<sup>6</sup>. Who knew what happened to the books after they had been bought or borrowed? Sources used included memoirs, letters and marginalia in books and manuscripts, magazines, journals, interrogative (e.g., court records and prison inspections) and oral sources.

Inspired by RED, projects dedicated exclusively to the collection of interviews and oral sources have also taken shape. Among these, we find first of all “Memories of Fiction” which represents an oral history archive containing 46 interviews conducted between 2014 and 2015 with members of the reading groups of the London district of Wandsworth. Particularly interesting is the study that the creator and curator Shelley Trower, obtained from the interviews: *Forgetting Fiction: An Oral History of Reading, 2014–15*. In it, it emerges that, more than the books themselves, it is the reading experience and the context in which they are read: on the bus or in the library, with a parent or alone: «The Memories of Fiction project title alluded to memories of fiction in a double sense: both to interviewees’ memories of fictional narratives they had read, and to those memories themselves as potentially fictional (for example, in remembering plots or

<sup>6</sup> S. Eliot, *The Reading Experience Database; or, what are we to do about the history of reading?*, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm>, 2012 (last access: 25.01.2023)

characters inaccurately)»<sup>7</sup>. Trower has also promoted another project, "Living Libraries"<sup>8</sup>, which aims to study public libraries through the life experiences of people who use, work or manage them: between August 2019 and January 2020, a total of forty-seven oral histories were collected, archived in the British Library Sound Archive and made publicly accessible. Finally it is worth mentioning "Reading Sheffield - All the books of our lives"<sup>9</sup>. It is a resource to promote reading directly curated by some Sheffield readers: funded by the Sheffield Town Trust, the oldest of the local charities, the main purpose is to explore the context of the readers' experiences during the 1940s and 1950s. An initiative that acquires a particularly significant value because it was born and driven from below, from the community of readers of an English citizen<sup>10</sup>.

Those described represent some examples capable of highlighting how digital history represents a particularly suitable perspective for studies on educational memories, especially in fostering a link between academic research, learning places and life contexts. A very useful approach to incorporate stories from below in the historical narrative in ways that are not always possible in the press, in exhibitions and obviously in school textbooks that make use of new communication technologies, helping to give voice not only to individuals but also to associations and groups, just as happens in the portal that we are going to describe in the next paragraph: *memoriascolastica.it*

## 2. *Reading in the school memory database "Memoria scolastica"*

The website "Memoria scolastica" was created as part of the project of significant national interest "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation", a research project that focuses its attention on school memory, understood as an individual, collective and public practice of evoking a common school past. As we read on the project's home page:

School memory is an interpretative category that has recently been introduced in the historiographical reflection of the historical-educational sector at an international level, both in the countries of the Ibero-American area and in those of central Europe, both in the countries of the Ibero-American area and in the Anglo-Saxon world, and it has soon established itself also in Italy, thanks above all to the early presence in Italy, largely thanks to the studies carried out by the scholars who have joined this project in the last five years.

<sup>7</sup> From the homepage <https://memoriesoffiction.org> (last access 22.01.2023).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.livinglibraries.uk/> (last access 22.01.2023).

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.readingsheffield.co.uk/> (last access 22.01.2023).

<sup>10</sup> The project conceived by the author [www.madeleineinbiblioteca.it](http://www.madeleineinbiblioteca.it) is inspired by these English databases. For more details: M. Dati, *Leggere di nascosto in età contemporanea. Un seminario costruito con fonti orali tra Public History e Library learning*, «Lifelong Lifewide Learning», vol. 17, n. 38, 2021, pp. 397-409; M. Dati, *Come nasce un lettore. Ricordi di lettura e memorie di educazione familiare a partire dal progetto Madeleine in biblioteca*, «Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare», vol. 18, n. 1, 2021, pp. 317-335.

Inside is the “Educational memories in video” repository, an electronic archive of video testimonies of teachers, students and educators who speak about their school life. Although not specifically dedicated to reading, the database allows us to investigate some aspects that are difficult to find in other projects precisely because they are linked to the world of schools and the educational context. Finding within the archive a transversal and multiform theme such as that of reading is not simple, but by making use of specific keywords you can get to some testimonies that dedicate ample space to it. Here we focus our attention on the memories and recollections that deal with the themes of reading teaching, literacy courses for adults, the textbook and its questioning and the promotion of the pleasure of reading. A first step of a path to be enriched and deepened to highlight the importance of oral sources in creating a reflection on reading, its multiple educational values with reference to one of the main contexts in which it is practiced, that of school. Below are some examples and excerpts from interviews.

### 2.1 *Teaching and learning to read with the syllabic phonetic method*

How and through what teaching practices do children acquire the ability to read and write? In the stories, we find strategies and stratagems that characterise the daily teaching practice of teachers, but also attitudes, postures, reflections on how professional knowledge is built that help us understand the profound characteristics of teaching practices that can facilitate learning to read. Emblematic in this regard is the interview with the teacher Mariangela Ciacagli (1956, Tuscany). As can be deduced from the title, *L'importanza delle metodologie didattiche* the central theme of the testimony is represented by school methodologies, with a particular reflection on the teaching of reading and the need to alternate the various methods according to the needs of the class and teamwork with other teachers<sup>11</sup>. Starting from the 1970s in Italy, the classic alphabetical (or phonetic) method was accompanied by other “innovative” ways to teach reading, equivalent to the Whole Word method of the United States: in Italian they have had and continue to have many names and variants, such as global, visual, ideo-visual, natural, mixed method, etc., but essentially in all cases it is a matter of starting to learn to read with a visual and non-phonical approach to reading, considering the words all in their entirety, teaching them to memorise and recognise them as visual images. The teacher also recalls the method developed by Ferruccio Deva in the 1960s. Starting from Decroly's studies, the scholar elaborated a partial revision of the global method developed by the Belgian pedagogist, based on the observation that the child learns concrete words of which he or she knows the meaning more easily than words or groups of letters without an tangible meaning or with an unknown meaning. On the graphical level, the Turin scholar also demonstrated that the learning of writing was facilitated by the use of uppercase capital letters. On the

<sup>11</sup> Of the same opinion is the teacher Donati (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/dai-decreti-delegati-ai-giorni-nostri-le-memorie-della>) (last access: 20.02.2023).

basis of this research, he developed appropriate teaching tools and techniques widely used in Italian schools and known as the "Deva method". However, the method mainly used and appreciated by the sample of teachers in the database seems to be the phono-syllabic method still considered the most effective as much as it may seem boring and dated, the Italian language has the advantage of having a correspondence between grapheme and phoneme, so the passage of grapheme-phoneme association is simpler than in other languages, such as English or French. In this regard, the teacher MariaGrazia Lazzareschi (entry to role in 1974, Tuscany) says that she has continued to use the phono-syllabic method because, in her opinion, the global method is not suitable for students with specific learning disorders (*Tra pluriclassi e metodologie scolastiche: le memorie della maestra Lazzareschi*). The teacher Danilo Serafini (1962, Tuscany) is of the same opinion. Serafini also remembers the syllables and the volumes of which he is entrusted with the task of accompanying a child from the first encounter with the alphabet to the reading of small passages (*Avevo imparato a leggere prima di andare alle elementari grazie ad Alberto Manzi: i ricordi del maestro Serafini*).

## 2.2 Learning to read as an adult

One of the most interesting points of Serafini's video-testimony is represented by the teacher's memory of his personal experience of learning reading skills: «I had learned to read even before going into the first year of primary school thanks to Alberto Manzi and his broadcast that I used to follow, obviously the episodes were made especially for the illiterate and or for those who had to interrupt school or who had to acquire an elementary licence instead». A testimony that makes us reflect on the relationship between school and society that characterised the post-war period and all the 1960s, on the problem of illiteracy, whose percentages remained alarming and on the important work of Manzi: his broadcast "Non è mai troppo tardi"<sup>12</sup> would teach the many illiterate Italians of that time the bases of understanding and social communication and would allow more than a million and a half people to obtain the elementary licence. A context rendered very well by the interview with Graziella Bartolini («*Mi disse di leggere, leggere sempre*»). Born in a rural hamlet in the province of Florence in 1949, she came from a large and numerous farming family. Her parents, who had attended school until the third year of primary school, read with great difficulty. Although compulsory schooling up to the age of 14 was provided for by law, it was disregarded until the second half of the 1960s, either due to the absence of middle schools or vocational schools nearby or, on the other hand, due to economic problems. This is also the case for Graziella who, however, evokes the school experience as deeply significant for her school career: among the teachings received, she

<sup>12</sup> Also remembered by the student Angela Galletti: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/non-avevamo-la-calcolatrice-noi-i-conti-si-facevano-tutti> (last access: 20.02.2023).

recalls above all the advice of the Year 6 teacher, who, aware of the impossibility for Bartolini to go any further, recommended to her that she read, read always, without losing pace and without getting disheartened if she did not have the money to buy books, because she could resort to the library or newspapers. Similar problems are found in the video testimonials collected by Jessica Lombardi for the purposes of preparing her thesis *Le scuole di Montemurlo dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (2019/2020) aimed at analysing the school context of Montemurlo, an area in the province of Prato, starting from the post-war period: «The stories they told, the difficulties they had to go through during the war and in the post-war period, school, which was not always a priority for parents dedicated to work, and childhood spent between the fields and desks, brought to light a reality that I knew existed, but whose proximity I had never realised». It is the stories of Franca and Annamaria Menici and Giancarlo Lombardi who, like many other children, ended their schooling too soon by finding themselves as adults without an adequate degree (*«S'era in tanti che si andava a lavorare»: memorie d'infanzia di Franca Menici*). These are important memories that remind us not only how illiteracy in Italy has represented a problem of great proportions, but also of the lack of an adequate adult education system. In the 1960s, those wishing to resume their studies or carry out cultural updating activities had essentially two routes available: a) Evening courses, at public schools with severe difficulties related to rigidity and widening of the schedule. b) Public courses for adults: financed by the Ministry of Education and usually managed by private bodies to which they were entrusted. The experiences produced by associations such as the COS (Centres of Social Orientation) founded by Aldo Capitini and the CCP (Public Culture Centres) promoted by the UNLA were richer and more up-to-date from a pedagogical and cultural point of view. One problem is that of adult literacy, which would continue to be at the centre of the debate throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, with the start of public schools and the important experience of the 150 hours. Emblematic in this regard is the memory of the teacher Daniela Migliori who began his teaching role in 1972 in the small school of Fratta (Cortona, Arezzo). In retracing her professional history, she mentions the after-school teaching and the years spent in schools for adult literacy: «I did three years of literacy school, there were several illiterate and semi-literate people who needed the Primary School Certificate, so I rose to the occasion, I worked every night except on Saturdays and I taught a group of people of a certain age but also young and old who could not even sign for the post».

A memory that evidences how precarious the teacher's professional habitus was, but above all how much the problem of illiteracy was still alive in those years, a theme that we also find in the testimony of the teacher Rita D'Arpinzio (*Dalle colonie estive al ruolo di maestra*). In the interview the teacher, employed for 42 years in the primary school of Monteiasi in the province of Taranto, remembers being able to enter the role thanks to the experience gained at the school of public courses. With the help of her husband and her mother-in-law the teacher managed to set up a class for illiterate adults: «with a full year of substitution and a year of public school, one entered the role thanks to a specific law».



### 2.3 Criticism of the textbook

The seventies also saw a particular phase in the history of the textbook in our country, that relating to the criticism and rethinking of this important learning tool. These are the textbooks that, with particular reference to primary school, are denounced by the well-known "Stupidario" created in 1969 by some Genoese teachers; the books ridiculed by Umberto Eco in his texts *Ammazza l'Uccellino* and the *Pampini Bugiardi*; the books that the Educational Cooperation Movement and its authoritative representatives begin to criticise by proposing the alternative model inspired by the *Bibliothèque du travail* of Freinet and represented by the class library.

A ferment that can be documented not only through printed sources, but also thanks to the help of oral sources, a way to encourage the conservation and enhancement, in a historical perspective, of the experiences of those who contributed to innovation at school in those years. Thanks to some video testimonies found in specific repositories dedicated to the memory of the teaching profession (e.g. "Memorie Magistrali" by Indire<sup>13</sup>, "Memorie di Scuola", <https://memoriediscuola.it>) it is possible to find the voices of teachers of the Educational Cooperation Movement (MCE) that were directly confronted with educational tools, technologies and textbooks. With regard to "Memoria Scolastica" is particularly significant the interviews presented in the video *«Lessere maestro o maestra perché avevi vinto il concorso dovevi scordartelo»: memorie del gruppo Mce pisano*<sup>14</sup> that collect a series of testimonies of teachers active in the Pisan MCE (Michela Lanciani, Isabella Moretti, Giovanna Zitiello, Tiziana Gasperi) curated by the student Francesca Petrucci as part of her master's thesis work (2020). In it, the teachers also refer to Law No. 517 of 1977 which gave the possibility of alternative choice to the textbook, a theme dear to the MCE, which conceived the book, the school manual «one of the institutional tools of passivisation of the student as of the teacher». The teachers recall that in a report of a meeting of the MCE in Pisa in 1978 the pedagogical principle was declared according to which one learns only by listening to those who know, encourages only a passive attitude, and is convinced that knowledge is transmitted from one to the other not in the sense of transfer, but literally in the sense of a filter and this implies implementing an involvement that is not only cognitive, but also emotional and behavioural. These are experiences and experiments that find a point of contact with the recent perspectives that see the digital as an opportunity to review study practices through resources and self-produced books (legitimised by Ministerial Decree no. 781/20139); an opportunity to retrace a stage in the complex history of the textbook as a learning tool in order to reflect on today and understand in what form textbooks can retain their function in the digital age.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.indire.it/progetto/memorie-magistrali/movimento-di-cooperazione-educativa/> (last access: 20.02.2023).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/lessere-maestro-o-maestra-perche-avevi-vinto-il-concorso> (last access 20.02.2023).

## 2.4 *The pleasure of reading*

It was Gianni Rodari, with his *Nove modi per insegnare ai ragazzi a odiare la lettura* (1966)<sup>15</sup>, who first advised adults intending to instil a love of reading to avoid exercises of constraint on the text, not to impose prohibitions and obligations, to offer a wide free choice of texts and to read aloud to children and young people. In this sense, it is 1985 that represents a turning point because for the first time in a ministerial policy text it is suggested to the teacher to ignite interests suitable for bringing out the pleasure of reading. It is an issue also addressed by Ermanno Detti in the essay *Il piacere di leggere* (1987). The writer, explicitly referring to Calvino<sup>16</sup>, states that among the various ways of reading, one in particular is aimed exclusively at pleasure and can be called “sensual” because it involves all the senses and takes us into an imaginary world from which we return to reality enriched and deeply involved. It is a “naïve” experience, but the only one that can create a positive attitude towards printed paper for a lifetime. According to Detti, it is precisely the school that has the task of allowing this pleasure to be felt by eliminating the notional study just as the testimony of Cristina Totti suggests (1971, Tuscany)<sup>17</sup>. The former student recalls a teacher focused on the memorisation of poems, in particular on the recitation of the poem *I Sepolcri*, whose book had been included in the list of volumes to be purchased for the course of the lessons: «verses to be learned by heart, every morning in turn a student had to repeat all of this poem by heart, if you made a mistake, even one little word, you had to start again from the beginning». In this way, for the witness, reading even in front of passionate teachers who were able to get students to engage with works such as *I malavoglia*, *La Divina Commedia* and *I Promessi Sposi* was always experienced by her as an activity linked to school and to the requests of teachers.

The interview that has as its subject the memories of the former student Alessandro Baccani is dedicated to the pleasure of reading (Florence, 1966)<sup>18</sup>. The interviewee initially remembers the subsidiary, «a unique volume that contained all the humanities and scientific subjects» and then the love for school books: «As children, let's put it this way, we tended to be quite solitary, this was because I started reading alone before going to school and for me books were a great source of company so when I went to school I did it with enthusiasm, I went to school very willingly». The volumes of text were usually bought used: «I think I only had new books in primary school, those few times that parents were – in quotation marks – forced to buy them. I always remember the new books eagerly, because the new books were so beautiful, even the smell that emanated from the press, when I would get a new book it was always a celebration». A memory is also reserved

<sup>15</sup> Gianni Rodari is remembered by the student Sandra Bongi: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/ascoltando-la-maestra-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access 20.02.2023).

<sup>16</sup> I. Calvino, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, Torino, Einaudi, 1979.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/invasa-da-questi-album-di-figurine-memorie-dinfanzia> (last access 20.02.2023).

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/quando-potevo-avere-un-libro-nuovo-era-sempre-una-festa-i> (last access 20.02.2023).

for dictionaries<sup>19</sup> and for the encyclopaedia in particular. «Knowledge was in there», so it was there that it was necessary to turn when the homework was to "do research". They lasted for years, they kept a photograph of the world and allowed access to the pillars of geography and science, history and culture: «the books in the house were always there as a result of the passion of my mother, which I probably inherited, of mom and of my grandmother; to do research I had the encyclopaedia, the encyclopaedia as a necessary reference for research, on the level of in-depth analysis». As emerges from the words of the witness that the encyclopedia acquired a fundamental value in terms of knowledge but also of relationship: «if someone did not have one, we found ourselves hosting those who did not have an encyclopaedia. They would come, I hosted many classmates who perhaps needed to further their knowledge of some topics». Alessandro also recalls the importance of school libraries. The school library, of every order and degree, has always been for many decades a sort of second series library, since the reference legislation does not even recognise the figure of the school librarian, usually covered by teachers and volunteer teachers. It is a collective space that in the past acquired an important role in terms of access to culture as stated in the testimony: «In this regard we have always been very lucky, in short, there were access opportunities for everyone, both in primary and middle schools, there was also a cabinet with books inside; in secondary schools there was an institute library that could be accessed»<sup>20</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The references proposed here constitute a small sample that, although limited, trace, thanks to oral and digital history, a path of analysis on the reading practices of students and teachers. The latter can prove to be a useful tool for future generations of teachers: not only to identify the strategies that have been most productive, but also to initiate a comparison to enrich through historical awareness that important competence of teacher training represented by reflexivity. Investigating memories and reading memories can also represent an unprecedented and original way of dealing with the history of reading in the school context and the start of a possible path of advancing knowledge that provides for a strong involvement of people and their heritage of memories and experiences:

We remain convinced of the significance of historiographic research on educational memories and the continued relevance of autobiographical sources for the reconstruction of the processes of transformation of individual and collective identities. The discourse is more than open, and corresponds to the need to

<sup>19</sup> See the work of Gastone Novelli dedicated to vocabulary (1964), <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/opere-darte/il-vocabolario> (last access 20.02.2023).

<sup>20</sup> The testimony of Fabio Tesi should also be taken into consideration: <https://www.memoriedininfanzia.it/video/fabio-tesi-ricordi-di-scuola-e-di-infanzia-negli-anni-60-e-70/> (last access 23.02.2023).

gather further elements of consolidation for the delineation of strands of research, that are perhaps still little valued, but widely accredited on an epistemological level<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> E. Macinai, S. Oliviero, *Le memorie di educazione familiare: voci, autobiografie, suoni e immagini. Prospettive di ricerca*, «RIEF-Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare», n. 1, 2017, p. 18.

# The “Diario di una maestra”<sup>1</sup> of Maria Giacobbe<sup>2</sup> and the Sardinian School

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«The school, as an unexpected collateral result, has given us a series of extraordinary books, for example the *Diario di una maestra* by Giacobbe», wrote Tullio De Mauro confirming the importance of this ego-document of the Sardinian writer, to be considered one of the most incisive and innovative post World War II Italian school *memoirs*<sup>3</sup>. As underlined by the linguist himself, Giacobbe is part, together with other authors such as Maria Maltoni, Leonardo Sciascia, Albino Bernardini and others, «of the rank of teachers to whom we owe a large part of the progressing path of our schools, especially of kindergarten and primary school»<sup>4</sup>.

## 1. *Biographical reports*

Maria Giacobbe was born in the 1928 in Nuoro to a wealthy family. She attended school during Fascism and in a context, like that of Nuoro, strongly marked by the

<sup>1</sup> On the work of Maria Giacobbe see D. Pigliaru, *Maria Giacobbe vista da G. Dessì e N. Tanda*, «Frontiera», vol. 8, n. 93, 1975, p. 312; A. Capitini, *A proposito del diario di una maestra*, «Ichnusa», vol. 6, n. 24, 1958, pp. 41-43; A. Pigliaru, *Note sul «Diario di una maestra»*, «Ichnusa», vol. 5, n. 20, 1957, pp. 13-23.

<sup>2</sup> On the life and work of Maria Giacobbe see M. Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, Nuoro, Il Maestrale, 2020; M. Giacobbe, *Piccole Cronache*, Bari, Laterza, 1961; M. Giacobbe, *Le Radici*, Cagliari, Edizione Della Torre, 1996; R.M.G. Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi (l'opera narrativa e saggistica di Maria Giacobbe)*, Thesis, Faculty of Education Sciences (Supervisor: S. Maxia), Cagliari, University of study of Cagliari, Academic Year 1998/1999; M. Pittau, *L'era fascista nella provincia italiana: il Littorio a Nùgoro e in Sardegna, con la lettera di Maria Giacobbe*, Sassari, EDES, 2011; G. Marci, *Radici e poesie della Sardegna: la scrittrice Maria Giacobbe racconta in una intervista il suo percorso umano e letterario: i due linguaggi della narrazione*, «La Nuova Sardegna», vol. 97, n. 153, 1987, p. 28; P. Alcioni, P. Degli Esposti, *Cagliari, racconti di Maria Giacobbe*, Cagliari, T Hotel, 2010; P. Caocci, *Intervista a Maria Giacobbe, autrice del Diario di una maestra*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 1, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> On the role of the scholastic diary as a source for historical reconstruction see A. Viñao, *Las Autobiografías, Memorias y diarios como fuente histórico-educativa: tipología y usos*, «Teías», vol. 1, n. 1, 2000, pp. 223-253; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> T. De Mauro, *Prefazione*, in A. Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, Nuoro, Illisso, 2004, p. 12.

propaganda of the Regime. It must be taken into account that the “Atene Sarda”, the city of Nobel Prize winner Grazia Deledda, had become the provincial capital in 1927, a choice that had reinforced support for the dictatorship<sup>5</sup>. Her childhood was, in reality, anti-fascist, thanks to the influence of her family and her teacher, characterized by the yearning for democratic freedom and by a strong opposition to the dictatorship. Her father, Dino Giacobbe, was one of the founders of the Sardinian Action Party, as well as one of the best-known exponents of Nuoro anti-fascism<sup>6</sup>, was arrested and then self-exiled first to France, then to Spain and finally to the United States. Her mother, Graziella Sechi<sup>7</sup>, was a teacher who shared her husband’s anti-fascism. Giacobbe recalled how she listened secretly to the then banned Radio Barcelona<sup>8</sup>. Their home was raided several times by the police, and her mother was also imprisoned, although she was soon released<sup>9</sup>. Her elementary teacher, Angela Maccioni, was also anti-fascist, and because of her political position she was fired and imprisoned<sup>10</sup>.

Despite the worsening economic conditions and political pressure, Giacobbe managed to attend primary and secondary school, but was unable to finish her studies due to a serious illness. Years later, in 1946, she decided to prepare for the master’s qualification exam, despite the hostility of family members who considered this choice a «downgrading»<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Pittau, *L’era fascista nella provincia italiana*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> «I remember when my mother was arrested. The police had completely surrounded the house, as if to surprise a dangerous criminal. Then they came in and showed her the arrest warrant. So, mom went up to her room, I was six years old. I followed her. She was beautiful and elegant; she was preparing to be taken to prison. Prison was an ugly and dirty place, there were cockroaches. She combed her hair calmly. I hid under the bed and watched him. I was ashamed. I was ashamed that men were foolish enough to arrest a beautiful and good woman, to want to take her to prison with cockroaches» (Marci, *Radici e poesie della Sardegna*, cit., p. 28).

<sup>8</sup> «Those were the years of the civil war in Spain. Almost all the people I knew sided with the “reds” and in the morning, doors and windows barred, while I was doing my braids and getting me ready for school, my mother listened to Radio Barcelona. I had confused ideas about all this, only I knew that in a town not far from Sardinia and very similar to it, they fought “for freedom”» Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., pp. 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

<sup>10</sup> «The “teacher” I am referring to was Angela Maccioni, who was for those who knew her a splendid example of intelligence, culture and moral, and therefore also political, coherence in the struggle for freedom against fascism then in power. A struggle that, in 1937, cost her prison and the loss of her job, the only source of livelihood for her and for her blind and totally disabled mother, who was the widow of a master and mother of two who died during the still recent First World War World. Her “example”, like that of my mother and father, was important in the formation of my moral personality, but I don’t think I ever took it as an “example” or “inspiration” in my didactic and pedagogical choices. Two beautiful books by Angela Maccioni were published posthumously, for one of which I wrote her introduction and a volume of the series “Pensatori sardi - Antologia delle idee entrate nella Storia” is dedicated and entitled to her ed. Unione Sarda, Cagliari 2014. A school in Nuoro is dedicated to Angela Maccioni and, recently, the Nuoro anti-fascism scholar Marina Moncelsi organized a meeting on her» (P. Caocci, *Intervista a Maria Giacobbe*, cit.).

<sup>11</sup> «I was sorry to be a “daughter of the family” and tried to get employed. But for a girl “of my social status” it was not easy to find a job. Not a manual job in the ceramic factory that was springing up and that attracted me a lot: it would have been indecorous. Not a job because I didn’t have qualifications valid to obtain one equal in importance to the dignity of my clan...but what then?» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 17).

After some time, while still very young, she received her first teaching post as a fifteen-day substitute in a multi-class of twenty-six children suffering from ringworm and trachoma, gathered together to avoid infecting healthy classmates<sup>12</sup>. After this baptism of fire, Giacobbe continued her teaching in some small and disadvantaged towns in and around Nuoro, with enthusiasm and interest<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. *Genesis of the Diario*

The publication of the *Diario di una maestra* was quite fortuitous<sup>14</sup>. During the first years of teaching, Giacobbe wrote: «I worked and lived in a kind of a solitude, and my need to narrate became writing. Evening writing, for myself, with no plans for publication [...]. But equally, with some of those pages, I participated in a competition in 1951 announced by UNESCO and the Union Against Illiteracy with a paper on a teaching experience in Oliena night school. And I won Second Prize».

It was a meeting with Adriana Gherardi, from Milano, which was decisive for the future of the diary: Gherardi told Giacobbe about her trip to Naples and her experiences with children marked by war and poverty. Also the *maestra* talked about her experience in Orgosolo. Intrigued by her story, Gherardi asked to look at what she had written about her experiences and gave the draft to a Milanese friend, Francesco Flora, author of the successful *History of Italian Literature*. Impressed by Giacobbe's pages, Flora sent Giacobbe's accounts to Mario Pannunzio, the editor of «Il Mondo». Pannunzio decided to publish them in installments in his magazine, entitled *Diario di una maestra*, the definitive title of the work, later published by Laterza in 1957.

## 3. *Topics*

After the first autobiographical chapter, she describes her first work experience as a teacher in primary schools in Barbagia in the early 1950s. After the description of her

<sup>12</sup> Id., *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> «The tangible observation of the economic, social and cultural misery of Sardinian society at the time led me to understand that the path of teaching would have been the most direct means to get to the heart of the problem. I would have been in contact with the children, but I would have also experienced the problems of their families up close, to whom I would have gladly offered my total availability. So, I made the decision to drop out of high school, and once I obtained the master's degree that enabled me to teach, I forgot the worldly commitments due to the elegant provincial life I led, and threw myself into my work with great enthusiasm» (P. Caocci, *Intervista a Maria Giacobbe*, cit.).

<sup>14</sup> «Novels get old, and even poetry books get old; with all the more reason and more rapidly should works like these two of mine age which have never claimed to be anything other than testimonies» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 193).



experience in Oliena, Fonni and Bortigali, she focused on the three school years spent in Orgosolo, which occupy almost half of her diary. Despite her pejorative epithet *maestrina*, from the first pages of her diary she is not seen as submissive or compliant, but combative and stubborn. Giacobbe soon found the problems that have come out of war with old problems, a society that appeals to the unwritten laws of agro-pastoral communities. As she herself writes in the preface to the 1975 edition:

more were unemployed and very many underemployed and underpaid, many were illiterate, many were the children who died in early childhood and among those who survived many were undernourished, many were those for whom school, as it was, even if attended, remained a mostly negative episode of childhood, many were those young people who ended up finding themselves in conflict with the laws of the State, very many who, to get the job that the Constitution says it was a 'right and a duty' for all citizens of the Republic, had to leave their land which was already one of the least densely populated in Europe<sup>15</sup>.

School, even in different counties, looks the same for her: miserable, basic, inadequate. Classrooms in decrepit houses on the edge of town were cold; a stagnant smell characterized them with a single small window. «The floor was simple beaten earth», the benches of rickety boards on each of which five or six children sat in a row also with men forced to kneel in front of the desk, with «their faces tense in an effort that is new and more serious for them than driving the plough»<sup>16</sup>. Blackboards, made of wood, were leaning precariously on a stool. Different areas, new faces, equal misery. Villages without a doctor, midwife, priest or cemetery. The teacher is the only person who has to carry out these roles<sup>17</sup>.

School was a luxury, and few people could attend it<sup>18</sup>. Education was not a priority because to become shepherds it was unnecessary to know how to read and write; playing in the streets or listening to conversations with adults are more fun than sitting in a classroom for hours with vetoes and constraints<sup>19</sup>.

Many pupils arrived tired from working, left an hour earlier than usual to arrive at school at half past seven in the morning, after long walks. Others could not even go to school, due to the fault of the *aggiudu*, the obligation to help at home or in the fields, which «with the lack of books and notebooks, with hunger and cold, is my most powerful antagonist» says Giacobbe<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Id., *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 194.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Some of his pupils had become aware of this, as she writes about a child from Oliena: «one day he developed the theme "the most beautiful day of my life". It was the one in which, well cleaned and combed, he had set off, with many books under his arm, to the middle school in Nuoro. Around him other clean and elegant boys with their books. But the theme ended bitterly: "I only dreamed that day. I was one of those boys, but I wasn't with them, that day I had gone to Nuoro because my father had hired me as a servant with a shepherd, and my road was another"» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., pp. 37-38).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Children grew up like adults: they slept on the floor, the bed was considered a luxury to be ashamed of, they knew the law of retaliation, pride and honor, they had the obligation to defend themselves. All of this went against the tide of the virtues taught in school. Hygienic rules were given, cleaning and frequent bathing, healthy and varied foods were promoted, but these children lacked a hot meal more often than not<sup>21</sup>. While working as a substitute in Fonni, the Swiss Red Cross donated ten bars of soap to the class. Giacobbe describes the surprise and joy of that unexpected gift. For girls and boys, it meant the possibility of taking a hot bath, new in a community in which personal hygiene could not be a question of morals, good will or education<sup>22</sup>.

Mothers were often absent all day because they worked in the fields and could not look after their children. They did not even have the money to pay for their school report cards. During a general pedagogy course for women at Fonni, Giacobbe took the liberty of saying that in town the girls played too little and worked too much<sup>23</sup>; she immediately realized that, perhaps, «she was talking too much». Almost all the mothers agreed with her statements, except one: an older woman who, with sadness on her face, had the courage to tell the harsh reality they were forced into. They loved their little girls and wanted to see them happy, but they could not do without their help. While the mothers go to the countryside or to reap, the older girls must look after the family.

The first experiments to evaluate entry skills were disastrous: compositions with «horrible scripts, spelling and syntax that are very particular and bear little resemblance to the Italian ones». Many pupils did not understand the Italian language because they only spoke Sardinian.

She confided that she had to resume, even for much older children, the practices and indications of the books designed for the first grade. With regard to her pedagogical indications, she became convinced that certain theoretical principles, while acceptable, seemed very distant from her educational reality. She observed:

there is a talk of spontaneity, of the child's "natural desire" to learn, but we think of environments in which the civilization of the alphabet has conquered a position of pre-eminence. Signs in shops, names of the street and squares, license plates on transport, boxes and wrappings with printed words, newspapers and books in every house... Here I have only seen two signs in the whole county and both say "Bar", the only public transport is the Nuoro-Mamoiada-Orgosolo, nobody has the curiosity nor need to read names of the streets because the county is patriarchal and people know each other and find each other without having to resort to addresses, the printed paper in circulation is so scarce that it still has the character of a precious thing and is not willingly entrusted to the destructive hands of children. [...] "Discover the center of interest", suggests modern pedagogy, and on this hinge all teachings. But in the school of Orgosolo what center of interest can be linked not artificially to the learning of the alphabet?<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-125.

<sup>22</sup> «Not when the house is reduced to one or two poorly heated rooms in which parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren and animals live together. Not when basic toilet facilities are a gentleman's luxury and water a rare liquid» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 65).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-115.

In places like this education must certainly have been a challenge. For example, during the first week as a substitute in a school in Gallura, her pupils looked at her as a usurper because she had taken the place of their beloved teacher. Initially «there were no open rebellions, only a secret hostility whose only outward manifestation was a bored indifference to my person. I made an effort to ‘do the school program’, I tried to amuse them...Nothing!»<sup>25</sup>.

And yet, precisely those who had been defined as «the dregs of the town», those taller and more robust boys than her, those «peasant-sheperds who belong to the “massajos” class, workers of the land who must know how to do everything to live [...]»<sup>26</sup>, those men, over time, began to talk about «their life and work experiences»<sup>27</sup>. Their trust was a result obtained thanks to the cancellation of every barrier that stood between them and the teacher. In fact, she sensed that to earn their respect it was necessary to enter their world and learn about their difficulties and their interests<sup>28</sup>. She began to make the most of her skills and her history when one day, during her first substitution, a large black snake entered the class. All the pupils were attracted to it. As a child, she used to play in the countryside with animals; therefore, it was not a problem to take hold of the long snake. She understood that it was an original way to win the respect of her students, incredulous that a female teacher would not only not run away from the sight of a reptile, but could even be familiar enough to praise the size of the animal!<sup>29</sup>

Her personal pedagogy accompanied her everywhere she went to teach. To Oliena, for example, she talked of her first day:

I want us to be friends: I’m here to teach you something you feel you need and that up to now you haven’t had time to learn, but I’m sure you have many things to teach me too. Our lives have been different, I had books, you had a work experience that I would be interested to know about so, I don’t want to be a teacher who always talks and pupils who listen; we are almost the same age, we must be a group of friends working together. If I say things you already know, please let me know, I don’t want to waste your time...<sup>30</sup>

However, her pedagogy clashed with the *unwritten* one of the educational establishment of the time. Some children advised her to beat them if she wanted to get something done as they were accustomed to this practice. Initially, she let herself be convinced of the effectiveness of this method but immediately realized that it was not part of her nature<sup>31</sup>. She had to deal with that feeling of ineptitude, incapacity and uselessness that pervaded the hearts and lives of those who tried hard to follow the lessons but failed. They looked at things with amazement, even the most common ones, and felt like strangers.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

<sup>29</sup> Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> «The teacher is not good at slapping and she tries not to hurt in giving them» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestrina*, cit., p. 46).

Sometimes, like uncertain guests, they seemed to apologize for being in the world<sup>32</sup>. And yet, there was in her young pupils an imperceptible, albeit confused, desire to belong to that civilization that the teacher represented and in which «not only the violent feelings, which are the essence of their lives, but also the little kind things can matter»<sup>33</sup>.

Through time, with patience, they began to understand the teacher's language. They even managed to compile a small Italian-Fonnese vocabulary and recited the *Pianto della Madonna*, a dramatic lauda. They wrote with ease about things that were important to them and «when faced with a blank sheet they no longer have that diffidence that forced them to lie with "thoughts" unrelated to their interests and their sensibilities»<sup>34</sup>. Since they wrote "lasquola è bela" or "lamama e brava" [*sic*], and additions and divisions were an insurmountable mountain, a long way has been travelled<sup>35</sup>.

Is the «merit mine», asks the teacher, «or rather the two years that have passed anyway»<sup>36</sup>? Yes, we answer, the credit belongs to her, even if not everything has changed, even if the conditions are still poor and miserable. But we must be grateful to that teacher who lived and suffered the realities, the anxieties, the little hopes and the many pains of the people among whom she worked<sup>37</sup>. «Orgosolo – she writes – is no longer the "university of crime". Everyone in the county knows me and everyone greets me; I enter their homes and warm myself by the flame of their hearths, listen to their stories and participate in their dramas. Their problems are my problems, because these are my people».

On such a delicate terrain it was not enough to be "experts", it was necessary to be significant educators, able to combine skills with a real passion for the *perfective* development of man. Giacobbe considered her pupils special, as well as particularly in need of all kinds of care. She wrote to a friend from Florence, director of the magazine ALI, edited by an Association of Young Christians, about the living conditions of her students and he obtained for her a way to have ten beds delivered, complete with mattresses and sheets, and old toys: «they won't be alms, but a lesson»<sup>38</sup> says the teacher. Radio Cagliari and the island's press immediately spread the news and several Italian cities mobilized to help its "Orgolese children". Giacobbe's desire to make the daily reality of these counties known, which seemed to be forgotten by everyone, had to collide with educational authorities, such as those imposed by the Superintendent, who forbade her

<sup>32</sup> «The amazement with which [Don Coco] looks at things, even the most common ones, is curious, almost as if he feels a stranger to them. Sometimes, like an uncertain guest, he seems to apologize for being in the world» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 170).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> «Now, they love her. Even Giovanni, the rebellious and disrespectful boy from Orgosolo, after being grabbed by the wrist by the teacher who held him in her power for a quarter of an hour, admired by the teacher's strength, gave in: «from that moment on, something changed. The dislike and contempt he had shown me from the very first day had given way to a new feeling. A few days later he suddenly came up to me and taking both my hands he said, giving me for the first time the pronoun of respect: You, Teacher, are my new friend! Only in this way, as an equal, as a friend to a friend, can he love me» (Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 139).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Pigliaru, *Maria Giacobbe vista da G. Dessì e N. Tanda*, cit.

<sup>38</sup> Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 134.

to continue writing about her pupils and to speak about their living conditions<sup>39</sup>. But she did not give up and continued insistently: through contacts with the Turin Children's Literature Study Center she managed to obtain about twenty books concerning plants, animals and educational fairy tales for her pupils.

One page in particular from the diary highlights her extraordinary educational ability: she continues to hope, even in circumstances in which everyone seemed resigned. The history of these children and men cannot be predetermined, but they remain unpredictable and living realities. In order to start loving school again, their freedom needs to be encouraged by another freedom, it needs support that makes the hope of changing and starting over possible:

The last day of school arrives and when I talk about it, with ill-contained joy, despite the pleasure I feel in being at school, they look at me with spite and perhaps with jealousy. For them I am "the teacher", I do not exist as a daughter, sister or friend of other people and if I allow them to guess that I may prefer the company of these strangers to theirs, they feel a sense of unease and disappointment. So every Saturday they need to ask me: - will you come tomorrow? - and every evening there is someone who explodes against the school keeper when he knocks at ten p.m. to warn that the lesson is over. I have no illusions that all this interest, all this desire to stay in school as long as possible are the result of a particular fascination of mine or of my exceptional teaching skills. I rather believe that, even if they have to give up smoking for a few hours – and this is one of the biggest sacrifices –, even if they have to submit to a certain discipline which is all the more difficult to bear because they are raised without any constraints, in this school, perhaps for the first time, they feel they are part of a civil society in which man is distinguished from beasts not only because they know how to defend themselves a little better from the elements but above all for their ability to understand and express the essence of things<sup>40</sup>.

#### 4. *Success of the Diario and its distribution*

Published by Laterza, the book immediately achieved great success. It had six editions in a decade, and a total of nine thousand copies sold<sup>41</sup>. She was among the winners of the *Viareggio Opera Prima 1957* award (*ex-aequo* with Felice Del Vecchio and Angelo Magliano; Giacobbe's name appears among those of Sandro Penna, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alberto Mondadori, Italo Calvino and Natalia Ginzburg<sup>42</sup>) and the *Palma Gold of the Union of Italian Women*. This success attracted the attention of many journalists, intrigued by the difficulties and social dramas of Sardinia. The reviews and essays dedicated to her diary multiplied. «It was like a stone thrown into the water – such is the metaphor of a

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

<sup>40</sup> Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> From the archives of the publisher G. Laterza it appears that the circulation between May 1957 and December 1966 reached 9,000 copies.

<sup>42</sup> Il «Premio Viareggio»: fra i candidati sono Giuseppe Dessì e Maria Giacobbe, «La Nuova Sardegna», vol. 67, n. 196, 1957, p. 3; Dodici premiati al «Viareggio». Tre poeti, tre narratori, tre «principianti»: la sarda Maria Giacobbe tra i vincitori col suo «Diario di una maestra», «La Nuova Sardegna», vol. 67, n. 204, 1957, p. 3.

Roman magazine —: all the frogs in the pond inevitably began to croak!»<sup>43</sup>. In Italy, after the various reprints of the Laterza (the last one in 1975), the book was then reissued only by Sardinian publishing houses<sup>44</sup>.

Finally, it is necessary to mention the unfortunate lack of cinematographic transposition of the volume. In an interview<sup>45</sup> with prof. Antioco Floris of the University of Cagliari, Vittorio De Seta revealed that he had read with admiration Giacobbe's *Diario di una maestra*, which would have been useful for him to better understand Barbagia society, in his film *Banditi ad Orgosolo* (1961). As revealed by Giacobbe herself, as soon as her school diary was published, the Sicilian director was not only impressed by the volume, but also contacted her because he wanted to make a film about it. They met few times in Sardinia and Rome but, due to a contractual misunderstanding, nothing came of it. Later, when the writer was living in Denmark, Nanni Loy also asked her to make a film inspired by her diary. They talked and wrote about it for a long time, but in the meantime, he had funding for another film, and the project fell through.

These are missed opportunities, which certainly would have helped to make the contribution of this ego-document even more effective in reconstructing and innovating the collective representation of the Italian school.

<sup>43</sup> Flores, *Una scrittrice fra due mondi*, cit.

<sup>44</sup> It is an element which, also according to Simonetta Soldani, represents a limit of its diffusion, which, after the national echo, was relegated to a more isolated dimension. Simonetta Soldani, professor of Contemporary History and of Political and Social History of the Contemporary Age at the University of Florence, one of the founders of the Italian Society of Historians (SIS) and of the Italian Society for Contemporary History (SISSCO) and member of the contemporary history magazine «Passato e presente» (active since 1982), during the penultimate appointment of the review *Un libro per la vita*, at the Auditorium in Piazzale della Resistenza in Scandicci, on 8 April 2018 she said she was already struck to the gymnasium from Giacobbe's diary but it was later readings, at different moments in her life, that made her (re)discover its profound meaning and its potential to be current, so much so that the professor admits that she used it during her university courses, to speak, for example of illiteracy and functional illiteracy.

<sup>45</sup> A. Floris, *Diari da Orgosolo*, 5 ottobre 2011, <http://www.cinemecum.it/diari-da-orgosolo> (last access: 17.02.2023).





# Formation and Transformation. Memories around Early Childhood Educational Services in an “Educationally Poor” Context

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## *Introduction*

This paper explores some findings about ongoing research, focused on public 0-3 educational services in Palermo and Catania (Italy). The aim of the research is to deepen the local pedagogical dimension, to reconstruct the history of early childhood education (ECE) services<sup>1</sup>, to achieve a more profound understanding of the different processes which contributed to the transformation of ECE services and the territory. This perspective implied a methodological approach oriented towards in-depth study and multidimensional analysis, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research, diversified and heterogeneous sources.

The main research dimensions are:

- the *normative dimension*, referred to the Italian early childhood pedagogical models; the national and regional early childhood educational laws with a particular focus on the most recent trends; the national, regional and local quantitative data, collected by different sources, based on specific parameters;
- the *interpretative dimension*, aimed at investigating the local historical transformations of public 0-3 services in Palermo and Catania municipalities, by analysing the narratives emerged from focus groups and oral interviews, involving different practitioners, and by analysing written local sources, archives, publications, institutional documents and conferences proceedings;
- the *critical dimension*, inspiring the approach of the whole research, the fieldwork and the following analysis, as well as the position and role as a researcher. The critical dimension is developed by enhancing an alternative discourse on Sicilian ECE

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term *ECE services* is used, instead of the most spread *ECEC services*, because «the expression “education and care” is used to open up the limitation of both terms that are perceived as complementary but at the same time separate [...]. Behind the choice of adopting the word “education” in a holistic sense stands the concern to overcome this conceptual split between education and care». (A. Lazzari, *Reconceptualising professional development in early childhood education*, Roma, Aracne editrice, 2017, pp. 12-13). See also P. Moss, *Power and resistance in early childhood education: From dominant discourse to democratic experimentalism*, «Journal of pedagogy», vol. 1, 2017, pp. 11-32.

services, commonly defined as “poor”, through the critical analysis of the collected counternarratives, the fieldwork, and the following analysis.

### 1. *ECE services and normative dimension*

The normative dimension includes standards, quality parameters, prescriptive laws, general theories and quantitative data that validate the previous aspects. The quantitative data confirm that in Palermo and Catania municipalities there are at least two main shortcomings: low provision of public 0-3 services in both cities and low enrollment requests, particularly in Catania services (see Figure 1). For example, in the 2020/2021 scholastic year, the provision was almost triple than the received enrollment requests.

2020/2021 s.y.	Palermo	Catania
0-3 public services	26	11
provision	870	312
enrollment requests	1.371	128
0-2 population	16.654	7.703

Fig. 1. ECE 0-3 public services in Palermo and Catania (Italy). Sources: *Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat)*; *Department of School and Office of Statistics (Municipality of Palermo)*; *Department of Social services (Municipality of Catania)*

The normative dimension also refers to national and regional laws: in this case, the most recent national laws on the integrated 0-6 system and the following guidelines<sup>2</sup> were considered. In these official documents, pedagogical coordinators are identified as one of the most important strategic actions to realise an integrated 0-6 system. Referring to Palermo and Catania municipalities, pedagogical coordination shows many limits<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, referring to the national pedagogical models, it may be significant to underline that the mostly known and legitimated 0-6 pedagogical paradigms were developed in Central and Northern Italy. Southern regions are considered “underdeveloped”, “not yet developed” compared to the national and international standards and quality requirements. For example, in the local dimension, the absence of a shared and common

<sup>2</sup> Legislative Decree 65/2017 *Istituzione del sistema integrato di educazione e di istruzione dalla nascita sino a sei anni*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», general series, n. 112, 16.05.2017; Linee pedagogiche per il sistema integrato “zerosei”, <https://www.miur.gov.it/linee-pedagogiche-per-il-sistema-integrato-zerosei-> (last access: 10.09.2023); Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l’infanzia, <https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-06/orientamenti-nazionali.html> (last access: 10.09.2023).

<sup>3</sup> In Palermo, the 0-6 municipal services are organised into 3 U.D.E. (Unità Didattiche Educative, *Educational Didactics Units*), but the responsables deal with both administrative and pedagogical dimensions, with a consequential tasks overload.

pedagogical identity among 0-3 ECE services, as well as of an integrated and defined regional governance emerged<sup>4</sup>.

Considering all these aspects, related to the normative dimension, we can absolutely affirm that Palermo and Catania municipalities are “educationally poor”<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Two counter-narratives: ECE services as democratic levers

In the mainstream discourse, people in poverty are portrayed as Others, «perceived as objects who lack complexity, motivation, rationality and capabilities [...] being “different” from others [...]. Idioms such as “culture of poverty”, “underclass”, “culture of dependency”, “welfare queen” and the distinction between “deserving” and “undeserving poor” have served to further this tendency of stigmatization»<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the educational practitioners are still undervalued, their professional competences are unrecognised, assimilated to a maternal role<sup>7</sup>. The historical and interpretative lens gives the opportunity to look at the local community not composed of problematic, invisible, ignorant poor people, but permits to find a plethora of local stories, democratic experimentalism, community self-empowerment inside and around the 0-3 public educational services<sup>8</sup>.

The historical process regarding building constructions, inauguration, closing and – in some significant cases – re-opening of public 0-3 services shows the active participation of entire urban districts, neighbourhoods communities, different social and political actors. The following example highlights how a *nido*<sup>9</sup> can become a democratic lever

<sup>4</sup> A common and defined pedagogical identity and a shared approach among ECE services weren't individuated in both local contexts. Furthermore, after 5 years from the 0-6 national law, a regional institutional commission for the 0-6 integrated system was established in October 2022.

<sup>5</sup> The expression “educationally poor” is borrowed from the concept of “educational poverty”, measured by adopting a “Indice di Povertà educativa” (*Educational poverty Index*). The ECE services provision is included as one of the Index parameters. See Save the children, *La lampada di Aladino*, <https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/la-lampada-di-aladino>, 2014 (last access: 02.09.2023); Save the Children, *Liberare i bambini dalla povertà educativa. A che punto siamo?*, <https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/liberare-i-bambini-dalla-poverta-educativa-che-punto-siamo.pdf>, 2016 (last access: 02.09.2023).

<sup>6</sup> M. Krumer-Nevo, O. Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, «Current Sociology», vol. 58, n. 5, 2010, pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> See L. Malaguzzi (ed.), *Esperienze per una nuova scuola d'infanzia*, Roma, Editori riuniti, 1971; E. Goldschmied, S. Jackson, *Persone da zero a tre anni. Crescere e lavorare nell'ambiente del nido*, Parma, Edizioni Junior, 1996; E. Catarsi, A. Fortunati, *Nidi d'infanzia in Toscana. Il bello, la qualità e la partecipazione nella proposta del “Tuscany Approach” per i bambini e le famiglie*, Bergamo, Edizioni Junior, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, an implicit connection between nidi and poverty can be retraced in the history of ECE services, especially for 0-3 years old children, born and developed as charitable places to support poor and disadvantaged families.

<sup>9</sup> *Nidi* (nurseries) are the most common Italian 0-3 educational services. The Italian integrated system also includes other supplementary educational services (*servizi integrativi*) and dedicated sections for children aged between 24 and 36 months, located in pre-primary 3-6 schools (*scuole d'infanzia*), and called “spring sections”

for a community. The urban district of Danisinni, located in Palermo, is characterised by a long main street and a big square, where public transport doesn't pass. All the main services are lacking: there aren't any hospitals, shops or offices. Although not peripheral – it is 5 minutes far from the Sicilian Parliament headquarters –, it is isolated from the rest of the city. Economical, social and educational poverty define this suburb.

In this district there is one of the first founded public *nidi*. It was built at the centre of the big square, between 1958 and 1960, thanks to the theatre entrepreneur Luigi Biondo's donation. It was inaugurated in 1960 and donated to O.N.M.I. (*Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia*)<sup>10</sup>. In the same building there was a *nido* and a counselling service for women. It was closed several times: during the last 62 years, it was closed for 25 years in total. From the women's life stories, collected by a social worker who I have interviewed, the most recent closure, in 2007, is considered – still now, after 15 years – a deep wound, something unexpected, something stolen, without any reasons or explanations. In fact, the *nido* was temporarily closed for a water loss. But it never reopened.

In the last decade, Danisinni community has been experimenting with a complex process of transformation and emancipation<sup>11</sup>. The first effort and commitment engaged by the community was focused on reopening the *nido*. A group of women wrote a public letter, delivered to the Assessor of Social services. A fundraising was organised to collect further funds to obtain a technical project for the renovation of the vandalised building: then, it was delivered to the mayor. Finally, a small group of inhabitants and social workers went to the town council meeting, during which the final project had to be approved or rejected. Their presence was effective to see the project approved: during the same meeting, the other two submitted projects to reopen other two *nidi* were refused. The renovation works officially started in September 2022.

The second example refers to a specific practitioners' in-service training, considered as one of the most powerful and effective experiences of their professional development by almost 100% of interviewed educators. This second example emerging from the interpretative dimension shows pedagogical identity and professional development as a complex and multidimensional individual and collective process, influenced by different levels, actors and factors.

In the second half of the 80's, Palermo experienced a special period, called «The Spring of Palermo», characterised by several political changes, an active civic society and a flourishing cultural period<sup>12</sup>, emancipating from the mainstream representation

(sezioni primavera).

<sup>10</sup> O.N.M.I. – *Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia* was the national 0-3 service, established during the fascist government (1925) to fight against infant mortality, and abolished in 1975.

<sup>11</sup> About the process of urban regeneration – and its contradictions –, and the bottom-up experiences and projects, see M. Mondino, *La rigenerazione urbana a base culturale tra rinascita e retoriche: il caso Danisinni a Palermo*, «Tracce Urbane», n. 13 (in press); C. Giubilaro, F. Lotta, *Quartiere in transizione. Il caso di Danisinni (Palermo) tra marginalità socio-spaziale e rigenerazione di comunità*, «Confini, movimenti, luoghi: politiche e progetti per città e territori in transizione», Roma-Milano, Planum Publisher, 2019, pp. 481-487.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Putnam suggested the correlation between a tradition of social differentiation with low levels of civic engagement and inequalities in terms of life styles and educational opportunities (*Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993).

linked to the Mafia. Early childhood education was identified as a symbolic and concrete dimension to promote civil, moral and political redemption. The local municipality, with Leoluca Orlando as mayor, financed and supported many networks and cultural activities; meanwhile, a shared synergy and commitment spread, strongly animated by the desire to develop a new innovative vision of community, education and childhood. From 1971, when the national law of *nidi* was enacted, many buildings were edified<sup>13</sup> but the first *nido* for 0-3 years old children was inaugurated in Palermo in 1989. In the same year, by the will of the Assessor Marina Marconi, other 11 *nidi* were opened, after restoring the abandoned and vandalised buildings.

From 1993 to 2000, Leoluca Orlando, the political leader of the *Spring of Palermo*, was reelected as mayor. In 1993 Alessandra Siragusa became the Assessor of School: she aimed her commitment not only at opening new *nidi*, but also to emancipate the 0-3 services from their exclusive caring mission, to consider them, for the first time in the local context, as educational services. Professional development was a key-element in this process. Between 1996 and 1998, a twinning between Palermo and Pistoia (Tuscany) was realised. The design of this professional development programme focused on peer-learning among practitioners: in the first phase, 6 one-week study visits with fieldwork observation and thematic workshops in Pistoia let the educators from Palermo know better the pedagogical identity and the colleagues' practices; in the second phase, a one-week study visit of educators from Pistoia became another effective and significant opportunity for a mutual benefit: the EC educators from Pistoia benefited from both observing the colleagues working in such a diverse context, and discussing their practices with them.

Moreover, Donatella Giovannini, who was the responsible of the *nidi* of Pistoia, continued until 1999 to give pedagogical support to the educators, with many visits, observation and supervising meetings.

This experience culminated in 2000, when the national conference of the association "Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia", founded by Loris Malaguzzi in 1980, was held in Palermo. More than 1000 participants came from different Italian regions.

Although not totally shared, fragmentary and developed by educators, without a defined and structured pedagogical coordination, the pedagogical identity of the *nidi* in Palermo is deeply rooted in this twinning. Its value resides not only in that historical happening. It was like a stone thrown in a pond, the waves are still moving. Almost all of the collected professional stories are marked by the consequence of this training: some practitioners decided to get a degree, to have the opportunity to reflect, to know the theories on child development or didactics techniques; some of them started to travel, visiting other 0-3 educational services around Italy; some of them join the association "Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia", till to form a regional official group in 2015.

<sup>13</sup> The national law 1044/71, which established *nidi* as «a social service in the public interest», provided national funds to regions seeking to develop municipal infant-toddler services, aimed both at the building construction and the services management.

### 3. *Emancipatory pedagogical research for an alternative discourse*

The first research findings retraced the mainstream representation of South Italy as poor, including the multidimensional aspects of poverty: social, economic, cultural, educational poverty. The perspective has been traditionally absorbed by the political discourse, as well as by the academic and scholastic one, by the nonprofit sector and the banking institutes and foundations. This dominant discourse shows and underlines the lack and the limits of the Southern regions, motivating the priority of intervention and investment. Describing people in poverty as “damaged”, possessing «negative characteristics, deficits and weaknesses such as low self-esteem, low intellectual achievement, or weakness of will»<sup>14</sup> may imply the risk to veil the possibility of identifying different forms of life, different local stories, the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below and a multitude of perspectives. Moreover, the economical investment is almost motivated by economical reasons and labour market benefits: «such an investment, it was argued, would disrupt the inter-generational transfer of poverty and form more competitive, productive and competent human resources tomorrow, to face the social challenges presented by a constantly ageing population»<sup>15</sup>. The “story of quality and high returns”, that characterises the dominant discourse, is based on «a simple equation [...]: “early intervention” + “quality” = increased “human capital” + national success (or at least survival) in a cut-throat global economy»<sup>16</sup>.

Which kind of pedagogical paradigm is shaped by such a dominant discourse? It coincides with the “prophetic pedagogy” described by Loris Malaguzzi, which «knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen. It knows everything and it has no uncertainty, it is absolutely imperturbable, it contemplates everything and prophesies everything and sees everything»<sup>17</sup>.

A dominant discourse, a conservative narrative of poverty and a prophetic pedagogy are deeply interrelated. «If only outcomes and results are to be considered, should our investments privilege younger children and disregard older ones? For that matter, we may ask, why invest in making tomorrow’s more productive adults and not in tomorrow’s democratic citizens, or tomorrow’s more cooperative and responsible individuals?»<sup>18</sup>.

Furthermore, should we conceive pedagogical research as a tool to encourage «power and resistance in early childhood education»<sup>19</sup>, promote democratic experimentalism and an alternative discourse? A possible way is through enhancing counter-narratives,

<sup>14</sup> Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> B. Casalini, *The Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Debate in the EU*, «Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies», anno XIX, vol. 1, 2014, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> P. Moss, *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> P. Cagliari, M. Castagnetti, C. Giudici, C. Rinaldi, V. Vecchi, P. Moss (edd.), *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches, 1945-1993*, Oxford, Routledge, 2016, p. 421.

<sup>18</sup> Casalini, *The Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Debate in the EU*, cit., p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Moss, *Power and resistance in early childhood education: From dominant discourse to democratic experimentalism*, cit.

to push towards a transdisciplinary re-conceptualisation of traditional and dominant epistemologies<sup>20</sup>. Counter-narratives<sup>21</sup> allow us to focus on the same local contexts, the same educational services, the same practitioners and local communities immersed and involved in a historical multidimensional process. Counter-narratives

always situate individual experience and voice within material and discursive contexts, on the one hand, and policies and institutional practices, on the other. They also indicate that often avoiding Othering is related to researchers' deep commitment to social justice [...] and is based on close contacts with social activists [...] Thus, the new poverty knowledge is based [...] on acknowledgement of its inherently political nature and the recognition and legitimization of knowledge grounded in practice, activism and experience<sup>22</sup>.

The alternative discourse tells stories «of democracy, experimentation and potentiality»<sup>23</sup> in every city, suburbs, school. In this framework, a degree of coherence, equality and accessibility to early childhood services has to be provided – not to be forgotten the need for a normative dimension –; but equally important, it provides the conditions needed for diversity and experimentation of ideas, projects and practices in services themselves – «a plethora of local stories. [...] the enacting of different stories, with people working on a diversity of projects inspired by different ideas, desires and circumstances»<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> See M. Urban, *From “closing the gap” to an ethics of affirmation. Reconceptualising the role of early childhood services in times of uncertainty*, «European Journal of Education», vol. 50, n. 3, 2015, pp. 293-306.

<sup>21</sup> About counter-narratives – and their contradictions –, see Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, *Critical Poverty Knowledge: Contesting Othering and Social Distancing*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Moss, *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality*, cit.

<sup>24</sup> Moss, *Power and resistance in early childhood education: From dominant discourse to democratic experimentalism*, cit., p. 16.





# School Architecture and Furniture in Italy, 1950-1970. Forms and Spaces of a Collective Memory

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## 1. *The origins of modern schools: classrooms with large windows and tubular steel chairs*

As analysed in the pioneering work of Maria Paola Maino on children's furniture, limited attention has, as yet, been paid to studying environments specifically designed for children by artists, architects, designers and industrialists, figures who have contributed to modifying our vision of childhood and school<sup>1</sup>.

From a methodological perspective, this investigation has been shored up by a different range of sources ranging from specialist journals and exhibition catalogues to previously unseen documentation found in private archives and those of institutions such as Triennale di Milano that devoted its first thematic exhibition to school and home in 1960<sup>2</sup>.

Grasping the various ideological attitudes and design practices applied to school requires starting not simply from certain building models used in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which were used by post-war architects, but also by testimony left by these same architects on the school world.

Italian Fascism paid great attention to school and the role of the state as primary educator. In the 1930s the rationalisation of spaces and furniture, at the expense of ornamentation, for the purposes of fostering functionalism and the construction of new public buildings entrusted to a new generation of architects, fed into the modern school myth. This was the cultural milieu in which Giuseppe Terragni was working when, in 1936, after praising the regime's school building plans and Opera Nazionale Balilla in the «Quadrante» journal, he stated:

It would seem that school is also now moving in the direction of its own architecture. But care is needed in small town buildings. Money saving, that eternal enemy of healthy initiatives, is too often used as

<sup>1</sup> M.P. Maino, *A misura di bambino: cent'anni di mobili per l'infanzia in Italia, 1870-1970*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is the result of research and cataloging activities of numerous works of art, architecture, photography and design conducted on the occasion of the PRIN project "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)" by the research unit of Roma Tre University and published in [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it).

a pretext for inadequate architecture and it thus happens that the “stylish façade” preconception eats up the cash required for a simple, light-filled building. Four walls are all a school building needs. True saving consists of opening up four great windows in these four walls so that light and air bursts in, the only medicine children need<sup>3</sup>.

Light, air, large windows replacing the stylish façade: these were principles that Terragni himself turned to in these years for one of his masterpieces, “Asilo Sant’Elia” in Como, for which he also designed the furniture, including desks and chairs for pupils and teachers. His use of materials such as plywood and steel as chair supports were, even at the time, hailed as ultra-modern evolutions from the old school classrooms and wooden desks. With a vision influenced by modernist Northern European design, Terragni set aside traditional desks for a model made with materials satisfying the need for mass production and designed to be user-friendly by small children.

## 2. Italian school buildings and furniture in the 1950s: the Zanuso model

In the wake of the inevitable production and consumption collapse caused by Second World War, the style of the late 1930s remained the primary model prior to the new material experimentation of the economic boom era. The debate set in motion in the 1940s in some of the main architecture journals around mass furniture production, including for children and schools, and their intrinsic recreational component, is interesting in this regard<sup>4</sup>.

Post-war reconstruction required not just a change in style but also an effort to redefine school spaces in design and town planning terms, a task which architects and designers from all over Italy were called on to take part in. These included Marco Zanuso, who built a nursery school with attached housing for single mothers in a suburban Milanese district. The building is in the Lorenteggio district in south-west Milan and was built in 1953-1954 on commission by Pio Istituto per i Figli della Provvidenza. For this type of commissions, Zanuso turned to architects, designers and artists. A very young Cini Boeri, who had just joined his studio, was commissioned by Zanuso with the task of «interpreting the project» to «accord dignity, comfort and help to mothers and children»<sup>5</sup>. This attention to the needs of a small community makes for a human scale work that covers both the building itself and the design and ad hoc production of the furniture with personalised and modular solutions a world away from the cold and anonymous places of assistance and aseptic atmosphere of Fascist-era schools. The Lorenteggio nursery school

<sup>3</sup> G. Terragni, *Scuole e bimbi*, «Quadrante», nn. 35-36, October 1936, p. XIV.

<sup>4</sup> On this subject see Carlo Mollino’s article in the «Stile» magazine edited by Gio Ponti, in particular the section *Vera psicologia del bambino* in which he theorises the mass production of children’s furniture that was to be interchangeable and stackable: «Stile», n. 31, July 1943. See Maino, *A misura di bambino: cent’anni di mobili per l’infanzia in Italia, 1870-1970*, cit., p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> C. Boeri, *Progettare con gioia*, in A. Piva, V. Prina (edd.), *Zanuso: architettura, design e la costruzione del benessere*, Roma, Gangemi editore, 2007, p. 124.

can thus be considered one of the most interesting examples in the Italian panorama of second post-war period school architecture in which building and furniture were designed by the same person.

A few years later, in 1959, Zanuso took part in the competition held by the Milan Municipality and the Triennale di Milano to promote research into primary school furniture design. The Milanese architect participates together with Richard Sapper, his young collaborator at the time. Their design research took Zanuso and Sapper around five years, in which time they drew up an initial proposal for a curved plywood chair that they then decided against. They then turned to sheet steel used precisely at that time by Zanuso for his “Lambda” chair but this turned out to be too costly and unsuited to children. The solution came when they contacted Giulio Castelli’s firm Kartell, which specialised in the production of plastic objects, a material which came to definitive everyday use prominence in the 1960s in the fields of fashion, art and design. In 1964, then, they decided to opt for a lightweight and user friendly colourful polyethylene chair that culminated in “Seggiolina K 4999” (previously called K1340)<sup>6</sup>. The chair was thus conceived of as a child-friendly school furniture item and for play. It was a modular chair whose legs could be taken off and stacked up just like Lego, which could be made into a multiplicity of real or imaginary architectural structures, the same ones that appeared in some of the product’s famous advertising campaigns.

Modular, replicable, lightweight, mobile, playful and, above all, colourful: the Zanuso and Sapper children’s chair set in motion a lively experimentation with plastic for school furniture, as comes across in the many articles in the main sector journals, such as «Domus» and «Casabella», which published multiple manufacturer advertising campaigns, above all from Northern Italian firms<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. *The XII Triennale di Milano in 1960*

In the years in which the political debate on state school reform was raging, the theme of the XII Triennale di Milano held in 1960 was home and school. Interest in childhood had already been shown at the 1954 Triennale, for which the BBPR studio (Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers) created a specially designed maze for children to play in at Parco Sempione, decorated by Saul Steinberg’s graffiti and with a mobile sculpture by Alexander Calder that was later demolished and which today can be studied in full through photos and archival documentation<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> M. De Giorgi (ed.), *Marco Zanuso: architetto*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale di Milano, 24 marzo-30 maggio 1999), Milano, Skira, 1999, pp. 248-251; Piva, Prina (edd.), *Marco Zanuso: architettura, design e la costruzione del benessere*, cit. The chair is now part of the Triennale permanent collection. I would like to thank Archivio del Moderno in Balerna for supplying me with the photographic documentation from the archival fund “Marco Zanuso” during my research.

<sup>7</sup> «Domus», n. 502, September 1971, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Triennale Milano Archives, file TRN\_X\_15\_0925.

The dissent shown by Movimento degli Studi per l'Architettura (MSA) against the 1957 Triennale raised issues destined to usher in radical change in this event over the years that followed and, more generally, to be reflected in the crisis that struck the whole Italian design cultural milieu from the years immediately following on from the controversial 1957 Triennale. In 1959-1960 a great many scathing criticisms were, in fact, levelled at design, basically revolving around accusations that it had betrayed its roots and given in to market logics. This was the basis of the MSA's proposal to return the Triennale's program to the primary contemporary cultural issues, an objective they proposed to achieve by setting up a study centre and radically changing the event's exhibition framework from a commodity and sector basis to a thematic and unitary format. The 1960 edition was thus organised on the basis of these demands for change, abolishing the classic commodity-based sectors and traditional disciplinary categories – which were accused of making it one of Italy's many trade fairs – and focusing on a single theme of political and social importance, home and school, to be developed in accordance with a coherent and unitary narrative capable of getting the public actively involved in an exhibition that was to be divided up into three macro contexts: urban, rural and suburban<sup>9</sup>.

The Italian section was presented through a unitary path in which real school environments were reconstructed, complete with furnishings, following a careful urban planning and anthropological investigation of the Italian context, which prompted the organizers to bring together architects, engineers and educators in an international congress on school building, which took place within the event<sup>10</sup>.

Reconstructions of the multi-age classroom characteristic of small rural schools designed to contain groups of pupils of different ages and levels and modern city school classrooms with their spaces set aside for group work, workshops and other active education models are evocative of the Italian school context<sup>11</sup>. It is also of interest that the two classrooms were furnished with products selected for that year's edition of the "Compasso d'Oro" (Fig. 1).

In fact, some of the objects on show also won the prestigious prize set up by the Associazione per il Disegno Industriale (ADI) which had been the brainchild of Gio Ponti – such as the "T12" desk and chair designed by architects Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni (Fig. 2) for the occasion of the 1959 national competition that Zanuso had also taken part in.

This desk and chair, together with a teacher's desk model, all designed on the same occasion in plywood and steel tubing, appeared in a great many photos now accessible at the Triennale di Milano's archives. These photos also show children and teachers present

<sup>9</sup> See the archive units relating to the exhibition's arrangement, the reports of the study commission and the meeting minutes: Triennale Milano Archives, files TRN\_12\_DT\_104\_P, TRN\_12\_DT\_062\_C, TRN\_12\_DT\_004\_VE.

<sup>10</sup> Archives of Triennale Milano contains a copy of the typewritten transcriptions of the speeches and the publication of the conference held from 13 to 16 October 1960, file TRN\_12\_DT\_169\_P.

<sup>11</sup> G. Ciliberto, *La Triennale di Milano fra costruzione e critica del design in Italia*, Degree Thesis, Visual and Multimedia Communications, Venice, IUAV, A.A. 2011/2012, pp. 84-89.



Fig. 1. Example of common classroom in elementary school with school desk and chair in curved steel and curved plywood by Achille Castiglioni, Pier Giacomo Castiglioni and Luigi Caccia Dominioni, 1960, produced by Palini firm, XII Triennale di Milano, *Home and school* section, TRN\_XII\_10\_0554. Photo Publifoto. Courtesy © Triennale Milano – Archivi



Fig. 2. Achille Castiglioni, Pier Giacomo Castiglioni and Luigi Caccia Dominioni, school desk and chair in curved steel and curved plywood, 1960, produced by Palini firm, XII Triennale di Milano, *Home and school* section, Installation and “production islands”, TRN\_XII\_08\_0429\_01. Unidentified photographer. Courtesy © Triennale Milano – Archivi

at the inauguration who had been called in to bring the classrooms to life and use the objects set out in the Italian section, in a quasi-simulation of school life<sup>12</sup>.

A reading of reviews of the 1960 Triennale shows that the greatest praise was accorded to the prefab primary classroom presented by Great Britain in Parco Sempione, donated to Milan city council and set up in the Milanese suburbs, testifying to the fact that prefabs were seen by many as a solution in several schools in Italy.

The criticisms levelled at the school exhibition organised by the Italian committee were, on the other hand, scathing, with the most famous coming from Bruno Zevi who, in his magazine «L'architettura. Cronache e storia» criticised the un-unitary and un-national character of the 1960 edition in his usual fervent way and accused the Italian section's school installation as an «orderly book for walls» burdened down by lengthy texts and a great many display cases<sup>13</sup>. But his biggest accusation was the Milan-centric nature of the event's organisation and its school furniture exhibitions at the expense, as he saw it, of Rome and the South: «The Milanese perspective generally has this fault. It represents the problems of other regions, and the South in particular, in a paternalistic way. In the case at issue here, in a reactionary way». Zevi's review was therefore designed to prompt thinking on the North-South imbalance, including in visibility and publicity terms, and thus analysis of the communications strategies of the firms producing school objects and furniture in those years. The Palini firm, one of the best known chair and desk manufacturers of that period, based in the Lombard town of Pisogne, packed the main design magazines of the era with its advertisements and also appeared in the 1960 Triennale's official catalogue<sup>14</sup>, which also welcomes the official poster designed for the occasion by Roberto Sambonet, a further Milanese area architect, graphic designer and consultant for La Rinascente, a firm that was, in these years, taking an active part in organising and sponsoring events such as this as well as selling products exhibited at the event in its stores. In the economic boom years, advertising was the most effective way of spreading the word on demands for change at school and in school furniture, perfectly capturing the complexity of the intersections between art, childhood, education, school, design and everyday life as a TV advert by Aristide Bosio commissioned by Olivetti company in 1965 shows. This advert was set in a school classroom in which children were quickly learning how to type on Marcello Nizzoli's famous «Lettera 32»<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Triennale di Milano Archives, file TRN\_XII\_10\_0523.

<sup>13</sup> B. Zevi, *La XII Triennale di Milano: dodici punti fermi per la XIII*, «L'architettura. Cronache e storia», September 1960, pp. 290-293.

<sup>14</sup> *12. Triennale di Milano: esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne e dell'architettura moderna*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Triennale di Milano, 16 July-4 November 1960), Milano, Arti Grafiche Crespi, 1960.

<sup>15</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kN\\_qwLC-\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kN_qwLC-_c) (last access: 11.12.2022).



#### 4. *Art, school and city: visual suggestions from an essay by Giulio Carlo Argan*

Whilst it had been architects, engineers and designers who had made their voices heard thus far, in the late 1960s the 1968 cultural revolution, the political debate and the long-drawn-out school and university reform process prompted young students themselves to take possession of these school settings and act directly on these architectures. The slogans and graffiti of the 1968 youth protests that burst onto the Valle Giulia scene, both inside and out, are still visible on the façade of the Faculty of Architecture of “Sapienza” University of Rome in Valle Giulia (1925-1964), designed by Enrico Del Debbio. The work was attributed to a collective of creative young students going by the name “Gli Uccelli” led by Paolo Ramundo. The idea was to leave creative testimony of these days of protest, using urban graffiti in accordance with the artistic tradition of Mexican mural painting but also with New York writing and street art. A woman’s face in profile eating a bunch of grapes, a hand and a series of grape vines on which a naked man is climbing were painted onto the façade in a language that conjures up the themes and linear and stylised motifs of early Christian wall painting. These young people also involved Renato Guttuso, an internationally famous artist and eminent figure in the Italian left, who supplied some of the preparatory designs for the façade. This was work inspired by live broadcasts of the events, by dialogue with the era’s centre stage players and an awareness of the revolutionary nature of the student protests then exploding in the squares, schools and universities, in the firm belief that, as Guttuso argued, artists «cannot separate “poetic reason” from what Vittorini (Elio, ndr) called “civil reason”»<sup>16</sup>. The active contribution of artists to history and contemporary society was the subject of a 1968 essay written by Giulio Carlo Argan in the magazine «Metro»<sup>17</sup>, in which he stressed the human, educational and political vocation of designers and artists, calling on them to teach in the schools in the same years in which the university students were invoking «anti-authoritarian pedagogy» in the name of the 1968 protests<sup>18</sup>.

#### 5. *“Autoprogettazione” and play: considerations on childhood via the work of Enzo Mari and Cini Boeri*

Artist *faber* or *ludens*? In an essay released in «Metro», Argan’s answer is that the artist is «increasingly and more convincingly *politicus*»<sup>19</sup>. Designers themselves also gained greater political consciousness of their trade, in particular Enzo Mari whose «self-design» idea

<sup>16</sup> R. Guttuso, *Preface*, in Id., *Mestiere di pittore. Scritti sull’arte e la società*, Bari, De Donato, 1972, p. 7. On Valle Giulia’s graffiti see G. Muratore (ed.), *Graffiti sui muri della Facoltà di architettura Valle Giulia, 1968-2004*, Roma, Kappa, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> G.C. Argan, *Arte, scuola e città*, «Metro», n. 496, March 1971, pp. 4-12.

<sup>18</sup> *Per una pedagogia antiautoritaria. Documento elaborato da un gruppo di studenti e di insegnanti dell’Università Statale di Milano*, «Marcatré», pp. 222-226.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

juxtaposed to merely commodity-based logics, conceived of furniture design, like that of toys, as an individual exercise designed to stimulate individual creativity and construction abilities without ever losing sight of entertainment value. Gillo Dorfles was one of the first to take note of this in 1968 in the magazine «Metro» on the subject of certain work in cardboard such as “Il posto dei giochi” or a bookcase of just four elements and «ultra-easy to assemble»<sup>20</sup>.

The playful and transversal nature of the Italian design of these years can, as we have seen, be found in many of the advertising campaigns of the manufacturers who often chose children to act as testimonials for their products, even those whose target audience was not directly children or schools. An example of this was the “Serpentone” sofa, a chair prototype that was never actually put into production, designed by Cini Boeri for Arflex in 1971. This was an adaptable sofa designed to be sold by the metre and made of polyurethane foam which, in some of the photos kept in the archives of the «Domus» magazine, was mobbed by children curious to explore a new object in the shape of a snake in the courtyard of their school, perhaps during recreation.

Cini Boeri herself was also the author of an unrealized project, preserved in her archive, for a «punishment-less and prize-less» primary school: an ideal school, surrounded by greenery and organized on the basis of circular classrooms with the teacher’s desk in the middle and the pupils’ desks arranged around it on rails, to make them moveable. Boeri envisaged teachers or pupils themselves as deciding on organisation as this would educate them in notions of autonomy and responsibility.

## 6. “Human architectures” dialoguing with the cities: Aldo Rossi’s schools

From the 1950s to the 1970s, a great many Italian architects began taking an interest in school and school building, frequently during their training and earliest university teaching years. This was the case of Aldo Rossi, who was invited to the 1960 XII Triennale di Milano and designed his first school in 1968, a middle school in Trieste, the scholastic institute “Giuseppe Caprin”, near the “San Sabba’s Risiera”, an area of strong urban expansion, in which the building was supposed to build a civil and educational “bulwark”. In 1969-1970 he set to work extending and restoring the “Edmondo De Amicis” school at Broni, work which was completed in 1971. This was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century building to which Rossi added a large, covered portico, an atrium and a staircase, enabling the distribution of the classrooms to be changed. One of its ground floor entrances features a recurring theme of his work, a triangular structure over the entrance resembling a classical temple tympanum whose solid geometries substituted all decorative elements and poetically conjured up a metaphysical and de-Chirico-esque atmosphere with its pure and minimalist volumes. His focus on this specific element of the composition is tangible

<sup>20</sup> G. Dorfles, *I giochi di Mari*, «Metro», June 1968, pp. 169-173; Enzo Mari: *la biblioteca in cartone*, «Domus», n. 496, March 1971.

in the project's preliminary designs. As Rossi himself confirmed later, his intention was to create «human» architectures dialoguing with and emulating the cities they were located in, as showcased by the central focus on the town square in his designs for the “Salvatore Orrù” primary school in Fagnano Olona (1972-1976), photographed in the late 1980s by Luigi Ghirri, as a multi-functional space for lessons, sporting activities and the district's cultural events<sup>21</sup>.

These were years in which the 1949 “Law 717”, known as the “2% law”, was still in force, legislation with which the Italian state attempted to foster public art work by encouraging joint working between architects and artists – mainly sculptors – in the creation and decoration of public buildings, including schools. This law remained in force for schools until 1975. Whilst the quality of the outcomes was not always superlative, the “2% law” was, at least in its intentions, a significant opportunity to rethink, regenerate and renovate shared urban spaces in Italian towns and cities, from north to south<sup>22</sup>.

### 7. *Design as an interpersonal and educational space: Riccardo Dalisi and the children of Naples's Traiano quarter*

In the years in which the *Decreti Delegati* came into force, in 1973-1974, figures such as Neapolitan architect and designer Riccardo Dalisi worked to foster the democratisation of schools in peripheral and disadvantaged contexts by getting local children directly involved in multi-disciplinary artistic activities, capable of critiquing the town planning, educational and political macro-systems of the day.

Dalisi's workshops with the children of Naples's Traiano quarter constituted a design and interpersonal experience demonstrating that art and design can make a political mark and have an ethical, social and educational mission capable of making a profound difference to the lives of children and young people called on to get directly involved in collective art work. Examples of this are the Secondigliano and Scampia murals based on an idea of Felice Pignataro's or the chairs made by children with affordable materials and leftovers together with Dalisi, once again in Naples<sup>23</sup>.

These are, in actual fact, the very same years in which Bruno Munari set up his educational workshops in Milan and proposed teaching even nursery-age children to design objects in a 1974 article in «Domus»<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> A. Ferlenga (ed.), *Aldo Rossi. Tutte le opere*, Milano, Electa, 1999, pp. 44-45.; Id., *Aldo Rossi / I miei progetti raccontati*, Milano, Electa, 2020, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> M.G. Messina, *Lo “stile 2%”*, in *2%/717/1949: la legge del 2% e l'arte negli spazi pubblici*, volume edited by Direzione generale arte e architettura contemporanee e periferie urbane, Roma, Cura.Books, 2017, pp. 17-37.

<sup>23</sup> Many archival materials and photographic documentation of Dalisi's work from his personal and professional archive have recently been shown at the *Utopia Dystopia: the myth of progress seen from the South* exhibition in the section devoted to the peripheral spaces (Naples, MADRE, 9 July-8 November 2021).

<sup>24</sup> B. Munari, *Proposta per una scuola di design che comincia dall'asilo*, «Domus», n. 538, 1974, p. 9.

The challenge on the “school” environment taken up by these eminent exponents of Italian material and visual culture in the second post-war period, briefly reviewed here in a first but not exhaustive investigation, remains an open challenge for today’s pedagogues, architects, artists and designers and for anyone who wants to question themselves on this subject of urgent socio-cultural relevance.

# Plaques and Statues as School Memories. The Case of the Monumental Tributes to Giovanni Cena

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## 1. *Monumental sources as documents of the official school imagery*<sup>1</sup>

There are the events, the memory of the events and the history of the events. The difference is that between being, remembering and knowing. There is also the history of the memory of the events to consider. This is a new research frontier: the history of the public memory of school. This history is told through multiple categories of typical sources – which include stamps, coins e banknotes, street and school names, plaques and statues. Here it has been chosen to focus on epigraphic and sculptural memorials, which have been cumulatively defined as «monuments». Monuments are particularly suitable for explaining the nature, ways and purposes of public memory and the role that this memory has had in the cultural history.

It is worth pointing out that the word «monument» is here not used to refer to the vestiges of the past having the character of grandeur. The Latin verb «monère» means to «remind», but also to «admonish» and «educate»: plaques and statues are therefore monuments in the etymological sense of the term, that is, they are objects designed to hand down the memory of figures or events of the past, and their task, like for any kind of admonition, is pedagogical.

Taking into account the material configuration of monumental sources, their peculiarities are: singleness, fixedness, permanence over time and public facies. First of all, each monumental piece is unique, without copies. Monuments are then stationary, immovable, permanently linked to the environment. Furthermore, being ideally conceived to be forever, plaques and statues challenge the wear of time: school memory is destined to last when it is set in marble or bronze; the materials for making monumental artefacts approach the idea of immortality. Finally, the perpetuation of memory has to be combined with the installation of plaques and statues in plain sight, in places impossible to miss, so that the narration of the school past is addressed *erga omnes* or at least to as

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph deals with the theoretical and methodological premises for the study of monuments to the memory of school personalities. These premises were defined in my PhD thesis: V. Minuto, *Memoria e potere. I monumenti a personalità della scuola dall'Unità agli anni '70 del Novecento*, PhD thesis (supervisors: A. Ascenzi, F. Targhetta), Macerata, University of Macerata, a.a. 2021-2022.

many recipients as possible. While the consultation of archival or printed documents is done voluntarily by an individual expert, the contact with plaques and statues is almost always unintended and potentially massive. The involuntariness of the encounter with epigraphic and sculptural memorials is functional to the primary aim of disseminating the content of monumental communication as much as possible.

In addition to defining the material characteristics of plaques and statues, it is necessary to build a theoretical map for orientation in the areas of the conservation of school memory through monuments; the guidelines of this map are drawn by responding to six fundamental inquiries relating to monumental memorialization.

The first question is: in whose hands does the monumental narration of the school past lie? As the maximum owners of public spaces, the constituted authorities order the installation of monuments. Even when the initiative to commemorate with plaques or statues comes from below, political-institutional endorsement is required: no one – it is worth emphasizing – can enter the circuits of public memory without support from above. The leading strata therefore have the monopoly on monumentalization practices: power establishes the rules of monumental communication, i.e. who should be commemorated and to what extent.

The second question is: what are the admission criteria to the monumental narration of the school past? Plaques and statues are dedicated to personalities who excel in their pursuits. However, the outstanding outcomes achieved in the educational field are not the only credentials to access to monumentalization practices. The requirement of conformity to the hegemonic cultural positions is needed together with the meritocratic one: the possibility of being the object of monumental memorialization depends on the axiological correspondence to the *weltanschauung* of the ruling classes.

The third question is: what narrative of the school past is done by plaques and statues? Monuments reflect a dignified school past: a chosen and therefore partial vision of school emerges from epigraphic or sculptural memorials; the monumental tributes to those who constitute an aristocracy of merit do not document the deficiencies existing in the educational reality. But it is not just the school past of low worth not having a place in the monuments. Even deserving figures may be absent from the monumental narration of the school past if they are not fitting with the hegemonic order paradigm. The monumentalized school past therefore expresses the dominant values and as such it is functional to the survival of power.

The fourth question is: what are the monumental communication strategies to narrate the school past? The monumental medium is syncretic: varied languages – the materiality of the monuments, the words of the epigraphs and the iconography of the statues, as well as of the decorative sculptures on the plaques – operate all together. It is possible to speak of the material component of monumental communication because the very physical presence of plaques and statues is significant: the materials used, the dimensions, the location, the techniques applied, all contribute to persuading the public of the historical importance of the characters commemorated. As regards the verbal component of monumental communication, the epigraphic writings have the following features: the brevity, which is for enticing to read; the high linguistic register, which is appropriate for

the solemnness of formal commemorative codes; the narrative textual typology, which is intended to expose the events causing certain figures to be deemed worthy of memory. And as for the figurative component of monumental communication, the power of images is exercised mostly unconsciously; in other words, little or no attention is paid to iconic suggestions; thus, much of the visual information is uncritically absorbed. The communicative effectiveness is therefore ensured by a global approach, where the material, verbal and figurative components are unitedly intent on expression.

The fifth question is: what is the function of the monumentalization of the school past? The aims pursued through monuments are certainly commemorative, but also political-educational and political-celebratory. Monumental artefacts are the most persistent means of public display of school memory, due to the durability of the materials they are made of and to the visibility of the places where they are located. However, the commemorative ends are intermediate: the ultimate reason for the *laudatio* of the figures commemorated is pedagogical-civil; drawing their etymology from the Latin verb «monère», monuments are warnings to follow certain examples of virtue; the significance of monumental memorialization is ethical-normative; the intention is to present an axiological horizon towards which to strive, more than to keep the past alive in memory. The model proposed to the recipients of monumental communication is a compendium of dominant ideas about the good citizen. It can therefore be said that monuments are cultural devices for social reproduction. When the monumental narration has as its protagonist a teacher, it is not limited to the representation of a model citizen: a plaque or statue also conveys the ideal elaboration of the concept of education. Needless to say, the having-to-be of school – in the way it is epitomized by monuments – is conceived accordingly to the hegemonic social paradigm: the teacher profiles emerging from the monumental narration are organic to the dominant cultural trends. Turning to the political-celebratory implications of monumentalization practices, commemoration through plaques and statues is an instrument of legitimation of strong social groups: commemorating certain characters means celebrating certain values – the dominant values: the school past monumentally staged is therefore the confirmation of the validity of the hegemonic vision of the world. If the gaze remains directed at the school personalities commemorated, monumental artefacts merely say something about their excellent biographies. Instead, it is necessary to move the viewpoint to the commemorating social environment. In this way it turns out that each monument is a mirror of how the dominant social forces want to be seen. It is as if the prestige of the commemorated personalities reverberated on the actors of monumental memorialization. Juan Gonzáles Ruiz remarked that the doubt often arises whether the real beneficiary of praise is whoever is honored or even more whoever honors<sup>2</sup>.

The sixth and last question is: what is the significance of the pioneering historiographic feat of resorting to the epigraphic and sculptural artefacts of school memory or, said differently, what historical knowledge is brought by the use of monumental sources? To

<sup>2</sup> See J. Gonzáles Ruiz, *Memoria y gratitud: el reconocimiento de la docencia a través de escrituras expuestas*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 12, n. 1, 2017, p. 280.



deal with commemoration through plaques and statues involves more than recovering noble portraits of figures of the school past: to describe the memory preserved by monuments is not a satisfactory result. It is rather a question of explaining the why of monumentalization practices. The critical operation underlying the historical research on monuments must be to recognize the ingredients forming the commemorative matter and the political-cultural causes of this combination of ingredients. It has already been stated that every plaque or statue is the repository of a school image consistent with the hegemonic cultural assets: monumental sources bear a testimony shaped by the ideological influences exerted by power on the official historical narrative. Monuments can therefore be used as documents of the school imagery produced by the leading groups in the succession of different cultural seasons; like reflecting surfaces, plaques and statues absorbed – and can return – the representations of school to which the constituted authorities provided their stamp of approval. What I called «monumental archeology of the official school imagery» is a new cultural history approach: by studying the monumental heritage, a historian reconstructs the official idea of school, as if he were an archeologist, and, by sequentially ordering epigraphic and sculptural evidence, he traces the evolutionary line of this idea. However, it is not enough to glean the official school representations from monuments; it is necessary to make plain the political use of memory in these representations by deepening the critical reflection on the connections of public commemorative practices with the needs of the dominant culture.

There is a brief methodological clarification I need to make. In addition to monuments, the public elaboration of memory permeates certain cultural artefacts organically linked to the inaugural ceremonies of these monuments, I mean the commemorative speeches. It is clear that these two types of sources are of a different nature: speaking to us in their own language – which is both material, verbal and figurative –, monuments are historical epitomes of official school representations; giving explicit cultural indications on the meaning attributed to public commemorative action, speeches are an excellent complement to the interpretation of monumental data. The procedures for acquiring these two categories of sources are also different: monumental testimonies are visually identified through an environmental investigation, what in archeology is called «surface reconnaissance»; to find commemorative speeches, instead, requires conducting bibliographic search, that is, a method a historian is decidedly more used to. The historiographical potential of monumental sources, anyway, is fully developed by integrating the testimonial materials presented by these sources with those deriving from commemorative speeches.

Below there are the study findings about the case of the monumental tributes to the memory of Giovanni Cena to exemplify the historiographic fruitfulness in using epigraphic and sculptural sources.

## 2. *Monumental memory of Giovanni Cena*

Giovanni Cena prematurely died in Rome on 7 December 1917. After his passing, the name of «apostle of education» was consolidated in common usage to refer to him – testifying to the public esteem to which he had been raised thanks to his educational commitment in favour of the peasants of the Ager Romanus and the Pontine Marshes. Three monumental artefacts were devoted to the memory of Cena with solemn ceremonies: the plaque on the façade of the school in Colle di Fuori in 1918; the plaque under the porch of the school named after him in Casal delle Palme in 1921; the funeral monument in his native Montanaro for the tenth anniversary of his death in 1927. The wide symbolic production to honour the memory of Cena requires to examine these monumental artefacts together with the related printed documents, in particular the commemorative speeches: the one by the director of the Schools for Peasants, Alessandro Marcucci, in Colle di Fuori (1918); the one by Marcucci in Casal delle Palme (1921); the one by the Minister of Public Education Pietro Fedele in Montanaro (1927). The chronological period of Cena's monumental fortune (1918-1927), although short, allows to observe the variations in his posthumous consideration. Through a multidimensional analysis of the sources, it is possible to reconstruct the evolution of the commemorative narrative about Cena from his late-liberal civil glorification to his fascist religious transfiguration. In 1918, Marcucci defined Cena the «Saint» who made the miracle of the peasants' redemption from ignorance in the Ager Romanus: a saint, but of those who are non-religious. Nevertheless, the representation of Cena changed as the signing of the Lateran Pacts approached: Fedele filled the portrait of the apostle of education with evangelical traits at the Montanaro Cemetery in 1927; corresponding to his words, the funeral monument to Cena, by the sculptor Leonardo Bistolfi, had the face of Christ forged in bronze. The study of Cena's official imagery through monuments is also a channel of access to the political use of memory: the inaugural ceremonies provided the actors of Cena's memorialization with an opportunity to bring public attention to certain political key issues: the unconditional support to the Great War, which was reinforced by the hope of the post-war distribution of the land to the fighting peasants (Marcucci in Colle di Fuori in 1918); the bitter disappointment for the betrayal of the promise of agrarian reform (Marcucci in Casal delle Palme in 1921); the advantage of the fascist restructuring of rural education (Fedele in Montanaro in 1927). On these commemorative solemnities, Cena's name resounded mixed with the noises of the historical events following his death; paraphrasing Maurice Halbwachs, the practices of recalling the past were functionally intertwined with the needs of the present<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Mouton, 1975, p. XVIII.

## 2.1 *The commemorative plaque in Colle di Fuori*

At the foot of the School for Peasants in Colle di Fuori, near Rocca Priora, there is a commemorative plaque – as it can be read in the inscription – of «who wanted and prepared» the peasants' redemption. At the time of the inauguration of the stele – which was held on 26 May 1918, almost six months after Giovanni Cena's death –, Colle di Fuori was only a village of huts, which was «renamed Concordia» by this propagator of the «light of love and civilization». Duilio Cambellotti carved the travertine: at the top of the slab, the artist placed the iron of a plow. The epigraph was dictated by the historian Pietro Fedele, who would have become Minister of Public Education: Cena brought into the unfortunate immutability of those «poor huts» the «good word» of literacy, which ignited the «constructive faith in the future» by arousing the awareness that another life was possible (1)<sup>4</sup>.

(1)

FROM THE TOPS OF THE ALBAN HILLS  
GIOVANNI CENA  
DISCOVERED THE POOR HUTS IN COLLE DI FUORI  
HERE HE CAME  
TO SPREAD THE LIGHT OF LOVE AND CIVILIZATION  
WITH THE GOOD WORD  
TO COMFORT HUMAN MISFORTUNE  
WITH THE CONSTRUCTIVE FAITH IN THE FUTURE

IN THIS SCHOOL ERECTED BY THE INHABITANTS OF THE VILLAGE  
HE RENAMED CONCORDIA  
GIOVANNI CENA STOOD  
FORGETTING THE HARD LIFE  
IN YOUR AFFECTION OH PEASANTS  
WHO WILL VIVIDLY AND PERPETUALLY REMEMBER  
WHO WANTED AND PREPARED  
YOUR REDEMPTION

<sup>4</sup> As for this plaque, see: *Una commemorazione scolastica di Giovanni Cena*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 19, n. 21, 20 May 1918, p. 334; *Per Giovanni Cena nelle scuole dell'Agro*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 19, n. 22, 30 May 1918, pp. 299-301; *Onoranze a Giovanni Cena*, «Nuova Antologia di Lettere, Scienze ed Arti», ser. 6., vol. 195, n. 1113, 1 June 1918, p. 299; A. Marcucci, *L'apostolato di Giovanni Cena*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», section: *Pagine gentili*, vol. 19, n. 23, 10 June 1918, pp. 183-185; F. Acerbi, *La scuola Giovanni Cena a Casal delle Palme, MCMXVII-MCMXXI*, Roma, Tip. Editrice Laziale A. Marchesi, 1921, p. 6; P. Minetti, *Giovanni Cena. Poeta e apostolo dell'istruzione. Note biografiche*, Torino, G.B. Paravia & C., 1927, pp. 20-21; V. Minuto, *Lapide a Giovanni Cena a Colle di Fuori (1918)*, in «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/392, published: 30/10/2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-giovanni-cena-colle-di-fuori-1918> (last access: 25.01.2023).

(1)\* Original version in Italian: «Dall'alto dei Colli Albani / Giovanni Cena / scoprì le povere capanne di Colle di Fuori / Qui venne / a diffondere con la parola buona / luce d'amore e di civiltà / a confortare le umane sventure / con la fede operosa nell'avvenire / In questa scuola eretta dagli abitanti del villaggio / al quale dette nuovo nome Concordia / Giovanni Cena sostava / obliando la vita faticosa / nell'affetto vostro o contadini / che serberete vivo e perenne / il ricordo di chi volle e preparò / la vostra redenzione».

On the day of the unveiling, 26 May 1918 – as mentioned above –, the director of the Schools for Peasants Alessandro Marcucci reminded in his speech<sup>5</sup> that Cena was the «Saint» of the peasants' redemption from ignorance: «he had an active faith, for which he fulfilled his duties to the point of self-sacrifice, even if it cost him his life»<sup>6</sup>. Despite the extensive use of religious vocabulary to describe him, Cena was regarded as a civil saint: although at the bottom of his conscience there was a justicialist instinct imbued with an evangelical spirit, Cena's educational apostolate was non-denominational. The director explained the way Cena conceived education: school was a workshop of citizenship, an antidote to the paralyzing fatalism that dulled the consciousness of the proletariat in the Roman countryside; once he became literate, the labourer entered into a critical relationship with his harsh living conditions:

every improvement could only come from the peasants themselves, after they had defeated their greatest enemy: *ignorance*. If peasants do not become aware of themselves, their humanity, their right to civil life, they believe that their unchanging destiny is drinking water from ditches, eating polenta, sleeping on a humble pallet in a hut, eating enough to stay up and to work, being exploited and despised [...]. Oh peasants, ignorance kills you, so Giovanni Cena brought you school [...]. And you come out of it changed, because you know, you hope, you ask, and soon you will want...<sup>7</sup>

Marcucci did not just praise the educational heritage left by Cena. It was late May, 1918: the country was in the vortex of war. The director of the Schools for Peasants bent the commemorative occasion toward the purpose of war propaganda. Shortly after the outbreak of the Great War, Cena, – it is worth emphasizing – took the side of interventionism. This is important because – following the Halbwachsian intuition that the publicly remembered past is the most suitable to legitimize the interests dominant in the present society – it is reasonable to claim that Cena would not have been commemorated if he had been pacifist. Marcucci mixed an extra commemorative theme of great topical interest with the memory of Cena, exalting the reasons for war to fuel the will not to give up:

Giovanni Cena wanted war; [...] he wanted it because, despite all the horrors [...] that it unleashes, [...] it will mark the triumph of the free peoples, the liberation of the oppressed peoples. [...] Woe if we lose [...]. German victory would be the victory of all the dark and evil forces [...]. Oh! Peasant soldiers, [...] we must overcome the enemy of our homeland and humanity there as we overcame ignorance here»<sup>8</sup>.

After invoking the need for salvation from German imperialism, Marcucci illustrated an ongoing process: the integration of rural masses into the nation-state; before the

<sup>5</sup> An extensive summary of Marcucci's speech was featured in the magazine «I diritti della scuola» shortly after the inaugural ceremony: Marcucci, *L'apostolato di Giovanni Cena*, cit., pp. 183-185. The full publication – in booklet form – was in 1919: Id., *Giovanni Cena e le scuole per i contadini*, Roma, Off. Poligrafica Italiana, 1919.

<sup>6</sup> Marcucci, *L'apostolato di Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

Great War, the feeling of national belonging was foreign to the subordinate classes in the countryside; once they were called to the front, the proletarians of the land discovered their homeland:

war enlightened you like and perhaps more than school, oh peasants! [...] on the Piave front [...] you were the purest and the most disinterested supporters of a God who was still unknown to you: *the Homeland*. [...] Well, this Homeland [...] immediately inflamed him with love. He saw the mountains, the rivers of the sacred border, and he said: they must be conquered and defended, because they secure even the miserable hut where I was born, where my children stay at<sup>9</sup>.

The people of the countryside had begun to perceive themselves as Italians on the battlefields. But it was not just a matter of having the patriotism enhanced. The rural workers were also acquiring citizenship rights by fighting: the contribution in blood to victory would have created a future of justice for them. Marcucci said, continuing to motivate war: «your redemption [...] will be really achieved with victory. [...] when you return triumphant and free to dictate the laws of the new life of Italy and of the world, we who remained here will bow to you»<sup>10</sup>. The director alluded to the agrarian reform the Government had promised to enact, once war had been won: after the defeat of Caporetto, the slogan «land for peasants» was circulating at the front to encourage the commitment to fight. But the expectations of land distribution would have been frustrated, as we will see.

## 2.2 *The commemorative plaque in Casal delle Palme*<sup>11</sup>

Under the porch of the School for Peasants in Casal delle Palme, in the Pontine Marshes, a plaque remembers that – as stated in the epigraph dictated by Alessandro Marcucci – «Giovanni Cena traversed this countryside spreading / the light of the alphabet»; in addition to the commemorative intent, this marble slab acts as a toponomastic sign because it warns the reader that «this schoolhouse» – erected «where the first school for peasants of the Pontine Marshes was modestly opened in 1911» – is «entitled to» Cena's «blessed name»<sup>12</sup>. On the top of the plaque, sculpted by Duilio Cambellotti – who had taken care of the embellishment of the school building –, a decoration was engraved: a book, a spade and two ears of ripe wheat suggested the role played by literacy «in order that the Latian peasants / could rise from the misery of their life to / the dignity of citizens and free farmers» (2)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>11</sup> What you see in Casal delle Palme today is a copy. After restoration, the original plaque was moved to the entrance of Giovanni Cena Middle School in Latina.

<sup>12</sup> Placing the naming plaque under the portichetto of Giovanni Cena School conferred an honorific character upon the entire edifice: the schoolhouse itself paid homage to the memory of the apostle of education.

<sup>13</sup> As for the plaque to the memory of Cena in Casal delle Palme, see: Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., p.

(2)

IN ORDER THAT THE LATIAN PEASANTS  
 COULD RISE FROM THE MISERY OF THEIR LIFE TO  
 THE DIGNITY OF CITIZENS AND FREE FARMERS  
 REDEEMING ALONG WITH THEMSELVES THEIR BEAUTIFUL AND FERTILE  
 LAND SUBJUGATED TO THE LATIFUNDIUM PLAGUED  
 BY MALARIA, GIOVANNI CENA  
 TRAVERSED THIS COUNTRYSIDE SPREADING  
 THE LIGHT OF THE ALPHABET  
 AND THEREFORE ENTITLED TO HIS BLESSED NAME IS  
 THIS SCHOOLHOUSE  
 FOUNDED BY WILL AND WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PEOPLE  
 HERE WHERE THE FIRST SCHOOL FOR PEASANTS OF THE  
 PONTINE MARSHES  
 WAS MODESTLY OPENED IN MCMXI

CASAL DELLE PALME  
 NOVEMBER  
 MCMXXI

Giovanni Cena School was inaugurated on 20 November 1921<sup>14</sup>. The rhetorical fulcrum of the inaugural ceremony was the speech given by Marcucci<sup>15</sup>. The director recalled the deeply empathic spirit of his friend Giovanni: in the Pontine Marshes, Cena «recognized the goal of his frantic research. It seemed that pain fascinated him, it found an infinite resonance in his heart and he was looking for it to share and to relieve it [...]. And these Pontine lands, as well as those of the Ager Romanus, [...] grabbed his soul and seemed to be excellent for exercising his piety, his love, his ardour<sup>16</sup>». According to Marcucci, Cena was a «poet» even in his educational work<sup>17</sup>: a «poet» in the etymological

21; V. Minuto, *Lapide a Giovanni Cena a Casal delle Palme (1921)*, in «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/394, published on: 30/10/2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-giovanni-cena-casal-delle-palme-1921> (last access: 25.01.2023).

(2)\* Original version in Italian: «Perché il contadino del Lazio / salisse dalla miseria della sua vita alla / dignità di cittadino e di libero coltivatore / redimendo con sé la sua bella e ferace / terra asservita al latifondo flagellato / dalla malaria, Giovanni Cena / percorse questa campagna diffondendo / la luce dell'alfabeto / E però al nome benedetto di lui / si intitola questa casa della scuola / sorta per concorso e volere di popolo / qui dove umile nel 1911 si aperse / la prima scuola per i contadini delle / Paludi Pontine / Casal delle Palme / novembre / 1921».

<sup>14</sup> As for the initiative to erect another masonry schoolhouse after the one in Colle di Fuori, see: *Per una scuola al nome di Giovanni Cena nell'Agro*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 19, n. 24, 20 June 1918, p. 381; Acerbi, *La scuola Giovanni Cena a Casal delle Palme*, cit.; *L'inaugurazione della Scuola "Giovanni Cena"*, «I diritti della scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», vol. 23, n. 6-7, 27 November 1921, pp. 96-97; A. Marcucci, *La scuola in gloria di Giovanni Cena*, «I Diritti della Scuola. Rivista della scuola e dei maestri», section: *Pagine gentili*, vol. 23, n. 8, 4 December 1921, pp. 50-53; Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> This speech was published in the magazine «I diritti della scuola»: Marcucci, *La scuola in gloria di Giovanni Cena*, cit., pp. 50-53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Cena published the short poem *Madre*, the volumes of verses *In umbra* and *Homo* and the novel *Gli ammonitori*.

sense of the term, that is, «author» – author of human formation. In order to have a chance of changing his life, the inhabitant of the Pontine lands had to be deprived «of his beastly appearance», «a clear thought of humanity» had to emerge «from his torpid and closed minds»; the introduction of the latest technical discoveries of our civilization would have been of no avail without the humanizing work of education; «whether [a peasant] uses [...] an agricultural machine or thrusts a piece of iron into the ground with his painfully hunched back», nothing changes for him if «he does not have his will, his dignity, his moral and economic freedom»<sup>18</sup>.

And also on this commemorative occasion, as during the unveiling ceremony held in Colle di Fuori in 1918, Marcucci got through the perimeter of remembrance. Three years had passed since the end of the war. The intention of giving the land to the peasants had not been followed through; the dream of turning the labourers «who do not sow and harvest for themselves»<sup>19</sup> into free farmers had been broken. Three years earlier, the director had led the rural audience in Colle di Fuori to believe in a future of righter social relationships. But his hopeful oratory was replaced by controversial tones in Casal delle Palme: Marcucci railed against the breaking of the promise to carry out the agrarian reform. Bitterly recalling the illusions, he had helped to foster, he said: «About three years ago, in May 1918, when we were anxiously still fighting, we believed [...] that we were going faster and the promised changes in the social order better distributed justice and wealth. [...] We were mistaken and deluded! [...] You peasants did not gain any rights or raise your dignity an inch»<sup>20</sup>. The inability of the liberal State to respond to the demand for social legitimacy of the rural subordinate classes would have contributed to the advent of fascism.

### 2.3 *The funeral monument in Montanaro*

The funeral monument to Giovanni Cena, a work by the sculptor Leonardo Bistolfi, is located at the Montanaro Cemetery. A bronze bust of Christ rests on a simple grey granite parallelepiped: the Redeemer gazes «before himself from his half-closed lids that veil to him the aspects of the earthly world and unveil to him the ultimate truths»<sup>21</sup>. In the back of the monument, a lunette arch is hollowed out in a granite slab, as it wanted to accommodate the effigy of Christ: in this way «the Divine figure emerges from the background with his eyes fixed on a goal: the redemption of humanity»<sup>22</sup>. On the left, at the base of the pseudo-niche, there are a few bronze decorative elements: an open book surrounded by a thorn wreath – a symbol of the oppression of ignorance as well as

<sup>18</sup> Marcucci, *La scuola in gloria di Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> M. Bernardi, *Il ritorno di Giovanni Cena a Montanaro. Il monumento di Bistolfi*, «La Stampa», 11 December 1927, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., p. 26.



representing the preparation of emancipation; then, two closed books resting on laurel leaves to signify the triumph of knowledge. Down on the right, an inscription dictated by Bistolfi himself is engraved in granite and filled with gold pigment; the words of epigraph clarify the beyond-human vision that had driven his hand as an artist: Cena – whose life was «burned with humility and charity», whose heart «wanted to give the redemption / of thought and labour to all humble people» – is recognizable «in the simulacrum of the Supreme Man / who lived and died for all men». So, we are dealing with the identification Cena-Christ (3)<sup>23</sup>.

- (3)
- GIOVANNI CENA, POET AND APOSTLE!  
THIS IS THE ALTAR OF YOUR LIFE  
BURNED WITH HUMILITY AND CHARITY,  
THE ALTAR OF YOUR IMMORTAL DEATH.  
AND HERE WE WILL COME TO RECOGNIZE YOU  
IN THE SIMULACRUM OF THE SUPREME MAN,  
WHO LIVED AND DIED FOR ALL MEN.  
AND HERE WE WILL COME TO KISS THE STONE  
WHERE FINALLY RESTS YOUR HEART,  
WHICH WANTED TO GIVE THE REDEMPTION  
OF THOUGHT AND LABOUR TO ALL HUMBLE PEOPLE:  
A HALO TO ALL MOTHERS: A STAR  
TO ALL THE PATHS OF LIFE.

In constructing the funeral monument to Cena, the sculptor Bistolfi reproduced part of a work he had made in the late nineteenth century: *The Christ of the waters*. That full-figure bronze – which would have been later placed in the park of Villa Contarini in Piazzola sul Brenta, near Padua – had aroused the interest of the young Cena while living in Turin. Bistolfi says:

<sup>23</sup> As for the funeral monument to Giovanni Cena in Montanaro, see: Bernardi, *Il ritorno di Giovanni Cena a Montanaro*, cit., p. 3; E. Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro. La commossa orazione del ministro Fedele*, «La Stampa», 12 December 1927, p. 1; Minetti, *Giovanni Cena*, cit., pp. 25-26 (these biographical notes on Cena – which were commissioned to the teacher rev. Pietro Minetti by the Committee for the honours to Giovanni Cena in Montanaro on the tenth anniversary of his death – were also published in a periodical: Id., *Giovanni Cena. Poeta ed apostolo dell'istruzione*, «Latina gens. Rassegna mensile illustrata», vol. 10, n. 1, January 1932, pp. 26-37); V. Minuto, *Monumento funebre a Giovanni Cena a Montanaro (1927)*, in «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/395, published on: 30/10/2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/monumento-funebre-giovanni-cena-montanaro-1927> (last access: 25.01.2023).

(3)\* Original version in Italian: «Giovanni Cena, poeta e apostolo! / Questo è l'altare della tua vita / arsa dall'umiltà e dalla carità, / l'altare della tua morte immortale. / E qui noi verremo a riconoscerti / nel simulacro dell'Uomo Supremo / che visse e morì per tutti gli uomini; / e qui verremo a baciare la pietra / dove alfine riposa il tuo cuore, / che volle dare a tutti gli umili la / redenzione del pensiero e del lavoro: / a tutte le madri un'aureola: a tutti / i sentieri della vita una stella».

I was working on my Christ [...]. It was 1891: I was young and at the time few visitors came to my studio, near Corso Francia [...]. One morning I heard a knock on the door. I opened it. I saw before me a little man younger than me [...]. He looked at me with kind eyes; and with a low, slightly hoarse, voice: «I was told that you are carving a Christ. Let me see it». He came in. We talked together. Half an hour later, we were friends as if we had always known each other [...]. And our friendship lasted until he died ten years ago<sup>24</sup>.

In the mind of the artist, the memory of the birth of friendship between him and the apostle of education was related to the effigy of Christ. Bistolfi saw the signs of the evangelical message embodied in the self-denial of his friend Giovanni; the sculptor explained to Marziano Bernardi, the art critic of the newspaper «La Stampa», the symbolic reasons behind the metamorphosis of Cena into Christ:

When I was asked to make the monument to Giovanni Cena for the cemetery of his Montanaro Canavese, I thought that the poet of «Mother» had really been a Christ for his goodness, his suffering, his ardent and beneficent faith [...]. And [...] it seemed nice to give up the corporeal appearances (what was the body for poor Cena but a tough, narrow and miserable prison?) and to let only the spirit speak to the living, instructing them on how one must live<sup>25</sup>.

The inauguration of the funeral monument took place in Montanaro on 11 December 1927. Published by «La Stampa» the day after the ceremony, the inaugural speech was given by the Minister Fedele as the representative of Mussolini. Under the symbolic power the Christ by Bistolfi radiated from Cena's tomb, the speaker's words took on an evangelical ardour. The Minister evoked Cena who like Christ «made himself humble with the humble, little with the little ones, and said: "Let the derelict children come to me"»<sup>26</sup>. Fedele also reminded that Cena came from the same land that had «given birth to two other apostles, Giovanni Bosco and the venerable Cottolengo»<sup>27</sup>. The attribution of a religious aura to Cena's philanthropism testified the changed historical conditions in which the gaze was retrospectively directed at the apostle of education. After the consolidation of the regime into a dictatorship, the fascist government and the Church had initiated those friendly relationships that would have led to the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929. We can therefore recognize in the equation Cena-Christ the harbingers of Mussolini's instrumental opening to the Catholic culture: the classification of Cena's educational work under the Christian label was affected by the modification of the dynamics between the Italian State and the Holy See.

And continuing his speech, Fedele declared «Mussolini's particular sympathy for Cena»<sup>28</sup>. This sympathy would certainly not have been granted if Cena's socialism had not been sentimental-humanitarian, non-doctrinal and non-partisan, far from any form

<sup>24</sup> Bernardi, *Il ritorno di Giovanni Cena a Montanaro*, cit., p. 3 (the story of Bistolfi's meeting with Cena is quoted in the article by Bernardi).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro*, cit., p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



Fig. 1. The Minister of Public Education Pietro Fedele delivers his speech during the inauguration of the funeral monument to Giovanni Cena in Montanaro (1927)<sup>29</sup>

of subversion of the established order<sup>30</sup>. The Minister illustrated the presumed «deep spiritual affinities» between the two men:

they both had modest origins from rough workers and their lands; they both welcomed the great voice of the fields, perpetually keeping it saved in their hearts; they both suffered, fought and overcame the harshness of youth, then they felt the rebellion against all the injustices created by the malevolence of the men and they felt animated by the aspiration to a better humanity, to everything that could serve the good of the Italian people<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Museum of School and Education “Mauro Laeng” (Department of Education, Roma Tre University), *Le Scuole per i contadini, Raccolta fotografica, Le Scuole per i contadini, Foto di gruppo, «Adunate e cerimonie»*, photo 184 «Commemorazione di Giovanni Cena (1926) [sic] al Cimitero di Montanaro Canavese presso la tomba del Poeta (opera di Leonardo Bistolfi). Tiene il discorso Pietro Fedele, Ministro per la Pubblica Istruzione».

<sup>30</sup> See in this regard: E. Scialla, *Il socialismo umanitario di Giovanni Cena*, «Studi piemontesi», vol. 3, n. 1, March 1974, pp. 17-31.

<sup>31</sup> Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro*, cit., p. 1.

The Minister's speech was a masterpiece of posthumous appropriation of Cena at the service of the exaltation of Mussolini: the memory of the apostle of education was exploited to benefit the cult of the Duce<sup>32</sup>. The reference to the «modest origins», the «rough workers» and the «great voice of the fields» was to promote the fascist policy of ruralizing Italy: the rhetoric of the rural nation was functional to obtain the consensus from the multitude of the land workers, not to mention that the call to living in the fields was intended to counter the phenomenon of industrial urbanization as a potential hotbed of proletarian insubordination: Mussolini regarded the countryside as more reassuring than the city, the peasant as more tameable than the factory worker.

Fedele took the opportunity of the remembrance of Cena also to propagandize the reform of rural education he was conducting:

If we men of government [...] are given to take pride in our acts conceived for the sake of the Nation, I take pride in the law that promotes the establishment of rural Schools throughout Italy [the Royal Decree 20 August 1926 – no. 1667]. It represents a wide educational program the fascist government proposes to completely implement. [...] The establishment of rural Schools is the first push towards the spiritual renewal of our countryside<sup>33</sup>.

Fedele stated that the ratio of the Royal Decree 20 August 1926 – no. 1667<sup>34</sup> was based on Cena's example; the official narrative was that the schooling model in the Ager Romanus and the Pontine Marshes had been extended by the fascist government to the whole of Italy. In reality the purpose of the fascist educational policy in rural settings was not – as we read in the epigraph on Cena's tomb – «the redemption / of thought and labour to all the humble people», but on the contrary it was the enfeoffment of rural masses to fascism. Cena's name, instrumentally pronounced by the Minister, was used as a seal of legitimacy on the work of fascistization the regime was carrying out on rural schools.

<sup>32</sup> Alessandro Marcucci echoed Fedele in his speech delivered in Sala Borromini in Rome on 22 December 1927 for the tenth anniversary of Cena's death; the director of the Schools for Peasants ascribed ante litteram fascist roots to the mission of the apostle of education: «The Fascist school consecrates and celebrates him today» because «he was a precursor of the spiritual rebirth of the Homeland. [...] His work [...] starts to have the virtue of a tradition since the Fascism [...] has considered it as part of its history». In order to corroborate this fascist interpretation, Marcucci insisted on Cena's extraneousness towards socialism: «someone roughly mistook» Cena's humanitarian ideal «for socialist doctrine. Ah! no! In those fifteen years of tireless apostolate, he was alone, alone with his few companions; none of the political parties in contention at the time, no socialist was there with him in his work and his sacrifice». A. Marcucci, *L'apostolato educativo di Giovanni Cena*, Roma, Le scuole per i contadini dell'Agro romano e delle Paludi pontine, 1928, pp. 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Soave, *Giovanni Cena commemorato nella natia Montanaro*, cit., p. 1 (square brackets enclose information added to the text by me).

<sup>34</sup> As for the rural education policy under the ministry of Pietro Fedele, please refer to L. Montecchi, *I contadini a scuola. La scuola rurale in Italia dall'Unità alla caduta del fascismo*, Macerata, eum, 2016, pp. 116-142.

### *Conclusions*

To observe school memory from the monumental perspective entails the use of new sources – i.e. plaques and statues –, as well as the consideration of historiographically neglected symbolic realities – i.e. the ways in which the elites represented the school in ideal terms. The monumental history of Giovanni Cena shows that the memory of a deceased is not fixed in time: the content of public commemoration varies with the hegemonic cultural models. The monumentalization of the past – as it emerges from the commemorative speeches here examined – is an instrument for consensus-building on the burning issues of the present: the French sociologist Halbwachs was right when he wrote that the time of memory «is not identical to the events that have occurred within it. [...] The traces of past events and people are present insofar as they have answered, and still do answer, an interest or concern of the group»<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> M. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, p. 118.



# Child-Care Institutions. Memories between Public Celebrations and Collective Representations

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## *Introduction*

Memory represents one of the main points in contemporary historical-educational research, whose study allows to analyse and to define the ways how «the present looks at the past and interprets or re-interprets it»<sup>1</sup> – as also indicated in the guidelines of the PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)” –. Therefore, associating the question of memory with the childhood one, especially in reference to the educational and school fields, which are considered as contexts able to recall a common cultural dimension, in order to restore a shared sense of belonging and to enhance the role and the value of each person acting in them, appears emblematic, so to speak.

However, these more “traditional” dimensions are the evolution of another field intrinsically linked to childhood, namely the care one, which has been for centuries the only one to provide for some kinds of participation, be it private, collective or public at the service of the children’s protection and care, especially for those who belonged to marginalized conditions.

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the objectives and the characteristics of the PRIN project, which was launched in 2019, please refer to the official website <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/il-progetto> (last access: 16.01.2023) and the following publications: L. Paciaroni, S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica. A proposito del primo seminario nazionale PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2019, pp. 1047-1053; Eadd., *Le forme della memoria scolastica: interventi nazionali e prospettive internazionali. A proposito del secondo seminario PRIN*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XV, n. 1, 2020, pp. 809-816; L. Paciaroni, *Memoria scolastica ed educativa: questioni metodologiche, buone pratiche ed esperienze digitali. A proposito del terzo seminario nazionale PRIN (Firenze, 17 settembre 2020)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, pp. 755-765; S. Montecchiani, *Le forme della memoria scolastica e i primi affondi interpretativi. A proposito del quarto seminario nazionale PRIN (Milano, 26 febbraio 2021)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVI, n. 2, pp. 785-797; R. Sani, J. Meda, «School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation». *Un progetto di ricerca innovativo e a marcata vocazione internazionale*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, pp. 9-26; V. Minuto, *Presentazione ufficiale delle banche dati sulla memoria scolastica. A proposito del quinto seminario nazionale PRIN (Roma, 5 novembre 2021)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVII, n. 1, pp. 545-555.



Furthermore, studying the more general question of orphaned and abandoned children and all that number of institutions devoted to them allows us not only to understand the significance of the changes undergone by some specific concepts, such as childhood, family, care and education, as well as by economic, political and cultural contexts, which have been determining a renewal of the whole national social organization over time, but it also allows us to return a more *real* representation of the complex civil and pedagogical role, which was played by these shelters and pious places and, somehow, to celebrate the lives of all those children, who are tragically condemned to an uncertain existence full of obstacles.

### 1. *The evolution of the problem about abandoned children in Italy between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*

Before going into the merits of analysing memory and collective imaginary linked to child-care institutions, it is necessary to summarily outline the profile of the phenomenon of child abandonment in Italy, with a specific reference to its evolution between modern and contemporary age. Indeed, this problem has represented for a long time one of the most dramatic questions of social history, which has taken on different characteristics according to the period and the context of reference and has always animated anthropological, political, social and pedagogical debates and reflections in the communities involved<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> For a general reconstruction of the problem of child abandonment and care, without any claim to exhaustiveness, please refer to some of the most significant works about the question, including: M. Gorni, L. Pellegrini, *Un problema di storia sociale. L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nel secolo XIX*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1974; G. Da Molin, *L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nell'età moderna*, Bari, Università degli Studi, 1981; G. Di Bello, *Senza nome né famiglia. I bambini abbandonati nell'Ottocento*, Pian di San Bartolo (Firenze), Luciano Manzuoli Editore, 1989; J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1988, It. tr. F. Olivieri, *L'abbandono dei bambini in Europa occidentale. Demografia, diritto e morale dall'Antichità al Rinascimento*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1991; G. Da Molin, *Nati e abbandonati. Aspetti demografici e sociali dell'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nell'età moderna*, Bari, Cacucci editore, 1993; Ead. (ed.), *Trovatelli e balie in Italia secc. XVI-XIX. Atti del Convegno Infanzia abbandonata e baliatico in Italia (secc. XVI-XIX)*, Bari, 20-21 maggio 1993, Bari, Cacucci editore, 1994; P. Zocchi, *L'assistenza agli esposti e alle partorienti nell'Ospedale Maggiore di Milano e nell'Ospizio di S. Caterina alla Ruota tra Sette e Ottocento*, «Bollettino di Demografia Storica SIDES (Società Italiana di Demografia Storica)», n. 30-31, 1999, pp. 165-184; N. Terpstra, *Abandoned children of the Italian Renaissance: orphan care in Florence and Bologna*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2005; S. Polenghi, *Fanciulli soldati. La militarizzazione dell'infanzia abbandonata nell'Europa moderna*, Roma, Carocci, 2005; M. Canella, L. Dodi, F. Reggiani (edd.), *Si consegna questo figlio. L'assistenza all'infanzia abbandonata e alla maternità dalla Ca' Granda alla Provincia di Milano: 1456-1920*, Milano, Università degli Studi di Milano-Skira, 2008; F. Lomastro, F. Reggiani (edd.), *Per la storia dell'infanzia abbandonata in Europa. Tra Est e Ovest: ricerche e confronti*, Roma, Viella, 2013; F. Reggiani, *Sotto le ali della colomba: famiglie assistenziali e relazioni di genere a Milano dall'età moderna alla Restaurazione*, Roma, Viella, 2014; D. Boati, R. Cavallo, G. Uberti (edd.), *Una vita per l'infanzia. Il Pio Istituto di Maternità di Milano: una esperienza di 150 anni*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017; S. Montecchiani, *Per una storia dell'assistenza ed educazione dell'infanzia abbandonata nelle Marche. Il brefotrofo di Osimo dal*

On the other hand, the same conception of childhood has undergone reformulations and revisions over time, which were caused by different representations of childhood mostly uniquely developed by the paradigms dictated and determined by adulthood. Only after what is defined by scholars as a real «discovery of childhood», understood not only as a cultural operation, but also as a sort of «historiographical event», it was possible to promote a concrete understanding of the *real* childhood and a deeper knowledge of it, which has also made it possible to strengthen the studies on childhood, to recognize its social value and also to systematically assume its responsibility for support, education and protection<sup>3</sup>.

Although the history of child abandonment sinks its roots in the classical era, it was especially starting from the Middle Ages that its profile considerably changed thanks to the implementation of increasingly systematic and targeted Christian charitable interventions. In fact, in this period, numerous pious places were established and mostly run by religious orders and congregations, which were led by the principles of the Christian apostolate and decided to devote themselves to child-care as a matter of priority. Moreover, the use of the foundling wheel system, a device which was able to guarantee the anonymity of those who chose or were forced to resort to exposition – and was also widely used and abused for this reason –, spread throughout Europe at the same time. The wheel tool, which was created prematurely in the Hospital of the Canons of Marseilles in France in 1188, was set in the *Archiospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia* of Rome in Italy for the first time in 1198 and then it was rapidly inaugurated in numerous other small and big Italian institutes such as, for example, at the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence, the *Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata* in Naples, *Santa Caterina alla Ruota* in Milan, the *Istituto di Santa Maria della Pietà* in Venice, or the *Ospedale dei Bastardini* in Bologna.

However, childhood began to be no longer considered as a mere transition phase towards adulthood, but rather as the centre of educational and pedagogical action in the wake of the eighteenth-century revolutions and through the development of what Philippe Ariès called the «feeling of childhood»<sup>4</sup>. However, this conceptual evolution and the theorization of a child-centred educational perspective did not automatically correspond to a concrete reduction in the phenomenon of child abandonment, at least

*primo Ottocento al secondo dopoguerra*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> About this question, please see in particular E. Becchi (ed.), *Storia dell'educazione*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1987; M.C. Giuntella, I. Nardi (edd.), *Il bambino nella storia. Atti del Seminario di Studi Interdisciplinare (Perugia, 14-15 giugno 1991)*, Napoli, ESI, 1993; E. Becchi, D. Julia (edd.), *Storia dell'infanzia*, 2 vols., Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996; P. Guarnieri (ed.), *Bambini e salute in Europa 1750-2000 (Children and Health in Europe 1750-2000)*, «Medicina & Storia», n. 7, 2004, pp. 57-100; F. Cambi, C. Di Bari, D. Sarsini (edd.), *Il mondo dell'infanzia. Dalla scoperta al mito alla relazione di cura. Autori e testi*, Milano, Apogeo, 2012; H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, London, Routledge, 2014, 2 ed.; E. Scaglia, *La scoperta della prima infanzia. Per una storia della pedagogia 0-3*, 2 vols., Roma, edizioni Studium, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> About the evolution of the child conception continuing towards a more realistic and empathic understanding and representation of childhood, which led to the definition of a «feeling of childhood», please refer to the first part of the important work by Ph. Ariès, *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, tr. by M. Garin, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006, 4 ed.

initially. On the contrary, in a paradoxical way, with the increase of specific institutions, which were devoted to child-care and set up to prevent *locis publicis* exposition in the first place and to lower the mortality rate of *proietti*, there was a completely opposite effect so much that the phenomenon assumed the profile of a real «massacre of innocents» between the modern and contemporary ages.

In Italy, the heterogeneity of political and social contexts, the variety of complex historiographical events – among them, the process of national unification *in primis* – and the total absence of an organic structural and legislative link among charitable experiences caused deep differences and fractures in the evolution and the management of an Italian healthcare network, which was reconverted in a centralized perspective with great limitations and critical issues only in the late nineteenth century.

During what was not defined as *the century of foundlings* by chance, the traditional institutions devoted to child-care, such as homes for waifs and strays, *brefotrofi*, pious places, orphanages and hospitals, did not actually undergo substantial changes and continued to be mostly linked with the local hospital and charitable activity. Nonetheless, thanks to the elaboration of a renewed and more modern perception of childhood and the enhancement of developing the psycho-physical and sensory dimensions of children, new and important initiatives, which definitively changed the mere healthcare intervention in educational intervention guaranteed within the dimension of public charity, made their way into cultural and social fields. Starting from the nineteenth century, for example, Aporti's kindergartens spread and the first *presepi* were established by Giuseppe Sacchi and created upon the model of the French *crèches*, which represented the first real heart for the subsequent development of future nursery schools<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a transition phase, which determined the definitive closure of foundling wheels, as well as the opening of delivery offices, a general reform of institute statutes and the beginning of specific regulations referring to care, wet-nursing and childhood. Among the most significant ones, we can certainly include the Crispi law of July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1890, with which pious places were changed into public charity institutions placed under the control of the State through local authorities, and the *General Regulations for the care service of foundlings* of December 1923, which marked the definitive closure of foundling wheels in Italy and the introduction of some specific hygienic-sanitary and professional standards all the services devoted to child-care had to respect, in addition to introducing changes in the administrative sphere<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> With regard to the birth and the evolution of Aporti's kindergartens and nursery schools in the Italian context, please especially refer to: F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici e lettere. Con introduzione di Angiolo Gamaro*, edited by M. Sancipriano and S.S. Macchiotti, Brescia, La Scuola, 1976; C. Sideri, *Ferrante Aporti: sacerdote, italiano, educatore*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1999; L. Sala La Guardia, E. Lucchini (edd.), *Asili nido in Italia. Il bambino da 0 a 3 anni*, 2 vols., Milano, Marzorati, 1980; M. Piseri, *Ferrante Aporti nella tradizione educativa lombarda ed europea*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2008; S. Polenghi, *Aportiana*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. IV, n. 2, 2009, pp. 387-396; N.S. Barbieri, *Asili nido e servizi educativi per la prima infanzia in Italia. Lineamenti storici, fondamenti pedagogici, modalità operative*, Padova, CLUEP, 2015; D. Caroli, *Per una storia dell'asilo nido in Europa tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> In order to completely read the regulatory texts, please refer to «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia»:

Beside the legislative field, the intellectual evolution of child conception gave way to a dutiful rethinking about other concepts firmly linked to the topic of childhood, including family and parental responsibility<sup>7</sup>, and even a reorganization of the whole network of the services addressed to it. In turn, this process caused the emergence of a growing attention towards hygienic-sanitary and pedagogical questions and the appropriate training of the staff, who was employed within care and educational institutions. Then, this topic was taken up with greater intensity during the twentieth century again, when the process of centralizing charity, care and education in the hands of the State made the need to have the staff equipped with a precise training and professional requirements evident<sup>8</sup>.

Subsequently, care and educational commitments in Italy changed their profile again with the rise of the Fascist regime: in fact, during these twenty years, they became the expression of a specific demographic policy and a particular ideological need<sup>9</sup>. Having

<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1890/07/22/171/sg/pdf> and <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/1924/01/18/15/sg/pdf> (last access: 18.01.2023); while for a deep examination of the changes undergone by institutes, please see S. Lepre, *Le difficoltà dell'assistenza. Le Opere Pie in Italia fra '800 e '900*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1988; F. Della Peruta, *Le Opere Pie dall'Unità alla Legge Crispi*, «Il Risorgimento. Rivista di storia del Risorgimento e di storia contemporanea», vol. XLIII, n. 2-3, 1991, pp. 173-213; and M. Taccolini (ed.), *Dalla beneficenza alla cultura del dono*, Rudiano, GAM, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> The complex question of parental responsibility has greatly influenced the phenomenon of abandonment and, above all, the definition of the civil *status* of foundlings and orphans. About this topic, please refer to D. Lombardi, *Essere madri, essere padri nella società di antico regime*, in Canella, Dodi, Reggiani (edd.), «*Si consegna questo figlio*». *L'assistenza all'infanzia e alla maternità dalla Ca' Granda alla Provincia di Milano 1456-1920*, cit., pp. 13-34; D.I. Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor. Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1993; the monographic number, D. Lombardi (ed.), *Legittimi e illegittimi. Responsabilità dei genitori e identità dei figli tra Cinque e Ottocento*, «Ricerche storiche», vol. 27, 1997; M. Gerber, *Bastards: Politics, Family and Law in Early Modern France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> On this regard, for example, we can think about the itinerant chairs of child hygiene, the hygienic institutes and the complementary hygiene courses created by Ernesto Cacace in the early twentieth century with the aim of training not only the staff of the time, who was employed in childcare services, but also promoting a general education of mothers and ordinary women regarding the main hygienic and childcare indications and the use of some “technical” aids to be exploited for the sterilization or the preparation of milk and other foods (see Caroli, *Per una storia dell'asilo nido in Europa tra Otto e Novecento*, cit., pp. 264-268). About the topic of professional training, please also see E. Betta, *Animare la vita: disciplina della nascita tra medicina e morale nell'Ottocento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006 and R. Raimondo, *Gabinetti anatomici, fantocci e manuali: la formazione della levatrice nella storia sociale dell'educazione*, «Studi sulla formazione», n. 23, 2020, pp. 331-342.

<sup>9</sup> At the time, a rather important role in the care field was played by ONMI-Opera Nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia [National Organization for the protection of motherhood and childhood] and the services, which were activated and controlled by it; the body intended to strengthen the traditional value of family, promoting support for motherhood and childhood, and to respond to the needs of growth and stability of the regime, following the directives of a precise demographic and procreative policy. In relation to the relationship between Fascism and early childhood and ONMI and its work, it is worth recalling some works including: A. Lo Monaco Aprile, *La legislazione assistenziale nel diritto fascista*, Roma, Anonima Romana Editoriale, 1928; ONMI, *L'Opera nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia dalla sua fondazione*, Roma, ONMI, 1962; C. Ipsen, *Demografia totalitaria. Il problema della popolazione nell'Italia fascista*, tr. by G. Cuberli, Bologna, il Mulino, 1997; A. Bresci, *L'Opera nazionale maternità e infanzia nel ventennio fascista*, «Italia Contemporanea», n. 192, 1993, pp. 421-442; M. Minesso (ed.), *Stato e infanzia nell'Italia contemporanea. Origini, sviluppo e fine dell'Onmi 1925-1975*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007; M. Morello, *Donna, moglie e madre prolifica. L'Onmi cinquant'anni di storia italiana*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2010; M. Minesso, *L'Onmi negli anni del fascismo. Temi e problemi*, «Storia in Lombardia», vol. 39, n. 1-2, 2019, pp. 116-131.

therefore abandoned the ancient charitable commitment in an exclusive way, care had been changed into a sort of tool, which was used to broaden the basis of political consensus and to guarantee a more “populous” handful of soldiers, while education had been placed at the service of every Fascist dimension of social life.

The progressive improvement of economic conditions and the dismantlement of traditional cultural *habitus* linked to child-care certainly led to the definitive assignment of some care activities and the closure of the institutions devoted to orphaned and abandoned children during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, above all, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the delay in a prompt political intervention on this topic and the lack of adequate compensatory and/or regulatory measures, which more or less completely compensated for the function of ancient institutes, contributed to complicate the resolution of the critical issues related to the evolution of a care and educational dimension both from a bureaucratic and social and organisational point of view.

## 2. *The collective and public memory of care institutions and their different representations*

The topic of abandoned and orphaned children in collective memory usually refers to a general feeling of pity and desolation and, sometimes, even “repulsion”, a perception which mostly comes of the representations offered over time by testimonies, literature and cinematography, which return a rather lugubrious, gloomy and sad image of the ancient care places and people who had inhabited them. These institutions are often remembered almost exclusively as places of abuse, rigor, discrimination, detention and constraints, as institutions which are completely unable to understand children’s needs and to activate adequate responses to the needs of their guests, on whom corporal punishment and repeated psychological mistreatment were imposed. This representation seems to take the way of conceiving children back centuries, when they were still considered as “secondary” and almost inert people, who were not allowed to take part in the social life of their community of reference in any way and to whom no possibility and decision-making authority on their own existence and their own future was up.

For demonstration, for example, it would be enough to refer to the imaginary figure of the orphan, who was returned to us by literature, which often also arouses a shared sense of pity, exculpation or aversion towards the protagonists and their personal story. On this regard, it is worth mentioning some main characters belonging to works, such as the classics *Oliver Twist* (1838) by Charles Dickens, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, which was firstly published in 1847, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by her sister Charlotte Brontë; or the most recent *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, which was published starting from 1997 and where just two orphans, Harry Potter and Tom Riddle, who later became Lord Voldemort, contrast, or the even most recent *The Orphans of Warsaw* by Kelly Rimmer (2022).

Beside literature, cinematography also deeply contributed to outline a precise imaginary of orphaned children: for example, we can refer to various theatrical and cinematographic adaptations of *Oliver Twist*, the 1953 short film by Guido Guerrasio with the emblematic title *Hanno bisogno di noi*<sup>10</sup>, the propaganda videos about ONMI-Opera Nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia [National Organization for the protection of motherhood and childhood], baby rooms, schools and orphanages, which are still kept in the Film Archive at the Istituto Luce<sup>11</sup>. Please, see also the recent Danish film *The Day will come* (2016), filmed by Jesper W. Nielsen, or *Lion*, released in the same year and filmed by Garth Davis.

However, this repertoire of images – and even feelings, of course – does not do justice to the complex and extremely significant social, civil and pedagogical function assumed by shelters and pious institutions over the centuries at all; on the contrary, this relevance emerges from scientific reconstructions on the topic, as well as from commemorations and public celebrations, or self-representations provided by modern organizations on some special occasions now, such as centenaries or museum exhibitions.

Therefore, an eloquent and deep hiatus emerges between public memory and collective memory in reference to child-care questions, which is able to restore a more real and intrinsic understanding of the solidarity and the educational value for both the structures and the interventions activated, if it is critically analysed. This investigation needs to jointly take into account local and national dimensions, as well as the ideological and empirical factors determining this explicit caesura between the two kinds of memory, which drives us to re-think and to reinterpret the considerations formulated so far about the memory related to child abandonment and the institutions, which welcomed orphaned and abandoned children in the past.

Therefore, sources and tools suitable for overcoming this fracture, which are also useful for a reformulation of a collective imaginary, are currently represented, for example, by various plaques devoted to baby hatches or to the memory of institutes, commemorative busts of individual personalities, who acted in the educational and care fields<sup>12</sup>; or still, they are provided by the museums devoted to the history of some big important institutions. Among them, we can certainly mention the Museum of the Innocents in Florence, which offers the possibility of undertaking various exhibition itineraries linked to the history of the ancient *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, the first real *brefotrofo* in the European context, but

<sup>10</sup> The film made with the contribution of the province of Milan was restored and digitized in 2005. Its vision is available on the following links [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O43YIQVUXQ&ab\\_channel=Medialogo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O43YIQVUXQ&ab_channel=Medialogo) and <https://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/portale/news/Hanno-bisogno-di-noi/> (last access: 18.01.2023).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.archivioluce.com/archivio-cinematografico-2/> (last access: 18.01.2023).

<sup>12</sup> In particular, this kind of source is fully in line with the number of sources, which have been recently taken into consideration and analysed within the PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”. By way of example, we can mention the tombstones erected in the former orphanage of Iglesias in Sardinia, which has been abandoned since the late twentieth century and was originally reserved for the orphans of miners and soldiers, or the ones near the ancient baby hatches in Calle della Pietà in Venice, in Santa Maria della Stella in Crema or in via Ognissanti in Padua.



also the precious architectural, pictorial and archival heritage of the institute<sup>13</sup>; or the Martinitt and Stelling Museum in Milan, which was opened in 2009 and equipped with a particular interactive exhibition methodology able to retrace the history of institutions, organizations and personalities, who offered their support to the Milanese orphaned children in the medical, training, working and care fields<sup>14</sup>. Although it is not in Italy, the Foundling Museum in London also has a great impact and importance: in addition, in 2016 it welcomed the exhibition *Drawing on Childhood* devoted to the illustrations on abandoned, orphaned or adopted children by the most important artists in the last 300 years. The museum also houses a special and rather relevant section devoted to marks dating back to the eighteenth century, with which foundlings were abandoned at the ancient Foundling Hospital; in addition to conveying the hope of a future reunion with one's own child, this symbol of identification and recognition represents an important source for the analysis of the phenomenon of child abandonment today, which is able to return some information about the origin of the orphans, the uses and the customs of the time and the religiosity of their families of origin<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> With regard to the heritage in the Museum, please refer to the official page <https://www.museodeglinnocenti.it/> (last access: 18.01.2023) while, in relation to the question of the Foundlings in Florence, see: G. Di Bello, *L'identità inventata. Cognomi e nomi dei bambini abbandonati a Firenze nell'Ottocento*, Firenze, CET, 1993; L. Sandri (ed.), *Gli Innocenti e Firenze nei secoli: un ospedale, un archivio, una città*, Firenze, SPES Studio per edizioni scelte, 1996; A. Lucarella, *Lo Spedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti. Ospizio degli Esposti*, Bari, Laterza, 1999; M. Brunelli, *Five hundred years of the history of childhood and the family at the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence. Two exhibitions*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. II, n. 2, 2007, pp. 463-466; G. Macario (ed.), *Dall'istituto alla casa. L'evoluzione dell'accoglienza all'infanzia nell'esperienza degli Innocenti*, Roma, Carocci Faber, 2008; L. Rosati, A. Schena, R. Massacesi, *Childhood and adolescence between past and present. Using knowledge organization to bridge the different channels of a cultural institution: the case of the Istituto degli Innocenti*, Firenze, «Knowledge Organization», vol. 40, n. 3, 2013, pp. 197-204; S. Filipponi, E. Mazzocchi, L. Sebregondi (edd.), *Il Museo degli Innocenti*, Firenze, Mandragora, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> The Martinitt and Stelling Museum, which collects a significant heritage of documents dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is obviously linked to the experience of the two male and female orphanages, which marked the care history of the city of Milan. For a deep examination on the two institutions and the exhibitions and the educational activities, which were proposed by the Museum, please see: <https://cultura.gov.it/luogo/museo-martinitt-e-stelling> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.museomilano.org/museo/museo-martinitt-e-stelling/> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.milanoperibambini.it/rubriche/ciabattine-piccine/2239-il-museo-dei-martinitt-e-stelling.html> (last access: 18.01.2023); L. Dodi, *L'Orfanotrofio dei Martinitt nell'età delle riforme*, Milano, Electa, 1992; E. Baio Dossi, *Le Stelling. Storia dell'Orfanotrofio femminile di Milano*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1994; *Le Stelling: storia e vita di un palazzo*, Sondrio, Gruppo bancario Credito Valtellinese, 1995; M. Belvedere, C. Cenedella, *La storia va in scena. Appunti di museologia dal percorso di realizzazione del Museo Martinitt e Stelling di Milano*, Sondrio, Ramponi Arti Grafiche, 2012; E. Catania, *I Martinitt. La Milano cuore in mano dall'epoca degli Sforza a quella dei Rizzoli, Bianchi e Del Vecchio*, Milano, BookTime, 2012; C. Cenedella, L. Giuliaci (edd.), *La vita fragile. Infanzia, disagi e assistenza nella Milano del lungo Ottocento*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> With regard to The Foundling Museum in London, please refer to the official website <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/> (last access: 18.01.2023), the page devoted to the marking section <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/our-art-and-objects/foundling-collections/tokens/> (last access: 18.01.2023), the link [https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/foundling\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/foundling_01.shtml) (last access: 18.01.2023) and some important works, including: R. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981; C. Oliver, P. Aggleton, *Coram's Children. Growing Up in the Care of the Foundling Hospital: 1900-1995*, London, Coram Family, 2000; G. Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*.



Furthermore, in addition to these museums, various exhibitions are particularly significant, because they are precisely organized by cultural, municipal or provincial institutions about the topic of abandonment and often focus on the heritage of the foundlings' marks, introducing the set of objects, symbols and letters, with which children were abandoned, or the artistic and documentary heritage of various institutions. In order to only cite a couple of examples, we can mention the 2014 exhibition *L'eredità dei Bastardini: dall'assistenza all'arte* linked to the ancient *Ospedale dei Bastardini* in Bologna or the exhibition *Appesi ad un filo. I Contrassegni della Congregazione di Carità di Camerino*, which was organized at the section of the State Archive in Camerino in 2022<sup>16</sup>.

Of course, in addition to showing a marked interest in local history and the fate of the so-called «children of guilt», these initiatives also testify how and to what extent the topic of child abandonment, care and education still continue to animate cultural and political debates and social conscience. The paradigms of reference have naturally changed, and now the attention and the commitment aimed at childhood are exclusively addressed to the children's protection in their integrity, paying attention to respecting their primary needs, as well as their psychological, moral, educational and legal needs; services and interventions correspond to the modern democratic habit and the new *welfare* concept and are now strictly regulated and organized within a precise network.

### Conclusions

Of course, the social, economic and political context In Italy and, more generally, in Europe has radically changed compared to the past and the question of abandoned children no longer represents an emergency situation, nevertheless the problem is not completely eliminated. For example, there are still the so-called «cradles for life» today, a sort of modern evolution for the ancient baby hatches – whose judgment is particularly conflicting –, and the need for having services and institutions devoted to parental and child care persists, such as communities for unaccompanied foreign minors, protected

*Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital*, Cheltenham, The History Press, 2007; A. Levene, *Childcare, health and mortality in the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800. 'Left to the mercy of the world'*, Manchester-New York, Manchester University Press, 2007; J.A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Unwed Mothers: Victorian Women and the London Foundling Hospital*, London, Continuum, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief description of the exhibitions mentioned, please refer to the following links: [https://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/portale/Home/Archivio\\_news/8220Leredita\\_dei\\_Bastardini\\_dallassistenza\\_allarte](https://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/portale/Home/Archivio_news/8220Leredita_dei_Bastardini_dallassistenza_allarte) (last access: 18.01.2023); [https://www.bolognametropolitana.it/Home\\_Page/Archivio\\_news/001/8220Leredita\\_dei\\_Bastardini\\_dallassistenza\\_allarte](https://www.bolognametropolitana.it/Home_Page/Archivio_news/001/8220Leredita_dei_Bastardini_dallassistenza_allarte) (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.lastampa.it/cultura/2014/01/13/news/l-eredita-dei-bastardini-dall-assistenza-all-arte-opere-scelte-dal-patrimonio-della-provincia-di-bologna-1.35934626/> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://archiviodistatomacerata.cultura.gov.it/2022/06/08/appesi-ad-un-filo-i-contrassegni-della-congregazione-di-carita-di-camerino/> (last access: 18.01.2023); <https://www.beniculturali.it/evento/appesi-ad-un-filo-i-contrassegni-della-congregazione-di-carita-di-camerino> (last access: 18.01.2023).

homes for imprisoned parents and children, centres for children with disabilities, anti-violence centres and shelters for the abused ones.

Therefore, the value, which the historical-pedagogical reflection on the memory of institutions and care and educational interventions currently assumes, is undoubted: in fact, in addition to contributing to a general renewal of a collective imaginary on the topic, which is far from pietism, prejudices and the mere charitable attitude of the past, it allows to enrich and to strengthen contemporary pedagogical thought and actions through a critical attitude towards the potentialities and the difficulties already experienced in the past and thanks to an increasingly trans-disciplinary approach in the wake of which we can build services, which are concretely devoted to the quality of life of children and their well-being.

# The “Raggio di Sole” Open-Air School and Its Directors in Collective and Public Memory

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## *Introduction*

The paper is divided into two parts: the first briefly introduces the experience of the “Raggio di Sole” open-air school and of Alessandro Randi, the president of the committee that promoted its foundation, in an attempt to present this experience against the backdrop of the time and in the historical, pedagogical and cultural context of Padua in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second part of the speech is dedicated to the public and collective memory today of Alessandro Randi and the “Raggio di Sole” school, in the desire to present a piece of the historical reconstruction that has unfolded, and then to highlight the public narrative that arose around Randi and his open-air school, which today comes to us in the form of “memory”.

The city of Padua in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a leader in the field of public hygiene and focus on the health of the population, and this was due in large part to doctors, city administrators and philanthropists, who were interested in care, prevention and hygiene education<sup>1</sup>. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the study of tuberculosis aroused lively interest in Italy, especially with regard to treatment and preventive action to be taken, primarily because of the living conditions in city centres (overcrowding, poor hygiene, poverty, polluted air, inadequate nutrition, and so on). Secondly, there was still a widespread belief among the population that tuberculosis was a kind of exposure to the cold, a “colpo d’aria” (a blast of cold), and for that reason it was thought that it had to be treated in a heated and enclosed environment.

There was a need for a movement towards both a social safeguard against the disease and towards the opening of treatment centres, but also for information and health education. Indeed, even before Robert Koch identified the bacterium responsible for the disease in 1882, the beneficial contribution of natural environments and “air cures” in both the prevention and treatment of the disease had already been ascertained in the medical sphere: it was from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that sanatoriums, seaside hospices and open-air schools were established in Europe and the United States<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Aliprandi, *Un cinquantenario dimenticato. Iniziative padovane nella lotta contro la tubercolosi*, Padova, Erredici, 1961, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> The institution of the first seaside lodging on today’s Italian territory dates back to the pre-unification period, established in Viareggio in 1856. In Padua in 1869, Associazione degli ospizi marini di Padova (Padua

At the dawn of social medicine, the innovative contribution, both academic and civic, of doctors from Padua proved decisive for the birth and development of educational and school structures in the city<sup>3</sup>, but it also became the inspiration for similar experiences that spread throughout Italy from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The intertwining of education, hygiene and medicine emerged within the trend of Italian and European positivism<sup>4</sup>, in the exaltation of scientific progress as the panacea for all ills, and was promoted by educators, doctors, hygienists, anthropologists and philanthropists from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>5</sup>: the word “science” was juxtaposed with the word “humanity” in large letters, «to symbolise the joint ideal of a civilisation considered unfailingly progressive»<sup>6</sup>. A scientific work, therefore, that expanded towards a civil and educational commitment.

### 1. *The open-air school “Raggio di Sole”*

It was in this context that Alessandro Randi (Pordenone, 1858 - Gorgo di Cartura, 1944) came on the scene, a graduate in medicine and from 1885 honorary assistant to the chair of the Clinica Medica Propedeutica (Propedeutic Medical Clinic) at the University of Padua, employed from 1887 until 1890, when he resigned his academic post<sup>7</sup>. In 1891 he was appointed interim health officer at Padua City Hall, where he then held the position of Chief Physician at the Office of Hygiene from 1895 for the next forty years. It

Seaside Hospice Association) was founded, which by Royal Decree of 25 October 1893 was united with the Associazione ginnastica di Padova (Padua Gymnastics; founded in 1889) into a single institution, named the Padua Seaside Hospice and Rickets Institute. In 1881 the city of Milan founded an institution for alpine climatic cures for poor children. The first Italian anti-tubercular sanatorium was built in 1903, at Pineta di Sortenna, a hamlet of Sondalo (Sondrio).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. Zago, *La pedagogia positivistica a Padova*, «Studium Educationis», vol. 16, n. 1, 2015, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> The University of Padua is recognised as one of the “cradles” of Italian positivism. Among the most illustrious presences at the University of Padua are: Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920), undoubtedly the most representative Italian exponent of this current, whose magisterium at Padua stands out in both the philosophical and pedagogical spheres; Giovanni Canestrini (1835-1900), lecturer in zoology and comparative anatomy at the University of Padua, promoter in Italy of the dissemination of Darwin’s evolutionary thought; Achille De Giovanni (1838-1916), dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Padua from 1885 and for the next eleven years, then rector between 1896 and 1900: he believed that the origin of “morbidity” lay in the morphological disharmony between the parts or in an anomaly in the process of evolution; De Giovanni in particular was involved on both the academic and social-political fronts, especially in the fight against tuberculosis. Cf. G. Berti, G. Simone (edd.), *Il positivismo a Padova tra egemonia e contaminazioni (1880 - 1940)*, Treviso, Antilia, 2016; M. Quaranta, *Il Positivismo Veneto*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. D’Ascenzo, *Le esperienze di scuole all’aperto in Italia nel primo Novecento. Avvio di un’indagine*, in M. Tomarchio, L. Todaro (edd.), *Spazi formativi, modelli e pratiche di educazione all’aperto nel primo Novecento*, Santarcangelo di Romagna, Maggioli, 2017, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> G. Cosmacini, *L’arte lunga. La storia della medicina dall’antichità ad oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011, p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. Dal Zotto, *Biografie*, in V. Dal Piaz (ed.), *“Raggi di Sole” sulle mura di Padova: scuole e strutture ospedaliere contro la tubercolosi*, Padova, Il Prato, 2013, pp. 116-117.

was during his years at the city municipality that he promoted important studies and city initiatives, with a commitment to health and hygiene but also imbued with a pedagogical and educational vision.

In January 1902, Randi contributed to the founding of the "Comitato di soccorso ai tubercolosi poveri" ("Committee for the Relief of Poor Tuberculosis"), of which he was President from 1904 to 1908, which in July 1908 merged, together with the "Comitato padovano della lega nazionale contro la tubercolosi" ("Padua Committee of the National League Against Tuberculosis"), into the "Associazione padovana contro la tubercolosi" ("Padua Association Against Tuberculosis"); this was later named the "Raggio di Sole" ("Ray of Sun") Association after the open-air recreation centre of the same name was inaugurated in 1905 on the Bastione degli Scalzi (thus on the city walls) and, on 24 May 1907, it finally became the open-air school<sup>8</sup>.

It is precisely the "Raggio di Sole" open-air school that historiography recognises as the first open-air school in Italy, almost contemporary with the "Waldschule" in Charlottenburg, the school-sanatorium started in Germany in 1904, the first example in Europe<sup>9</sup>. In the following years, Randi coordinated the opening of other open-air recreation centres-schools in the area: the "Camillo Aita" school on Bastione Santa Croce (1910), the "Enrichetta Luzzatto Dina" school on Bastione Venier (1920), the "Giovan Battista Da Monte Lysiatric Ward" on Bastione Cornaro (1915)<sup>10</sup>. The choice of the city walls for the establishment of these institutes was, of course, not accidental: in the dusty city, the walls were the only green, elevated but also easily accessible place that could be reached by foot from the centre. They were also suitable locations for the installation of verandas and terraces for "air treatment".

Randi calls such experiments «works that strive to give children the best way to develop», also accusing the Italian school of the time as a generally unhealthy place:

The school not only disseminates knowledge, but also feeds and sows the seeds of disease, due to the deplorable conditions of the environment, the crowding of pupils, and the excessive work imposed on evolving brains. It has been said and repeated: less brain work and more material work, harmoniously combined; [...] air and sunshine for all. [...] In this way, school will no longer be seen as a danger to health, but as a useful gymnasium<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, «Igiene della scuola», vol. 45, December 1914, pp. 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> A. Gutierrez, *Scuola all'aperto*, in G. Marchesini (dir.), *Dizionario delle scienze pedagogiche. Opera di consultazione pratica con un Indice semantico*, vol. II, Milano, Società Editrice libraria, 1929, pp. 452-453. Regarding today's educational historiography, we cite, by way of example, a text referring to the Italian context and one of international scope: M. D'Ascenzo, *Per una storia delle scuole all'aperto in Italia*, Pisa, ETS, 2018; A.-M. Châtelet, D. Lerch, J.-N. Luc (dir.), *L'école de plein air. Une expérience pédagogique et architecturale dans l'Europe du XX siècle/ Open-Air Schools. An Educational and Architectural Venture in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Paris, Éditions Recherches, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G. Lenci, *La lotta contro la tubercolosi a Padova tra Ottocento e Novecento: scuole all'aperto e il "Da Monte" sulle mura cinquecentesche*, in V. Dal Piaz (ed.), *"Raggi di Sole" sulle mura di Padova: scuole e strutture ospedaliere contro la tubercolosi*, cit.

<sup>11</sup> A. Randi, *Le stazioni diurne di cura d'aria nella lotta alla tubercolosi*, Padova, Stabilimento tipo-litografico Fratelli Salmin, 1906, pp. 10-11.

In 1908, in *Ricreatori e Scuole all'aperto per fanciulli deboli* (*Recreation Centre and Open-air Schools for Weak Children*), an excerpt from the report that the doctor presented at the Italian Paediatric Congress held in Padua in 1907, he clarifies the perceived need to «modify the school environment, adapting teaching methods and proportioning intellectual work to the needs of weak organisms, resolving in a word the problem of improving their physical condition without prejudice, indeed to the benefit of their education»<sup>12</sup>. Hence the value placed on walks, excursions «of pleasure and treatment»<sup>13</sup>. For Randi, this should have been the situation in the municipal schools, spaces that were in any case different from those places primarily intended for the care of the weak and the sick – generally with continuous hospitalisation – recognising the benefit of being able to return home in the evening hours and conduct care in the family as well.

The transformation from recreation centre to school occurred in 1907, partly prompted by the local involvement in primary schooling that the 1904 Orlando Law had enshrined, setting compulsory schooling until 12 years of age. From November 1908, among other things, the open-air school fell under municipal control, and from the 1910-1911 school year, *open-air after-school clubs* were started, allowing pupils to stay on site until 6 p.m., enjoy two meals and occupy their time between study, play and rest; this institution was so successful that in the 1912-1913 school year, 787 pupils were enrolled<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Alessandro Randi's legacy: public and collective memory linked to “Raggio di Sole”

In order to understand the perception and legacy of the experience Randi and “Raggio di Sole” (as well as the public and social image it developed), we will consider some elements of the public and collective memory linked to Randi and his open-air school.

In recognition of his commitment to social, educational and prevention work, Alessandro Randi was awarded the “Gold Medal of merits in Public Education” (1912) for «enhancing the education of individuals, a prerequisite for a better social life» and «for rare and unremunerated services for the benefit of infant and primary education» and the “Silver Medal of Merit in Public Health” (1923) «for outstanding scientific and organisational skills».

Evidence of the first words of recognition of the pioneering Paduan experience can be found in local essays of the time. Alberto Graziani, a doctor and successor to Randi's work at the city hall, writes about the significance of “Raggio di Sole”: «It is a legacy of good and blessings that the Association will leave to the municipality, not a passive legacy

<sup>12</sup> A. Randi, *Ricreatori e scuole all'aperto per i fanciulli deboli*. Estratto dagli Atti del VI Congresso pediatrico italiano; Padova, Ottobre 1907, Padova, R. Stab. P. Prosperini, 1908, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Randi, *Le stazioni diurne di cura d'aria nella lotta alla tubercolosi*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> The recreation centre was started in 1905 with 54 pupils in its first year. The open-air school had 90 pupils when it opened in 1907.

as one might believe; a legacy in which the fruits are in the seed stage, but will grow and ripen in the sun in a few short years»<sup>15</sup>.

The Royal District School Inspector of Padua, Pietro Trotto, in *La scuola elementare a Padova negli ultimi cent'anni* (*The primary school in Padua over the last hundred years*) (1805-1906) published in 1909, also highlights how:

The credit for the initiative of this ingenious and philanthropic institution belongs to Dr. Alessandro Randi, chief physician of the municipality of Padua, who was able to implement his noble idea, despite many serious difficulties, because he was endowed with a fervent intellect, a broad and clear scientific culture, a big heart and a firmness of purpose<sup>16</sup>.

It also seems interesting to review a few excerpts from the visitors' book of the "Raggio di Sole" school and recreation centre, published in 1914 as an appendix to Alberto Graziani's essay, it boasts more than one authoritative voice of the time, including Giovanni Marchesini (1868-1931), who at the time of the visit (1914) held the position of full professor of Pedagogy at the University of Padua. Marchesini writes:

I wish (although I know I am boldly indulging in fantasy) that all primary and secondary schools were outdoors, because I believe that youth should never be deprived of air and sunshine, especially if we recognise the complaint that excessive intellectual work in our schools threatens physical development and fertile mental vigour at the age that should be considered most sacred to the future of families and the nation<sup>17</sup>.

Marchesini emphasises how the medical-educational and social policy innovations implemented in Padua are praised and taken as an example, demonstrating how their merit is also recognised in the educational sphere. In this excerpt, certain key ideas from Marchesini's thinking clearly resonate: the role of moral instruction on the part of educational institutions as part the duty of building the nation, the education of the child as a psycho-physical being, and example and habit as methods to shape morality<sup>18</sup>. The value placed by Marchesini on Randi's work and more generally on open-air schools as a pedagogical-social device (in addition to its civil relevance and «undisputed praise») is clear by the inclusion of a specific sub-heading – "Open-air school", under the broader heading "School" – within the *Dictionary of Pedagogical Sciences*, which was edited by him in 1929<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> P. Trotto, *La scuola elementare a Padova negli ultimi cent'anni* (1805-1906), Firenze, R. Bemporad, 1909, p. 514.

<sup>17</sup> Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, cit., Part IV "Estratti dall'album dei Visitatori - Onorificenze - Bibliografia", pp. 22-23.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. Zago, *Il pensiero pedagogico di Giovanni Marchesini e la crisi del positivismo fra Otto e Novecento*, in Id. (ed.), *Il pensiero pedagogico di Giovanni Marchesini e la crisi del positivismo italiano*, Lecce-Rovato (BS), Pensa Multimedia, 2014, pp. 15-66.

<sup>19</sup> The entry is written by Alfredo Gutierrez, a collaborator on the project, who does not fail to emphasise the fruitful relationship between medicine and pedagogy in these places: «The work of the teacher must be supported by the school doctor, who must see, study and check the pupils, to detect their physical conditions and any shortcomings, and to indicate cures [...]. And in turn the teacher gives the doctor all the information



There were many visits by many personalities from the educational-institutional world linked to Ministries and to medical and social associations, journalists and writers. But the commentary signed by Pio Foà stands out. He was a doctor and professor of pathological anatomy, first at the University of Modena (from 1875) then in Turin (from 1884), a Senator of the Kingdom from 1908 and a remarkable individual in terms of civil and political commitment. Following his visit to the “Raggio di Sole” in 1914, he left a long commentary in which we read:

It is rare to find the coincidence of so many minor impressions capable of generating a concise and grandiose one. Useless ramparts of the city concerted into parks for weak children to study in the free air. A beneficial ray of sunshine in the surface of the earth that generates a ray of sunshine bestowing good works in the soul of a gentle apostle who neither speaks nor writes, but works like a saint. [...] Nature, in whose presence the child grows free and healthy, develops more fully the sphere of cerebral functions and nurtures the little man of the future, who will, in a more or less distant future, demand the extension of the benefit to other ages of development and other schools<sup>20</sup>

Even the press, local but also national, did not fail to report on the experience in question. Four examples are given:

Nothing similar has been set up so far in any other city in Italy – to find something reminiscent, for its intended purpose, of the recreation centre in Padua, one must look to Germany and France [...]. The creator and soul of this most noble institution is a doctor, as modest as he is knowledgeable, Dr. Alessandro Randi, director of the Municipal Sanitary Office.

*Il Resto del Carlino*, Bologna, 31 May 1907

The Municipality of Padua, always a vigilant promoter of every healthy initiative, could not remain deaf to the call of the well-deserving “Raggio di Sole” principals and, under their auspices, was the first in Italy to implement those open-air schools that Rome, Milan and Venice copy today. Therefore, praise be to you Sir Randi, standard bearer of the good fight, praise be to your companions in faith and work.

*Il Veneto*, Padua, 8 May 1910

In Italy, the first outdoor school was organised in Padua by Dr Randi, a fervent and tenacious apostle of the idea [...] who immediately realised the great benefit that open-air schools could bring to children.

*L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 13 September 1912

But the best organised outdoor school, which has yielded surprising results, is the one founded in Padua in 1905 under the name “Raggio di Sole”. Those who read the report by Dr Randi of Padua, who was the soul of the institution, are moved and filled with admiration for the immense benefits derived from the ingenious modern reform.

*La Provincia di Mantova*, n. 95, 1914

about the child and reports the findings he makes on the educational results of his work»; Gutierrez, *Scuola all'aperto*, cit., p. 452, 454.

<sup>20</sup> Graziani, *La scuola all'aperto in Padova*, cit., Part IV “Estratti dall'album dei Visitatori - Onorificenze - Bibliografia”, p. 22.

To date, some 30 or so excerpts from newspapers and printed publications, both local and national, have been found, which between 1906 and 1914 report on the experience. They all praise Randi's work, almost always mentioning him as the director and founder of the "Raggio di Sole" school.

As we conclude, we propose a further reference to Randi's legacy starting with a study of the backpack desks preserved in the Museum of Education belonging to the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology at the University of Padua, from the "Gioconda" open-air school founded in Este, in the province of Padua, on 24 May 1922. Not only was "Gioconda" an open-air school, it was also a "mobile" school, as desks, blackboard and Italian flag were transportable by "backpack" from one place to another depending on the weather, the seasons and hygienic and teaching requirements. Unlike the "Raggio di Sole" facilities, which were fixed.

Some iconographic and documentary sources illustrate the instructions for opening and closing the desks: indeed, in 1928, a small booklet was prepared containing instructions for setting up and dismantling the classroom but also with the prices for starting such a school<sup>21</sup>. Inside, the teacher was shown a usage diagram indicating "warning commands" and "execution commands" for preparing and disassembling the class, which took the form of actual repetitions of outdoor gymnastic exercises. Each "warning command" (e.g. "desk on the shoulder", or "desk on the ground") recalled the action to be performed with the desk, and was linked to four "execution commands", which were punctuated through the repetition of the numbers "one" "two" "three" "four". There is a clear reference to a march and a repetition of exercises in a military setting. Thanks to the instructions, the teacher could learn the commands and corresponding actions, and also teach them to the pupils using the enclosed photographs.

The conception and start-up of the "Gioconda" is due to the ingenuity and commitment to education of head teacher Mario Cacciavillani. Cacciavillani became a head teacher at only 23 years of age, even before he actually obtained his Diploma as Head Teacher, for which he was following a course at the University of Padua. In 1903 he arrived in Este, a town 30 km from Padua, as Director of Primary Schools. In 1922 he realised his plan to start a "mobile" open-air school, which he named "Gioconda". He designed the abovementioned "backpack desks" himself<sup>22</sup>, the drafts and sketches of which are still preserved at the Gabinetto di Lettura Association in Este, and he supervised its realisation by commissioning a local carpenter, master craftsman Ettore Bressan.

<sup>21</sup> *Scuole comunali di Este: La Gioconda dei Balilla*, Este, Tip. A. Apostoli, 1928.

<sup>22</sup> It seems that "backpack desks" were already in use in the open-air schools of Rome. Indeed, they appear in a 1911 Paravia catalogue of teaching aids (*Catalogo del materiale scolastico per gli asili infantili e le scuole elementari. Anno scolastico 1911-1912*, Torino, Paravia, 1911). Paravia calls them "Grilli backpack desks", on sale for 20 lire, marketing as «the model chosen by the Municipality of Rome for the open-air schools it has established». Three different sizes were available, depending on the age of the schoolchildren: 6 to 8 years; 8 to 10 years; 10 to 13 years. The photographs in the catalogue show some substantial differences between these backpack desks and those of the "Gioconda" school: above all, in this case the desk and chair were fixed together, and opened with a single sweeping movement. We presume, however, that Cacciavillani drew inspiration from this already existing patent.

Cacciavillani's intuitions, brought to life in the mobile open-air school, became famous in the Veneto region, so much so that the "Gioconda" school, in the meantime renamed "La Gioconda dei Balilla" due to the changed political and cultural context<sup>23</sup>, was awarded a gold medal at the 1926 Regional Educational Exhibition in Venice, for the unique and excellent educational and training experience that was offered to the pupils. This resulted in the organisation of a "propaganda and educational trip" (in May 1928) between the provinces of Padua, Vicenza and Treviso, with the aim of publicising the experience, which was pioneering in the Veneto region due to its "mobile" nature. In each town centre the pupils stopped to give a demonstration of their travelling classroom set-up.

Today we still have Cacciavillani's memoir *Lontani Intimi Ricordi di un Ottuagenario* (*Distant Intimate Memories of an Octogenarian*), 1959, which unfortunately does not describe the background and ideas that led to the creation of the mobile open-air school. Certainly, however, the head teacher, moving between Este and Padua, had had the opportunity to witness and appreciate the experience of the "Raggio di Sole" and was probably also familiar with the other experiences that had arisen in the meantime in Italy<sup>24</sup>. In any case, his diary stands today as a valuable source to trace the beginnings of the professional career of a teacher who very quickly also became a head teacher.

### Conclusions

In the testimonies reported through ideas and practices linked to the "Raggio di Sole" school and Alessandro Randi, the interest in social medicine, hygiene education and prevention can be viewed in a historical framework of a country in which, in the pedagogical sphere, a greater awareness of the needs of childhood and attention to "outside" places for education and training were developing<sup>25</sup>.

The intertwining of social medicine and education that emerges from the "Raggio di Sole" experience, of a scientific approach that promotes organic and civilised improvement and of preventive education that acts as a conduit for such instances in responding to social needs, fits well into the framework of Italian positivism, in both the medical and pedagogical spheres, thanks, in the latter case, to the importance given (albeit in a secondary and functional way) to educational settings, to the very ideas of education, socialisation and play<sup>26</sup>. These assumptions in the subsequent encounter with

<sup>23</sup> During the Fascist regime, the term "Balilla" referred to boys from 8 to 14 years of age, but also more broadly to youth.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding a historical-pedagogical reconstruction of the first open-air school experiences in Italy, we refer to the works already cited here by Mirella D'Ascenzo.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. G. Fasan, *Medici-pedagogisti nella Padova del Positivismo. L'impegno sociale e educativo di Achille De Giovanni e Alessandro Randi*, in G. Zago (ed.), *Le discipline filosofiche e pedagogiche a Padova tra positivismo e umanesimo*, Roma, Studium, 2021, pp. 219-240.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Zago, *La pedagogia positivistica a Padova*, cit., p. 27.

the activism of European pedagogy have had an important influence on the traditional idea of the school, and for this reason the medical-pedagogical experiences of open-air schools remain a notable stage in the history of education and educational institutions, but also in the social history of childhood<sup>27</sup>, in their pursuit of an idea of re-appropriation and care of the body directed towards psychophysical, and, by extension, social well-being.

Compared to the "Raggio di Sole" school, the "Gioconda dei Balilla" school was clearly influenced by Giovanni Gentile's school of thought and programmes, of an education of the body and morals which was held to be indispensable for the very education of the spirit. There are, therefore, fundamental differences in the ideological assumptions underpinning the development of these open-air schools: the "Raggio di Sole" school under the influence of medical and pedagogical positivism, the "Gioconda dei Balilla" school in a neo-idealist climate influenced by the emerging fascist ideal. Both are outdoors, but one is mobile and the other has fixed structures. However, they are united in the idea of caring for the educational environment as a place for the transmission of cultural and moral values, a place for training and education that cannot be separated from physical well-being.

It is precisely the aspects of continuity and divergence that make it possible today to enrich the study of these experiences with different types of memories and representations, different types of images of these schools linked as much to the various types of sources we have today to study them as to the different pedagogical theories they describe. But it becomes clear that, even leaving completely aside the positivist school, the influence of the ideas and inheritance of Randi and the "Raggio di Sole" school was destined to endure in pedagogical thought, both locally and among other head teachers, with ever-increasing attention placed on the harmonious development of children, on their physical and psychological well-being, on decent living conditions, and on the educational place as a space for relationships and training.

Furthermore, in view of the heritage relating to open-air schools preserved at the Museum of Education in Padua, one can see some of the educational value and potential that the use and exercise of memory can have today in university teaching venues. Indeed, memory and its forms appear to be closely connected to the promotion and construction of critical thinking and a sense of belonging which, in educational venues, can become both an exercise in active citizenship and the foundation of a professional, individual and collective identity. "Inhabiting" these forms of memory also becomes a cornerstone for the development of democratic and humanising thinking in the training of educational professionals<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. D'Ascenzo, *Per una storia dei diritti dell'infanzia. Le scuole all'aperto nel primo Novecento in Italia*, in M. Tomarchio, S. Olivieri (edd.), *Pedagogia militante. Diritti, culture, territori*, Pisa, ETS, 2015, p. 680.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. G. Fasan, *Storia della pedagogia e materialità educativa. Un connubio per la didattica al Museo dell'Educazione*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 93-107.



# Villa Emma in Nonantola, between History and Public Memory

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## *Introduction*

This contribution is part of a much broader and more solid research area focusing on the forms of school memory understood as public practices of re-evoking a common past through the study of the monumental heritage of schools<sup>1</sup>. The study

of monumental artefacts seems particularly suitable for explaining the purposes for which public commemorative practices have been implemented, how they have developed, how they have changed over time, who has been involved and what significance they have had in making the cultural history of school<sup>2</sup>.

The study conducted covers a long period from 1937 to 1985 and the educational practices and events occurring in a small town in the province of Modena, Nonantola. It refers, in particular, to four emblematic experiences of the pedagogy of Don Zeno

<sup>1</sup> On the concept of public and monumental memory, refer to the following publications: M. D'Ascenzo, *Linee di ricerca della storiografia scolastica in Italia*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. III, n. 1, January-July 2016, pp. 249-272; Id., *Creating Places of Public Memory through the Naming of School Buildings. A Case Study of Urban School Spaces in Bologna in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, «El futuro del pasado», vol. 7, 2016, pp. 441-458; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; M. D'Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as a resource in history of education*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, 2017, pp. 633-657; A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...». *Public memory and awards of honour of public education in Italy from the Unification to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 185-205; M. Brunelli, J. Meda, L. Pomante (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times* (special issue), «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019; M. D'Ascenzo, *Esperienze di Public History of Education nell'Università di Bologna, tra ricerca scientifica e didattica*, in G. Bandini, S. Oliviero (edd.), *Public History of education: riflessioni, testimonianze, esperienze*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2019; J. Meda, *The "Sites of School Memory" in Italy between memory and oblivion: a first approach*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 25-47; V. Minuto, *L'educazione al patrimonio monumentale della scuola*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive. Atti del II Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Padova, 7-8 Ottobre 2021)*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 151-168, V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255.

<sup>2</sup> V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, 2021, p. 214.

Saltini<sup>3</sup>, significantly interpreted by Don Arrigo Beccari<sup>4</sup>; the pedagogic experience of school in the Jewish children's community at Villa Emma in 1943 and 1944; the professional training school, later the unified middle school that Don Arrigo Beccari ran from 1949 to 1968; the "Trains of Happiness" hospitality project run by the Italian Communist Party of Modena and Nonantola, which from 1946 to 1949 welcomed poor and disadvantaged children from Southern Italy and the Modena Apennines, and finally the experiences of the educational and cultural services run by the Municipality of Nonantola in the period 1960-1985. The research was then applied to the dissertations of the Primary Education Sciences degree programme at the University of Bologna<sup>5</sup>. Tracing the history of the teachers in question and the stone plaques devoted to them, as well as the inauguration speeches and public commemorations organised by local and national institutions aiming to obtain consensus and strengthen the sense of belonging to the community of Nonantola, the methodology used was mainly that of historical research, focusing on printed sources from newspapers and archives, many of which private, as well as those treasure chests of memory which are the registers of the primary school teachers in Nonantola from 1947 to 1949 held in the school archives of the "Fratelli Cervi" Comprehensive Institute in Nonantola. Great importance was also given to oral and photographic sources, «sources that are not found in the usual archives but in people», which offered an approach

to the local community, the common people and the schools, with a dual function: to trace these sources and contribute to their preservation and enhancement for the local community. This is one of the key sectors of international community of the academic historian as a citizen, the ethic and civil dimension of his work as a scholar and member of a local, national and international community,

<sup>3</sup> Don Zeno Saltini was born in Fossoli di Carpi on 30 August 1900, the ninth of twelve children, in a well-off farming family. Aged fourteen and a half, he left school to work in the fields. He was called to arms on 20 March 1918, serving until 7 March 1919. In 1923, he passed the classic high school diploma at the "Ludovico Antonio Muratori" school in Modena as a private student, enrolled in the Faculty of Law in Modena in 1923 and in 1926 transferred as a fourth-year student to the Catholic University in Milan, where he graduated in 1929. He went on to become a priest, and was ordained in 1931 by Mons. Giovanni Pranzini, Bishop of Carpi. He celebrated his first mass in the city cathedral on 6 January that year, and during the ceremony he adopted a seventeen-year-old boy who had already been arrested several times by the Carabinieri. He began his mission in Fossoli, in the province of Carpi, dealing particularly with children. In June 1931 he moved to San Giacomo Roncole, a hamlet outside Mirandola, belonging to the diocese of Carpi and, on 22 January 1933, he founded the Opera Piccoli Apostoli. After the war, he worked in the former prison camp in Fossoli and set up Nomadelfia. He died in 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Don Arrigo (his real name was Ario) Beccari was born in Castelnuovo Rangone on 24 August 1909. In 1933 he was ordained and celebrated his first mass on 8 June 1933 in the church in Castelnuovo Rangone. He was immediately appointed as a teacher at the Seminary in Nonantola and on 1 January 1940 became Rector of the parish of Rubbiera in Nonantola. A highly active member of the Civil Resistance along with Giuseppe Moreali, Don Ennio Tardini, Don Ivo Silingardi and Don Elio Monari, Righteous Among the Nations for helping to save the Jewish children at Villa Emma. Arrested in Nonantola on 16 September 1944, he was imprisoned in San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna, and freed from Sant'Eufemia prison in Modena on 22 April 1945. In 1946 he founded a professional training school, and was the parish priest of Nonantola. He died in Nonantola on 27 December 2005.

<sup>5</sup> S. Panzetta, *Nonantola dei bambini, Nonantola dei ragazzi. Storie di pedagogia d'avanguardia, di solidarietà, di servizi educativi e di servizi culturali a Nonantola 1937-1985*, Modena, Edizioni Il Fiorino, 2021.



as well as the dimension demanded also by the university culture in terms of “third mission” and promotion of active citizenship<sup>6</sup>.

In this sense, it falls within the idea of «overcoming a history of schools and education focusing on the “ideal” pedagogic model or mere legislative reconstruction»<sup>7</sup> giving space to “real” schools.

The research was initially set around a question: how was it possible that, in a period of fifty years, such significant pedagogic experiences were embodied in a tiny town in the Po Plain. It is deemed that memory can be of fundamental support in recovering the great voids in school culture and everyday practice, able to help historians to investigate unexplored terrains. As Monica Galfrè stated in her intervention entitled *School, memory and history*,

20<sup>th</sup> century school historians certainly cannot avoid the relationship between history and memory, which is marked by an indissoluble bond, however without forgetting that history is one thing and memory is a source, and a such must be dealt with and subjected to a strict, severe critique of its sources<sup>8</sup>.

I was not aware of this professional experience in such a recent and innovative field of study like those relating to the study of the historical-educational heritage and public memory. But it was clear that I would have had to investigate completely different pedagogic experiences, even though I can certainly refer to them as active educational practices; I therefore related directly to these. Starting from

the first fundamental works of the French historian Dominique Julia and overcoming traditional studies into pedagogic theories in favour of those relating to educational practices, this type of heritage – which constitutes a kind of “sub-category” of the cultural heritage – was formally accredited as an essential source for historical-educational research. According to the definition proposed by Meda in 2013, specifically, the term school material heritage refers to that “set of tangible and/or intangible assets used and/or produced in formal and/or non-formal educational contexts over time”<sup>9</sup>.

Printed sources were examined to investigate the pedagogy implemented in the experience of Don Zeno Saltini and the Hashomer Hatzair. The aspects concerning Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati<sup>10</sup>, Don Zeno Saltini and Don Arrigo Beccari were dealt with

<sup>6</sup> M. D’Ascenzo, *Esperienze di Public History of Education nell’Università di Bologna, tra ricerca scientifica e didattica*, in Bandini, Oliviero (edd.), *Public History of education*, cit., p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> M. D’Ascenzo, *A caccia di storia nella scuola di ieri. Per una memoria educativa collettiva tra ricerca e didattica nella scuola primaria*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> L. Paciaroni, *Memoria scolastica ed educativa: questioni metodologiche, buone pratiche ed esperienze digitali. A proposito del terzo seminario nazionale PRIN (Florence, 17 September 2020)*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, pp. 755-762.

<sup>9</sup> S. Montecchiani, *Le fonti storico-educative per il rinnovamento della didattica universitaria. L’esperienza del laboratorio di Storia dell’Educazione dell’Università degli Studi di Macerata*, in Ascenzi, Covato, Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, cit., p. 364.

<sup>10</sup> Ottaviano Pelati was born in San Felice sul Panaro (Modena) on 28 September 1885. His ecclesiastical

by examining archive as well as oral sources; to investigate the “Trains of Happiness” I explored the school archive of the “Fratelli Cervi” Comprehensive Institute in Nonantola and conducted some interviews with figures from that period; in relation to the birth of cultural and education services, both public and private archives and oral sources were investigated.

As the research continued, I realised that although not all but many of the sources identified could also be used by the children in history teaching projects. Precisely these sources,

if safeguarded as a historical-educational heritage, can be used for active history teaching purposes at all school levels, in the wake of the educational renewal in schools developed significantly also by history teachers after the Second World War. Precisely the sources of historical-educational research, so close to the concrete experience of students in schools, can be used to renew history teaching, as also suggested in the *National Indications* of the Ministry of Education (MIUR) which specifies the need to use sources [...] which can thus become the starting point for inductive teaching and, at the same time, a resource to be saved in terms of collective heritage, functional to education to the cultural heritage and active citizenship<sup>11</sup>.

### While

the historiographic choice of increasingly focusing research on life inside the school and the school culture that this produced has opened the doors to the need to return to where real school is manifested: in the local community, the times and spaces of the cities, rural areas and mountains, the municipalities which, in this way, have acquired new dignity as a subject of study of a renewed local history<sup>12</sup>.

Nonantola has lent and continues to lend itself to this type of investigation. Of all the educators I investigated, the oral memory of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati has been lost, as he died in 1965 at the venerable age of eighty-eight, and his students are also no longer with us, but still today visitors to Nonantola asking about Don Arrigo Beccari will be able to talk about him as many people, although elderly, were students at his school and knew him, and the myriad of initiatives he ran, firstly in the tiny parish of Rubbiara and later in Nonantola. The same can be said for the teacher Ida Nascimbeni, who taught for many years in Nonantola until the early Seventies<sup>13</sup>.

In the case of this teacher, the collective memory still has to be systematically collected, while there are many interviews and written testimonials about Don Arrigo Beccari. As concerns Monsignor Pelati, everything stops with the official documents held at the library of the Metropolitan Seminary in Modena and the Diocesan Historical Archive.

career developed completely in the seminary in Nonantola, where he joined as a prefect in 1916, going on to become Vice-Rector, Rector and Vicar Capitular. He died in Modena in San Bartolomeo's Church on 31 May 1965.

<sup>11</sup> M. D'Ascenzo, *A caccia di storia nella scuola di ieri. Per una memoria educativa collettiva tra ricerca e didattica nella scuola primaria*, in Ascenzi, Covato, Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, cit., p. 364.

<sup>12</sup> M. D'Ascenzo, *Linee di ricerca della storiografia scolastica in Italia: la storia locale*, cit.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the insistent requests sent to the secretariat of the “Fratelli Cervi” Comprehensive Institute in Nonantola, I have still not been able to view the service records of the teacher Ida Nascimbeni.

At this point, we have to focus our attention even more on school memory,

within which instruments, practices and materials have been subject to unique attention and studies (memoirs, public naming, stone plaques, displayed writings, decorations and medals, obituaries and funeral speeches, etc.), able to highlight which memory of schools and teaching has been built on in official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions on the basis of a precise “politics of memory”, or a “public use of the past”, aiming to acquire consensus and strengthen the sense of belonging to a given community<sup>14</sup>.

In the case of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, the official collective memory comes from two stone plaques, a tomb and an epigraph. A slab affixed to the wall of the former seminary in Nonantola remembers Don Arrigo Beccari and Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati who offered shelter in those rooms to many of the children from Villa Emma; a stone placed in the crypt of the abbey marks the remains of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati; a monumental tomb in the nearby cemetery houses the remains of Don Arrigo Beccari; an epigraph in the primary school named after her remembers Ida Nascimbeni. In 2005, a state maternal school was inaugurated in Nonantola named after “Don Arrigo Beccari” but there are no epigraphs remembering him in the school itself. The school names therefore belong

to the school memory of a community, sharing mental associations referring to shapes, geometries of space, colours, smells and personal experiences, as well as common mental representations that become sedimented over time<sup>15</sup>.

### Naming a school after a specific person

therefore recalls a collective memory, they are authentic “tanks of collective memory” sedimented over time and which help to identify a community; school names hold and reveal a form of civil belonging and a set of common values, triggering strong educational values for the whole community<sup>16</sup>.

In terms of studying school history through school practices, it is clear that

the study of school names is filled with considerable heuristic potential, the spy of collective memory, public memory and local, national and international school memories, an authentically new source of historical and educational research<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> R. Sani, *La ricerca sul patrimonio storico-educativo in Italia/Research on education history heritage in Italy*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio. Atti del I Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Palma de Mallorca, 20-23 Novembre 2018)*, Macerata, eum, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> M. D'Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as resource in history of education*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, pp. 633-657.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

1. *The protagonists: Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, Don Arrigo Beccari and the teacher Ida Nascimbeni*

Continuing in chronological order, I shall examine the figure of Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, born in San Felice sul Panaro (Modena) on 28 September 1885. His ecclesiastical career developed completely in the seminary in Nonantola, where he joined as a prefect in 1916, going on to become Vice-Rector, Rector and Vicar Capitular.

Modena, 30 December 1926

Most reverend Don Ottaviano Pelati,

Having decided to elect a rector for the Venerable Seminary in Nonantola, which with science and virtue educates the young clergy that form the dearest part of our flock, preparing them to become saintly priests; on the other hand, knowing through doubtless testimonials your affection for us, your virtue, science and experience in the management of seminaries, our Ordinary Authority appoints you, Monsignor Don Ottaviano Pelati

Rector of the Seminary of Nonantola, wishing hereby that you shall have the faculties, honours and prerogatives which by right and by custom are assigned to those holding this office. It is our desire that you shall diligently train the students of this Venerable Seminary, directing their studies and other exercises and assessing their vocation<sup>18</sup>.

Mons. Ottaviano Pelati always taught mathematics, both as a prefect and as rector, and came into contact with the group of children from Villa Emma, guiding them in a tour of the Abbey in Nonantola and its treasures<sup>19</sup>. He was a priest with open ideas, and indeed according to some witnesses, Don Zeno Saltini was invited to speak of his pastoral experience at the seminary in Nonantola<sup>20</sup>. Monsignor Pelati allowed a large number of children from Villa Emma to enter the seminary, including girls, holding responsibility for such choice before the bishop of Modena, who was also the abbot at the Abbey of Nonantola. It should also be recalled that Monsignor Pelati was able to delay the children's departure from the seminary for as long as possible, against the continuous insistence of the then-Bishop of Modena, Monsignor Cesare Boccoleri. This educational action was based on continuous dialogue with his students, both those who continued their religious studies and those who abandoned them. The door of his rector's office was always open for talks with the children, whom he actively listened to.

One written testimonial of the seminary students dates back to 22 March 1928, Monsignor Pelati's name day, entitled "To our dear Rector". Firstly, the children gave spiritual gifts, listening well to the Masses, the spiritual Holy Communion, doing their duties well with a total of 106,921 good deeds offered to the Divine Heart of Jesus. There is also a request for Monsignor Pelati to celebrate a Holy Mass in their honour and finally

<sup>18</sup> Letter of appointment of Monsignor Pelati sent by the Bishop of the dioceses of Modena and Nonantola Giuseppe Antonio Ferdinando Bussolari (1926) preserved in Archive of the Seminary of Nonantola at the Diocesan Library Ferrini&Muratori in Modena, «Rectors» file.

<sup>19</sup> K. Voigt, *Villa Emma. Ragazzi ebrei in fuga 1940-1945*, Milano, La Nuova Italia, 2002, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup> E. Ferri, *La vita libera*, Modena, Mucchi Editore, 1997, p. 57.

the gift of an altar bell and ampoules containing water and wine for the celebration. At the end of the letter, the children signed themselves as his “children”<sup>21</sup>.

To better understand Monsignor Pelati, we must recall the events at Villa Emma, a noble villa just outside Nonantola. Here, in July 1942 around forty children from the Delasem<sup>22</sup> were hosted with their educators, and another thirty arrived from Split in the spring of 1943. The first group consisted of German Jewish orphans, and the second Croatian Jews. On 8 September 1943, the day of the fall of Mussolini, the children were still in Nonantola and in a few hours they were rescued. The largest group were hosted in the seminary, while the older children were housed by farmers and other people in the town. They stayed there until October of the same year when, thanks to the relations with a relief organisation working in Modena and the province, as well as other organisations in and beyond the region, they were taken across the Swiss border and officially welcomed by the Swiss State. As already underlined, Monsignor Pelati took the responsibility for housing the children in the seminary, including the girls who were placed in the apartments of the nuns who managed the seminary kitchen<sup>23</sup>. This decision in fact saved these children, who would otherwise have easily been discovered.

In the oral testimonials given by Don Arrigo Beccari, Don Ivo Silingardi and Don Ennio Tardini, this priest is remembered as a father who understood, helped and supported his priests, who were also involved in the Resistance<sup>24</sup>.

The second figure, of huge pedagogic importance, certainly more identifiable and traceable than Monsignor Pelati, is Don Arrigo Beccari, whose name was in fact Ario. Don Arrigo was a fundamental figure for Nonantola from 1940 to 1980. He worked actively in the Civil Resistance, hiding and rescuing officers from the British Army who escaped from the concentration camp in Crocetta, Modena, and from the trains deporting them

<sup>21</sup> Letter of greeting of the seminarians to the Much Loved Rector (22 March 1928) preserved in Archive of the Seminary of Nonantola at the Diocesan Library Ferrini&Muratori in Modena, «Rectors» file.

<sup>22</sup> «Delegation for the Assistance of Emigrants, a Jewish association founded in Genoa in December 1939. With headquarters in the Ligurian city, it was chaired by the lawyer Lelio Vittorio Valobra. It worked in various Italian cities where there were Jews. Its purpose was to facilitate the emigration of foreign Jews who were still in Italy, providing them with all the assistance they needed while in Italy. It was officially recognised by the Italian State. Delasem's main activity was to assist the many refugees coming from foreign cities invaded by the Nazis, Jews interned in the Italian camps, towns and cities. After the fall of the Italian State, on 8 September 1943, and after the Police Order no. 5 was issued by the Italian Social Republic which persecuted the Jews, despite the fact that many of its managers had moved to Switzerland, Delasem contributed significantly with men and money to rescue as many people as possible. From 1943 to 1945, the assistance works also relied heavily on the help of all kinds of Catholic orders. When Lelio Vittorio Valobra left for Switzerland, the points of reference became the Jew Massimo Teglio from Genoa and the Curia of Genoa, with the cardinal bishop Pietro Boetto and then his secretary Don Francesco Repetto» in S. Panzetta, *Nonantola dei bambini, Nonantola dei ragazzi. Storie di pedagogia d'avanguardia, di solidarietà, di servizi educativi e di servizi culturali a Nonantola 1937-1985*, cit., p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> For a description of these events, refer to K. Voigt, *Villa Emma. Ragazzi ebrei in fuga 1940-1945*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2002; I. Vaccari, *Il tempo di decidere*, Modena, CIRSEC, 1968; E. Ferri, *La vita libera. Biografia di don Arrigo Beccari (1933-1970)*, Modena, Mucchi Editore, 1997; G. Moreali, *Sprazzi di luce*, Modena, Poligrafico Artioli, 1978; O. Piccinini, K. Voigt, *I ragazzi di Villa Emma a Nonantola*, s.l., Comune di Nonantola, n.d.; E. Ferri, *Il sorriso dei ribelli*, Firenze, Giuntina, 2013; S. Borus, *Diario di Sonjia. Fuga e alijah di un'adolescente berlinese, 1941-1946*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Many of these testimonials are found in the private archive of Enrico Ferri.

to Germany. His efforts to rescue the Jewish children at Villa Emma was considerable, as he and Dr. Giuseppe Moreali<sup>25</sup> initiated contacts with the group and he was the one who presented Monsignor Pelati to the children, who were then invited to visit the Abbey's treasures and were given refuge in the adjacent seminary. The work to rescue escaping Jews continued even after the children left, relating to some draft evaders hiding in the Modena Apennines among the partisan formations of the Resistance, particularly the Brigata Italia led by "Claudio", the *nom de guerre* of Ermanno Gorrieri<sup>26</sup>. This activity consisted particularly of providing false documents, and ended with his arrest along with the other collaborator priests including Don Ennio Tardini and Don Ivo Silingardi. Don Arrigo remained in prison in San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna and later in Sant'Eufemia in Modena from autumn 1944 until April 1945, when he was freed by the partisans who entered the city.

After the war, Don Arrigo founded a professional training school named "Enrichetta Zanni Raiberti", which went on to become a unified middle school. In those years, in the small hamlet of Rubbiara, where he was rector from 1940, opera performances were put on, and a theatre, nursery school and glass and ceramic workshops were set up. He spent the last years of his priesthood as parish priest of Nonantola. Some testimonials of the professional training experience in Rubbiara were collected in a recent publication<sup>27</sup>. Don Arrigo Beccari was awarded the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic on 2 June 1961, and the Righteous Among the Nations medal on 18 February 1964 by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. Finally, on 23 October 1989, he was appointed Prelate of Honour of His Holiness.

The third educational figure leaving a profound mark on the inhabitants of Nonantola is Ida Nascimbeni, known as Dina, born on 6 January 1909, the same year as Don Arrigo Beccari. Of frail constitution with walking difficulties, she came from a humble family; rather than working in the fields, she became a primary school teacher. Firstly, she taught in Trentino-Alto Adige, then in Montese in the Modena Apennines, and finally in Nonantola, where she spent around forty years, before retiring in the early Sixties. On 10 January 1984, Ida Nascimbeni was awarded the first-class Diploma of Merit for primary and maternal education and for her particularly zealous and effective service to primary school and preschool education.

<sup>25</sup> He was one of the two general practitioners of Nonantola, born in 1895 and winner of the competition for the second general practitioner in Nonantola in 1925. He was a man of anti-Fascist sentiments, reported on several occasions to the police headquarters by the Carabinieri and the investigation department of the Voluntary Militia for National Security. He was a friend of Don Arrigo Beccari, and a sincere friend of the children's guide Josef Indig and other escorts. After the young Jews had escaped, he continued to collaborate with Don Beccari and the other men to help escaping Jews, draft dodgers and care for injured partisans. He was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations medal by the State of Israel in 1964. He died in Nonantola in 1980.

<sup>26</sup> Born in Modena on 26 November 1920, he was a partisan commander, taking part in the Resistance with the *nom de guerre* "Claudio" leading the Brigata Italia. He wrote a fundamental work on the Resistance entitled *La Repubblica di Montefiorino. Per una storia della Resistenza in Emilia-Romagna*, published by Il Mulino in 1966. Another of Gorrieri's fundamental books was *La Giungla Retributiva* published in 1972. He was an MP, elected to the Democrazia Cristiana party from 1958 to 1963. He died in Modena on 29 December 2004.

<sup>27</sup> S. Panzetta, *Nonantola dei bambini, Nonantola dei ragazzi. Storie di pedagogia d'avanguardia, di solidarietà, di servizi educativi e di servizi culturali a Nonantola 1937-1985*, cit., pp. 52-56.



In terms of educational practices, it should certainly be recalled that Ida Nascimbeni soon learned the importance of educational intervention that went beyond the customary hours of teaching, and indeed, from the testimonials collected from interviews with her former students, I learned that she ran after-school clubs in the afternoon, firstly in her own home and later in the newly founded municipal library. The after-school activities were run for her own students a couple of days a week, and were open to students from other classes on the other days. Her teaching focused on interclass work, leading to exchanges of skills and students with at least one other colleague, equally renowned and esteemed in Nonantola, Cesarina Zaniboni. Her working style with the children was based on dialogue, colloquial relations with her students, learning rules not by coercion but by understanding, the continuous use of encouragement and support rather than threats and repression. In a time when “caning” was far from forbidden, Ida Nascimbeni never used such methods. Another important aspect of her working style in the primary school was the introduction and the class library, which was used systematically<sup>28</sup>.

After this albeit brief presentation of the protagonists, I shall now illustrate the forms of public memory concerning them that we can find in the Nonantola area through the study of stone plaques and epigraphs. The main objective

pursued by epigraphic communication is to honour merit and immortalise memory; however, on closer inspection, in a more or less clear manner, the task of the inscriptions also seems to be to enhance the collective formations of which the commemorated individual was or is reputed to be a member, be they work places, professional groups or territorial entities at local or national level<sup>29</sup>.

## 2. *The forms of public memory*

Monsignor Pelati's remains lie in the crypt of the abbey in Nonantola. Monsignor Pelati died in 1965 and was exhumed and buried in 1967. The stone, inaugurated on 23 April during a religious ceremony, was commissioned by Monsignor Carlo Berselli and made by the stonemason from Modena Alfredo Borsari, in red Verona marble. It is inscribed with the Latin words

OSSA HEIC QUIESCUNT/ DD. OCTAVIANI PELATI/ PROTONOTARII APOSTOLICI/  
SACERDOTIS PIENTISSIMI/ CAPITULI CATHEDRALIS PRIORIS/ QUI PER L'ANNOS/  
SEMINARIUM MAGISTER RECTOR/ PATERNO FOVIT AMORE/ ABBATIALEM  
POPULUM/ VICARIUS GENERALIS/ PASTORALI STUDIO PROSECUTUS/ TEMPLUM  
HOC ARCHIVUM THESAURUM/ STUDIOSSIME SERVAVIT AUXTIQUE.  
1885-1965<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews recorded with Giovanni Piccinini, Ivano Reggiani and Roberto Vaccari, former students of Ida Nascimbeni.

<sup>29</sup> V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, cit., p. 232.

<sup>30</sup> Here lie the bones of Don Ottaviano Pelati, protonotary apostolic, most devout priest, prior of the Cathedral chapter, who for fifty years as a teacher and rector led the seminary with paternal care; as vicar



The burial of a Monsignor in an abbey cathedral is usually reserved only for bishops, but in this case it aimed to underline Monsignor Pelati's close ties with the church in Nonantola and all the local people. The spatial reference in the engraving in fact adds greater importance to the place of burial. The epigraph underlines Monsignor Pelati's specific character as teacher and rector of the seminary, which he led with "paternal care". The commemorative Holy Mass was held by the Archbishop of Modena Monsignor Giuseppe Amici, who stated that

we fulfil a commitment, bringing the remains of Mons. Pelati to the crypt of the Abnbe, near the tomb of the first abbot S. Anselmo. Although Mons. Pelati did not hold this title and without any other titles, he was in any case considered an abbot by his population, among whom he lavished the treasures of his goodness and his spiritual paternity. In particular, during the sad and tragic years of the war, when his spirit was offered to all, without concern for their ideas or professions of faith. Monsignor Amici also appropriately recalled Monsignor Pelati's work for the seminary, of which he was rector for many years, and the affection and esteem he always enjoyed among the priests who left and whom he loved and followed even in the ministry, being concerned with their fate when need most required of him. The solemn funeral bears witness to the goodness and fecundity of his work, continued Mons. Amici, with hundreds of people united in his dear memory, moved and tormented behind his coffin. His whole life was a testimonial of goodness and truth that nobody can forget. The archbishop then read Mons. Pelati's spiritual testament. Among the many phrases (some of which remind us of the testament of Pope John), one in particular struck us: "I lived in the Seminary and for the Seminary". The solemn funeral was held after the Holy Mass. Now he rests in the central nave of the crypt in the Abbey, right opposite the tomb containing the remains of St. Anselm<sup>31</sup>.

Don Arrigo Beccari died on 27 December 2005 – not unexpected, as the priest had been bedbound for some time – and the cemetery of Nonantola was chosen, when perhaps it was reasonable to expect him to be buried in the hamlet of Rubbiara, his parish of many years. The tomb was on the ground, and there was no special stone other than one bearing his name, date of birth and death. The priest's new tomb was inaugurated in 2008, made by the Modena-born architect Emilio Montessori and the Nonantola-born sculptor Paolo Sighinolfi. The texts on the stone were written by Don Emanuele Mucci<sup>32</sup> and cover the most important moments of Don Arrigo's priesthood – the events of Villa Emma, the professional training school and his work as parish priest helping the poor. A psalm is engraved on the rear of the stone, along with some of Don Arrigo's customary sayings, explaining his own way of understanding his ministry<sup>33</sup>. His signature is engraved beneath these words. On 14 September 2008, the date of the inauguration of the funeral monument, in the nearby church of Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo in

general, he accompanied the abbey's people and with great care preserved and raised this temple, the archive and his treasures (1885 – 1965).

<sup>31</sup> *Vicino alla tomba di S. Anselmo la salma di Mons. Ottaviano Pelati*, «Settimanale della Diocesi di Modena Nostro Tempo», n. 17, 29 April 1967, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Don Arrigo's assistant in the parish of Nonantola and currently the parish priest of Bagazzano, a village near Nonantola.

<sup>33</sup> «Good is always good. It is not true that nobody helps you, there is always someone who can give you a hand. When we can we must do good. God has forgiven me, that is his job».

Nonantola a short commemorative service was held with the participation of some local scholars and the Mayor of Nonantola<sup>34</sup>.

Mons. Ottaviano Pelati and Don Arrigo Beccari are also remembered on a marble plaque affixed to the outside wall of the former seminary in Nonantola, recalling the children rescued from Villa Emma and housed in the seminary itself<sup>35</sup>.

The ceremony unveiling the plaque on 3 December 2011, opened with greeting from the Archbishop-Abbot of Modena-Nonantola Antonio Lanfranchi and the Mayor of Nonantola Pier Paolo Borsari, followed by speeches by Marco Tarquinio, director of the newspaper *L'Avvenire*, and Paolo Turrini, teacher at the "Beato Contardo Ferrini" Higher Institute of Religious Science in Modena. Before the blessing by the vicar general of the Diocese of Modena, Monsignor Giacomo Morandi, Don Emanuele Mucci, the parish priest of Bagazzano in Nonantola, remembered the works of Beccari and Moreali and the support they received from the population of Nonantola<sup>36</sup>. The text of this plaque belies what was stated by Valentino Minuto in the previously mentioned article, that

"the epigraphic genre", even in its "specificity", can be compared to the aphoristic genre on the basis of "brevity", as well as "pregnancy of meaning".

The inscriptions cannot be too long, otherwise passers-by will not be enticed to read them; concision therefore determines communicative success<sup>37</sup>.

No funeral stone was dedicated to Ida Nascimbeni as her body lies in the anonymous family ossuary which does not even give her name. The collective memory of this teacher lies in an epigraph affixed to the entrance of the "Ida Nascimbeni" primary school in Nonantola. The text, accompanied by a photograph of the teacher, states

<sup>34</sup> *Il giusto testimone*, «Settimanale della Diocesi di Modena Nostro Tempo», n. 31, 13 September 2008, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> The stone plaque reads «IN THE NAME OF THE LORD ENTER»/ AWARE THAT THE WORST WAS JET TO TOME/ ON THE NIGHT OF THE NATIVITY OF MARY/ 8 SEPTEMBER 1943.

ARRIGO BECCARI AND GIUSEPPE MOREALI/ PRIEST AND GENERAL PRACTITIONER / DELIVERED TO / MONS. OTTAVIANO PELATI/ RECTOR OF THE ABBEY SEMINARY / VICAR GENERAL OF THE DIOCESE/ THE JEWS FROM VILLA EMMA/ TRUSTING IN THE SILENCE OF THE ROSARIES OF THE STUDENTS AND OF THE SUPERIORS/ WITH THE PROVIDENTIAL LOVE OF SOME FAMILIES IN THE TOWN/ THEY PROTECTED THEIR HIDING PLACE AND HELPED THEM ESCAPE TO SWITZERLAND/ THANKS TO THEM NONANTOLA BECAME / A PLACE OF WELCOMING/ FOR ALL KINDS OF OUTCASTS IN SEARCH OF SALVATION/ ON 15 SEPTEMBER 1944 IN MEMORY OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS/ FOREWARNED TO GET TO SAFETY/ DON ARRIGO DON ENNIO TARDINI DON IVO SILINGARDI/ WAITED FOR THE SUFFERING TO STOP AND THE DEATH SENTENCE OF THE GESTAPO/ CERTAIN OF PREVENTING THE REPRISAL/ THREE YOUNG CLOISTERED NUNS/ ADORATRICES HANDMAIDS FROM BOLOGNA/ OFFERED THEIR LIVES IN ATONEMENT FOR THEIR SALVATION/ WITNESSES OF JESUS RESURRECTED FOR THE POPULATION/ RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS / "THESE ARE THE TWO OLIVE TREES, AND THE TWO CANDLESTICKS / STANDING BEFORE THE GOD OF THE EARTH" (REVELATION 11.4)/ IN 2011 FOR GRATITUDE/ NONANTOLA LAYS ALL TO REST.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.pietredellamemoria.it/pietre/lapide-a-ricordo-del-salvataggio-dei-ragazzi-ebrei-di-villa-emma-in-nonantola-mo/> (last access: 07.12.2022).

<sup>37</sup> V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, cit., p. 232.

“IDA NASCIMBENI” PRIMARY SCHOOL

“MAESTRA NASCIMBENI” WAS A TEACHER AT SCHOOL AND IN LIFE,  
AN EXAMPLE OF SENSITIVITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE,  
HER UNSELFISH COMMITMENT TO THOSE IN NEED,  
HER CONSTANT AND SILENT SOCIAL COMMITMENT,  
HER SIMPLE LIFE.  
IDA NASCIMBENI, NONANTOLA

06 JANUARY 1909 – 10 JUNE 2007

The epigraph was laid for the inauguration of the school on 9 May 2009 in the presence of the town authorities and Ida Nascimbene's former students who, during the ceremony, told anecdotes of their teacher.

*Conclusions*

The research conducted allowed me to investigate the extremely complex and heterogeneous characters who worked actively not only during the Resistance but also afterwards. The events concerning the children from Villa Emma were part of a wider and more complex plan of assistance that people from different social backgrounds and political orientations gave to British soldiers and officers escaping from the concentration camp in Fossoli and the camp in Crocetta, Modena, immediately after 25 July 1943. Two members of the organisation were shot because of their activities<sup>38</sup>. Another fundamental member of this assistance network, Don Elio Monari, was arrested during a shoot-out between partisans and Nazi forces in the Modena Apennines, taken to Florence and later shot. Don Beccari was arrested in September 1944 and imprisoned by the German security police in San Giovanni in Monte in Bologna. The children from Villa Emma, who were the first to be saved by this organisation, all found refuge and safety in Switzerland with their escorts, except Salomone Papo, a young man admitted to the sanatorium in Gaiato suffering from tuberculosis. The Italian police forces arrested him and sent him to the concentration camp in Fossoli di Carpi, from where he was deported to Auschwitz.

The narrated events left a significant, lasting trace in the history of the town in which I was born and live, Nonantola, and indeed periodically the memory comes increasingly more precisely to the fore. While in 1964 the Righteous among the Nations award went almost unnoticed, with only a brief ceremony in a council meeting<sup>39</sup>, in 1978 a film

<sup>38</sup> These were Arturo Anderlini and Alfonso Paltrinieri, of whom, in his book *Il sorriso dei ribelli*, Enrico Ferri speaks at length.

<sup>39</sup> From the Liberation and for as long as it existed, Nonantola was governed by the Italian Communist Party, which had a crushing majority; therefore, the episode, among those of the Civil Resistance, was not enhanced as more room was given to episodes of the Armed Resistance.

on the events of the Children of Villa Emma<sup>40</sup> obtained national resonance. In 1997 the publication of Enrico Ferri's book "La vita libera" clarified some decisive aspects of the events, with precise references to the religious and cultural biography of Don Arrigo Beccari. In the early Nineties, the municipal administration appointed professor Klaus Voigt to bring the events to light, with precise historical references which ended up in a book published in 2002<sup>41</sup>. In 2004 the Fondazione Villa Emma was set up, and still exists today. Its origins lie in the episode of the Jewish children in Nonantola in 1942 and 1943, and it keeps their memory alive with meetings, conferences and public events.

As concerns Monsignor Ottaviano Pelati, we should say that, in all the years since his death, he has been the subject of the studies mentioned here, but no research has been conducted on him specifically to investigate his training and educational and teaching practices. Therefore, the epigraph on the floor in the crypt of the Abbey in Nonantola in no way guarantees the immortality of his memory<sup>42</sup>.

Finally, in the case of the teacher Ida Nascimbeni, I continue to perform research in the archives, through oral sources and in the teaching materials, as well as through her former students and the archives of the schools where she taught.

<sup>40</sup> The film was made by the Nonantola-based priest Don Gianni Gilli, the parts played by the children of class 3D of the middle school and class 4A of the primary school in Nonantola.

<sup>41</sup> K. Voigt, *Villa Emma. Ragazzi ebrei in fuga 1940-1945*, cit.; E. Ferri, *La vita libera*, cit.

<sup>42</sup> V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, cit., p. 247.



# Public School Memory between Centralist Policies and Local Instances. Giulitta Ferraris Well-Deserving of Education and the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” Boarding School in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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## 1. *Processes of schooling and the development of merits between centre and periphery in the first post-unification decades*

As is well known, the liberal ruling groups of post-unification Italy entrusted the primary schools with the dual task of combating widespread illiteracy and nationalising the masses by disseminating norms of national civilised behaviour and proposing to unify the peninsula from a linguistic point of view, so as to bring the different parts of the country closer together in terms of communication<sup>1</sup>. In order to address the limitations, already evident from the first post-unification months, of the Casati law, it was necessary to wait until the start of the government experience of the historical left to see a more precise definition of the regulations for compulsory schooling passed by Minister Coppino in 1877, and the opening of evening and festive schools to offer more literacy opportunities also to the adult Italian population<sup>2</sup>. Alongside the major school policy interventions since the decade following Italian unification, in order to support the establishment of the national school system and combat the high rate of illiteracy, unprecedented forms of recognition were established for persons or entities that had a significant role in popular education. The Ministry of Education gave rise to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Vigo, *Gli italiani alla conquista dell'alfabeto*, in S. Soldani, G. Turi (edd.), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, Vol. I, pp. 37-66; G. Chiosso, *Alfabeti d'Italia. La lotta contro l'ignoranza nell'Italia unita*, Torino, Sei, 2011; E. De Fort, *Scuola e analfabetismo nell'Italia del Novecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> On the school policies of the first post-unification decades, see E. De Fort, *La scuola elementare dall'Unità alla caduta del fascismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996; M.C. Morandini, *Scuola e Nazione. Maestri e istruzione popolare nella costruzione dello Stato unitario (1848-1861)*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2003; G. Talamo, *La scuola. Dalla legge Casati alla Inchiesta del 1864*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1960; Id., *Istruzione obbligatoria ed estensione del suffragio*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (edd.), *Scuola e Società nell'Italia unita. Dalla legge Casati al centro sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, pp. 47-73.

the institution of honours, through the awarding of diplomas, medals or life cheques. The practice of honours conferred on primary teachers is configured «as a form of policy to promote the memory of the school and the teaching staff, [...] in relation to both the development of basic schooling processes and the promotion of the process of professionalisation of the teaching staff»<sup>3</sup>. This special award institution, conveyed through strategies to promote public remembrance, has evolved significantly over time, associated with that of the teacher model. A teacher with a «predominantly lay character [...] capable of taking upon herself the task of a mission strongly marked by the traits of a civil religion ready for sacrifice»<sup>4</sup>. It was Minister Natoli in 1865 who instituted the first form of merit addressed to teachers. Specifically, Circular No. 159 issued by the Head of Public Instruction established the awarding of two prizes worth 100 lire each to be assigned in each municipality to a teacher and a schoolmistress<sup>5</sup>; in this way, the ministry intended to meet the need expressed by many to support the growth of the social and cultural prestige of the elementary teacher and to make the career of the teacher less difficult by encouraging them with prizes. In reality, prizes were not awarded on the basis of particular teaching skills or cultural competence, but the criteria for obtaining prizes were differentiated between teachers and schoolmistresses. Soon the practice of merit awards began to take root, so much so that the Minister of Education in May 1871, with a new measure, was forced to set limits to avoid an overly generous attitude in awarding them, this preventing «a distortion of the meaning of the awards with the consequent loss of their value and prestige»<sup>6</sup>. More attention was paid, as requirements for the awarding of honours, to years of teaching, possession of a licence and constancy in teaching especially in problematic environment that could set an example for other teachers. Attention was also paid to the number of pupils, the type of school, and the time devoted to teaching activities. The award categories also included private teachers and the religious body, such as priests. For about twenty years, the rules for awarding merit did not change significantly, except that the award forms were extended to other categories of teachers in the 1880s.

With the birth of the unitary state also in Molise, various municipalities, including the capital, found themselves «in the condition of having to provide for the reorganisation of education in order to apply the measures that extended the prescriptions of the Casati law for the development of schools and, subsequently, the provisions of the measures to support compulsory schooling»<sup>7</sup>. In a context characterised by a condition of profound backwardness, the first interventions for the reorganisation and development of both

<sup>3</sup> A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...». *Public memory and awards of honour of public education in Italy from the Unification to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Circular n. 159 of the Ministry of Public Education «Encouragement prizes to primary school teachers who stand out for diligence and culture», in *Collezione Celerifera delle leggi, decreti, istruzioni e circolari pubblicate nell'anno 1865 ed altre anteriori*, Torino, Tipografia Editrice di Enrico Dalmazzo, 1865, p. 310.

<sup>6</sup> A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...», cit., p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> A. Barausse, *Le istituzioni scolastiche dall'Unità al fascismo (1861-1933)*, in R. Lalli, N. Lombardi, G. Palmieri (edd.), *Campobasso capoluogo del Molise*, Campobasso, Palladino Editore, 2008, Vol. II, p. 67.



elementary and high school education were promoted immediately after the birth of the national state. A series of measures were enacted concerning primary schools, normal and teacher training schools, secondary education and the reorganisation of the administrative structure of public education<sup>8</sup>.

In Molise there was a need to structure the school administration at the local level by trying to support the development of the school network with that of the administrative network. The municipal administrations did not yet have the bodies deputed, at provincial level, to the administrative management of schools, in particular the Provincial School Council. It was the extraordinary delegate of Public Education, Domenico Carbone, who urged its establishment, which took place in October 1861. In the first two unitary years, the school administrative structure was weak, characterised by strong fragmentation and discontinuity<sup>9</sup>.

Initially the administrative structure was weak and fragmentary, it was only in 1863 that it was possible to see a complete constitution of the Provincial School Board, so that «the continuous flow of information from the periphery to the ministry began through the annual reports of the high school headmasters, the reports of the inspectors, provveditori and prefects»<sup>10</sup>. During the pre-unification period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, three distinct educational paths were established in Molise:

the public one, made up of secondary schools financed by the municipalities and the Collegio Sannitico, founded in 1816 in the provincial capital, Campobasso, and elevated to a Lyceum in 1857, which allowed it to become a provincial university with the introduction of Law and Medicine chairs; the private channel, particularly flourishing as in the whole of Southern Italy; and, finally, the ecclesiastical channel, which found its existence in bishop's seminaries<sup>11</sup>.

Interesting in this period is the almost total absence, with the exception of schools for the training of schoolmistresses, of initiatives to support the development of schooling, especially secondary schooling for women; as was the case in other contexts within the Italian peninsula, a substitute role was played during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the flourishing of religious institutes, especially female ones: boarding schools, conservatories and charitable organisations. Most of these institutes had as their objective «the care of poor and disinherited youth, the rehabilitation of children in danger and most at risk from a moral point of view, the care of the disabled, orphans and abandoned children, and,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69. On normal schools see the study by V. Miceli, *Formare maestre e maestri nell'Italia meridionale. L'istruzione normale e magistrale in Molise dall'Unità a fine secolo (1861-1900)*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2013; with regard to gymnasium education and in particular on the "Mario Pagano" National High School and Boarding School in Campobasso see M. D'Alessio, *Tra mura cittadine e educazione nazionale*, in Lalli, Lombardi, Palmieri (edd.), *Campobasso, capoluogo del Molise*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 107-135; on technical schools see V. Viola, «Il segreto della ricchezza degli altri paesi è la scienza, è l'istruzione tecnica». *Percorsi di formazione tecnica e professionale nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Lecce-Rovato (BS), Pensa MultiMedia, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> F. Palladino, *Istruzione secondaria e formazione delle classi dirigenti in Molise nelle relazioni dei presidi, dei provveditori, dei prefetti e degli ispettori scolastici (1862-1877)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVII, n. 2, 2022, p. 548.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 551.

above all, the education and civil and religious education of children of both sexes and of different social classes»<sup>12</sup>. The presence of the Church, through the work of these religious institutes, was also «particularly incisive in other sectors of the post-unification educational and scholastic reality»<sup>13</sup>. After the birth of the Unitary State, beyond the strong political contrasts between the Church and the State in matters of schooling and education, «private education was destined to find its own space and its own vital dimension also by virtue of a spirit of adaptation [...] to the new rules and regulations of the liberal State»<sup>14</sup>. It should be emphasised that the Church, through their «welfare, educational and scholastic organisations, have ended up exercising a role that is not only supplementary and subsidiary to the public function, as in the case of primary and secondary schools and teaching, but substantially substitutive and supplementary to a structural lack of State presence»<sup>15</sup>.

## 2. *The birth of the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” boarding school and the work of the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antida Thouret*

It is against this backdrop that the decisive role of the congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antida Thouret for popular girls' education is to be found. Jeanne-Antide Thouret entered the novitiate of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, training at the school of St. Vincent de Paul, in 1787. Then, in 1799, she opened a school in Besançon, with some companions, thus founding «the Sisters of Charity, who on 15 October 1800 consecrated themselves to God in the service of the poor»<sup>16</sup> and played an active role in French and later Italian society. The Sisters of Charity arrived in Naples in November 1810, disrupting traditional Neapolitan religious life with their style of community life and service, initially limited to the care and assistance of the poor. When the Sisters of Charity arrived in Naples at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their work was limited to caring for the poor and women in the Santa Casa degl'Incurabili, each with their own function, but they «did not spare themselves in their efforts to combine the functions of hospital assistants with the maternal attentions of educators, also taking care of the education of the girls in the hospital»<sup>17</sup>. After the death of the foundress, the future Superior General arrived in Naples: Sister Geneviève Boucon «whose strong educational vocation led her to combine the caring work of health care with the solicitous attention

<sup>12</sup> R. Sani, *Stato, Chiesa e scuola dal 1861 al 1870*, in R. Sani, *Sub specie educationis. Studi e ricerche su istruzione, istituzioni scolastiche e processi culturali e formativi nell'Italia contemporanea*, Macerata, eum, 2011, p. 325.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>16</sup> P. Arosio, R. Sani, *Sulle orme di Vincenzo de' Paoli. Jeanne-Antide Thouret e le Suore della Carità dalla Francia rivoluzionaria alla Napoli della Restaurazione*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2001, p. VIII.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

to the education of young hospitalised girls»<sup>18</sup>. Gradually the nuns were called upon to run the most prestigious educators in Naples including the *Educatorio Reale Principessa Maria Clotilde ai Miracoli*. Schools were opened divided into two classes: an elementary one, more numerous, for the poorest and most derelict [...] the other secondary for poor girls of civilised condition and for those of the first class who were worthy of attending»<sup>19</sup>. The curricula were different: in the first class, in addition to catechism and civic life, the sisters taught the women 's arts useful for future family women, learning to spin, sew, clean and tidy. As rewards, to alleviate their miserable condition, they were given some food, clothes and money from the work they did. For the girls in the second class, on the other hand, «they also applied themselves to more extensive knowledge of the Italian language, and to learning the French language, the rules of arithmetic, to making embroidery and lace, and to sewing fine linen»<sup>20</sup>. The separation of the two groups, rather than a difference in social classes, essentially referred to criteria of merit, both classes were free for girls of civilised status and for those in need. The nuns imparted «a more complete and in-depth education than that offered in other Neapolitan educational institutions [...] not neglected were professional teachings indispensable for an honest insertion [...] in productive activities and social life»<sup>21</sup>. These innovations gave great success to the educational work of the Sisters of Charity, in fact, the schools experienced a strong increase; soon the Sisters of Charity in addition to hospices, popular schools also devoted themselves to the service of orphans and exposed children. In response to the increased need for literacy among the Italian population, Sister Thouret «considered it opportune to enhance the work of the Sisters at the charity schools [...] including orphanages and conservatories»<sup>22</sup>. It is in this context that the work of the Sisters of Charity was placed at the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” boarding school.

The history of the Institute dates back to 1836 when a nobleman from Termoli, Cav. Policarpo Manes, who had moved to Naples, left a large sum of money in his will for the construction of an orphanage. The widespread presence in the area of boys and girls without parents or with relatives who could not take care of them, and especially of girls in destitute conditions destined to beg, represented a dramatic reality for the city of Termoli in the years between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; the city was characterised by severe poverty, deaths from plague and cholera, and poor hygiene standards. In this context, there was no shortage. The proposal to open an orphanage matured in this highly problematic context. The will was drawn up on 1 February 1836 by Notary Amendola in which we read verbatim:

I Polycarp Manes, knowing the end of my life is near [...], after having invoked God's mercy in the tremendous passage [...], I am determined to make my will known and precise in this my public Testament [...]. I want [...] that the funds of my property located in Termoli, in the Province of the

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

County of Molise, have the following destination: half of the building pertaining to me [...] to be reduced to a house of education and specifically to an orphanage, in which all the poorest orphans of the city will be gathered, to learn women's work, for which purpose there will be a teacher and a servant for the internal and external offices of the House with the corresponding provision. The age of admission will be between six and seven, and there will be children up to the age of eighteen. In all the time between their entrance and their exit, they will be instructed in those arts that may be most profitable to them. When they leave, they will be given a dowry of twenty-five ducats; when they do not marry, they will be paid back to the House [...]. There will be an administrator under the direction of the Bishop of the City. I want the administrator to be the Primicerio D. Giovanni Colonna *vita sua durante*. Applications for admission will be made to the Administrator, which, after being stamped by the Bishop, will be submitted to the heir-owner for approval [...]. At the end of each year, the administrator will render an exact account of his management to the bishop [...]<sup>23</sup>.

The orphanage was not immediately opened, as the noble benefactor would have wished, because a series of disagreements arose with Policarpo Manes' relatives, in particular with Giuseppe Petti, the husband of the latter's niece, who lived in the other half of Palazzo Manes.

The latter, wishing to enjoy the entire palatial house, rented it from his wife's uncle, Cavaliere D. Policarpo Manes, [...] the other half [...] and in order not to lose the comfort of the whole palace, as soon as Mr Giuseppe Petti learnt that in Cavalier Policarpo Manes' will of 1 February 1836, the other half of the palace owned by him had been destined for use as an orphanage, [...] he applied to the Minister of Justice of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, offering to buy the other half of the palace<sup>24</sup>.

This application was not accepted because it was submitted after the approval granted by Ferdinand II, Sovereign of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, by Royal Decree of 10 August 1839<sup>25</sup>. Mr. Petti then began a battle by defining himself as the heir of Policarpo Manes and «legitimate possessor of the other half of Palazzo Manes in Termoli, in addition to that owned by his wife»<sup>26</sup>. He qualified himself as an «heir in order to hide under this name his arrogance used against the administrator Colonna, so as not to pay him the rent he owed on half of the house he had built as an orphanage»<sup>27</sup>. This situation lasted until 1852 when Monsignor Vincenzo Bisceglia was elected Bishop of Termoli, who personally took over the administration of the Orphanage and after a series of disagreements succeeded in inaugurating, on 26 July 1881, the Manes-Bisceglia girls' orphanage under the title of «Jesus and Mary» «thus giving Termoli and the Province a centre of education and training for the girls of the people»<sup>28</sup>. At its meeting of 10 June 1881, the Provincial School Council of Molise, «having seen the construction of the

<sup>23</sup> *Testamento Cav. Policarpo Manes. Atti costitutivi*, in Archivio storico della Diocesi di Termoli-Larino, based in Larino (from now on: ASDTL), fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

<sup>24</sup> A. Vetta, *Orfanotrofio di Termoli contro Antonio Petti*, Larino, Tipografia di V. Ficcaglia, 1897, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> See *Atti costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

<sup>26</sup> A. Vetta, *Orfanotrofio di Termoli contro Antonio Petti*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> M. Paradiso, *Termoli cenni storici*, Termoli, Ediduomo, 2003, p. 171.

home for destitute girls, considered fully suitable for imparting a moral education to those from wealthy families, [...] authorised the start-up on condition that it be erected as a moral body»<sup>29</sup>. The institute, therefore, intended to ensure the education of not only destitute girls but, above all, girls of civilised status. The management was entrusted to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Jeanne Antida Thouret, with the first Mother Superior Sister Marietta Guidi. The initiative reflects the expansion of the educational commitment of religious congregations, including women's congregations, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Sani's studies have shown<sup>30</sup>. Following a special regulation, drawn up on 3 November 1899 and signed by Bishop Angelo Balzano, on 11 March 1900 the King of Italy, Umberto I, ordered the issuing of an Organic Statute for the Institute, consisting of eleven articles. The Statute states that «the administration of the Girls' Orphanage Jesus and Mary is entrusted entirely to the Bishop *pro tempore* of the city of Termoli»<sup>31</sup>, who is assisted by other figures, furthermore, «the girls admitted will be divided into classes according to their age and instructed in the principles of morals and literature and all women's works»<sup>32</sup>. A regulation of the Orphanage from 1900, retrieved from the Diocesan Historical Archives, reads:

The location of our Institute is very beautiful [...], rising up close to the St Peter's coast [...]. The enchanting view of the sea and the place remote from the noise, make it a delightful dwelling and at the same time suitable for conciliating the necessary recollection to attend to study and work with profit. The Institute's main aim [...] is to educate in a Christian manner girls of civilised condition and to instruct them in literature and women's work, in order to make them fit to run a family one day<sup>33</sup>.

The rules of admissions follow, among which are those of possessing «proof of birth and baptism; medical certificate of good health and vaccination; commendation from the parish priest»<sup>34</sup>. The girls admitted had to be between 6 and 12 years old, the monthly fee was 35 lire, excluding music and French language lessons that cost an additional 7 lire, plus a list of other expenses due annually. Education followed the government syllabus, once the elementary course had been completed «the pupils move on to the finishing school»<sup>35</sup>. The girls were educated with exercises in applied arts for the ornamentation of the home, with drawing and painting, sewing and cutting, stocking and embroidery. The study of the piano and singing was taken care of; «all of them indiscriminately attend catechism and religious school, as well as lessons in good manners, so that they go out into

<sup>29</sup> *Dispaccio del Consiglio Provinciale Scolastico del Molise 1881. Atti costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

<sup>30</sup> On the role of 19<sup>th</sup> century religious congregations in education, see also, P. Arosio, R. Sani, *Sulle orme di Vincenzo de' Paoli. Jeanne. Antide Thouret e le Suore della Carità dalla Francia rivoluzionaria alla Napoli della Restaurazione*, cit.

<sup>31</sup> *Statuto Organico 1900. Atti costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Regolamento del Collegio-Convitto "Gesù e Maria" 1900. Atti Costitutivi*, in ASDTL, fond «Orfanotrofio Manes-Bisceglie sotto il titolo di Gesù e Maria», folder 1, dossiers 1-39.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

society formed in mind and heart, lovers of Religion, family and Country»<sup>36</sup>. According to the regulations, girls were educated to strict discipline in order to internalise behaviour appropriate to the social status to which they were to belong:

the pupils were allowed to go out twice a week for a walk and to go out for a day on Christmas, Easter and the Patron Saint's Day; [...] a month's holiday is given every year [...] it is therefore forbidden for pupils to be absent from the school for more than one month without a serious and justified reason. [...] The pupils are not allowed to receive visits except from family members; [...] the pupils are not allowed to send or receive letters without the approval of the Headmistress, nor are they allowed to keep money or valuables, nor to keep books other than those approved by the Headmistress. The Headmistress undertakes the obligation to keep the pupils' families informed about their conduct, reporting on the progress of their education and instruction and on their state of health<sup>37</sup>.

### 3. *Sister Giulitta Ferraris well-deserving of public education*

Among the nuns who took care of the "Gesù e Maria" Institute, the second director deserves special attention: Sister Giulitta Ferraris, Mother Superior and Director of the Orphanage and Boarding School from 1883 to 1913. The study of Sister Giulitta Ferraris' obituary, kept in the General Archives of the Sisters of Charity in Rome, was useful for reconstructing her profile. As pointed out by the studies of Sani and Ascenzi with the examination of the obituaries we intend to retrace

the evolution of the model of teacher and school official in the various historical phases and in the light of the different ideological, political and cultural contexts, also delving into the significance attributed to popular education and the fight against illiteracy, as well as the role of education and the school itself in the construction of national identity and the promotion of the values of citizenship in the various seasons of the now centuries-old Italian unification story<sup>38</sup>.

Isabella Ferraris, in religion Sister Giulitta, a native of Castelnuovo Bormida, in the province of Alessandria, in 1841, where she embraced religious life while still an adolescent. In the current state of research we are not in a position to reconstruct the reasons that led the young woman to choose vows. Reading the obituary, however, shows us the representation of a model of a religious woman not marked by a strong spirit of conflict between her religious and civil identity. Significant, in this regard, is the reminder of the Italian patriots who fell during the Second War of Independence and the civil needs of a country, Italy, ravaged by cholera.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, "Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere". *Memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistrali nel primo secolo dell'unità (1861-1961)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, pp. 8-9.

Sister Giulitta «[...] had portrayed from her land, a robust and energetic temperament, firmness of will, fortitude of character that she kept constant until the last breath of her life. [...] At only 16 years of age, strong, generous, with a high ideal of goodness in front of her eyes, she left her family and the world to enter our novitiate in Vercelli. Barely a few months after her entry into religion, a war cry echoed through Italy [...] and Sr Giulitta asked and obtained permission to go with the other Sisters to bring comfort to the wretched fallen on the battlefield, [...] she multiplied in her care for her needy brothers and sisters, even when, after the war, cholera ravaged Italy [...] to bring charity to them. Having finished the Novitiate, being endowed with excellent qualities of mind and heart, she was proposed for teaching and deployed as an expert educator, first in Piedmont and Genoa, then in southern Italy, where she was destined by holy obedience to teach in several houses around Naples. Towards the end of 1882, her work being needed in the orphanage at Termoli, she was sent there for a short time. But the Lord, who had entrusted another good mission to his Bride in that very place, made her stay there for about thirty years»<sup>39</sup>.

When she arrived at the Termoli Orphanage, had to manage a situation of strong internal conflict. The religious «found the orphans in revolt against their mother superior who did not want them to leave: “some wanted to run away, some wanted to jump out of the window” [...] and complained that the orphans had little time for school»<sup>40</sup>. For these reasons and to meet the Institute's needs, probably considered it necessary to strengthen, alongside the predominantly welfare intervention, the educational and in 1884 she opened a girls' boarding school next to it for the elementary education of both internal and external girls. In his obituary, we read that «he made countless sacrifices so that the orphan girls would not lack for anything, so that the premises, at first cramped, would be enlarged to the point of being able to open [...] a boarding school, an external school for young girls [...] a wise and beneficial work»<sup>41</sup>. Sister Giulitta's work succeeded in keeping the Orphanage and the boarding school alive, which became a destination for many girls from the Province. Demand was so high, as we read in the archive documents found, that the premises had to be enlarged. The report of the School Inspector of the Larino District, retrieved from the Central State Archive, shows us the model of teacher and headmistress that the official considered useful to represent and communicate to the Ministry. In particular, he emphasised how the nun was: «a valiant teacher, a distinguished educator, a woman who loved and loves, with her work and good life, supported by great strength of will, she immediately saw the way forward to find the means to meet the needs of the Pious Work and keep it alive»<sup>42</sup>. She was, therefore, that model of a missionary teacher dedicated to teaching and a leader attentive to educational institutions deserving to be reported to the minister for an award as a well-deserving elementary school teacher. The institution of honours had meanwhile undergone an interesting evolution. At the

<sup>39</sup> *Cenni necrologici intorno alle carissime sorelle [di carità ospitaliera], trapassate nell'anno 1912*, Roma, Tipografia Pontificia nell'Istituto Pio IX, 1913, pp. 76-77.

<sup>40</sup> M.A. De Padoue Duffet, *Storie delle Suore della Carità di Santa Giovanna Antida Thouret 1826-1915*, Roma, Casa generalizia delle Suore della Carità, 2006, p. 145.

<sup>41</sup> *Cenni necrologici intorno alle carissime sorelle [di carità ospitaliera], trapassate nell'anno 1912*, cit., p. 77.

<sup>42</sup> *Relazione dell'Ispettore Scolastico della Circostrizione di Larino 21 agosto 1908*, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, based in Rome, fond «Direzione Generale Istruzione Primaria e Popolare 1897-1910», folder 277bis, dossier «1910 Campobasso».



beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the increasing professionalisation of teachers led to new measures, so that there was an evolution in the way of thinking about the awarding of honours, which were extended to various school professional categories. In 1902 a provision was extended to head teachers and headmistresses who had been in service for at least 35 years to receive merit badges. Alongside this in the same year, a special medal was instituted for the VIII lustrums of teaching, i.e. for 40 years of uninterrupted service in boys' and girls' primary schools, emphasising «the value of the loyalty expressed by teachers»<sup>43</sup>. Some measures taken required the need to reduce expenditure, which in the school year 1903-04 led Parliament to cut the funds for the purchase of medals and this provoked a broader debate on the most effective strategies to really improve the economic condition of teachers. Some of the measures taken required «the need to reduce expenditure, which in the school year 1903-04 led Parliament to cut the funds to purchase medals and this provoked a wider debate on the most effective strategies to really improve the economic condition of teachers»<sup>44</sup>. The fund to purchase medals was necessary to support the development of evening and festive schools. In 1904, with Royal Decree n. 633, Minister Orlando again instituted the medal for meritorious persons in popular education with the intention of replacing and rationalising the pre-existing system of awards for elementary education, despite the fact that cuts were made in other areas of expenditure by the Ministry of Education. The minister wanted to reform the honours system, extending the awarding of medals to the well-deserving of popular education, to other school professional categories such as primary schools' headmasters and kindergarten and nursery school teachers. The decree consolidated the policy aimed at strengthening the public dimension of remembrance and provided, in particular, for the awarding of three types of well-deserving diplomas classified as class I, II and III, respectively associated with gold, silver and bronze medals and the awarding of life allowances. Those considered suitable for the award had to meet certain requirements, consisting of a good curriculum and significant scholastic and cultural commitment<sup>45</sup>. The provisions were later systematised with a new regulation presented by Minister Rava in 1908. Class I, II and III diplomas were awarded to headmasters, headmistresses, teachers of public elementary schools, teachers of kindergartens and kindergartens belonging to municipalities and other moral entities, as well as to people distinguished for uncommon and free services or for considerable donations for the benefit of primary education and child education. The well-deserving were able to be awarded the gold medal. The medals bore the effigy of the King on one side and an oak wreath with the legend "To the well-deserving of popular education" on the other and could be worn on the left side of the chest, hung on a silk ribbon in the national colours. The awarding of the diploma with medal followed very precise requirements that echoed what had already been established by Royal Decree No. 633 of 1904<sup>46</sup>. At the beginning of the

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> M.C. Morandini, *Medals and diplomas of merit for teachers: the Premio Bottero award in Turin (1891-1918)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> *Regio Decreto n. 633*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 293, 17 December 1904, pp. 5981-5983.

<sup>46</sup> *Regio Decreto n. 150*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. III, 11 May 1908, pp. 2499-2500. On the orientations

20<sup>th</sup> century there was a revival of «the reference to the patriotic theme, to the national function of education, a tendency that reflected the design of the liberal political class at the beginning of the Giolittian decade to relaunch education on a national basis in order to tackle the fight against illiteracy with greater vitality»<sup>47</sup>. The awarding of such honours in this period was accompanied by a new and different climate compared to previous decades, the work of the teacher was understood and appreciated, and his moral and economic conditions were improved. What is striking, however, is the valorisation of the nun's educational work while, at the same time, the anti-clerical accents were marked in the context of the polemics against Giolitti's policies, which were considered to be too accommodating to Catholic interests, especially by the republican and socialist politicians of the democratic bloc<sup>48</sup>. On the basis of these premises, Minister Credaro awarded the nun the 3<sup>rd</sup> class diploma of merit with bronze medal on 27 January 1910. She died in Termoli, where she is still buried, on 12 August 1913, mourned by all the citizens of Termoli and beyond, her obituary reads: «Beautiful soul rest in peace! For the institute you loved so much [...] where your memory reigns supreme»<sup>49</sup>. The awarding of the honour to the religious woman is in line with the orientations taken by the liberal ruling elite from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, careful to recognise the role of the teaching and management staff of religious origin even within the framework of the affirmation on the political ideological level of the defence of the secular and state character of scholastic and educational institutions. Especially where the initiatives of the clergy and religious made up for the shortcomings of the State in the educational sector. Orphanages, boarding schools or institutes for the disabled, such as the blind or deaf-mutes, belong to this sphere of action: of making up for the direct absence of the State. The history of the Termolian Institute, which lasted a long time, having been closed only during the first decade of the year two thousand, contributed to the growth of schooling processes in the Molise region. For these reasons, the history of the Institute and the figures who succeeded one another within it is being studied and researched in order to increase those elements that are useful in the panorama of public school memory.

that generated the measures of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Alberto Barausse's contribution in this same volume.

<sup>47</sup> Barausse, «*Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...*», cit.

<sup>48</sup> On the anticlerical polemics linked, in particular, to the request for the abolition of religious instruction presented by the socialist deputy Bissolati see L. Pazzaglia, *La scuola fra stato e società negli anni dell'età giolittiana*, in Pazzaglia, Sani (edd.), *Scuola e Società nell'Italia unita. Dalla legge Casati al centro sinistra*, cit., pp. 171-211.

<sup>49</sup> *Cenni necrologici intorno alle carissime sorelle [di carità ospitaliera], trapassate nell'anno 1912*, cit., p. 78.







# **The School and Its Many Pasts**

## **II: Official and Public Memories of School**

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani









# Introduction

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## *Premise*

These volumes collect the contributions presented at the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts. School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation”, held in Macerata from December 12 to December 15, 2022. This conference is the result of a long process of international research and comes as the conclusion – the most relevant and ambitious step – of the Research Project of National Relevance (PRIN) entitled “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”, which started in Italy in 2019 and was co-financed by the Ministry of Education, University and Research.

A research project that in these years has benefited from the collaboration and the scientific contribution of more than fifty scholars and young researchers from fourteen Italian universities. A research project that has already produced extremely relevant results, which will be presented – together with others – in these volumes.

We are convinced, however, that the presence at that conference of over 150 speakers from as many as 25 countries and three different continents allowed us to make a real qualitative leap in the in-depth analysis of the object of our research and to give it a truly comparative reading, capable of taking into account a series of contexts and scenarios not limited to a national or even European perspective, but truly open to a global one.

## 1. *The premises of the research project*

Our research project develops in the path previously traced by the international conference “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues” (Seville, 22-23 September 2015), which was organized by the University of Seville in collaboration with the *Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia* of the University of Macerata (Italy), the University of Murcia (Spain) and the *Centro Internacional de la Cultura Escolar* of Berlanga de Duero (Spain).

In fact, a significant representative of historians of education coming from all over the world already gathered in that occasion in order to elaborate the epistemological foundations of the historiographical reflection on school memory and elaborated a

first systematic reflection on the topic, defining some general theoretical coordinates, and providing methodological criteria and suggesting possible contaminations with anthropology of education and sociology of cultural processes.

## *2. The research project*

On the basis of these coordinates, our research project focuses on school memory, which is understood as an individual, collective and public practice of recalling a common school past.

School memory is an interpretative category, which has recently been introduced in the historiographical reflection of the historical-educational field at an international level, both in the countries of the Iberian-American area and in the Anglo-Saxon world. This category has also enjoyed prominence in Italy, largely thanks to the studies carried out by the scholars who have adhered to this project in the last five years.

On the basis of new types of sources and a necessarily interdisciplinary methodological approach, the research units who collaborate in the project investigated both the models of school, teaching, learning and school attendance emerging from individual memories and the representation of these models that has been proposed by the world of information and communication and the cultural industry. This research endeavour has conducted from 2019 to this day despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nonetheless, an attempt was made to focus on how school and teaching memory was elaborated in the context of official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national institutions on the basis of a specific “policy of memory”, or rather a “public use of the past” aimed at acquiring consensus and strengthening the feeling of belonging to a specific community.

The first results of the investigations carried out in these years by the research units involved in the project have been published in about a hundred monographs, essays and articles on magazine and within qualified collections of sources, which are accessible online and are intended for a wider audience than only educational historians.

But further and even more organic and thorough results had been officially introduced during the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts”, which obtained sponsorships by the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE) and by eight among the most prominent national scientific societies in history of education. The international conference held in Macerata in December 2022 allowed to promote a broad methodological and historiographical confrontation on problems concerning the study of school memory and – at the same time – to start an organic reflection on the same topic in a comparative key.

### 3. *A new idea of scientific communication*

It was immediately clear that this project would require to spread research results not only through the traditional channels of scientific discussion but also through more innovative ones, based on the digitization of contents, aimed at reaching a wider audience than just the specialized one.

Other elements have subsequently confirmed that this was the correct perspective to frame the research project and the spreading of its results.

The first one of these elements within the PRIN 2017 announcement was the inclusion of a specific article which provided that research units involved in the project had to guarantee free and online access (at least in green access modality) to the results obtained and the research contents, object of peer-reviewed scientific publications within the project.

This is a fundamental fact, which is not possible to ignore, as it forced those who took part in the project to wonder what were the most appropriate ways to comply with this fulfilment in an intelligent way, creating an organic plan of digital and open publication for research contents rather than dividing and publishing them within tools already available, although not necessarily connoted from a scientific point of view.

However, the constraints imposed by the announcement were not the only elements which led us towards one *modus operandi* over another.

Over the last few years, the academic world has, in fact, developed a newfound awareness of the fact that the effective social impact of new know-how produced by scientific research is possible only through the adoption of a new paradigm of mediation that brings the public role of the intellectual back into the discussion.

This new paradigm is embodied by Public Scientific Communication, which – unlike internal communication among members of the scientific community – is the type of communication which occurs between experts and non-experts, between creators and users of knowledge, and it consists of a high-quality scientific dissemination, which is able to mediate the contents of knowledge to a general audience.

This attempts to contrast the dangerous degenerations of a scientific pseudo-dissemination, which has conquered the top of trending topics in social networks and has infiltrated the social fabric in recent years, spreading fake news, misconceptions and stereotypes, and increasing individual skepticism towards science.

The extensive spreading of the increasingly pervasive means of mass communication implies that scientific research results must be effectively communicated through television, radio, world wide web and social media, for which – however – it is necessary to use very different techniques from the ones used in scientific publications. Techniques that can catch and keep the attention of audiences who would otherwise be addressed by so many scammers and charlatans who perfectly master these very same modalities of communications but devote them to the spreading of poor or – even worse – harmful contents.

Besides, the public nature of the funds granted at a national and/or community level to support academic research implies the need for them to be used to produce goods

of public utility, such as knowledge, which is not the exclusive prerogative of either the scientific community who generates it or the publishing houses who disseminate it but belongs to the community as a whole and serves the function of guaranteeing its social development and cultural progress.

#### 4. *Mnemosine software and databases on the forms of school memory*

To these aims, in the first two years of the research project we worked on the design and the implementation of the *Mnemosine* software for cataloguing the forms of memory described in the eight databases developed in collaboration with the Italian company Elicos s.r.l., which assisted and significantly implemented our project from a technological point of view.

The *Mnemosine* software, which we appropriately patented, was used to implement the eight databases that are the heart of this research project. On the one hand, this was done because they collect a considerable amount of data (900 catalogue records and 700 biographical records have been loaded into the website up to this date) made to be searchable and comparable, showing possible interactions among different forms of school memory, whether they are individual or collective. Furthermore, this contributed to effectively disseminate the research results carried out within the project to a public of non-experts, who are difficult to be reached.

Each database has been published by a university press with a Creative Commons license and is provided with an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). The code configures them as online digital serials in all respects, attested by a refereeing committee made up of well-known experts, who are able to ensure the peer review procedure of the contents published within them.

Moreover, each catalogue record was provided for a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), allowing their unique network identification through the association of their respective metadata.

This made it possible to create real electronic repertories for the publication of research results carried out in open access mode, in accordance with what PRIN 2017 announcement stated concerning the funding of our research.

In this respect, the website [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it) and the eight scientific databases contained in it became a real research infrastructure. They are able to provide the scientific community of reference with resources and services (scientific data collections, computer systems, communication networks, etc.) in order to carry out research activities and to promote innovation. But they have purpose beyond research initiatives, for example in the context of public education, and to provide teachers with training and updating resources.

For this reason – in anticipation of the closure of the research project in August 2023 – the coordinators of the research units unanimously resolved to sign a framework agreement that guarantees the continuity of this research infrastructure, regulating its

co-ownership, controlling the distribution of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance and management costs and establishing the guidelines to be followed for the permanent updating of the eight existing databases. This extends to the possibility of participating in further national and EU funding announcements in collaboration with individual foreign scholars and research groups, who are interested in working on the same topics in a comparative perspective at an international level.

The letter of intent leading to the signing of this framework agreement was signed by the coordinators of research units during the plenary session on December 15, 2022.

The valuable opportunity for discussion and debate at the highest level on school memory represented by the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts” offered to all of us the opportunity to enrich our reflection on the theme, to establish valuable synergies and further forms of research collaboration and to give an authentically international breath to the in-depth study of a field of investigation – the one related to school memory – that still has many stimulations and suggestions to offer to the historians of school and education.





# Introduction to the Study of School Memory

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In his introduction to these volumes, Roberto Sani framed them within the research project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”, presenting its key features. In this introduction, moreover, I will try to frame them instead within a historiographical process developed over the past twenty years, which offered a significant contribution to the redefinition of the heuristic horizon of the history of education.

The taking into account of school memory as a historical object by the historiography of education matured during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, driven by a deep renewal of the epistemological foundations and heuristic goals of this field of study, as well as the growing attention paid by generalist historians to the policies of memory and public use of the past made in modern and contemporary times<sup>1</sup>.

In a seminal work published in 2000, António Nóvoa – who concluded the international conference “The School and Its Many Pasts” with his keynote address – indicated the possibility of using images to study the evolution of the public image of teachers between the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries<sup>2</sup>. Nóvoa noted in this regard:

In underlining the idea of public images, I intend to understand the game of social mirrors that marks the teaching profession in an epoch of strong social beliefs and convictions on the idea of school as a central institution for progress and citizenship. Here the conflict between opposing images of teachers and the relationships they provoke both inside and outside the profession becomes more obvious<sup>3</sup>.

The statement of Nóvoa contributed to widening the heuristic spectrum of our discipline, as it invited historians of education not to analyze the school of the past only “from within” (that is, how the school really was or at least how it represented itself), but also “from outside” (that is, how it was perceived by a given social group or society as a whole), in order to get a more general view of this historical phenomenon.

Nóvoa – it is true – intended to demonstrate the heuristic potential of visual sources, but his discourse could be extended to a wider and more composite set of sources.

<sup>1</sup> E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (edd.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984-1992; R. Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, London, Cornell University Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> A. Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing: Public Images of Teachers (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century)*. «Paedagogica Historica», XXXVI, n. 1, 2000, pp. 20-52.

<sup>3</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing*, cit., p. 16.

The school was therefore not only an institution and a place of teaching practice and educational experimentation, but also became a category of collective imaginary, whose imaginative representations did not necessarily correspond to how the school really was in a given period, but rather reflected the perception of it within a given social group or society as a whole.

Nóvoa also came to notice how the historical relevance of images was testified «by this traffic between individual and collective beliefs, social and cultural representations, memoirs and imagination»<sup>4</sup>.

It is this complex traffic that defines the social meaning of the school, which transcends the literal one, the result of a cognitive definition that attributes to an expression the mental image of the features of the denoted object, formed in the consciousness of the speakers on the basis of their perceptual and cultural experiences. What, then, is school? On the basis of which criteria is school experience classified by each of us and which abstract idea derives from it? Only on the basis of information of educational nature or on the basis of more complex elaborations? Paraphrasing Philippe Ariès, is there a *sentiment de l'école*<sup>5</sup>, that is the attribution of a specific social meaning to the school, understood not as an institution but as a cultural elaboration? How has it evolved over time?

A push in this direction was already given by Dominique Julia, when in 1995 he put the «school culture» at the center of the historical-educational debate, defining its forms and structures<sup>6</sup>. The debate that followed, in fact, produced a quickly evolving within the international scientific community of history of education.

That same year Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon – taking up an expression already used by sociologist Colin Lacey in 1970<sup>7</sup> – indicated the «black box of schooling» as goal of the historical research in education, focusing attention on the classrooms as places of «evaporated educational relations» from which it was essential to recover every single trace of the educational practices – orthodox or revolutionary, licit or illicit – that had been held there<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, more and more historians of education began to study the school memory as a useful device to explore the content of this “black box”, since – being founded on an empirical school culture – it was able to testify what had really happened within the classrooms. This especially with regard to issues – such as corporal punishment, prohibited teaching practices and other educational taboos – not documented in the official reports, although historically attested. Hence, the flourishing of historical studies in education that widely used diaries, memoirs and autobiographies, as well as oral sources.

<sup>4</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> On this historiographical category, see P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Plon, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, in A. Nóvoa, M. Depaepe, E.W. Johannigmeier (edd.), *The Colonial Experience in Education: Historical Issues and Perspectives*, Ghent, Universiteit Gent, 1995, pp. 353-382.

<sup>7</sup> C. Lacey, *Hightown Grammar: the school as a social system*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Is there any place for the history of “education” in the “history of education”? A plea for the history of everyday reality in and outside schools*, «Paedagogica Historica», XXXI, n. 1, 1995, pp. 9-16.

In the following years, the Spanish and French scientific communities were the protagonists of the troubled historiographical process that led to devote more and more attention to school memories, thanks – for example – to the seminal studies of Agustín Escolano, Antonio Viñao and Pierre Caspard<sup>9</sup>.

The use of individual memories as sources for the history of education slowly increased in some scholars the awareness that there was a collective dimension of school memory that could itself become the object of historical research, according to the interpretative categories proposed by Nóvoa.

The memory of the past school, thus, ceased to be only a tool of historical reconstruction and became its object. New interesting researches were started, such as those promoted by the American scholars Pamela Bolotin Joseph and Gail E. Burnaford, that in their pioneering work investigated the evolution of the “public image of the school” and the social perception of the teaching profession, that is the archetypes that pervade society and determine the public status of education<sup>10</sup>.

In some way, it is possible to affirm that there are three main types of school: the “legal school”, codified by laws, programs and educational theories; the “real school”, shaped by the real educational practices carried out in the classroom and the material living conditions within the school; and the “ideal school”, shaped by common sense, imagined and represented by the cultural industry and subject to the distortions of individual remembering and collective memory.

Not surprisingly – during the International Symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues”, organized in Seville in 2015 with Antonio Viñao and Cristina Yanes – we defined the school memory as the individual, collective and public practice of remembering a common school past, indispensable to give us back the overall cultural dimension of this historical phenomenon, and we tried to study the modes of symbolic representation of school, schooling and teachers over time<sup>11</sup>.

If personal memories can be studied individually or compared as sources, collective memory can instead be studied only as a process, since it consists in a social reconstruction of the past, which derives from the fusion between the “lived school past” (of which those who remember were actors) and the “imagined school past” (of which often those who remember were listeners, readers and spectators, namely cultural consumers)<sup>12</sup>. In

<sup>9</sup> See A. Escolano, *Memoria de la educación y cultura de la escuela*, in J.M. Hernández Díaz, A. Escolano (edd.), *La memoria y el deseo: cultura de la escuela y educación deseada*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2002, pp. 19-42; A. Viñao, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.; P. Caspard, *L'historiographie de l'éducation dans un contexte mémoriel. Réflexion sur quelques évolutions problématiques*, «Histoire de l'Éducation», n. 121, 2009, pp. 67-82.

<sup>10</sup> J.P. Bolotin, G.E. Burnaford (edd.), *Images of Schoolteachers in America*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>12</sup> On this concept and the risks associated with its use in historiography: C. Shaw, M. Chase (edd.), *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989.

this sense, collective memory descends genetically from the collective imaginary, whose symbolic materials can derive as much from the cultural heritage of a given community as from the new elaborations promoted by the cultural or information industry.

The study of this type of memory allows, in particular, to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense.

These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed in its historical dimension, thanks to the large number of contributions here collected, that will help us to better understand the school and its many pasts.

# School Memories and Travelling Iconic Images of Education in the Nineteenth Century

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## *Introduction: from Print Collection to Image-Based Research*

I would like to begin by talking about a project that has occupied much of our adult lives, a project that opened a world of possibilities that we could not even begin to suspect, as well as providing us with some of our greatest intellectual satisfactions in recent years. I speak in the plural because I am referring to a joint project with my husband, Sjaak Braster, a project that is as old as our marriage. In July 1992 we went to Vienna for our honeymoon, and there we discovered that we could buy engravings of educational subjects. We were especially drawn to those depicting the insides of schools, classrooms where we could see the interaction between teachers and students, and iconographic representations of teaching methods that we had only ever read about. During that week we ate very little, spending most of our scarce money on four school prints, one of them being from the *Orbis Pictus* by Comenius. Thus began our collection, which has grown to include several hundred images of schools from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, from all over the world<sup>1</sup>.

For many years we collected school prints for two main reasons: to decorate the mostly empty walls of our houses and, in my case, to liven up the classes I taught in History of Education, where I attempted to follow the Pestalozzian ideal of teaching by images, showing the evolution of teaching and of the school in an intuitive way. Beyond these decorative and pedagogical functions, it had not occurred to us that the prints themselves could somehow be the object of historiographical interest<sup>2</sup>. But an academic

<sup>1</sup> S. Braster, *Exhibiting Teachers' Hands: Storytelling Based on a Private Collection of Engravings*, in F. Herman, S. Braster, M.M. del Pozo Andrés (edd.), *Exhibiting the Past. Public Histories of Education*, Oldenbourg, De Gruyter, 2022, pp. 317-320.

<sup>2</sup> We have started to sense the possibilities that the gravures could offer to the historians of education in 2002, while analysing the images of secondary schools published in a Spanish illustrated journal, also a rich and very neglected iconographical source. M.M. del Pozo Andrés, S. Braster, *Understanding Images of Secondary Education (Spain, Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century)*. Paper Presented in the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education, ISCHE XXIV, Paris, 10-13 July, 2002, and M.M. del Pozo Andrés, *La Imagen de la Mujer en la Educación Contemporánea*, in T. Marín Eced, M.M. del Pozo Andrés (edd.), *Las mujeres en la construcción del mundo contemporáneo*, Cuenca, Diputación de Cuenca, 2002, pp. 241-301. Later on, we have tried the study of single school images, both paintings and engravings, one of which was exceptionally part of our collection. S. Braster, *The People, The Poor and the Oppressed: The Concept of Popular*

event, in which Juri Meda would be closely involved, would turn our understanding of the collection upside down. The year was 2015, and together with Cristina Yanes and Antonio Viñao, he was organizing a symposium in Seville on *School Memories* as a historical object. The idea was to open new theoretical and methodological paths into a subject of growing interest among historians of education. Juri urged us to do something different, to make this symposium really stand out. On December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014, just the day on the deadline for presenting proposals, we had the idea of using our collection of prints as a primary source for exploring the relationship between images and the collective memory. Among the first questions we asked ourselves were the following: Why can we find countless versions of some educational prints published in the nineteenth century? Could their popularity owe to the fact that for certain generations these images brought back memories of their school years? Or was it an attempt to construct a collective memory that transcended time and space?

In this very first work on the topic, we defined the concept of «iconic images of education», by describing the indicators that determine the reception, distribution, and impact of these images. We established five characteristics: 1) «they have been reproduced many times»; 2) «these are reproductions not only of the works in their original form, but also of their many variations»; 3) «they can evoke emotions»; 4) «they have a symbolic meaning that for most observers is immediately obvious», but that «can change over time and ultimately depends upon the context in which the image is framed»; and 5) they «refer to archetypes, have the potential to be archetypes themselves and thus represent more than what is being displayed», making the invisible visible<sup>3</sup>.

While we have yet to find the answers to many of these previous questions, we have developed a research methodology which we could define as «the biography of an image»<sup>4</sup>. It involves analysing, with the traditional biographical/iconographic method, some of the more singular prints, those which we have good reason to believe enjoyed exceptional popularity, circulation and impact. Upon selecting a print, we proceed to search for the symbolic meaning of the image, to understand its cultural connotations and significance, to reconstruct its underlying messages and its history by tracing the different versions and copies that were made of it as well as testimonies from the time. With this approach we try to establish and understand how the iconic character of certain images of education was constructed.

The third concept for understanding the relationship between educational engravings and collective memory is that of the «travelling images, circulating in time and space around the globe». Art historians have demonstrated the existence of travelling artworks images between the East and the West, which was the result of the circulation of copies of engravings and etching illustrations in printed books. Thus, some eighteenth-century

*Education through Time*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 47, n. 1-2, 2011, pp. 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> M.M. del Pozo Andrés, S. Braster, *Exploring New Ways of Studying School Memories: The Engraving as a Blind Spot of the History of Education*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> M.M. del Pozo Andrés, *The undisciplined child: the image of the rebellious childhood in an age of educational disciplining (1809-1840)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 13, n. 1, 2018, pp. 71-72.



Japanese pictorial schools underwent a «process of appropriation of Western visual culture», while some «Japanese woodblock prints reached nineteenth-century Europe», and influenced artists such as van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet, or Degas. We speak of «a complete and circular trajectory of travelling images». The interest of art historians nowadays is focused on finding out «through which specific travelling images, this influence can most clearly be seen»<sup>5</sup>. We can transfer this discussion to the history of education, as we have already begun to explore some «travelling images» of school scenes from the nineteenth century<sup>6</sup>. The composition, the school landscape, the teachers and students gestures, the depicted scenes, the arrangement of objects, the perspective and so on can be thought of as the result of a global circulation of images and their mutual influence. The big open question is the same that worries the art historians, namely, to find the specific «travelling images» that most clearly show this influence.

### 1. *Social and Cultural Use of Engravings before/during the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

When you enter into the world of old prints, you are joining a club of passionate enthusiasts of what is considered, quite wrongly, a «lesser» art form. People tend to forget that, as the great art historian and print collector Leo Steinberg wrote, for 600 years gravures contributed to raising «the level of critical visual awareness», serving to visually educate countless generations across geographical boundaries and social classes. During the Renaissance and the following centuries, gravures were «the circulating lifeblood» of pictorial and iconographical ideas – the vehicle through which artists communicated with one another», in the words of Steinberg<sup>7</sup>. Because the crucial idea behind the importance of engravings lies in the word *circulation*, in the fact that because of their physical properties they were easy to transport and could cross borders. Printed images have always travelled from one place to another, reaching countries and cities far from their place of origin. In fact, starting in the Renaissance, artists generally became known not through their original works, but from reproductive engravings. In the words of Alberto Milano, another art historian who was also an avid print collector, «Europe was a common market where images were widely understood, copied, and sold from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century»<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> K. Abe, *Travelling Images in the Global Context: A Case Study of the Short-Lived 18<sup>th</sup> century Akita Ranga Painting School in Japan*, «Artl@s Bulletin», vol. 10, n. 1, 2021, pp. 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> M.M. del Pozo Andrés, S. Braster, *An image travelling across Europe. The transformation of «The school in an uproar» into «Le désordre dans l'école» (1809-1850)*, in H. Amsing, N. Bakker, M. van Essen, S. Parlevliet (edd.), *Images of education. Cultuuroverdracht in historisch perspectief*, Groningen, Uitgeverij Passage, 2018, pp. 84-97.

<sup>7</sup> L. Steinberg, *What I Like About Prints*, «Art in Print», vol. 7, n. 5, 2018, pp. 3, 10, 17, 18.

<sup>8</sup> A. Milano, *Change of Use, Change of Public, Change of Meaning: Printed Images Travelling Through Europe*, in E. Stead (ed.), *Reading Books and Prints as Cultural Objects. New Directions in Book History*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 139.

The second key word for understanding the importance of engravings is *mass production*. Owing to their reproductive possibilities, engravings became the most democratic aesthetic object in the history of art; they reached all of the social classes, finding their way into «the homes of the poor and the rich, the ruler and the ruled»<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, they circulated and spread about, prints were reproduced with much cheaper materials and techniques, meaning they could be sold for a broad range of prices and reach very different buyers from the originally targeted audience. The consumers of these mass production engravings had neither the access nor possibility of seeing the original work of art, but they could experience it through household objects such as calendars, handkerchiefs, table games or prints for daily consumption. As the British pre-Raphaelite art critic Frederic George Stephens remarked in 1860: «Where the picture cannot go, the engravings penetrate»<sup>10</sup>.

We lovers of old engravings have an ongoing battle with the legendary essay written by Walter Benjamin in 1935, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin asserts categorically that photography broke with the past, due to its being a technique that allowed for «the process of pictorial reproduction», and that this changed society's visual culture. Benjamin laments the loss of what he calls the «aura», that is, the uniqueness and authenticity of the original work in the face of the mechanically produced photograph. He then delves into the classic nineteenth-century dispute regarding the artistic value of painting versus photography<sup>11</sup>. But what Benjamin failed to take into consideration was that when people at the end of the nineteenth century began to acquire photographs of Old Master paintings, they «were not substituting these photographs for original paintings, but for the engraved copies and chromolithographs that had previously represented them»<sup>12</sup>. Only a few lucky individuals had actually seen the original works; the versions that most people had seen and admired were the prints of these works that were circulating. The engravers served as the translators and interpreters of the original works, and a good engraver could turn a mediocre work of art into something of great demand, or, to the contrary, convert a masterpiece into something banal. In fact, a painter's reputation depended not on the success of his original works but on the number of them that were rendered into engravings and the popularity that these enjoyed among the general public<sup>13</sup>.

Consequently, the origin of the «age of mechanical reproduction», to use Walter Benjamin's expression, actually predates by far the popularization of photography, and should be established at around the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The primary cause for this revolution was the unprecedented boom in the print

<sup>9</sup> F. Eichenberg, *The Art of the Print: Masterpieces, History, Techniques*, New York, Harry N. Abrahams, Inc. Publishers, 1976, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in R. Verhoogt, *Art Reproduction and the Nation: National Perspectives in an International Art Market*, in J.D. Baetens, D. Lyna (edd.), *Art Crossing Borders. The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation States, 1750-1914*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, p. 322.

<sup>11</sup> W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York, Schocken, 1968, pp. 217-251.

<sup>12</sup> Steinberg, *What I Like About Prints*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> R.K. Engen, *Victorian Engravings*, ed. by H. Beck, London, Academy Editions, 1975, p. 10.

market resulting from the appearance of new engraving techniques such as steel, intaglio, mezzotint, lithography, chromolithography, ..., allowing for thousands of copies to be made of a single image. From a steel plate, for example, up to 30.000 impressions could be made. The cheapest versions of such prints – together with pirated copies – could number in the millions and find their way into any kind of home. People of the middle classes, in addition to becoming massive consumers of what were known as «demi-fine» engravings, began to cultivate a taste that differed from that of the aristocracy. In Victorian England, for example, they did not tend to acquire prints based on Old Master paintings, preferring instead gravures dealing with family subjects and homely scenes of common life created by living artists. Their appetite was for images that stimulated and brought back their own memories, that captured on paper the images they retained in their minds. Painters were quick to adapt to the public's taste and to depict subjects with immediate popular appeal.

This revolution in the print market meant that all social classes suddenly had much easier access to images and could observe a far greater number of scenes than any previous generation. The nineteenth century lived in a sort of what it has been called the «frenzy of the visible»<sup>14</sup>. At this moment, the popularity and increased demand for engravings «evolved from a newly urban culture which tried to grasp and classify its experience of world through vision»<sup>15</sup>. In the history of visual communication «the nineteenth century was therefore characterized by a hitherto unprecedented production of reproductions, in terms of both quantity and quality»<sup>16</sup>, till the point that it has been affirmed «that more prints were produced during the nineteenth century than in all the precedent centuries put together»<sup>17</sup>. The engravings market was benefiting from the first consumer boom that struck the globe, even it has been strongly affirmed «that no one in the future should doubt that the first of the world's consumer societies had unmistakably emerged by 1800»<sup>18</sup>. And the symbol of this new society was the shop with great glass windows, to which the passers-by, astonished by the images that were offered before their eyes, leaned out.

Many engravings were sold in the elegant stores of the big cities, in shops with huge display windows showing to potential buyers their most recent and striking prints. The shop windows with the latest engravings, lithographs, and etchings, were called «the poor men's galleries», and «were part of the fascinating visual culture of the nineteenth century»<sup>19</sup>. It was in this elegant stores – like the Ackermann's Repository of Arts in

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in G. Beegan, *The Mechanization of the Image: Facsimile, Photography, and Fragmentation in Nineteenth-Century Wood Engraving*, «Journal of Design History», vol. 8, n. 4, 1995, p. 257.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>16</sup> R. Verhoogt, *Art in Reproduction. Nineteenth-Century Prints after Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Josef Israëls and Ary Scheffer*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> N. McKendrick, J. Brewer, J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England*, London, Europa Publications Limited, 1982, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> R.M. Verhoogt, *Free Access to the History of Art: Art Reproduction and the appropriation of the History of Art in the nineteenth-century culture*, in L. Jensen, J. Leerssen, M. Mathijssen (edd.), *Free Access to the Past. Romanticism, Cultural Heritage and the Nation*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2010, p. 149.



Fig. 1. Travelling print seller showing his commodities to the village children (Nationaal Onderwijsmuseum, Dordrecht)



Fig. 2. Print peddler showing his goods. Published in the cover of the 2<sup>me</sup> collection de Chansonnettes, Bruxelles, Meynne, c. 1832 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

London, with its exclusive tea room<sup>20</sup> – that the aristocracy and bourgeoisie acquired their gravures from among the luxury works and «fine art», pieces which, when displayed in their houses, would bring greater social recognition to their owners. But the so-called «cheap prints» or «popular prints»<sup>21</sup> – produced for the masses – were sold and circulated on a broad scale, in good part by travelling salesmen who went from town to town with their merchandise stashed in boxes, baskets and even in their umbrellas. Some had fixed stalls in marketplaces and local fairs and would display their prints on the walls, the ground or inside their booths; others went from door to door in the towns and villages, showing the villagers the latest acquisitions to arrive from the city (Figures 1 and 2).

In front of the engravings shop windows, it was a gathering of all the social classes. In 1889, the Dutch writer Johan Gram described the spectacle of observing the passers-by looking at the window of a print shop in The Hague:

Everyone that passes by, be they an important magistrate, a fashionable lady or a blushing maid-servant with her basket, stops here to look at all the news, and it is very amusing to slip between them and to listen to the sober or witty comments<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> V. Furió, *La imagen del artista. Grabados antiguos sobre el mundo del arte*, Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, 2016, p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> A. Griffiths, *The Dissemination of Popular Prints*, «Print Quarterly», vol. 32, n. 1, 2015, pp. 98-101.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Verhoogt, *Free Access to the History of Art*, cit., p. 149.



Studies on visual culture have analysed the phenomenon of the print-shop window, which can be seen as a mediating panel between subject-observers and a collection of prints on display. The collection offers a cultural repertoire of images from a world that is foreign to that of the observers, whose ability to interpret the images will depend on their own cultural capital. In other words, these engravings serve to educate, but in order to be understood, the observer needs to have some prior cultural information. One of the most powerful depictions of the interaction arising between observers and prints can be seen in the famous work by MacDuff titled *Shaftesbury, or Lost and Found*, which was reproduced in prints in 1864. The scene shows two children, one a barefoot London street urchin, the other an older child in a London Shoe Black Brigade uniform. The older child has put down his shoe-shining materials and is explaining the prints in a shop window to his young companion. At first glance, we seem to be seeing a representation of the difficulties that the lower classes had in understanding such prints, or even in being able to read the captions. But a

closer look shows us that the older boy is pointing at a central portrait among the prints. This figure turns out to be the reformist Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801-1885), 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, co-founder of the London Shoe Black Brigade and founder of the London Ragged School Union. Through these institutions, Shaftesbury rescued and provided homes, education and work to children who were living on the street (Figure 3). The image can therefore be seen as having at least two symbolic meanings. The first of these is the depiction of engravings as powerful tools for the education and acculturation of society's lower classes<sup>23</sup>. The other meaning stems from the juxtaposition of "lost" and "found"; the "lost" child still lives on the street, with neither shoes nor education; the "found" child was lucky enough to have been found by Shaftesbury and educated in the



Fig. 3. *A London School-Board Capture, 2.40 a.m.*, engraving taken from «The Illustrated London News», vol. LIX, 9 September 1871, p. 1. The engraving portrays the London Brigade at the moment of capturing homeless children for bringing them to the Ragged Schools (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

<sup>23</sup> M. Tedeschi, "Where the Picture Cannot Go, the Engravings Penetrate": Prints and the Victorian Art Market, «Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies», vol. 31, n. 1, 2005, pp. 9-10.



Fig. 4. *Brook-Street Ragged and Industrial School*, «The Illustrated London News», 17 December 1853, p. 520 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

Ragged School (Figure 4). Having become integrated into society, he is now able to share his cultural conventions with his less fortunate friend.

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the manner of conserving and exhibiting engravings also changed. Traditionally they had been handled by experts, or *connaisseurs*, who assembled specialized, technical collections of Old Master prints (Figure 5). They conserved them in portfolios and albums which were only shown on rare occasions, and usually to other experts, but in the nineteenth century they opened their collections more and more to the public with the aim of contributing to the formation of a «well founded national taste»<sup>24</sup>.

But starting in the mid-eighteenth century, prints began to be used – with the appropriate frames – as decorative furniture in the houses of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes. Prints also made their way into the homes of the working class at this time, where they were more likely to be displayed unframed and unadorned, nailed or tacked to the walls (Figure 6). The inventories of the possessions of British gentlemen, carried out on the occasion of their death or of bankruptcy, show us that engravings tended to be hung in «rooms used for socializing, in particular in the dining room, which was

<sup>24</sup> M. Cerón, *Collecting Prints by Giulio Bonasone in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, «Print Quarterly», vol. 31, n. 2, 2014, p. 166.



Fig. 5. *Les amateurs d'estampes*, drawing by Honoré Daumier, Paris, Éditions Fouqueux, n.d. (but after 1837) (Nationaal Onderwijsmuseum, Dordrecht)



Fig. 6. House of a poor family (c. 1840) with a religious print hanging in the wall. J. Amades, J. Corominas, P. Vila, *Imatgeria popular catalana. El soldats i altres papers de rengles*, Barcelona, Orbis, 1936, vol. I, p. 54 (Joan Boadas Library)

generally the preserve of men». In the eighteenth century there was a clearly masculine tendency to exhibit prints in the walls, which showed a close association between the engravings and the heads of families, because in general they represented «the family and friends' networks of the householder and his political affiliations and ambitions», but also spoke about his «intellectual and cultural claims [...] as man of letters, familiar with science, literature, music or theatre»<sup>25</sup>. The new collectors of the nineteenth century, on the contrary, were much more interested in engravings of familiar subjects, with homely scenes of daily life or of their journeys, with a narrative of moral character. Their aim while framing and hanging these reproductive prints on the walls of their homes was subtly different from that in the past century, because «it is intended to serve as a reminder, a souvenir, and to rival the book as a source of knowledge»<sup>26</sup>. By the end of the century we witness a phenomenon of «domestication of art, which had been large accomplished by the permeation of engravings in every English parlour». As the American painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler had bitterly noted in 1885, «homes have been invaded, their walls covered with paper»<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> S. Nenadic, *Print Collecting and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, «History», vol. 82, n. 266, 1997, pp. 216 and 218.

<sup>26</sup> E. Gombrich, *The Uses of Images. Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication*, London, Phaidon, 1999, p. 129.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in M. Tedeschi, *Whistler and the English Print Market*, «Print Quarterly», vol. 14, n. 1, 1997, p. 34.



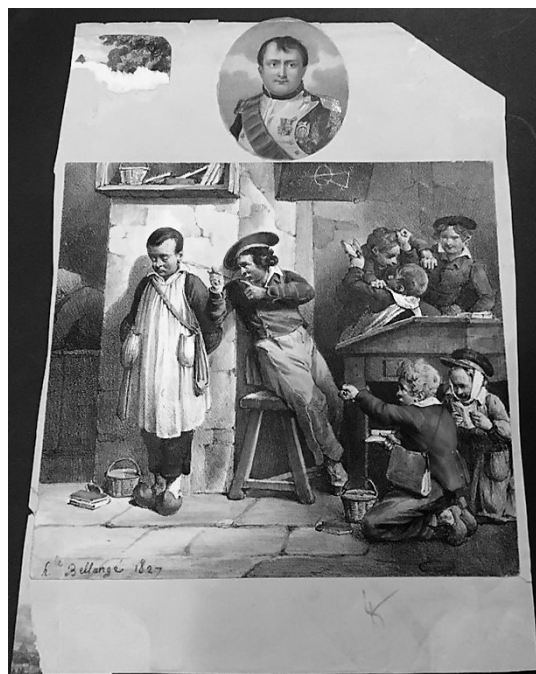


Fig. 7. Cheap prints glued to cheap paper, that once were part of a scrapbook-album (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

at family gatherings. And while it is true that most of the albums that have reached us today belonged to ladies of the aristocracy, in many print shops we can still find cheap prints glued onto silk paper, which leads me to suspect that this was a common practice among the lower classes (Figure 7).

## 2. *Memories of Nineteenth-century Schools: Case Studies*

We have now established the importance of engravings in the construction of a visual culture over several generations as well as their prevalence and popularity among people from every social class and geographic origin. This leads us to see educational prints as more than simple artistic objects that represent – more or less faithfully – school life at a given time; they also constitute the physical object that preserves the memory of

Men and women begin at the end of the eighteenth century the practice of putting together albums, which could include texts, pictures, engravings and lithographs. Albums can be thought of as collections of souvenirs that had a special significance for these women and men, constituting an individual memory of sorts, the artifact that protected their autobiographical memories. Organized as *collages* of literary and artistic creations, press cuttings, drawings, and portraits, they also included lithograph prints by European and North American illustrators which often had been cut out of illustrated journals<sup>28</sup>. Such a gathering of pieces made an album «a virtual portable museum» and a «practical form[s] of memory»<sup>29</sup>. Women and men found pleasure in collecting and preserving such reproductions and in showing them to friends on private occasions, especially

<sup>28</sup> V. Miseres, *Sociabilidad femenina y archivo: lectura de tres álbumes de mujeres en el siglo XIX colombiano*, «Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura», vol. 49, n. 1, 2022, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> B. Leca, *Before Photography: The Album and the French Graphic Tradition in the Early Nineteenth Century*, «Studies in the History of Art», vol. 77, 2011, pp. 33-34.

the school of our predecessors, the icon that encapsulates in the most direct way the classroom atmosphere, the graphic translation of the images retained in their heads, the depiction on paper of a certain memory from their school days. And I believe that this school memories took on the character of a collective memory as a result of the popularity and circulation of a particular engraving and the way in which this particular engraving was received by the public, a public that could very likely change the original message, depending on the school memories that they themselves harboured.

Our discovery of the first engraving that symbolized the school memory of the nineteenth century came about as the result of an inductive process. In our search of old prints this was the image that we came across most often, in a variety of formats and versions and in several European and American countries. We decided to study it from a biographical perspective, that is, to reconstruct the history of the image. This is where the surprises began<sup>30</sup>.

The original work which our engravings were based upon was a watercolour that was first exhibited in London in the Spring of 1809. Its author, Henry James Richter, was a minor painter who specialized in choosing subjects from daily life that appealed to people's sentiments and were easy to relate to for common people. The work's original title was *Picture of Youth*. And while the connoisseurs did not think much of the artistic merits of the watercolour, they were quite moved by its subject, some proclaiming it to be so evocative that they would never forget it. The scene shows a classroom in «a country school», where the teacher is absent and the pupils are up to all kinds of mischief; the precise instant depicted is that of the unexpected return of the teacher, who catches the students making a complete mockery of him and his teaching. It would be obvious to any observer that they were witnessing the moment just before a severe punishment was about to be inflicted upon the group.

The first observers were moved by this work because it conjured up memories of their school days and awakened school memories. I believe that this was possible because Richter did not paint some anonymous rural school. Rather, he was representing some of his own school memories from St. Martin's Library School and the Soho Academy, the two London centres where he had been educated between 1778 and 1787<sup>31</sup>. In several memoirs written by artists and actors who attended these same schools at the time we find references to similar incidents. These include students parodying and drawing caricatures of their teachers – an activity which, according to his own son, Richter was quite good at – as well as some of the comic school scenes appearing in the picture. Such recollections were shared by several generations of English gentlemen, which helps to explain the work's immediate success, which took the form of continued requests for its reproduction in engravings. While the original work itself has been lost, oil copies still appear occasionally in auction houses. This in itself gives some measure of its popularity,

<sup>30</sup> A more extended version of this reconstruction can be found in Pozo Andrés, Braster, *Exploring New Ways of Studying School Memories*, cit., pp. 12-24.

<sup>31</sup> Pozo Andrés, *The undisciplined child*, cit., pp. 85-91.



Fig. 8. *A Picture of Youth or The School in an Uproar*, engraving taken from *Illustrations of the Works of Henry Richter: First Series*, London, Rudolph Ackermann, 1822 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

as it shows that anonymous artists found it worthwhile to copy the subject because there was a demand for this particular school scene.

Aware of its popularity, Henry Richter finally had his work engraved in 1822 and titled it *A Picture of Youth, or The School in an Uproar*. But he did not actually reproduce the whole picture. Instead, he prepared a portfolio with four engravings – drawn by him on stone – that enlarged, with a zoom technique, parts of the original watercolour. This was accompanied by a cover showing, in the size of a small vignette, an engraved copy of the original watercolour, this being the oldest remaining image of the work (Figure 8). The choice of a portfolio format tells us that these engravings were meant for a public consisting of art critics, *connaisseurs* and persons of considerable culture. Each scene was laden with images appreciable only to a certain kind of influential Londoners of the time. These «secret» allusions ranged from the Masonic symbols carved on the classroom benches – which may well have symbolized the well-known Masonic connections of the Soho Academy – to the crusty old spelling-book by Thomas Dilworth, which countless generations of Brits and North Americans had used to learn grammar; from the references to the Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea to the mention of Goggins in the hangman game, an allusion to the Irishman Thomas Goggins, who had been executed that same year in Cork by this very method.

Despite their being intended for a cultured public, at least two of the five engravings from this portfolio were widely pirated and published as «cheap prints» in the 1830s, with



Fig. 9. *The Village School in an Uproar*, engraving by Charles Turner after painting by Henry Richter, 1825 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

no mention of the original work or of the author<sup>32</sup>. Captions indicated the new meaning being attributed to the images: «the angry schoolmaster» and «the idle scholar», two social archetypes which, in their oversimplification, were easily recognizable to anyone who had attended any type of school. And yet, the illustrated sector of society, in the voice of its art critics, requested insistently an engraving «of the whole», that is, of the complete watercolour, not just parts of it; it was the complete image of the school – they claimed – that «has lived in our memory», from when they first saw it in 1809. The reason for this vivid impression was that the subject was «intimately connected with our early associations»<sup>33</sup>, in other words, it evoked their first school memories.

Richter put off the conversion of his watercolour into a reproductive engraving for many years because he was not its legal owner, he was not in possession of the copyright, and he had no say over its fate. This led him, in April of 1823, to paint and exhibit a new watercolour titled *A Picture of Youth; or, the School in an Uproar, a second picture on the subject*, presenting it as an exact copy of the original and made «for the express purpose of its being engraved»<sup>34</sup>. By the hand of an elite engraver, Charles Turner, the first mezzotint engraving of Richter's watercolour appeared in April of 1825, with a title – that would become definitive – *The Village School in an Uproar* (Figure 9). Art critics

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>33</sup> *Fine Arts*, «The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences & c», n. 285, 6 July 1822, p. 425.

<sup>34</sup> *The Nineteenth Exhibition of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours*, «The European Magazine and London Review», n. 83, June 1823, p. 539.





Fig. 10. *The Royal Academy*, print made by George Cruikshank, published in «The Comic Almanack», May 1844 (British Museum, n. 1978, U.2671)

were quick to praise his excellence as a «translator» of the original work, due to the way he reproduced perfectly the expressions and movements of the characters as well as their underlying emotions. However, Turner not only erased all of the iconographic elements that helped to give a historical context to the picture; he also depersonalized it, eliminating the symbols linking it to the author's biography. In doing this, Turner was ensuring the atemporal nature of the image, enabling its reproduction in different times and settings. Turner was also striving for an intellectual democratization, turning something that was only truly comprehensible to the educated British elite into an object that was relatable to a much broader audience.

The engraving was an instant success, and the British press of the 1830s raved about how *The Village School in an Uproar* was one of the most popular modern prints ever. A first edition likely consisted of some 1500 prints, but many further impressions were made with the same plates. It continued to appear in print publishers' catalogues until at least 1864, and we find the press regularly welcoming it as a «new print». Its use was eminently decorative, hanging on the walls of many a British gentleman's home, where it tended to be displayed in the more private rooms, those reserved for family and close friends. Thousands of people acquired this print for the enjoyment of contemplating the school scene. Other, more caricaturesque versions were also made, in which Richter's

name disappeared, and noticeable changes were made in the characters depicted in order to better connect with the events that were entertaining the public at the time, such as, for example, the education of the Prince of Wales and future King Edward VII, who in 1844 was only three years old (Figure 10)<sup>35</sup>. And these audiences were wide-ranging indeed, with the image reproduced on puzzles and even on pocket handkerchiefs. From 1853, and at least until 1907, it also made its way into the theatre, where it was presented as a *tableau vivant*, recreating the famous picture *The Village School in an Uproar*. Spectators must have had a good laugh seeing the pictures' characters in flesh and blood. These data lead me to conclude that, when nineteenth century Britons evoked the concept of a school, the image that popped into their heads was most likely Richter's composition or one of its many variations and transformations.

The print's impact was felt well beyond the borders of Great Britain. In 1825 it travelled to France<sup>36</sup>. At approximately the same time that Turner's mezzotint engraving was published in London, an aquatint engraving titled *Le Vacarme dans l'École*, based on Richter's work, was published in Paris by the engraver Jean Pierre Marie Jazet. Here too it was a resounding success; before the year was out several other versions were published. There was even a sequel; the French painter Charles-Nicolas Lemercier immortalized the moment right after that shown in *The Village School in an Uproar*, the instant that every observer held in their imagination, when the teacher starts unleashing his fury on the pupils. Between 1829 and 1831 the image reached the shores of the United States, where it circulated through the so-called «annuals» which were very popular as Christmas presents. There it seems to have evoked similar sentiments as in the United Kingdom: «We can look at this scene over and over» – says one anonymous columnist – «no explanation is necessary; the whole story is before us»<sup>37</sup>. And sure enough, one consequence of the engraving's success in North America was a series of stories written about the future life of the picture's figures, character studies based on their behaviour in the scene. In 1876 a German publisher specialized in cheap prints, the Scholz House of Mainz, released a mass-produced lithography on very cheap paper aimed at the working-class public. The title attached to it was *Der Dorfschullehrer* (The Village Schoolteacher) (Figure 11). The multilingual caption – in German, French, Italian and Spanish – is a clear indication of the image's travelling character.

<sup>35</sup> The Figure 10 served as illustration of a very long and humoristic poem about the qualities, abilities and knowledge required by the future tutor of the Prince of Wales. *Who shall educate the prince of Wales?*, in A.S. Thackeray, G.A. Beckett, The Brothers Mayhew, «The Comic Almanack, and Ephemeris in Jest and Earnest, containing Merry Tales, Humorous Poetry, Quips, and Oddities», April 1844, pp. 16-17. The possible tutor needed to have a kind of «first rate» encyclopedic knowledge of all the subjects and be able to teach his illustrious student really very fast, «at railroad speed». The poem anticipated the rigorous educational program designed by his parents and supervised by several tutors that the Prince of Wales started at the age of seven years old.

<sup>36</sup> See the travel of the image to France and its sequels in Pozo Andrés, Braster, *An image travelling across Europe*, pp. 84-97. Reproductions of these works in pp. 91, 93, 94, 95.

<sup>37</sup> *The Annuals*, «Illinois Monthly Magazine», January 1831, p. 177.



Fig. 11. *Der Dorfschullehrer*, in *Vom Christ-Kind*, Mainz, bei Jos. Scholz, 1876 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

There is no way that in Mediterranean countries people would have identified this scene with a rural school. In Spain at least, no school memory could be evoked by such an image. But some of the many copies of the engraving *The Village School in an Uproar* did arrive in Spain and ultimately influenced artistic representations of the school. In 1871, what we could consider the Spanish version of the English engraving was published<sup>38</sup>. The author's inspiration in the original scene seems evident in the scene of the child chasing after an apple, of another sitting on a bench horsy-style, and yet another pupil drawing a caricature of his teacher behind his back. But the author spanishize the classroom by including typically Spanish children's games; by including a blackboard and teacher's desk as symbols of authority; by showing a rebellious child dancing on top of this desk and wearing a paper cap – possibly a burlesque version of the English dunce-cap; and by the writing on the blackboard, an iconotext of sorts, of the first letters of the alphabet, making clear that the students in this school barely knew the most basic rudiments of the alphabet (Figure 12).

<sup>38</sup> I. Gil-Díez Usandizaga, *La imagen del maestro español, entre el miedo y la parodia (1876-1931)*, «El Futuro del Pasado», n. 13, 2022, p. 370.





Fig. 12. *La Escuela*, drawing by José Giménez, published in «Los Niños», vol. 4, n. 9, September 1871, p. 136 (Hemeroteca Digital, Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid)

The print *The Village School in an Uproar* exuded masculinity, in both the activities shown and in the characters' body language. This leads us to ask ourselves, Are there not feminine versions of the *School in an Uproar*, ones showing scenes of chaos in girls' schools? The answer is yes, there are indeed paintings of this kind. These were meant to be companion prints to the masculine version. The decorating conventions and aesthetics of the times dictated that in well-to-do homes, paintings and prints should be hung in pairs, creating a kind of dialogue with two contrasting depictions of one same theme. The image of chaos in a girls' school can therefore be seen as simply fulfilling the need to accompany the boys' scene, which was the truly important one. In this case, art was imitating reality.

The first artist to paint one of these scenes was Henry Richter himself, and he only did so because Turner's engraving of *The Village School in an Uproar* was about to be published and he needed an accompaniment to help boost its sales. So, in 1825 he presented a watercolour destined to be associated with the original work. He titled it *The Village School in Repose*, and, when the pair of paintings was exhibited together for the first time, art critics said that the second picture was «not quite so brilliant in its colouring»<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> *The Northern Society*, «Leeds Intelligencer», n. 3699, 26 May 1825, p. 3.



Fig. 13. *The Village School in Repose*, engraving by John P. Quilley after painting by Henry Richter, 1825 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

Anyway a reproductive print was soon made of it (Figure 13), though the engraver of the new print was not nearly as famous as Turner and his work was considered «a failure», but extensive sales were expected «among those who possess the print with which it is meant to be associated, and which was one of the most popular of modern publications»<sup>40</sup>.

The scene shows a girls' school – not really rural at all – where, while the teacher is having a catnap – her *siesta* [sic]<sup>41</sup> –, the girls are engaged in all kinds of mischief. But they do so silently, so as to not wake their instructress. Here lies the contrast between these two works, the wild, frenetic scene of the boys opposed to Richter's depiction of the quiet and calm of the girls' classroom. Yet this engraving does not seem to have connected with the school memories of men or women. Art critics were of the opinion that Richter had carried out an exercise not of memory but of imagination, and their commentaries show that they were lacking the mental references to understand what they were seeing. One objected that the schoolmistress was not looking like an instructor, but «the bustling mother of a large family»<sup>42</sup>. Where some of them saw «sweet spirited girls»<sup>43</sup>, other described them as «rude, but merry-hearted tomboys»<sup>44</sup>, that is, girls who were

<sup>40</sup> *The School in Repose; engraved in mezzotinto by J. Arnold from a drawing by H. Richter*, «The New Monthly Magazine», 1<sup>st</sup> May 1832, p. 210.

<sup>41</sup> *Society of Painters in Water Colours*, «La Belle Assemblée: or Court and fashionable magazine», May 1825, p. 225.

<sup>42</sup> *Painters in Water Colours*, «The New Times», n. 8343, 25 April 1825, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Society of Painters in Water Colours*, cit., p. 225.

<sup>44</sup> *The School in Repose*, cit., p. 210.

decidedly *unfeminine*. Others saw a group of very same-looking youth, with no clearly defined personality<sup>45</sup>. Richter had rendered a feminine version of the cocky adolescent from the boys' school, which would seem to mean that she was adopting a provocative attitude towards the napping teacher, that was considered unpleasant by some art critics, while others interpreted her corporal language as an imitation of a dance teacher<sup>46</sup>. And, interesting enough, when both watercolours were exhibited together, probably for the last time, in the South Kensington Museum, and as late as 1875, the art critic found that «in the boys' school the enjoyment of the young imps in the absence of the pedagogue is deliciously natural», and that all the scene was still looking very real; while in the girls' school it was difficult to believe that «now-a-days» the schoolmistress was sleeping, the feminine schools at the moment «are too full of learning and "competitive exams"»<sup>47</sup>.

The engraving *The Village School in Repose* was deemed a failure, although it seemed to satisfy the need for which it was drawn: that of accompanying the famous, successful *The Village School in an Uproar*. While we have no evidence that the picture made it abroad, we do have evidence to the contrary; French publishers came up with their own versions of feminine school mayhem. Late in 1825 Philibert Louis Debucourt drew a somewhat free but recognizable rendition of Richter's work along with its inevitable feminine counterpart, which he called *La Récréation*. Here we see numerous young girls playing all kinds of pranks, undaunted by the fact that their teacher is ready to let loose with her birch. And in 1847 the French publisher Jean Dopter produced a pair of cheap prints meant for mass-consumption by the lower classes. The male print, titled *Le désordre dans l'école des garçons*, repeats the central narrative theme of *The Village School in an Uproar*, that is, the unexpected return of the teacher. It also contains two other secondary themes from the original: the two children drawing a caricature and the fight going on between two other classmates. The most notable difference is the French engravers' incorporation of scenes that are considerably more violent than anything in Richter's work, including the torturing of animals and the handling of arms. The corresponding feminine work, titled *Le désordre dans l'école des filles*, is much gentler. While the teacher naps in the classroom, some of the girls continue with their work, others play with animals and others, the most «rebellious» ones, practice some dance steps and seem to be ready to tickle the teacher with a feather.

The fundamental difference between the masculine and feminine representations of classroom chaos is that in the case of the boys the teacher is absent, while in the girls' classroom she is present, though asleep. This limits the girls' freedom and their chance to do greater mischief in the class. It would seem that the artists, all men, were afraid to explore the potential for feminine transgression, and the art critics were feeling uncomfortable in front of such behavior and preferred to ignore it.

<sup>45</sup> *Society of Painters in Water-Colours*, in *The Annual Register, or, a view of the history, politics, and literature of the year 1825*, London, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826, p. 55.

<sup>46</sup> *Fine Arts. Opening of the Water-Colour Exhibition*, «Weekly Fleming's Express», n. 105, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1825, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Winchester Art Loan Exhibition*, «The Hampshire Advertiser County Newspaper», 23 June 1875, p. 4.





Fig. 14. *En ausencia de la maestra*, wood engraving by M. Weber after painting by Emanuel Spitzer, 1891 (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

Only at the end of the nineteenth century do we come across an image that would become an icon of the female school – though admittedly this was determined by men as well. The origin was an oil painting by the Austrian painter Emanuel Spitzer (1844-1919), a work that must have been very popular indeed, as evidenced by the fact that copies and replicas by different Austrian authors – as Rudolf Geyling (1838-1904) or Heinrich August Mansfeld (1816-1901) – are still circulating today. But the painting became known by means of its publication in the illustrated press, appearing in various magazines in different countries between 1888 and 1891 (Figure 14). The scene is from a girls' secondary school, possibly a boarding school; the teacher is absent, and we only know that she is about to return because one of the girls is screaming. The students are engaged in all kinds of pranks that we had previously only ever found in depictions of boys, including the transgressive use of educational objects and the caricaturesque drawings of male and female teachers in the blackboard. The American and German versions of the print were titled in a similar way: *The teacher is coming* (1891) and *Die Lehrerin kommt* (1888), whereas in the illustrated Dutch journal «De Katholieke Illustratie», of a Catholic tendency, the caption reads *De eerwaarde moeder komt* (1889) – *The Reverend Mother is coming* –, affirming the school's religious nature.

The Spanish version was titled slightly different as *En ausencia de la maestra* (1891) – «In the absence of the teacher» –, but the strongest difference with the other national

versions lied in the way in which the scene was commented. In the accompanying article the painting was interpreted as an allegory of the youth, explaining how the young girls, compared with cocoons and chrysalis, were in the process of transforming in beautiful flowers and colourful butterflies, a process that was described with a language full of sexual connotations<sup>48</sup>. It is impossible for the image to evoke any kind of school memories in nineteenth-century Spanish society, as there were hardly any boarding schools for girls and hardly any teenage girls went to secondary school.

However, the approach was very different in the articles published in other countries. The common message coming from these journals is the evocative power of the image, which connects to school memories of men as well as women. The Dutch anonymous writer communicated directly with their female readers:

This amusing scene does not need an elaborate explanation; all our readers and especially our female readers will recognize it at the first glance as an image from the happy days of youth. Do you still remember, female readers, from the days when you were a rascal of twelve or thirteen years old sitting on the desks of the boarding school, the exuberant fun when the sister for a moment lifted her heels? What a spectacle that was! It was as if the schoolroom had to be torn down<sup>49</sup>.

In the North American version it was asserted, literally, that it did not matter if it was a boys' or a girls' school, although «girls are a little the worst of the two», «the enjoyment of fun, in the absence of the teacher, seems implanted in boy-and-girl-human-nature», it was a deeply held memory for *any* student *anywhere*, and therefore any man or woman could relate to this scene, «for we've all been there»<sup>50</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

We began our research of school engravings moved by a curiosity to discover the reasons that made certain prints so popular, even when they were not the most esthetically accomplished or the most pedagogically interesting. I am convinced now that some specific, particular engravings came to constitute a global phenomenon over the course of the nineteenth century, and that this only occurred with prints showing chaos and disarray in the classroom when the teacher was absent. The children's mayhem and mischief in these depictions is accompanied by the thrill of those precious moments of freedom.

At the beginning of this chapter, I established as archetypal «travelling images» those that succeeded in connecting the East and the West, that built bridges between Western

<sup>48</sup> *En ausencia de la maestra*, «La Ilustración Hispano-Americana», vol. 12, n. 579, 6 December 1891, p. 753.

<sup>49</sup> *De eerwaarde moeder komt*, «De Katholieke Illustratie», vol. 23, n. 50, 1889/90, pp. 396-397.

<sup>50</sup> *Triple Triumphs: Photogravures From the Original Paintings: The teacher is coming, Plam Sunday, A Trot*, Philadelphia, Gebbie & Co. Publishers, 1891, in History Colorado Online Collection (last access: 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023).



Fig. 15. Japanese version of *The school in an uproar*. Engraving from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Private collection M.M. del Pozo and S. Braster)

and Eastern culture and allowed the circulation of symbols, conventions and messages that influenced the global art world of the nineteenth century. What I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that also in the «travelling images» on the school there was an influence and exchange of codes and representations. The British artist Henry Richter pioneered in 1809 an image of a chaotic school which he called «the school in an uproar» and which circulated widely throughout the nineteenth century in different versions and media. Not only was this image reproduced many times, but it also served as a source of inspiration for other artists in Europe and the United States, who depicted the same subject and copied some of its symbols, which shows me that they were familiar with the original work or with one of its many variations. And the work must also have reached Japan, as we have found prints by Japanese artists that reproduce the same symbols and codes to represent the chaos of a school in the absence of the teacher (Figure 15).

The occupation by the students of the space of authority of the teachers, the use of educational objects in a transgressive manner, and the visible presence of the missing teacher symbolised by a caricature created by a young artist, are three of the elements that appear in all the Western engravings and in Japanese engravings as well. These same elements also would appear in the most popular «travelling images» of chaotic girls' schools at the end of the nineteenth century.

This chapter has proven that in the nineteenth century there were some educational images extremely popular and widespread. Every time it is more obvious that these prints were so popular because they connected with the school memories of many men and women around the world, they made people remember the moments in their youth when they were perfectly happy. The challenge for the future is to discover in which extent these images have contributed to build a nineteenth-century narrative about schooling, or a story told and imagined, that is rather different than the official history of schooling, based on discipline and order. And going a step further, we need to explore what was the role of these stories in constructing a collective memory that crossed borders and nations, and that eventually became the social memory of the school.

SECTION *Official and Public Memories of School*





# The International University Games of 1933. The Fascist Regime and the Issue of Commemorative Stamps as a Memory Policy for a “Glorious” Italian University Tradition

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From 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1933, Turin hosted the International University Games whose organisation for Italy was entrusted to the Fascist University Groups (better known as GUF – Gruppi Universitari Fascisti)<sup>1</sup>. Ten years earlier, Paris had hosted the first World Student Games, which were organized under the aegis of the *Confédération Internationale des Étudiants* in May. The Turin edition of the World University Games was the seventh one in the summer version – the second one in Italy, after the one in Rome, combined with the winter one held in Cortina in 1928 – and it was actually divided into two stages: the summer games in Turin were preceded from the winter ones, held in Bardonecchia from January 29<sup>th</sup> to February 3<sup>rd</sup><sup>2</sup>.

The enhancement and the celebration of this event by Fascism, like many others coming after each other during the 1930s, was part of that process implemented by the regime to also artificially “build” a great precise image of Italian Universities through the organization of a series of official representations and/or public commemorations promoted by the ministry in the wake of a specific memory policy<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> About GUF, please see M.C. Giuntella, *I Gruppi Universitari Fascisti nel primo decennio del regime*, «Il movimento di liberazione in Italia», vol. 107, n. 2, April-June 1972, pp. 4-38; A. Grandi, *I Giovani di Mussolini: fascisti convinti, fascisti pentiti, antifascisti*, Milano, Baldini & Castoldi, 2001; L. La Rovere, *Storia dei Guf. Organizzazione, politica e miti della gioventù universitaria fascista, 1919-1943*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003; H.A. Cavallera, *La formazione della gioventù italiana durante il ventennio fascista*, 2 vols., Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2006; S. Duranti, *Lo spirito gregario. I gruppi universitari fascisti fra politica e propaganda (1930-1940)*, Roma, Donzelli, 2008; E. Signori, *Tra Minerva e Marte: Università e guerra in epoca fascista*, in P. Del Negro, *Le Università e le guerre dal Medioevo alla seconda guerra mondiale*, Bologna, Clueb, 2011, pp. 153-172.

<sup>2</sup> On this regard, see P. Dessì, P.P. Zannoni (edd.), *Gli studenti dell'Università di Bologna dal fascismo alla liberazione. Aula Magna dell'Università di Bologna, 21 aprile 2010*, Bologna, Clueb, 2010, pp. 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> On this subject, see in particular C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; M. Brunelli, J. Meda, L. Pomante (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1 (special issue), pp. 9-394.

Especially thanks to Achille Starace, Giovanni Battista Giuriati's successor at the PNF (Partito Nazionale Fascista) secretariat and a GUF secretary<sup>4</sup>, the university events, which were often linked to sports events as they were able to involve and to animate «Fascist young and courageous men», became the ideal opportunity to recover and to enhance the Italian university traditions, above all the medieval or early Renaissance ones<sup>5</sup>, in order to make them an essential key element in the work of strengthening a national identity.

That «cult of the origins», which ended up being officiated in all the venues and in particular also during the most significant student celebrations and demonstrations, found a concrete application in such precise public situations. However, Fascism did not simply intend to limit to an aseptic commemoration of the past, but to effectively recover that past with its «legendary traditions», in order to seek in them the foundations of that «cultural and civil primacy» of the nation, which constituted the starting point of an age of splendour, such as the one which was started up by Mussolini's regime. Therefore, no collective Fascist manifestation could avoid this inspiring *ratio*.

After all, as recent historiography has well highlighted<sup>6</sup>, parades, public celebrations, organized mass meetings and, more generally, many «spectacular» commemorations organized by the regime ended up developing a real «Fascist liturgy»<sup>7</sup> whose main purpose was to mould «the new man»<sup>8</sup> thanks to the fusion between Fascist symbols and rituals and the pre-existing national ones. It is also well known that Fascists boasted several times that they had renewed what was called «mass aesthetics» with their collective rites. As well analysed by Emilio Gentile in his appreciated work *Il culto del littorio*, Fascist celebrations, a precious vehicle of indoctrination for people, could be considered «great choral celebrations» while

‘before Fascism, public demonstrations were extremely unaesthetic. [...] When our processions wind across the streets, pass under the arches, form squares at the foot of bell towers and towers in the squares,

<sup>4</sup> In the rich bibliography devoted to Achille Starace, PNF secretary from 7 December 1931 to 31 October 1939, please see the works by S. Setta, *Achille Starace*, in F. Cordova, *Uomini e volti del fascismo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1980, pp. 445-472, C. Galeotti, *Achille Starace e il vademecum dello stile fascista*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2000 and A. Spinosa, *Starace: l'uomo che inventò lo stile fascista*, Milano, Oscar Mondadori, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> On this subject, see S. Cavazza, *Piccole patrie. Feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il fascismo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1997, pp. 171-244.

<sup>6</sup> On this subject, especially see the works by Emilio Gentile, such as: E. Gentile, *Fascism as Political Religion*, «Journal of Contemporary History», vol. 25, n. 2, April 1990, pp. 229-251; Id., *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1993; Id., *Le religioni della politica: fra democrazie e totalitarismi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> See L. Klinkhammer, *Il fascismo italiano tra religione di Stato e liturgia politica*, in V. Ferrone, *La Chiesa cattolica e il totalitarismo. VIII giornata Luigi Firpo, Atti del Convegno Torino, 25-26 ottobre 2001*, Firenze, L.S. Olschki, 2004, pp. 185-203 (quotation on p. 185).

<sup>8</sup> About the subject of the fusion between the Fascist symbols and rituals and the pre-existing national ones, see R. Suzzi Valli, *Riti del Ventennale*, «Storia contemporanea», vol. XXIV, n. 6, December 1993 and Ead., *Jugendfeiern im faschistischen Italien. Die Leva Fascista*, in S. Behrenbeck, A. Nützenadel, *Inszenierungen des Nationalstaats: Politische Feiern in Italien und Deutschland seit 1860/71*, Köln, SH-Verlag, 2000. Instead, about the concept of a «new man», see L. La Rovere, *Rifare gli italiani: l'esperimento di creazione dell'«uomo nuovo» nel regime fascista*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», vol. 9, 2002, pp. 51-77.

they are worthy of our cities, and their beauty increases the beauty of stones and marble', giving people 'brotherly love for civic holidays, which is then love for city, tradition and, therefore, homeland'<sup>9</sup>.

At every anniversary celebrated or every collective holiday, the regime used to emphasize the difference in style and spirit with respect to the rites in the liberal age, which were characterized by their «aboulic patriotism» and the «crowd's terror with a commemorative ceremony addressed to the past». On the contrary,

the scenario of the Fascist rites was composed of squares full of applauding people, men, women and children of all the classes, who celebrate the Fascist glory and its leader in unison, in a mystical exaltation. [...] Fascism claimed to have redeemed the crowd by changing them into a *liturgical mass*, who took part in the celebrations of the regime's rites with joy and faith<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, even the Turin University Games and the related and connected Italian university historical Carousel, which had the task of introducing the event and, above all, recovering and celebrating the memory of a renowned cultural past<sup>11</sup>, ended up becoming targeted propaganda tools, which were used by the regime to the achievement of the objectives mentioned above.

In fact, beyond its purely sporting value, the celebrated event was part of that university operation of «invention of tradition»<sup>12</sup> promoted by Mussolini and blindly implemented by the Fascist ruling class throughout the twenty years<sup>13</sup> with the aim to recover the Italian «glorious» academic traditions, whether they were true or presumed. In fact, the Duce intended to restore and to enhance the ancient value of Italian universities, underlining their primary vital function as a centre for irradiating culture and a mine for

<sup>9</sup> See Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, cit., p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>11</sup> About the Italian university historical Carousel organized in Turin, please see the extensive discussion reported in L. Pomante, *L'Università italiana nel Novecento. Nuovi itinerari storiografici e inediti percorsi di ricerca*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2020, pp. 39-47.

<sup>12</sup> As we know, the reference is obviously to the category of the «invention of tradition» elaborated by Eric Hobsbawm in Hobsbawm, Ranger (edd.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983. Instead, according to a more recent contribution by Roberto Sani, the merit of having applied the historiographical category of the «invention of tradition» should be attributed no longer only to political organizations and state apparatuses in the strict sense, «but also to those social and cultural institutions, which were more invested by the deep and radical changes underway and struggling with the consequent need for a new and more solid legitimation of their role and their prerogatives and functions». And among these social and cultural institutions there were also universities and higher education institutions with regard not only to the ancient colleges of English universities struggling with the changes, which were produced by the industrial revolution in cultural and scientific fields and Hobsbawm mentions, but also very old and new universities, which arose in Germany and France during the nineteenth century, as well as that particular type of «minor universities» widespread in Italy, to which Sani himself turns his particular attention. On this regard, please see R. Sani, *The invention of tradition in the minor Universities of united Italy. The case of the thirteenth-century origins of the Studium Maceratense*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. VII, n. 1, pp. 485-504. Finally, about this subject, please also see the interesting work by D. Bidussa, *A proposito della "invenzione della tradizione"*, «Studi storici», vol. LIV, n. 3, July-September 2013, pp. 591-609.

<sup>13</sup> Please see Pomante, *L'Università italiana nel Novecento. Nuovi itinerari storiografici e inediti percorsi di ricerca*, cit., pp. 19-53.

the new Fascist ruling class in the hoped and definitive realization of that ideal of «state university», which had been always dreamt, but never concretely realized in previous decades<sup>14</sup>.

However, in order to be able to fully implement this plan, a specific apologetic celebration of university «glorious traditions» was necessary. Hence, Fascism invented a mythological tradition, which especially aimed at artfully introducing University as a typically Italian “creation” in a phase when the country was about to be considered the cradle of culture and intellectual development par excellence, underlining the birth of the first university venues in Italy in the late Middle Ages but, however, concealing the real coeval existence of many other prestigious European universities<sup>15</sup>. This invention represented the tool which would have allowed the regime to identify a mythical original event destined to mark a clear discontinuity in national history from which to date the “rebirth” of Italian people<sup>16</sup> and was an obligatory step to create a Fascist tradition, which represented «not only a system of ritualized procedures aimed at a symbolic use of mass politics, but [also] a pedagogy for Mussolini’s new Italian people»<sup>17</sup>. So, Mussolini more concretely started up a process of ideological reconstruction for a national identity, which was clearly and mainly founded on the recovery of past and tradition.

<sup>14</sup> About Italian University in the first fifty years after unification and the main university policies implemented by the ruling class of that time, please see in particular: F. De Vivo, G. Genovesi, *Cento anni di università. L'istruzione superiore in Italia dall'Unità ai nostri giorni. Atti del III Convegno nazionale CIRSE. Padova, 9-10 novembre 1984*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1986; T. Tomasi, L. Bellatalla, *L'Università italiana nell'età liberale (1861-1923)*, Napoli, Liguori, 1988; G.P. Brizzi, *L'Università italiana fra età moderna e contemporanea. Aspetti e momenti*, Bologna, Clueb, 1991; S. Polenghi, *La politica universitaria italiana nell'età della Destra storica (1848-1876)*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1993; A. La Penna, *Modello tedesco e modello francese nel dibattito sull'università italiana*, in S. Soldani, G. Turi, *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea I. La nascita dello Stato nazionale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1993, pp. 171-212; I. Porciani, *L'Università tra Otto e Novecento: i modelli europei e il caso italiano*, Napoli, Jovene, 1994; F. Colao, *La libertà di insegnamento e l'autonomia nell'università liberale. Norme e progetti per l'istruzione superiore in Italia (1848-1923)*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1995; I. Porciani, M. Moretti, *La creazione del sistema universitario nella nuova Italia*, in G.P. Brizzi, P. Del Negro, A. Romano, *Storia delle Università in Italia*, 3 vols., Messina, Sicania, 2007, Vol. III, pp. 323-379; F. Pruner, A. Bianchi, *School Reforms and University Transformations and Their Function in Italy from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*, «History of Education», vol. 39, n. 1, 2010, pp. 115-136; A. Ferraresi, E. Signori, *Le Università e l'Unità d'Italia (1848-1870)*, Bologna, Clueb, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> In fact, as it is well known, if it is true that some of the most important Italian universities, such as the universities of Bologna, Padua and Naples (Federico II), can trace their founding date back to the period between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, in the Middle Ages, it is equally undeniable that equally prestigious universities, such as the universities of Oxford, Paris, Cambridge and Salamanca, just to name a few, also saw the light in other European countries in the same period of time. About the medieval origins of Italian and European universities, please see the works by J. Verger, *Le università nel medioevo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1982; G.P. Brizzi, J. Verger, *Le università dell'Europa*, 6 vols., Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana Editoriale, 1990-1995 (in particular Vol. I: *La nascita delle università*); A. Romano, *Università in Europa. Le istituzioni universitarie dal Medio Evo ai nostri giorni: struttura, organizzazione, funzionamento. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Milazzo, 28 settembre-2 ottobre*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> About this subject, please see C. Tullio-Altan, *Ethnos e civiltà. Identità etniche e valori democratici*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1995 and R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, 6 vols., Torino, Einaudi, 1966-1970, Vol. I, t. II: *L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista*, pp. 372-377.

<sup>17</sup> See La Rovere, *Storia dei Guf. Organizzazione, politica e miti della gioventù universitaria fascista, 1919-1943*, cit., p. 185.



Figs. 1-4. The four celebratory stamps of the International University Games in Turin (1933)

In order to adequately celebrate the Turin sporting and university event and to underline its role as an important political window-dressing for the country on the international scenario of which to leave «lasting memory» to posterity, the regime also resorted to philately, which had been never involved in the celebration of sporting events so far<sup>18</sup>. In fact, the creation of a special series of four stamps with the same iconography, but with different colours (brown, red, purple and blue) and, therefore, with different costs (0.10, 0.20, 0.50 and 1.25 lire) was planned for the Turin Games<sup>19</sup>. The series was authorized by Royal Decree no. 945 of July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933, and was issued on August 16<sup>th</sup>; it was on sale until September 15<sup>th</sup> and remained in circulation for four months until December 31<sup>st</sup><sup>20</sup>. Made by the State Mint and Polygraphic Institute (in the Security Printing Works) with a certain care of carving, the four stamps (24x40mm) were printed with the photocalcographic system on paper with crown watermark. The drawing (21x37 mm) reproduced in them was composed:

of the monolith in Mussolini's Forum with the inscription 'Dux Mussolini' from the ground up and the statue of a football player. At the top there are the words 'Poste Italiane' and the State Coat of Arms, in the middle the indication of the value and at the bottom the caption 'Giochi Universitari Internazionali Torino 1933-XI' in a Roman plaque<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> A new sought-after series devoted to the world of sport was released the following year on the occasion of the II World Football Championship, which was played in Italy from 27 May to 10 June 1934, and was won by Italy. It consisted of nine stamps: five ordinary mail stamps and four air mail stamps. Furthermore, for the first time a stamp was designed by a woman, Liana Ferri, who drew some stamps of this series.

<sup>19</sup> About these stamps, please see: F. Filanci, *Il Novellario. Enciclopedia della Posta in Italia*. Vol. III: *Un Ventennio in Posta (1921-1943)*, 6 vols., Milano, CIF editore, 2016, Vol. III, pp. 210-211.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Decree no. 945 of 13 July 1933, *Emissione di speciali francobolli in occasione dei Giochi Universitari Internazionali che avranno luogo a Torino*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», vol. 74, n. 180, 4 August 1933, pp. 3556-3557.

<sup>21</sup> Royal Decree no. 1531 of 26 October 1933, *Descrizione tecnica dei francobolli commemorativi dei Giochi Universitari Internazionali di Torino*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», vol. 74, n. 275, 28 November



As rightly observed by Federico Zeri, the series, which was designed by Amedeo Pesci, represented

a very open example of propaganda exploitation: although the games took place in Turin, the (unique) design [strangely] depicted Mussolini's Forum in Rome with the monolith and the marble statue of a *Football Player*, a work by Bernardo Moreascalchi<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, the event takes place in Turin, but everything in the design speaks about Rome, the *Caput Mundi* with its renewed splendour, where there is Mussolini's Forum with the statue of a football player, a work by Moreascalchi, and the monolith with the reference to the Duce<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, the primary purpose of the stamps was to celebrate the greatness of Fascism even at risk of overshadowing the intrinsic sporting value of the Turin event, which was acquiring absolute relevance, especially if included in that course of recovery and exaltation of Italian university traditions to which Fascist hierarchies had turned their attention «with wisdom» since the first years of government.

The ideological *ratio*, which inspired the creation and the issue of the four celebratory stamps, was obviously the same one which led Fascism in the articulated planning of the University Games and the related University historical Carousel for whose organization nothing was left to chance in order to be able to achieve the desired objectives in the best possible way.

In fact, on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1933, a circular signed by the Minister of Public Education, Francesco Ercole<sup>24</sup>, had warned Italian university rectors that the International University Games, to which «the intervention of the representative teams from the most important foreign universities» was ensured, would be held in the Piedmontese city during the first half of September. In order to make the official opening ceremony more solemn, it established that there were «Italian university gonfalons, which were escorted by Italian university young people including the Fascist University Groups» with the aim of bringing back the Italian «illustrious university tradition»<sup>25</sup>. On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1933, various local GUF secretariats were informed by the national secretariat that all the venues would have taken part in the inaugural ceremony not only with the gonfalon, but also with a representative of heralds, trumpeters and drummers in perfect medieval clothes, in order to «faithfully reproduce our ancient glorious university customs»<sup>26</sup>.

1933, p. 5383.

<sup>22</sup> F. Zeri, *I francobolli italiani. Grafica e ideologica dalle origini al 1948*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Please see F. Giuliani, *I dentelli attorno all'Università*, «L'Arte del francobollo», vol. 80, May 2018, pp. 23-25.

<sup>24</sup> About Francesco Ercole, a full professor of History of Italian Law and Minister of Public Education from July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1932 to January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1935, please see the biographical profile drawn up by L. Lo Bianco, *Ercole, Francesco*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1993, vol. 43, pp. 132-134, to which to also refer for other bibliographical references.

<sup>25</sup> Archivio Università degli Studi di Parma (henceforth, AUP), year 1933, folder 1173, dossier 1, *Circolare del 7 giugno 1933*, n. 9693. *Giocchi universitari internazionali di Torino*.

<sup>26</sup> Archivio di Stato di Macerata (henceforth, ASMC), Circolari, years 1921-1935, folder 700, dossier 1933, *Circolare del 20 giugno 1933. Ai segretari dei Gruppi Universitari Fascisti*.



With a subsequent detailed circular dated July 7<sup>th</sup>, Starace, who was notoriously very careful to external organization of parades and mass public events<sup>27</sup>, provided the local GUF secretariats and, for information, «the Minister of Public Education, the magnificent rectors and podestas of the cities where universities were located» with further details about the desired correct development of the event and, above all, indications regarding the function and the ideological value, which the regime intended to attribute to it. First of all, as it was the custom of the best medieval ceremonies<sup>28</sup>, he specified that the representatives of each university had to be composed of a well-defined number of figures, which had to be the same for each venue and specifically composed of «a drummer, four trumpeters with banderols, two standard-bearers with flags in the colours of the city, two men of arms, a major page with the University Gonfalon, who was supported by two valets and, at the end, a variable number of pages». In this way, «while the representatives of young students from all over the world will be gathered in the field of the great «Mussolini» Stadium, Italian university Gonfalons will go by on the track in order to give an augural and welcoming greeting to competitors».

In his circular, Starace underlined that the «glorious millenary university Gonfalons» would precisely have recalled «what a beacon of light Italy was, even in the darkest times», while «new University Gonfalons, which were created by Fascism», would have testified «how much the Italy of the Duce has done even in this field for ten years». All those who were directly or indirectly involved in the event in any case should have contributed to give the demonstration that majesty and that interest, which the regime wished, and, above all, to ensure the perfect realization of the process of recovering the «immortal Italian university traditions»<sup>29</sup>.

In confirmation of the considerable importance that the regime attributed to the celebration, all the GUFs, who were scattered throughout the national territory, received even more precise and detailed instructions about the rituals and the actions, which the representatives in medieval costumes should have performed in the inaugural ceremony of the Games, with a PNF directive on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933<sup>30</sup>. In Starace's intentions, the «Italian University Historical Carousel», included in the context of the first day of an international event of this magnitude, should also have achieved that long-desired perfect mixture of medieval and Fascist elements, besides assuming the form of an effective propaganda tool for the regime, as well as a useful means to affirm a precise sense of a

<sup>27</sup> About this aspect, please see the interesting journalistic report by C. Galas, *Gli uomini di Mussolini: Achille Starace*, available on the web at <http://www.televignole.it/gli-uomini-mussolini-4-achille-starace/> (last access: 08.01.2022).

<sup>28</sup> About the structure and the organization of festivals and ceremonies in the Middle Ages, please see J. Verdon, *Feste e giochi nel Medioevo*, it. transl. by Marina Karam, Milano, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> AUP, year 1933, folder 1173, dossier 1, *Circolare del 7 luglio 1933*, n. 18. *Achille Starace ai segretari dei Gruppi Universitari Fascisti di Bari, Bologna, Cagliari, Camerino, Catania, Ferrara, Firenze, Genova, Macerata, Messina, Milano, Modena, Napoli, Padova, Palermo, Parma, Pavia, Perugia, Pisa, Roma, Sassari, Siena, Torino, Trieste, Urbino, Venezia; e per conoscenza a S.E. il Ministro dell'Educazione Nazionale, ai Magnifici Rettori delle Regie Università e ai signori Podestà delle città sedi di Università.*

<sup>30</sup> AUP, year 1933, folder 1173, dossier 1, *Direttiva dell'11 agosto 1933 dei Gruppi Universitari Fascisti. Carosello storico delle Università fasciste.*

shared national identity. In fact, it was a real rite, which was celebrated on the occasion of a sporting event in this case, an excellent example of how the regime did not limit the orchestration of mass liturgy only to political rites, but it appropriated all the spheres of collective life, bending them to their own purposes and integrating them into a «cult of Fascism»<sup>31</sup>. Along the track in «Mussolini» Stadium, where «the spirit of a new Italy» would have been in the air in the presence of a «stunning and euphoric crowd», as it was typical of the Fascist events of that time<sup>32</sup>, GUF pennants and athletic teams in black shirts would also have taken turns together with university representatives in medieval costumes, who were led by the representatives of the University of Rome; standard-bearers would have been escorted by their secretary in «regulatory uniform» and, after having declaimed the Oath of Office, «music [would have struck up] Giovinezza, while the games with the flags [would have been] resumed by all the standard-bearers»<sup>33</sup>.

Therefore, in this circumstance, the Fascist attempt to recover Italian university traditions, which was started up by Mussolini in the early 1920s, as we have seen, seemed to have reached its peak. Actually, the historical continuity between medieval and Fascist universities, which was supposed by Starace, turned out not to almost exist, at least with reference to the «Historical Carousel». In fact, the preparation of the «millenary university» Gonfalon was more simply a real operation of «invention of tradition» for many universities rather than an intervention for recovering tradition. In fact, as pointed out by Ennio Lazzarini, few venues could really boast a historic Gonfalon to «be brought up again and re-proposed for the occasion»; therefore, most of them were instantly created or even “invented”, very often taking the University Seal or only some of its parts as the main decorative element of the Gonfalon<sup>34</sup>. However, Starace’s requests ended up pushing academic leaders not to skimp any even significant economic efforts in many universities at all, in order to be able to satisfy the requests of the regime in the best possible way<sup>35</sup>.

Despite this, the Turin event met the desired echo and was greeted by the entire public opinion and, above all, the press of that time, who was close to the regime, with great emphasis and almost unanimous approval<sup>36</sup>. In particular, «Il Popolo d’Italia», a

<sup>31</sup> Please see Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell’Italia fascista*, cit., p. 50 and pp. 141-142.

<sup>32</sup> Please see Suzzi Valli, *Riti del Ventennale*, cit., pp. 1027-1031.

<sup>33</sup> AUP, year 1933, folder 1173, dossier 1, *Direttiva dell’11 agosto 1933 dei Gruppi Universitari Fascisti. Carosello storico delle Università fasciste*.

<sup>34</sup> Please see E. Lazzarini, *Università italiane. Stemmi, sigilli, medaglie*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2002, pp. 32-33.

<sup>35</sup> On this regard, please refer to Pomante, *L’Università italiana nel Novecento. Nuovi itinerari storiografici e inediti percorsi di ricerca*, cit., pp. 43-45.

<sup>36</sup> About the event, please also see the materials preserved in Istituto Luce Archive, in particular “Cinegiornali”, series “Giornale Luce September 1933”, *Trionfo di giovinezza allo Stadio Mussolini di Torino. Ai giochi mondiali goliardici hanno partecipato i rappresentanti di 32 nazioni*, and “Cinegiornali”, series “Giornale Luce September 1933”, *Una rassegna mondiale della gioventù goliardica. I giochi internazionali universitari a Torino* and Documentari, series Giornale Luce September 1933, *Giuochi mondiali universitari / Torino Anno XI* (<http://fondoluce.archivioluce.com/LuceUnesco/ricerca/avanzata/esito.html?temi=Giochi%20mondiali%20universitari>; last access: 08.01. 2022).

political newspaper, which was founded by Benito Mussolini in 1914 and later become the unofficial organ of the PNF and the government<sup>37</sup>, almost daily devoted detailed and enthusiastic articles both to the preparatory and organizational phase of the Games and their development<sup>38</sup>. The tones used to introduce the event and, above all, to celebrate the «Historical Carousel», which was considered to be an «almost epochal moment» for Italian university history, were obviously highly encomiastic. On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, on the eve of the inaugural ceremony, which would have been held the next day, «Il Popolo d'Italia» wrote:

Tomorrow we are having the inaugural ceremony of the games for which there is a great attention. [...] The big ceremony is taking place at the Stadium at 3pm. [...] The Carousel will be a great show. It will faithfully reproduce our ancient university customs with trumpeters, pages and men of arms. All the university gonfalons have arrived with spare valets and GUF secretaries. [...] After the ceremony at the Mussolini Stadium, Hon. Starace is visiting the National University Life Exhibition. This is a remarkable and useful initiative of the Turin GUF [...]. All the very interesting documentation about student life with particular regard to war, Fascism and our noble university traditions has been collected in numerous rooms<sup>39</sup>.

Two days later, Arturo Pianca, a correspondent of the newspaper in the Piedmontese capital city<sup>40</sup>, let further grow the encomiastic dimension of the descriptions supported by the pompous rhetoric, which was typical of Fascism in those years, by introducing readers with an extensive report about the opening day of the Games:

This Sunday in Turin will remain indelible in the eyes and the hearts of the students coming from all over the world and taking part in the International University Games as representatives of the best physical and intellectual part of 32 countries. With the intent of honouring guests, they witnessed a great Fascist day during which all the people shouted their Faith to the Chief thanks to whom Italy, which is a master of civilization today, recalls people from all over the countries under its blazing sun. [...] At the end of the polychrome grouping of teams, the tolls of the Olympic bell were heard and, at that moment, we saw the characteristic groups of student trumpeters from Italian universities, who were preparing to parade in ancient costumes for the historical Carousel, going up two large platforms [...]. The entrance of medieval uniforms had a great choreographic effect and the public

<sup>37</sup> «Il Popolo d'Italia» was a political newspaper founded in 1914 by Benito Mussolini, who edited it up to the march to Rome. From the positions of revolutionary interventionism on, the newspaper followed its editor's political evolution. Although it was always inspired by Mussolini, it was edited by his brother Arnaldo after Fascists took power and by his son Vito on his death (1931). From 1922, it became a PNF organ and suspended its publications only on 25 July 1943.

<sup>38</sup> Please see in particular the following articles: *L'organizzazione a Torino dei Giochi universitari internazionali*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», vol. 11, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933, p. 9; *Il saluto del "Guf" torinese*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», vol. 11, 31 August 1933, p. 8; *La partecipazione del G.U.F. dell'Urbe al carosello storico di Torino*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», vol. 11, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1933, p. 10; *La cerimonia inaugurale*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», vol. 11, 3 September 1933, p. 8; A. Pianca, *Olimpiadi universitarie solennemente inaugurate dal Segretario del Partito nello Stadio Mussolini di Torino alla presenza di una folla immensa*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», vol. 11, 5 September 1933, pp. 9-10; *La mostra goliardica di Torino*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», vol. 11, 6 September 1933, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> See *La cerimonia inaugurale*, cit.

<sup>40</sup> About Arturo Pianca, who was born in Mantua in 1903, a journalist, an editor of «Il Popolo d'Italia» from 1923 to 1943, a head clerk at ANSA Agency from 1945, please see G. Vaccaro, *Panorama biografico degli italiani d'oggi*, 2 vols., Roma, A. Curcio, 1956, Vol. II, p. 1200.

started applauding among continuous acclamations of wonder. [...] At some point, we saw two ranks of graceful pages appearing and carrying long bundles of laurel and university gonfalons immediately appeared with their magnificent escorts behind them. Opening on both sides of the field, the historical procession drew up in a semicircle around the athletes and the solemn inauguration ceremony took place in this superb setting, which was almost unreal.

And more:

When Y.E. Starace came back in the stands, the picturesque parade of the historical Carousel began. The procession was opened by the representatives of the University of Rome to signify the sovereignty of the city in all the fields of human activity. So, all the other universities followed by order of foundation. Each representative was preceded by a page carrying an emblem with the year of foundation, drummers and trumpeters came behind them and launched greeting notes, once arrived in front of the Party Secretary, while standard-bearers rotated their ensigns according to the ancient custom of jousts: the university gonfalon was escorted by men of arms followed by scholars and students. The characteristic styles aroused the exclamations of admiration from the public, many costumes were original and taken from museums and private collections, others had been faithfully reproduced and everything appeared to be neat down to the smallest detail. [...] So, Bologna, which is the oldest Italian university founded in 1088, Padua (1222), Naples (1224), Perugia (1266), Florence (1321), Pisa (1343), Siena (1357), Pavia (1361), Ferrara (1391), Turin (1404), Catania (1444), Urbino (1506) and gradually all the others up to the last ones established by the Fascist government, namely Bari, Trieste and Milan, paraded<sup>41</sup>.

Even the Italian University high hierarchies did not miss the opportunity to pay the right tribute to the Turin Games and the intrinsic value, which the regime had intended to attribute to them. The inauguration of the new academic year 1933-1934 represented the ideal official occasion to “celebrate” with emphasis the attention paid by the Duce and his hierarchs to University and, not less, the Fascist project of recovering the «noble» Italian university traditions and strengthening a national identity, which also passed through the organization of events, such as the Piedmontese one, as we have seen. In this sense, the words spoken by the deputy pro-rector of the small university in the Marches, Prof. Paolo Greco, a refined jurist and an esteemed lawyer of that time<sup>42</sup>, in the lecture hall at the Royal University of Macerata on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933 rise to a real “shared manifesto” of the academic thought of that time<sup>43</sup>:

The past academic year marked a fervent reawakening of Italian university life everywhere. It can be said to be the year when Italian University was definitively ranked among the most active and precious forces of the Fascist Revolution. [...] Among its various aspects, this rebirth of university life, which

<sup>41</sup> Pianca, *Olimpiadi universitarie solennemente inaugurate dal Segretario del Partito nello Stadio Mussolini di Torino alla presenza di una folla immensa*, cit.

<sup>42</sup> About Paolo Greco, a Professor of Commercial Law, a deputy pro-rector at the Royal University of Macerata from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1932 to 30 November 1933 and subsequently a rector at the «Bocconi» University of Milan from 1938 to 1945, please see L. Pomante, *L'Università di Macerata nell'Italia unita (1861-1966). Un secolo di storia dell'ateneo maceratese attraverso le relazioni inaugurali dei rettori e altre fonti archivistiche e a stampa*, Macerata, Eum, 2012, pp. 569-570.

<sup>43</sup> About the thought and the behaviour of the rectors of those years in the face of Fascism, please see some interesting cues reported in G. Cianferotti, *Le leggi razziali e i rettori delle Università italiane (con una vicenda senese)*, «Le Carte e la Storia. Rivista di storia delle istituzioni», vol. 6, n. 2, pp. 15-28.

took place under the high auspices of the Duce and the impulse of the Minister Ercole and the Party Secretary Achille Starace, had three programmatic cornerstones: increasing the scientific and didactic university industriousness with the call of all the university people, professors and disciples, to a more intense and active fulfilment of their duties; promoting and spreading in the militia, gyms and sports fields physical activity, which does not already reflect or excite only the brute force of human matter, but it reawakens and restores all the young people's energies with a Hellenic conception, which is rooted in the spirit of the Latin race, preparing it for the arduous trials of life; finally, fully re-entrusting to Italian Universities that function of radiating our civilization, which they historically carried out to spread the ideas of the Roman empire and law in the world once, the lights of humanism and science, which was renewed by Leonardo's intuitions and Galileo's observations, later, new regulatory principles of state and civil society, which are expressed by the reconstructive genius of the Duce and Fascism, today.

In this "mission" Fascism also intended to carry out the University Games of September 1933 as a «superb show of physical strength and compact unity of our national soul»<sup>44</sup>; indeed, they had undoubtedly played a leading role, which was appropriately celebrated and made everlasting in the common memory by the issue of a special series of four stamps.

<sup>44</sup> See *Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1933-1934. Relazione del Pro-Rettore Prof. Paolo Greco letta nella cerimonia inaugurale dell'11 novembre 1933*, in Pomante, *L'Università di Macerata nell'Italia unita (1861-1966). Un secolo di storia dell'ateneo maceratese attraverso le relazioni inaugurali dei rettori e altre fonti archivistiche e a stampa*, cit, pp. 579-585.



# “Educational Italianness”. National Stereotypes and Pedagogical Localism in the Centenary Celebrations of Italian and Foreign Educationalists between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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## *Introduction*

In 1885 in his *La scuola pedagogica nazionale*<sup>1</sup> Antonino Parato – basing himself on the «moral and civil primacy of the Italians» theorised more than forty years earlier by Vincenzo Gioberti<sup>2</sup> – defended the centuries-old Italian educational tradition, in polemic with the proponents of the positivist pedagogy, whose works were very often based on the educational theories elaborated by foreign thinkers.

In the essays collected in the first part of the volume and consisting of a series of biographies of well-known Italian educationalist, Parato endeavoured to demonstrate how since ancient times Italian culture had created its own original educational tradition, which – as Giorgio Chiosso has already noted – would have been «fine-tuned in its main principles as early as the humanistic culture of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, [...] gradually developed in a popular sense through the contributions of personalities such as Borromeo, Calasanzio and Miani [and] finally matured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the reflections and indications of Rosmini, [...] Aporti, Lambruschini, Capponi, Gioberti and Tommaseo»<sup>3</sup>.

Parato was a leading exponent of that Catholic spiritualism that was convinced that it was precisely in the continuity between Classical culture and Christian culture initially conceived by Francesco Petrarca and later shared by other thinkers of the early Italian Humanism that underlay the cultural substratum in which this tradition had been shaped. This in opposition to modern German educational theories, which arising from welding

<sup>1</sup> A. Parato, *La scuola pedagogica nazionale*, Torino, Botta, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> V. Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*, Brusselle, dalle stampe di Meline, Cans e Compagnia, 1843.

<sup>3</sup> G. Chiosso, *Profilo storico della pedagogia cristiana in Italia: XIX e XX secolo*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, p. 63.



between late German Humanism – aimed at a profound renewal of the Church through the recovery of the Christian doctrine of the origins – and the Protestant Reformation.

In those years, Catholic spiritualism was engaged in a heated controversy with the flourishing positivist pedagogy, bearer of the instances of German scientific pedagogy, to which it contrasted – as Roberto Sani already noted in 2001 – «a pedagogical perspective firmly anchored to Christian principles and in line with the addresses of the national educational tradition»<sup>4</sup>.

From a spiritualist perspective, therefore, we can state that the rediscovery of this glorious tradition appeared more functional to the defence of the theoretical framework of the pedagogical thought it bore, rather than consequent to the need to generate a deeper historical knowledge of the educational past of the country, which nevertheless drew a strong impulse from it.

The clash between the spiritualist and positivist educational matrix can also be found within the public celebrations of the centenaries of the birth and death of some great Italian and foreign educationalists, which were promoted in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which undoubtedly constituted yet another opportunity to affirm the concept of “educational Italianness”.

In that context, in fact, newly-born Italy – in search of illustrious antecedents and its own cultural traditions – undertook to define the uncertain boundaries of its national identity also in the field of education. So what were the characteristics of such “educational Italianness”? Using speeches pronounced during official celebrations, texts of celebratory epigraphs, commemorative pamphlets and other unpublished sources, we will attempt to dissect this concept, highlighting how it was not always substantiated by scientific evidences but rather by cultural stereotypes and nationalistic metaphors, which had a strong hold on public opinion and filtered very quickly into the common sense.

# 1. *The Centenary Celebrations of Ferrante Aporti and Friedrich Fröbel: Memory between Chauvinist Tensions and Local Skirmishes*

In 1882, the *Comitato centrale italiano per le onoranze a Friedrich Fröbel* (Italian Central Committee for the Honouring of Friedrich Fröbel) was established on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, chaired by Gabriele Luigi Pecile, who coordinated the numerous initiatives promoted almost everywhere on a national level to commemorate the German pedagogue and founder of the *Kindergarten*<sup>5</sup>, in preparation for the international celebrations in Dresden on 21 April of the same year. The Committee soon found itself defending the Froebelian approach against the accusation that it was «contrary to

<sup>4</sup> R. Sani, *I periodici scolastici dell'intransigentismo cattolico (1879-1904)*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (edd.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita: dalla Legge Casati al Centro-sinistra*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola, 2001, pp. 127-169 (in particular, p. 151).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A.P. Gualdi Piolti, *Nel centenario di Federico Froebel*, Bologna, Società tipografica Azzoguidi, 1882; M. Gonzenbach, *Pel Centenario di Froebel*, Palermo, Tipografia dello Statuto, 1882.

religious sentiment»<sup>6</sup> and not suitable for «Italian childhood». The latter prejudice is clearly exposed in the speech given by the lawyer Enrico Sandoni on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the Modena Kindergarden, in which the speaker relates how some claim that «Fröbel’s ideas, yes, they are beautiful, they are rosy but, it is said, they are better suited to the children of blond Germany», because: «There you will easily see patient children, devoting whole hours to folding and weaving, thoughtful and attentive about plants and flowers. But our child has a livelier temperament, the midday sun warms him, his feelings are warmer, his intelligence is earlier...»<sup>7</sup>.

Sandoni then wondered whether indeed – given that the climatic conditions in the countries where that educational method was applied were different – someone felt entitled to question its validity in general<sup>8</sup>. He observed: «Fröbel’s glory will not be diminished when the great work he began in Germany is treasured in order to shape it according to the needs of the Italian children»<sup>9</sup>.

While defending Froebelian approach, however, Sandoni emphasised that he had called the German educationalist a «powerful proponent» of modern educational reform, as «the truth and effectiveness of the system that took name from him had already been

<sup>6</sup> See in this regard the speech given by Gabriele Luigi Pecile in the Senate session of 17 December 1887 («Atti Parlamentari»). See also «I Problemi della Pedagogia», n. 16, 1970, p. 993.

<sup>7</sup> The same motivation, which evidently had to have a certain circulation at the time, is also found in another article: «If one then wanted to say that Aporti’s system is national, because it does not force children to do methodical work like Fröbel’s one, which therefore seems more suited to the patient German genius, then one would have to know whether Italianness means a lack of scientific method and critical thinking» («La Nuova Scuola Italiana», 1927, p. 636). Similarly, during a speech in the Rome City Council, councilor Francesco Vitelleschi had stated in this regard: «Every people has its own special genius, which is differently developed in educational methods. The Northern peoples of who have slow though solid and effective development are disposed to seriousness that tends to rigidity, while the Southern ones are as warm as they are early in development. Hence the difference in educational methods. While the Germans replace the slowness of their children’s development with a method that involves the frequent repetition of the same concept and temper its rigidity with the habit of various games, in the Italians – on the other hand – the frequent repetition of an idea is unnecessary considering their precocity and the levity of character would almost be encouraged by the variety of childish games» (*Atti del Consiglio Comunale di Roma dell’anno 1886*, Roma, Tipografia Cecchini, 1886, p. 397).

<sup>8</sup> Actually, fortunately, the differences between Aporti’s and Froebel’s kindergardens were also identified through more solid arguments, such as Aporti’s lack of awareness of the child’s spontaneity, while Froebel considered «the free activity of the child as a natural means of its development» and that according to which Aporti had promoted his kindergardens moved to pity at seeing the children of the working classes abandoned and exposed to vice, while Froebel had been «moved to compassion for the way in which young minds were oppressed» (F. Cicchitti-Suriani, *La scienza dell’educazione nelle scuole e nelle riviste italiane*, «Rivista italiana di filosofia», vol. VI, n. 2, luglio-agosto 1891, pp. 3-51; in particular, p. 13). A definition of what is historically meant by “Italian educational method” was recently provided by Fulvio De Giorgi (F. De Giorgi, *I cattolici e l’infanzia a scuola. Il “metodo italiano”*, «Rivista di storia del cristianesimo», vol. IX, n. 1, 2012, pp. 71-88; Id., *Il metodo italiano nell’educazione contemporanea: Rosmini, Bosco, Montessori, Milani*, Brescia, Scholè, 2023), who indicated its main features in the emancipatory tension of the educational commitment – according to a dialectic of freedom/liberation, in reference to the human dignity offended in many contexts – and the attention to the person, integrally considered in all its dimensions (including the religious one), whose full potential needs to be developed, also by stimulating his free creativity.

<sup>9</sup> *Federico Fröbel e l’educazione dei fanciulli: discorso dell’avv. Enrico Sandoni*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1883, pp. 23-24.

glimpsed as far back as 1400 by an Italian, by that Vittorino da Feltre whom Italy called: THE school master, [...] of whom prof. Contrucci<sup>10</sup> wrote: SOLEMN EDUCATOR / FOR WISE ORDERS / THAT THEN THE FOREIGNERS / USURPED WITH OUR OTHER PRIDES / AND THAT ITALY FORGOT<sup>11</sup>. And this I remember, not in order to diminish the value of Fröbel's work, but because I believe it is the duty of every good Italian to always claim the glories of his homeland, very lightly and too often forgotten<sup>12</sup>.

If it was «the duty of every good Italian to always claim the glories of his homeland», in 1891 the Committee for the 1<sup>st</sup> centenary of Ferrante Aporti's birth was set up and based in Mantua. Scipione Furga Gornini, director of the kindergarden of San Martino dell'Argine, was appointed president. He was supported by the honorary president Giuseppe Sacchi, president of the kindergardens of Milan. It is interesting to emphasise the «Mantuanity» of this initiative, to which we will return, as evidenced by the letter sent in June of the same year by the Mayor of Mantua to the Aportian Committee, in which he announced his willingness to contribute 50 liras to the honours and added that he counted that «the commemoration that will take place in San Martino dell'Argine will be worthy of the Man that the Province of Mantua is proud to count among its most important citizens»<sup>13</sup>. On 15 November 1891 – in fact – the Committee organised a ceremony in San Martino dell'Argine during which there was to be «the inauguration of the commemorative plaque placed by the honourable Municipality of San Martino dell'Argine on the house where Ferrante Aporti was born», followed by a commemorative speech by Francesco Saverio De Dominicis – a leading exponent of Italian positivist pedagogy – from the University of Pavia and finally the award ceremony for the teaching competition for kindergardens of the province of Mantua.

The polemics between supporters of Fröbel and Aporti – fostered by the celebrations – flared up again, somehow turning into – according to Angiolo Gambaro – a «struggle between those [the Aportians] who do not want to break away from traditions and deny the national spirit and those [the Fröbelians] who want to modernise and take the good wherever it is, considering it superior and indifferent to any distinction of nation and race»<sup>14</sup>. This in a context in which by now – as Fulvio De Giorgi noted – «the real frontier for a complete victory of Frobelism lay in the conquest of the *asili di carità* (charity kindergardens) and free kindergardens for the children of the lower classes, which were part of the public charitable institutions, stronghold of Aportism because of the lower

<sup>10</sup> He is the well-known Tuscan epigrapher Pietro Contrucci.

<sup>11</sup> The full text of the epigraph is reproduced in: *Opere edite e inedite del prof. Pietro Contrucci*, Pistoia, Tipografia Cino, 1841, p. 86 (Epigraph n° XIV). Before the part of the epigraph reproduced here, it is written: «INGEGNO E SALDO VOLERE / DEL POVERO TUGURIO / CONDUSSERO AL SOMMO DELLA SAPIENZA / VITTORINO DA FELTRE / PRIMO IN EUROPA» (Ingenuity and firm will / of the poor hovel / led to the summit of wisdom / Vittorino da Feltre / first in Europe).

<sup>12</sup> *Federico Fröbel e l'educazione dei fanciulli: discorso dell'avv. Enrico Sandoni*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1883, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Per Ferrante Aporti*, «Il Risveglio Educativo», vol. VII, n. 36, 14 June 1891, p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e la pedagogia italiana dell'800*, in A. Gambaro (ed.), *Ferrante Aporti nel primo centenario della morte*, Brescia, Centro didattico nazionale per la scuola materna, 1962, pp. 93-105 (in particular, p. 104).

costs this method entailed»<sup>15</sup> and which the Catholic Church intended as a fundamental instrument of moral and religious penetration among Italian youth.

Pietro Nigra – school inspector in Castiglione delle Stiviere – was central to this dispute. In 1890, in order to support the Committee's activities, he had founded the bimonthly bulletin «Il primo centenario della nascita di Ferrante Aporti»<sup>16</sup>, in which there were frequent articles by Antonino Parato and Giuseppe Sacchi – fervent supporters of Aporti's method – and a lively polemic with Adolfo Pick<sup>17</sup> devoted to the "fröbelization" of all Italian kindergardens. As Clara Castagnoli has observed, in this bulletin «the validity of the Aportian method and its Italian character is repeatedly affirmed and compared to the Froebelian approach, whose "self-proclaimed supporters" "with disdain and slander would like to banish for replacing it with the arbitrary and irrational institutions and reforms of Aportian mysticism"»<sup>18</sup>.

The controversy spread. Lucillo Ambruzzi published an article on the journal «La Scuola Nazionale» in which he invited Italian educators to imitate the German *Kaiser* Wilhelm II, who had declared that he wanted to banish «everything smelled foreign» from German schools<sup>19</sup>.

A few weeks later Nigra took up the topic again in the same journal in a polemical article, in which he resumed the controversy with Pick and asked – after demonstrating how even in Germany Froebelian approach was not adopted everywhere and therefore contesting its definition as the «German national method» – how Italian educators could be accused «of making an out-of-place nationalism, a misunderstood love of homeland»<sup>20</sup> if they refused to adopt this foreign method. Nigra then added:

Those who study the history of Italian pedagogy without preconceived ideas, and with a wide-ranging and dispassionate mind, know very well how it was Aporti who gave the first and strongest impulse here in Italy to the re-establishment of the national method of education. They also know how this truly Italian method, gradually enriched by the studies and experiences of other distinguished educationalists, can today give a sure guarantee that it will one day reach its maximum perfection through the constant progress of science and educational ideas. Italy indeed possesses so much virtue and so much strength that it can do it on its own, without going begging in others' houses<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> F. De Giorgi, *Il tramonto dell'aportismo dal compimento dell'Unità d'Italia alla fine del secolo*, in M. Ferrari, M.L. Betri, C. Sideri (edd.), *Ferrante Aporti tra Chiesa, Stato e società civile. Questioni e influenze di lungo periodo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2015, pp. 366-383 (in particular, p. 382).

<sup>16</sup> Not to be confused with the «Bollettino del Comitato pel Primo Centenario» (Bulletin of the Committee for the First Centenary), published in Mantua first by Eredi Segna and then by Tipografia Mondovì between April 1891 and July 1892 and edited by Scipione Furga Gornini, which did not enter into educational disquisitions nor took sides in the diatribes that arose in those years between Aporti's and Fröbel's supporters, but limited itself to honouring the memory of the famous educationalist.

<sup>17</sup> Founder in 1868 of the first Froebelian kindergarden in Venice and editor of the journal «L'Educazione dei Bambini» (The Education of Children).

<sup>18</sup> C. Castagnoli, G. Ciaramelli (edd.), *Un secolo di stampa periodica mantovana: 1797-1897*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2002, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> L. Ambruzzi, *In tedescheria*, «La Scuola Nazionale», vol. II, n. 12, 24 December 1890, pp. 178-179.

<sup>20</sup> P. Nigra, *I giardinetti frobéliani e l'on. Gabelli*, «La Scuola Nazionale», vol. II, n. 16, 21 January 1891, pp. 243-245 (in particular, p. 244).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

Nigra concluded by saying that Italy was already rich in «pedagogical glory» and should certainly not «beg outside its borders» and proposed rather to work «towards the perfection of the national method restored by Aporti»<sup>22</sup>.

Nigra's violent attack had to provoke the reaction of the Cremonese educationalist Pietro Pasquali, a follower of Fröbel, who published another polemical article in the journal of the positivist pedagogy, in which he stated that «fighting a system because it was devised beyond the Alps, and fighting it in the name of nationality and patriotism» was puerile and that it did not matter «whether Fröbel was born in Germany», but «whether, and to what extent, his method can be applied by us». Pasquali then asked:

In what does the prosperity of the nation consist? And how can the school cooperate in the prosperity and honour of the nation? Perhaps by excluding the pedagogues coming from beyond the Alps? [...] This crusade against foreign ideas is opposed to progress; it is absurd, ignoble, useless, vain, presumptuous, impossible, because the assimilation of thought was always inevitable<sup>23</sup>.

But animosities did not only arise between the supporters of the Italian Aporti and those of the Thuringian Fröbel. The «pedagogical chauvinism» descended into heated parochialism, on the basis of which the «small pedagogical homelands» ended up competing – in the best municipalistic tradition – for the origins of certain illustrious thinkers and educationalists, as if the environmental aspects and geographical context could not be disregarded to explain their greatness<sup>24</sup>.

That same year, indeed, a Cremonese Committee for the honouring of Ferrante Aporti on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, chaired by Luigi Ratti, was also set up, thanks to the contribution granted by the Provincial Deputation of Cremona to the Commission for charity kindergardens of the city. The Cremonese Committee promoted a series of initiatives in the city where Aporti had set up his first charity kindergarden, including an official ceremony held on 20 September 1891 in which the well-known Cremonese educationalist Costantino Soldi delivered a speech<sup>25</sup>. However, its role in the centenary celebrations was less important than the one played by the Mantuan Committee, contrary to what was to happen in 1927 on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the foundation of first Aportian kindergarden, which saw the fascist

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>23</sup> P. Pasquali, *Muraglie della china*, «Il Risveglio Educativo», vol. VII, n. 21, I March 1891, p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> That said, it should be recalled that the celebrations were not limited to the two cities in Lombardy that contended for the illustrious educationalist. On 20 November 1891, the Turin Kindergarden Society organised a commemoration of Aporti, at which Antonino Parato spoke: *Ferrante Aporti: commemorazione letta da Antonio Parato nel primo centenario della nascita del fondatore degli asili italiani celebrato per cura della società degli asili infantili nel locale della Palestra ginnastica in Torino: 20 novembre 1891*, San Marino, Tipografia Subalpina, [1891]. A copy of the booklet is housed in: Archivio di Stato di Cremona, fond «Comune di Cremona», series «Carteggio (1868-1946)», Category n. 32 «Oggetti vari», Cassetta n. 89, 1811 «Comitato per le onoranze a Ferrante Aporti».

<sup>25</sup> C. Soldi, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili infantili: discorso letto per il centenario della nascita di Ferrante Aporti, solennemente celebratosi in Cremona il 20 settembre 1891*, Cremona, Tip. Interessi Cremonesi, 1891.

Cremona<sup>26</sup> – his adoptive homeland – finally take centre stage, while Mantua and San Martino dell'Argine remained on the sidelines.

*Esterofilia* (foreignophilia) and *esterofobia* (foreignophobia) thus alternated fiercely throughout these centenary celebrations, which revealed to be strongly influenced by feelings of identity and belonging that had nothing to do with the validity or otherwise of the educational theories expressed by the various thinkers and depended heavily on the collective imaginary developed over time within what we have already defined as "small pedagogical homelands", rather than on actual historical reality<sup>27</sup>.

## 2. *The Contested Memory of Niccolò Tommaseo's "Dalmatian Italianness"*

Chauvinism and parochialism, however, were not the only sentiments that animated the public celebrations held in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to commemorate great Italian and foreign educationalists. There were also cases in which distinct communities, even those far apart geographically, instead of competing for the commemoration of a personality, were able to twin together to promote shared celebrations. This is the case of the eminent linguist Niccolò Tommaseo, Minister of Education in the Provisional Government of the Republic of Venice in 1848-1849, native of the Dalmatian town of Šibenik in Croatia<sup>28</sup>. Five years after his death, on 2 June 1878, a monument dedicated to him was unveiled in Settignano, made up of a plinth on which rested a marble statue by sculptor Leopoldo Costoli<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, Cremona played a central role in Italian political life due to the presence of Roberto Farinacci, one of the most prominent political figures of the Fascist regime.

<sup>27</sup> On these issues, in particular, see A. Arisi Rota, M. Ferrari, M. Morandi (edd.), *Patrioti si diventa. Luoghi e linguaggi di pedagogia patriottica nell'Italia unita*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> It should be recalled that Niccolò Tommaseo was not the only educationalist to be subjected to a process of Italianisation during his commemorative celebrations, as in the case of Enrico Pestalozzi, whose Italianness Luigi Credaro proved, reconstructing the passage of a branch of the Pestalozzi family from Chiavenna to Zurich through acute glottological inductions and historical investigations (L. Credaro, *L'italianità della stirpe di Enrico Pestalozzi*, «Rivista Pedagogica», vol. XIX, n. 2, February 1926, pp. 177-191).

<sup>29</sup> On this ceremony, in particular, see *Settignano e il monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo*, «L'Illustrazione Italiana», vol. V, 23, 9 June 1878, p. 411; G. Poletto, *Inaugurandosi un monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo in Settignano il giorno 2 giugno 1878*, Bergamo, Tipografia Pagnoncelli, 1878; C. Beltrami, *I monumenti che hanno fatto gli Italiani*, in C. Beltrami, G.C.F. Villa (edd.), *Scolpire gli eroi. La scultura al servizio della memoria*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana Editoriale, 2011, pp. 14-45 (in particolare, pp. 21-23). The history of this monument has been reconstructed in detail in: J. Meda, *Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo a Settignano (1878)*, «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», vol. II, DOI: 10.53218/2051, published on 30.12.2022 (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/monumento-niccolo-tommaseo-settignano-1878>; last access: 17.06.2023).





Fig. 1. Photo postcard *Settignano – Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo*<sup>32</sup>, n.d. (private collection of Juri Meda)

On that occasion, Temistocle Pampaloni – Mayor of Fiesole – stated:

This grave<sup>30</sup> and this monument make him part of our family; they unite him to us with an indissoluble, eternal bond; his memory, his genius, his glory now belong to us. And we are rightly proud of this, since great and virtuous men even from their graves benefit us, even when they are extinct, they radiate splendid light on all that surrounds them. Thus Settignano is honoured by the glory of that divine genius; for him this humble land will be remembered even by distant peoples; for him it will be celebrated by history; for him all those who hold in their kind hearts affection will make a pious pilgrimage<sup>31</sup>.

On the same occasion, on the facade of the Settignano church, in the square where the monument had been erected, the compatriots of the illustrious Dalmatian thinker and educationalist wanted to place a plaque, whose epigraph was dictated by Vincenzo Miagostovich<sup>33</sup>: «THIS PLAQUE / ŠIBENIK / HOME TOWN OF NICCOLÒ TOMMASEO / PLACED ON 2 JUNE 1878 / AS A REMINDER / OF EVERLASTING AFFECTION / TO ITS GREAT CITIZEN / AND OF TRUE GRATITUDE / TO THE PEOPLE WHO VENERATE

<sup>30</sup> Reference is made here to the graves of Niccolò Tommaseo and his wife Diamante Tommaseo, located in a chapel in the cemetery of Settignano. The epigraph on his tombstone, dictated by Augusto Conti, reads: «OF NICCOLÒ TOMMASEO / BORN 1802 IN ŠIBENIK / DIED 1874 IN FLORENCE / THE NAME IS ENOUGH / FOR THEM TO REMEMBER / HOW MUCH THEY OWE HIM / MAGNANIMOUS CITIZEN AND WRITER / IMMORTAL GRATITUDE». In the following years, the grave actually became a pilgrimage destination for admirers of Tommaseo (cf. P. Mazzoleni, *Una visita alla tomba di N. Tommaseo*, Zara, Tip. S. Artale, 1912).

<sup>31</sup> XXXI maggio MDCCCXCVI. *Niccolò Tommaseo e il suo monumento in Sebenico*, Sebenico, Editore Paolo Mazzoleni, 1897, pp. 256-257.

<sup>32</sup> On the use of postcards during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to commemorate illustrious compatriots, enhance local cultural heritage and promote feelings of belonging, also with reference to the world of school and education, see the interesting contribution of M. Brunelli, “Minor Educators”? *Traces of the Public Memory of the School, between the Official History of Education and the Community’s History. The Case of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913)*, *infra*. More generally, on the celebratory and propagandistic function of postcards also in the educational context, see A. Viñao Frago, M.J. Martínez Ruiz-Funes, P.L. Moreno Martínez, *Tarjeta postal ilustrada y educación (España, siglos XIX-XX)*, Murcia, Editum, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Miagostovich published incognito a detailed account of Settignano’s celebrations in Zadar’s newspaper «Il Dalmata», entitled: *Monumento in Settignano a Niccolò Tommaseo*, published in two issues («Il Dalmata», n. 42, 25 May 1878; «Il Dalmata», n. 47, 12 June 1878).





Fig. 2. Engraving *Settignano. Inaugurazione del Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo* by Francesco Canedi based on a drawing by Odoardo Borroni; taken from: «L'Illustrazione Italiana», vol. V, n. 25, 23 June 1878, p. 408 (private collection of Juri Meda)

HIS MEMORY». The shared celebration of the “Great Dalmatian” ended with the sending of a parchment by the Municipality of Florence to the Municipality of Šibenik, to thank it for its heartfelt participation in the public honours, on which was written:

To Šibenik, which honours its Niccolò Tommaseo, the City where he lived his last years as a blind seer and where his remains lie; the homeland of Dante and of the national idiom, grateful to the illustrious Dalmatian, who, as an artist and philosopher, lovingly studied the Poet's thought and collected the treasures of the Italian language, sends fraternal greetings in the communion of cherished memories<sup>34</sup>.

Celebrations continued in the following years. On 22 March 1882 – on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth – a monument to Tommaseo by the sculptor Francesco Barzaghi was unveiled in Campo Santo Stefano in Venice.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

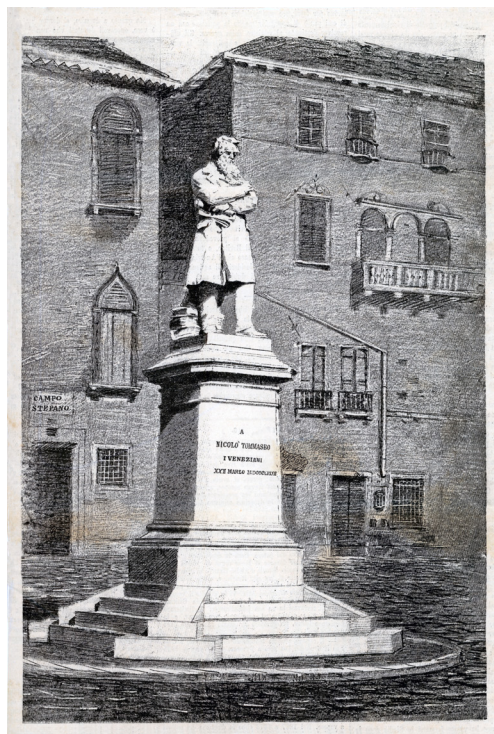


Fig. 3. Drawing *Venezia – Il monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo (di Barzaghi) inaugurato il 22 marzo* by Emilio Longoni based on a photograph by Paolo Salviati; taken from: *«L'Illustrazione Italiana»*, vol. IX, n. 17, 23 April 1882, p. 1 (private collection of Juri Meda)

On 17 March 1890, a plaque was placed on the house where Tommaseo was born in Šibenik. Finally, on 31 May 1896, the bronze monument by the sculptor Ettore Ximenes was unveiled in his home town<sup>35</sup>.

On that occasion – as further confirmation of the «communion of cherished memories» already witnessed during the celebrations in Settignano – the *Società Veneziana per l'Industria delle Conterie* (Venetian Society for the Glass Industry) sent the Municipality of Šibenik an artistically executed frame of coloured glass dots, in which – framed by the winged lion of Saint Mark and other friezes – was written:

Of strong wit endowed / Niccolò Tommaseo / honoured / his native Dalmatia / and his new homeland Italy. / He was a man of letters, a poet, a philosopher / who linked his name to history. / Šibenik / with great solemnity / inaugurates a splendid monument / to his worthy son / and of the happy event / to the town hall of the pleasant city / the glassworker's society / of Venice / offers in memory<sup>36</sup>.

The «communion of cherished memories» – inspired by the historical feelings of brotherhood towards the Dalmatian populations, considered culturally Italian, which found confirmation in the figure of the illustrious thinker who had then elected Florence and Settignano as his adoptive homeland – ceased with the First World War and the Italian Regency of Carnaro. In 1925, in fact, speaking of Tommaseo's «Dalmatian Italianness», the historian of literature Isidoro Del Lungo<sup>37</sup> during his speech at the congress organised by the *Associazione Magistrale "Nicolò Tommaseo"* («Nicolò Tommaseo» Teachers' Association) in Zara, held «under the sign of the most unrestrained nationalism and exaggerated exaltation

<sup>35</sup> The complex realisation process of the Tommaseo monument in Šibenik is reconstructed in detail in: C. Beltrami, *I monumenti che hanno fatto gli italiani*, in Beltrami, Villa (edd.), *Scolpire gli eroi*, cit., pp. 21–23. On the celebrations held in his home town in 1896, see also XXXI Maggio MDCCCXCVI. *Niccolò Tommaseo e il suo monumento in Sebenico*, Sebenico, Paolo Mazzoleni, 1897.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>37</sup> In 1924 Isidoro Del Lungo dictated the epigraph that the *Pro Dalmatia* Society in Florence, the Dante Alighieri Society and the Folk High School in Settignano engraved on a plaque that was added to the monument in Settignano on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.

of fascism»<sup>38</sup>, stated:

The reality of an intact Dalmatia, which Niccolò Tommaseo would once again invoke from God, but greeting in the new fortunes of the great Latin homeland the Dalmatian Italianness, not only of language, tradition and bloodline, but also of participation – blessed by God – in the life and future of the unified Nation<sup>39</sup>.

Tommaseo ceased to be a symbol of Adriatic brotherhood and was artificially elevated to an emblem of "Dalmatian Italianness".

Tommaseo's shared Italian-Dalmatian memory ceased to exist at the end of Second World War, when the Adriatic Question entered its most dramatic phase. As the Croatian historian Boško Knežić has effectively reconstructed, in February 1945, the poet Vladimir Nazor – president of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, which joined the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945 – delivered a speech at the foot of the monument inaugurated in Šibenik in 1896, in which he stated:

The only Italian optant<sup>40</sup> I can see in Šibenik is behind me. Now man of bronze, cold and hardened, cultured and endowed with various talents, who, however, did not fully share the feelings of the people from which he arose<sup>41</sup>.

The monument was demolished a few days later. The commemorative plaque placed on 1890 on Tommaseo's house of birth suffered the same sad fate. In order to confirm the



Fig. 4. Photo postcard *Sebenico – Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo* (dello scultore Ettore Ximenes), n.d. (private collection of Juri Meda)

<sup>38</sup> A. Dessardo, *L'Associazione Magistrale "Niccolò Tommaseo". Storia di maestri cattolici, 1906-1930*, Roma, Ave, 2018, p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> *L'italianità dalmatica di Niccolò Tommaseo. Discorso di Isidoro Del Lungo per il Congresso della Niccolò Tommaseo a Zara*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1925, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Between 1945 and 1946, thousands of Italians fled the cities of Istria and Dalmatia to escape Yugoslavian persecution and seek refuge in Italy. In 1947, the Italians who remained within the Yugoslavian borders were offered the option between Slavic and Italian citizenship. Those who opted for Italian citizenship (i.e. Italian optant) were immediately expelled from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

<sup>41</sup> B. Knežić, *La lapide e il monumento di Niccolò Tommaseo in Sebenico: storia di un'ingiustizia*, «Opinioni», n. 3, June 2019, pp. 28-30; by the same author, see also Id., *"Da Sebenico un figlio vindice nel bronzo ascolta..."*: *Nikola Tommaseo: od književnog uzora do političke ikone*, Zagreb-Zadar, Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada – Sveučilište u Zadru, 2019.



ancient «communion of cherished memories» – swept suddenly away by the rushing wind of history – a hand of the Šibenik bronze statue, the only part of the monument that survived demolition, was stolen and consigned to the Dalmatian School of Saints George and Tryphon in Venice, where it is still exhibited today<sup>42</sup>. The Dalmatian monument, the “twin” of those in Settignano and Venice, has thus become – in spite of itself – a relic with a strong symbolic value, the testimony of a deep wound dug into the memory of the Dalmatian population, which has not even spared the statue dedicated to an intellectual and man of letters, turned over time into an emblem of an “intolerable cultural otherness”.

### Conclusions

The public honours paid to an educator or pedagogue on the occasion of the centenary of his birth or death, as well as any other anniversary, serves to immortalise his memory, and – achieving this result – inevitably ends up destoricising him, abstracting him from his time in order to project him into the present and show him to a local or national community, so that they may remember him for what he did, identify themselves with his greatness and draw lessons for their own time<sup>43</sup>. The centenary celebrations, therefore, lead to the actualisation of the teaching experience of a great teacher or of the educational theories of a great educationalist. Besides celebrating a figure from the past for his/her extraordinariness by publicly remembering him/her, they also lead one to ask – concretely – how to reproduce that educational experience and how to apply those educational theories in the present time.

We know that memory is not history. According to the definition formulated by Maurice Halbwachs, indeed, memory is a reconstruction of the past using data provided by the present<sup>44</sup>. It does not study past events by placing them in their historical context, but rather tends to relate them to the present, to make them examples, providing (often distorting) reading keys to show their topicality and reproducibility.

The centenary commemorations analysed here therefore had two direct consequences: on the one hand, the appropriation of the figure celebrated in order to consolidate the identity of a given community, firmly anchoring it to a more or less extensive place (municipality, province, region or nation); on the other, the actualisation of his/her message, aimed at its projection into the present with the risk, however, of exposing it to considerable distortions and instrumentalisation.

<sup>42</sup> Knežić, *La lapide e il monumento di Niccolò Tommaseo in Sebenico*, cit., p. 29. This hand is also reproduced in the volume Beltrami, Villa (edd.), *Scolpire gli eroi*, cit., p. 109.

<sup>43</sup> More in general, on this topic, see V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», XVI, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. M. Halbwachs, *La memoria collettiva*, Milano, Unicopli, 1996, p. 119 (original edition: *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1950). More generally, on Halbwachs and his theories, see G. Truc, *Memory of places and places of memory: for a Halbwachsian socio-ethnography of collective memory*, «International Social Science Journal», vol. 62, n. 203-204, 2012, pp. 147-159.

# School Architecture as Public School Memory: the Portuguese Case of “Plano dos Centenários”

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## 1. Plano dos Centenários as school architecture

After 16 years of Republic, having succeeded seven parliaments, eight presidents and thirty-nine Government leaders, Portugal experienced what *Estado Novo* would call a National Revolution. It began in Braga, in 1926, and gave place to a military dictatorship. The new regime presents itself as a most necessary change, in which the idea of revolution perpetuates a project of national resurrection. Its repercussions in primary education are inevitable, as Sampaio points out: «the passage from a democracy to an authoritarian regime inevitably rebounds in orientations on primary education»<sup>1</sup>.

The lack of appropriated buildings for good teaching practices<sup>2</sup>, allied to Portugal's analphabetic rate of 60%<sup>3</sup>, forced the regime to adopt an innovative plan: the general plan of building new Primary Schools. This plan, a for-project<sup>4</sup> published as the “For-Project Memory of the General Plan of Regional Primary Schools Types to be Built” (from the architect Guilherme Andrade<sup>5</sup>), would give place to *Plano dos Centenários*<sup>6</sup> (PC), which was a school network of aesthetically unique buildings in the world. Duarte Pacheco, Minister of Public Works and Communication, was the project manager at a national

<sup>1</sup> J. Sampaio, *O ensino primário: 1911-1969. Contribuição monográfica*, Lisboa, Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência, 1976, vol. II, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> J. Silva Fêiteira, *O Plano dos Centenários: as escolas primárias (1941-1956)*, Master in History of Contemporary Art (Supervisor: Margarida Brito Alves), Lisboa, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, a.a. 2013; P. Tereno, *Grupos escolares construídos ao abrigo do Plano dos Centenários em Lisboa: 1944-1961*, «Sistema de Informação para o Património Arquitetónico», 2016, Last updated: n.d., [http://www.monumentos.gov.pt/site/app\\_pagesuser/SIPAINventory.aspx?id=0e28f969-9077-4e14-9370-8059272e8f3f](http://www.monumentos.gov.pt/site/app_pagesuser/SIPAINventory.aspx?id=0e28f969-9077-4e14-9370-8059272e8f3f) (last access: 05.02.2022).

<sup>3</sup> J. Pintassilgo, *Analfabetismo e educação popular*, «Público», 31 August 2010, Last updated: 31.08.2010, <https://www.publico.pt/2010/08/31/jornal/analfabetismo-e-educacao-popular-19905476> (last access: 19.08.2020).

<sup>4</sup> Ministério da Educação, *Muitos Anos de Escolas. Vol. II: Anos 40-Anos 70*, Lisboa, ME/DGEE, 1996; A. Santos Gama, *O Plano dos Centenários*, Dissertação de Mestrado em Arquitectura Departamento de Engenharia (Supervisor: Ana Maria Tavares Ferreira Martins), Covilhã, Universidade da Beira Interior, a.a. 2016.

<sup>5</sup> F. Beja, J. Serra, E. Machás, I. Saldanha, *Muitos Anos de Escolas. Edifícios para o Ensino Infantil e Primário anos 40-anos 70*, Lisboa, DGEE, 1985, Vol. 2, pp. 317-325; Fêiteira, cit.; Tereno, cit.

<sup>6</sup> Law n. 1983 of 27 December 1940.

scale; the project was named after the third centenary celebrations of the Restoration of Independence and after the eighth centenary of Portugal's foundation, celebrated in 1940 and 1943. In order to accomplish this plan, an organization was created: the Delegation for the Construction Works of Primary Schools. The Regime's leader, António Salazar, intended to teach Portuguese people to read, but mostly to educate them according to the values defended by the new regime, at the same time that he perceived the fact that «school buildings produce a major political impact»<sup>7</sup>. These new constructions would reflect an image of national organization and harmony, as a result of the development of a regime's unique architecture that aimed to break up with the modern architectonic legacy of the previous Republicans.

By demarking itself from modernist lines, *Estado Novo's* architecture, known as *Português Suave*, adopts the state power language: the rhetoric of the monumental, extolling national values in a true ode to archaizing traditionalism, propaganda vehicle par excellence<sup>8</sup>. School buildings didn't escape from that aura, although they are not monumental by themselves. However, monumentality was reflected in the extension of the network that was built and in the tradition of regional cultures. In this way peculiar school architecture was born, one that obeyed to the «regionalization of raw-material application and construction techniques, by allying them with state of the art building processes, with thorough study of solar use and other local characteristics. All projects settled on the repetition of the same functional blueprint»<sup>9</sup>. According to Gama<sup>10</sup>, along the 1930's, the type-building construction of the for-project had several interruptions, breakthroughs and setbacks: there was constant restructuring; according to Fêreira<sup>11</sup> not only were there budget issues, but also the fact that these buildings were regarded as «unfit to the new school reorganization». Despite these adversities, the architectural typology remained after. Starting in 1944, it kept the regionalization of buildings, although «uniformity traces between different types of buildings are much more manifest». The forecast was the creation of 11.458 classrooms in 6.809 school buildings throughout the country<sup>12</sup>.

The network of school buildings with PC architectonic typology is different from building to building only in subtle details related to every region. It must be referred that until the beginning of the XXI century these schools were kept fully operational – this fact allowed a direct association to materialize between education and the characteristics

<sup>7</sup> P. Pereira Pimenta, *A escola portuguesa. Do "Plano dos Centenários" à construção da rede escolar no distrito de Vila Real*, Dissertação de Mestrado em Educação, Área de Especialização História da Educação e Pedagogia (Supervisor: Alberto Filipe Ribeiro de Abreu Araújo), Braga, Instituto de Educação e Psicologia da Universidade do Minho, a.a. 2006, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> I. Bessa, *Arquitectura e memória do Estado Novo ao 25 de Abril: o Liceu Júlio Henriques / João III / José Falcão de Coimbra*, «Revista de História das Ideias», vol. 16, 1994, pp. 135-159.

<sup>9</sup> Tereno, cit.

<sup>10</sup> Santos Gama, cit.

<sup>11</sup> Silva Fêreira, cit., pp. 63-64.

<sup>12</sup> Repositório Digital da História da Educação, *Apresentação*, Last updated: n.d., <http://193.137.22.223/pt/patrimonio-educativo/museu-virtual/exposicoes/os-edificios-escolares-do-plano-dos-centenarios/apresentacao/> (last access: 05.02.2022).

of a physical space for successive generations of the Portuguese population. Such association occurs in the memories of those who attended these school buildings during the dictatorship, as well as those that until today attend them (despite the closure<sup>13</sup> of more than 13.000 primary schools between 1961 and 2020, many are still functioning).

This school-building memory can be reinforced by any PC building, in any part of the country, by those who attended it and by those who did not. Because this school network has buildings with common architectonic lines and specific characteristics, it has become scholastic heritage imbued in collective memory, at the same time that it has become memory by itself.

## 2. Plano dos Centenários' School: *memorial and patrimonial-building*

Starting from the dictum «a great building, despite its founder goal, is always and in many ways a history book»<sup>14</sup>, we perceive that architecture and memory form a metaphysic paradigm, where space and time become one. From this fusion patrimonial buildings with collective stories emerge.

According to Ricoeur<sup>15</sup>, there is a narrow parallelism between architecture and narrativity, when he claims that architecture is to space what story is to time. In buildings, however, there is a double constructive and continuous act: the physical and the historical. The physical is based on matter and space – they harbour the construction. The historical is more complex, and develops along two lines: one is temporal, relating with the physical manifestation of the building; the other develops afterwards, and is based on the act of inhabiting: on the life stories related with the construction itself. Therefore, the more a building is inhabited, the larger the history that it can tell.

In the PC case, the thousands of children that attended and still attend these schools took and take part in the historical construction of buildings that in their physical and historical wholeness express human temporality<sup>16</sup>. By expressing this human temporality, PC schools report the absent of what once was: they report memories. It must be stressed that these school buildings, by the time they were designed, already aimed to appeal to a nostalgic feeling: «it urged them to be wrapped in memory paper, and memory was called “rustic” (the people's roots) and “joanine” [after king João V] (the roots of power,

<sup>13</sup> Pordata: Base de Dados Portugal Contemporâneo, *Estabelecimentos nos ensinos pré-escolar, básico e secundário público: total e por nível de ensino: Quantas escolas públicas há no pré-escolar, básico ou secundário?*, Last updated: 01.07.2021, <https://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Estabelecimentos+nos+ensinos+pr%C3%A9-escolar++b%C3%A9sico+e+secund%C3%A1rio+p%C3%ABlico+total+e+por+n%C3%ADvel+de+ensino-1241-9829> (last access: 01.02.2022).

<sup>14</sup> Herculano (cit. in Bessa, *Arquitectura e memória do Estado Novo ao 25 de Abril*, cit., p. 156).

<sup>15</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Architecture et narrativité*, «Études Ricoeuriennes», vol. 7, n. 2, 2016, pp. 20-30.

<sup>16</sup> E. Calvi, *Proyecto y relato: la arquitectura como narración*, «Arquitectonics: Mind, Land & Society», n. 3, 2003, pp. 53-69.



the supreme empire), or, even better, both)»<sup>17</sup>. According to Teixeira<sup>18</sup>, memories are experiences of the most importance: as starting point memories, they perpetuate places with references to a consecutive return to the past, carrying a variety of feelings that are documented and expressed in stories and reports, in dreams and perceptions.

Thus, we may consider PC schools as mnemonic architecture: they preserve the general memory of the group of buildings in every person in particular. Due to the architectonic characteristics, any of these school buildings will wake in the viewer the same feeling, for they «are schools whose image and name are associated to tradition, keeping its past culture in its existence and image today»<sup>19</sup>.

In general, school buildings have always been special places, wrapped in specific rites that give them a sacred configuration: before them students appear as devotees on a daily pilgrimage. Teixeira<sup>20</sup> refers to school as a moment of thorough apprenticeship, since youth itself gives relevance to all elements that are then used: standards and values, dress codes, plays, experiences, even the everyday school path, among other things that make sense in social interactions. This is a micro-universe that allows its inhabitants to live a strong psycho-active and sensorial experience<sup>21</sup>, through which individuality can grow<sup>22</sup>. In its whole, school builds each student; but each student builds historically school in general, and the building in particular. Since all these buildings have the same configuration, this building type will emerge in each individual's memory regardless of the exact location. This shows that «school as a memory place is symbolic and material at the same time»<sup>23</sup>.

In this way, we consider the school network buildings that belong to PC as school memory buildings: memory-buildings that became a network of memory places, not in a memorial sense (as the ones that are preserved as a reflection of traumatic moments and/or related to violation of human rights), but in a narrative sense, being a material testimony of education and history of education in Portugal.

According to Silva<sup>24</sup>, PC schools are linked to tradition by keeping past culture in its own physical reality, but also in the image that they actually have. Once again we

<sup>17</sup> N. Portas, *A evolução da arquitectura moderna em Portugal*, «História da Arquitectura Moderna», Lisboa, Arcádia, 1973-78, vol. 2, chapter 7 (cit. in Bessa, *Arquitetura e memória do Estado Novo ao 25 de Abril*, cit., p. 143).

<sup>18</sup> M. Teixeira, *A escola como lugar de memória*, in *Anais do XXVIII Simpósio Nacional de História «Lugares dos historiadores: velhos e novos desafios»* (Florianópolis, 27-31 July 2015), Florianópolis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2015 Last updated: 2015, [http://www.snh2015.anpuh.org/resources/anais/39/1428380432\\_ARQUIVO\\_AESCOLACOMOLUGARDEMEMORIA-MariaLucia.pdf](http://www.snh2015.anpuh.org/resources/anais/39/1428380432_ARQUIVO_AESCOLACOMOLUGARDEMEMORIA-MariaLucia.pdf) (last access: 21.02.2022).

<sup>19</sup> F. Silva, *Primary school architecture in Portugal: A case study* (cit. in C. Monteiro, *Arquitetura escolar: o valor patrimonial como procura de identidade na reabilitação*, Master in Architecture (Supervisor: André Miguel Guimarães dos Santos), Porto, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, a.a. 2020, p. 69).

<sup>20</sup> Teixeira, cit., n.p.

<sup>21</sup> O. Lazzarotti, *Habiter la condition géographique*, Paris, Éditions Belin, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> M. Lussault, *Mettre l'expérience extrascolaire en lien avec la pratique scolaire*, «Diversité», n. 191, 2018, pp. 13- 17.

<sup>23</sup> Teixeira, cit., n.p.

<sup>24</sup> M. Dallari Bucci, *Arquitetura da Memória: a construção de uma rede de lugares de memória a ditadura militar na cidade de São Paulo*, Trabalho final de Graduação (Supervisor: Renato Cymbalista). São Paulo,

perceive that these are memory-buildings that reflect and report the past, rooting deep in people's collective memory. Santos<sup>25</sup> states that «memory, according to Rousseau, is acknowledgement. Is through collective memory that social groups conform, acquiring their individuality and an image of the space occupied by them»<sup>26</sup>. We perceive a cultural link between architecture and memory reflected in the collective with heritage echoes. Specifically in the PC buildings: these edifications present a particular form of heritage; they reflect different teaching conceptions<sup>27</sup> and form a reference of national collective memory.

### 3. Memory preservation

Emigration in the 1960's and 1970's in Portugal reduced its population, leading to profound demographic changes. An aging population left many communities without children. This decrease brought the closure of many primary schools in the 1990's, and even more at the beginning of the new millennia, especially in the center of the mainland.

Cordeiro, Gama and Barros<sup>28</sup> refer to an unbalance between supply and demand, which would have led to a major paradox: «too few students, too many schools in low density regions». Many villages didn't have enough children to make even ten classes of students, which brought to the closure of many schools. Between 2001/2002 and 2005/2006, 370 primary schools were shut down in the district of Guarda<sup>29</sup>. In 2012, Portugal closed 3 720 school units<sup>30</sup>, but since 1961 the number of closures totals more than 13.000<sup>31</sup>. Thousands of buildings were deactivated: no longer having a scholastic use, they ended up in the custody of town halls.

Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo, a.a. 2015; L. Kharoubi, *Architecture comme Mémoire et Emotion*, Master in Architecture (Supervisor: Christoffel Boghaert), Louvain, Faculté d'architecture, ingénierie architecturale, urbanisme de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, a.a. 2020; V. Riou, *L'architecture du souvenir et l'immatériel-mémoriel des lieux*, Last updated: n.d., <https://dpearea.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/v-riou.pdf> (last access: 15.01.2022).

<sup>25</sup> J. Silva, *Primary school architecture in Portugal: A case study*, s.l., OECD, 2008 Last updated: n.d., <https://www.oecd.org/portugal/40802346.pdf> (last access: 01.02.2022).

<sup>26</sup> N. Marques dos Santos, *Arquitetura e memória. O palheiro como objeto de identidade territorial*, Master in Architecture (Supervisor: Susana Luísa Mexia Lobo), Coimbra, Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra, a.a. 2016, p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> Repositório Digital da História da Educação, *Apresentação*, Last updated: n.d., <http://193.137.22.223/pt/patrimonio-educativo/museu-virtual/exposicoes/os-edificios-escolares-do-plano-dos-centenarios/apresentacao/> (last access: 05.02.2022).

<sup>28</sup> A. Cordeiro, R. Gama, C. Barros, *Reorganização de rede escolar em territórios de baixa densidade em Portugal. Construção de uma matriz de análise*, 2016, Faro, Universidade do Algarve, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ordem dos Arquitectos, *Vendem-se escolas*, Last updated: n.d., <https://arquitectos.pt/?no=202015347:012007> (last access: 10.02.2022).

<sup>30</sup> *Fecharam 3720 escolas básicas desde 2005*, «TVI Notícias», 24 July 2012, Last updated: 24.07.2012, <https://tvi.iol.pt/noticias/sociedade/tecnologia/fecharam-3720-escolas-basicas-desde-2005> (last access: 9.02.2022).

<sup>31</sup> Pordata: Base de Dados Portugal Contemporâneo, cit.

In an attempt to seek some kind of social benefit in this heritage, since these school buildings lost their primary use, today they welcome local associations and services oriented to the aged<sup>32</sup>. Portuguese regions that lost a great number of these schools now instead have Institutions for the elder. There are several reports of this kind of transformation in different places, such as Chaves<sup>33</sup>, Montalegre<sup>34</sup>, Braga<sup>35</sup>, Barcelos<sup>36</sup>, Caldas da Rainha<sup>37</sup>, among others. Another way to monetize these buildings came by public auctions, which lead to different uses, such as social housing, restaurants<sup>38</sup>, even private homes<sup>39</sup> and mortuary houses<sup>40</sup>. Despite these assorted approaches and different objectives, they all share the same goal: to recover the past.

There is a will to rehabilitate and preserve the PC network of school buildings, because there is also a desire to preserve memories, in order to avoid any withering of their identitarian stories. Most closures have happened in the countryside, and that has increased the interest in maintaining these primary schools, since their buildings could be considered the soul of these rural places. We must stress that PC school buildings, in a time when life in most villages withers, are a kind of physical memory of former happy days, when children bustle, whereas nowadays silence seems to thrive. Once deactivated, these structures decay, and memories fade away with them, for according to António Mendes «the closure of any school in the countryside contributes to the destruction of a

<sup>32</sup> Ordem dos Arquitectos, *Vendem-se escolas*, cit.

<sup>33</sup> *Chaves: escolas encerradas transformadas em equipamentos para idosos*. «Público», 22 August 2006, Last updated: 22.08.2006, <https://www.publico.pt/2006/08/22/local/noticia/chaves-escolas-encerradas-transformadas-em-equipamentos-para-idosos-1267965> (last access: 08.02.2022).

<sup>34</sup> *Antiga escola primária de Padornelos transformada em centro de dia*, «Jornal de Notícias», 17 August 2011, Last updated: 17/08/2011, <https://www.jn.pt/local/noticias/vila-real/montalegre/antiga-escola-primaria-de-padornelos-transformada-em-centro-de-dia-1953469.html> (last access: 08.02.2022).

<sup>35</sup> *Antiga escola primária transformada em lar de idosos em Amares*, «O Minho», 17 June 2016, Last updated: 17.06.2016, <https://ominho.pt/antiga-escola-primaria-transformada-em-lar-de-idosos-em-amares/> (last access: 10.02.2022).

<sup>36</sup> *Escola primária transformada em “lar inovador” para idosos em Mesão Frio*, «Diário de Notícias», 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017 Last updated: 01.07.2017, <https://www.dn.pt/lusa/escola-primaria-transformada-em-lar-inovador-para-idosos-em-mesao-frio-8524259.html> (last access: 10.02.2022).

<sup>37</sup> *Antiga escola primária de Salir de Matos transformada em centro de dia*, «Jornal das Caldas», 4 May 2021, Last updated: 04.05.2011, <https://jornaldascaldas.pt/2021/05/04/antiga-escola-primaria-de-salir-de-matos-transformada-em-centro-de-dia/> (last access: 08.02.2022).

<sup>38</sup> *Escolas transformadas em restaurantes e museus*, «Diário de Notícias», 10 October 2009, Last updated: 10.10.2009, <https://www.dn.pt/dossiers/politica/eleicoes-autarquicas-2009/noticias/escolas-transformadas-em-restaurantes-e-museus-1386398.html> (last access: 10.02.2022); *Elvas: antiga escola primária de Vila Fernando transformada em turismo rural*, «O Digital», 31 May 2021, Last updated: 31.05.2021, <https://odigital.sapo.pt/elvas-antiga-escola-primaria-de-vila-fernando-transformada-em-turismo-rural/> (last access: 08.02.2022); J. Mourão Carvalho, *Escolas desativadas. Os espaços novos que dão vida às aldeias*, «Jornal N», 8 September 2021, Last updated: 08.09.2021, [https://online.sapo.pt/artigo/745800/escolas-desativadas-os-espacos-novos-que-dao-vida-as-aldeias?seccao=Portugal\\_i](https://online.sapo.pt/artigo/745800/escolas-desativadas-os-espacos-novos-que-dao-vida-as-aldeias?seccao=Portugal_i) (last access: 08.02.2022).

<sup>39</sup> A autora deste artigo adquiriu um edifício da rede de escolas do CP para residência própria.

<sup>40</sup> V. Alevato, *Vila de Rei: antiga escola primária será transformada em casa mortuária*, «Mediatejo.net», 27 February 2017, Last updated: 27.02.2017 <https://www.mEDIATEJO.NET/vila-de-rei-antiga-escola-primaria-sera-transformada-em-casa-mortuaria/> (last access: 08.02.2022); Diana fm, *Antiga escola de Arraiolos transformada em casa mortuária*, Last updated: 20.05.2020, <https://www.dianafm.com/antiga-escola-de-arraiolos-transformada-em-casa-mortuaria/> (last access: 08.02.2022).

nation's cultural identity»<sup>41</sup>. Reichert, Oliveira and Franzen<sup>42</sup> refer that identity crystallizes through social relationships and through the feeling of belonging that each individual builds in his social environment. Regarding that, PC schools that have been recovered reinforce this identitarian relationship of belonging locally and nationally: throughout the country there is a feeling that these schools must be maintained. Other than cultural identity preservation, it is important to preserve historical buildings<sup>43</sup>. As the mayor of Salvaterra de Magos stresses, when he refers to the recovery of a primary school in his country, saying that «it is a centenary building that is important to preserve»<sup>44</sup>. At the same time, Sousel's mayor stresses that «it is urgent to give some dignity to this space, in the village's core, for it has been inactive since the construction of the new School Center»<sup>45</sup>.

Having been born during a dictatorship regime, and having grown in number through decades, the buildings of the PC school network were inhabited by thousands of children. These children lived their school routine, and this routine impregnated them of memories. The very configuration of school buildings helped to cement these memories. Due to this, after the closure of thousands of schools, there was a need to preserve the buildings. We found that identity, heritage and dignity are values that drive the will to recover, rehabilitate, maintain and preserve a collective memory that is stamped in the model blueprint of these schools: «an intervention in built heritage [can] physically bring memories and past traditions»<sup>46</sup>. Rehabilitation in school buildings from the past that dignify the present aims to project themselves into the future as teaching memorials, while their architecture stimulates identity and belonging throughout PC's school network.

<sup>41</sup> *Escola dá vida a aldeia*, «Correio da Manhã», 21 June 2004, Last updated: 21.07.2004, <https://www.cmjournal.pt/portugal/detalhe/escola-da-vida-a-aldeia> (Last access: 08.02.2022).

<sup>42</sup> B. Reichert, P. Oliveira, D. Franzen, *Arquitetura, memória e identidade: interfaces do património edificado no extremo-oeste catarinense*, «Revista Grifos», n. 43, 2017, pp. 157-190.

<sup>43</sup> F. Matias Cristóvão, *Reabilitar o passado para reutilizar no futuro: proposta de intervenção numa antiga escola primária*, Dissertação de Mestrado em Arquitectura, Departamento de Engenharia (Supervisor: Jorge Manuel da Silva Carlos). Covilhã, Universidade da Beira Interior, a.a. 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Câmara Municipal de Salvaterra de Magos, *Reabilitação da antiga escola primária "O Século" em Salvaterra de Magos*, Last updated: n/d, <https://www.cm-salvaterredemagos.pt/informacoes/noticias/item/3983-reabilitacao-da-antiga-escola-primaria-o-seculo-em-salvaterra-de-magos> (last access: 11.02.2022), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Sousel: *Câmara Municipal vai reabilitar antiga Escola Padre Joaquim Maria Fernandes*, «Diário Campanário», 3 March 2020, Last updated: 03.03.2020 <https://www.radiocampanario.com/ultimas/regional/sousel-camara-municipal-vai-reabilitar-antiga-escola-padre-joaquim-maria-fernandes> (last access: 11.02.2022).

<sup>46</sup> F. Matias Cristóvão, *Reabilitar o passado para reutilizar no futuro: proposta de intervenção numa antiga escola primária*, Dissertação de Mestrado em Arquitectura, Departamento de Engenharia (Supervisor: Jorge Manuel da Silva Carlos), Covilhã, Universidade da Beira Interior, a.a. 2016, p. 2.



# Memory and Celebration of the “Heroic Youth”. The Youth Organisations of the Mussolini Regime, School and the Creation of the “New Fascist Man”

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## 1. *The youth organizations of fascism and the totalitarian socialization of the new generations*

For the totalitarian regimes that emerged in Europe between the two world wars, the matter of the ideological and political education of young people, of their placement in suitable mass organizations designed to «temper their body and spirit» in light of the inspiring principles of the totalitarian ideology, and of their mobilization to support the regime itself was destined to take on special relevance<sup>1</sup>.

A somewhat exemplary case, in this respect, is the fascist regime that was established in Italy in the aftermath of the march on Rome of 28 October 1922 and that was destined to remain in power for around twenty years, until 25 July 1943<sup>2</sup>. With specific regard to the Mussolini regime, in fact, some scholars have talked about a sort of «identity relationship that fascism maintained with the notion of youth», which, far from representing a mere age category, was considered to be an «expression of the positive absolute» and the synthesis of «a vast range of civic, moral and aesthetic values at the same time». This led to the fascist regime's political choice to make young people «the focus of its own action and the central point of its organizational system»<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See A. Klönne, *Jugend im Dritten Reich. Die Hitlerjugend und ihre Gegner*, Dusseldorf-Köln, Diederichs, 1982; D. Caroli, *Ideali, ideologie e modelli formativi. Il movimento dei pionieri in URSS, 1922-1939*, Milano, Unicopli, 2015<sup>2</sup>. With specific reference to Italian fascism see R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936*, Torino, Einaudi, 1974, pp. 235 ff.

<sup>2</sup> On the origins and development of the fascist regime in Italy there is a considerable amount of studies and research. We will just recall here: R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista. Vol. 1: La conquista del potere, 1921-1925*, Torino, Einaudi, 1966; Id., *Mussolini il fascista. Vol.2: L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista, 1925-1929*, Torino, Einaudi, 1968; Id., *Mussolini il duce. Vol. 1: Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936*, Torino, Einaudi, 1974; Id., *Mussolini il duce. Vol. 2: Lo Stato totalitario, 1936-1940*, Torino, Einaudi, 1981; P.G. Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo. Miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1985; E. Gentile, *Storia del Partito Fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1989; Id., *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918-1925)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996; Id., *La via italiana al totalitarismo. Il partito e lo Stato nel regime fascista*, Roma, Carocci, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> L. Malvano, *Il mito della giovinezza attraverso l'immagine: il fascismo italiano*, in G. Levi, J.C. Schmitt (edd.), *Storia dei giovani. Vol. 2: L'età contemporanea*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000, pp. 311-314.

It is no surprise that, with reference to fascism, a sort of «youth ideology»<sup>4</sup> emerged which was based on the conviction that Italian youth itself, having survived the trenches of the First World War, created and was the authentic protagonist of the birth of the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* – the political movement founded in Milan by Benito Mussolini on 23 March 1919 – and of the real national revolution – culminated with the March on Rome of 28 October 1922 – which led to the dissolution of the liberal, bourgeois «old Italy» and to the creation of the totalitarian fascist state<sup>5</sup>.

In view of these considerations, it is easy to explain the emphasis with which fascism, right from the beginning, took charge on the one hand of operating a sort of totalitarian socialization of the younger generations through the mobilization and placement in the regime's mass youth organizations, and on the other to promote the emergence of a new political class based on a systematic program of political and ideological education designed to imbue the new Italian youth with the fascist spirit.

To this end, already as of January 1920 the first youth organization of the Mussolini movement had been formed. It was the Student Avant-garde of Italian fascist combat bands which – after the extension of its membership only to students but also to “young people in the factories and in the fields” – the following year assumed the more comprehensive title of *Avanguardia Giovanile Fascista* (Fascist Youth Avant-garde)<sup>6</sup>. During the same year 1920, the University Fascist Groups were officially formed, bringing together university students who, since 1919, had been joining the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* first and, later, the National Fascist Party<sup>7</sup>.

In the period immediately after fascism obtained power, in particular after its transformation into a totalitarian regime (1925), the matter of the placement and the ideological and political training of young people took on a special urgency and was made the subject of a series of systematic interventions<sup>8</sup>. With the Law No. 2247 of 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1926, first of all, the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* was set up for the aid and the physical and moral education of young people, bringing together young people of both sexes between 8 and 17 years old<sup>9</sup>. Subsequently, for the purposes of completing the process

<sup>4</sup> See M.A. Ledeen, *Italian fascism and youth*, «The Journal of Contemporary History», vol. IV, n. 3, 1969, pp. 137-154.

<sup>5</sup> L. La Rovere, «Rifare gli italiani: l'esperimento di creazione dell'«uomo nuovo» nel regime fascista», «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 9, 2002, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> See P. Nello, *L'avanguardismo studentesco alle origini del fascismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> See B. Garzarelli, *Un aspetto della politica totalitaria del PNF: i Gruppi universitari fascisti*, «Studi storici», vol. 38, n. 4, 1997, pp. 1121-1161; L. La Rovere, *Storia dei Guf. Organizzazione, politica e miti della gioventù universitaria fascista, 1919-1943*, Torino, Bollati-Boringhieri, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See, in this regard, the lively debate on young people and the problem of the formation of a new authentically fascist ruling class held since 1927 on the columns of «Critica Fascista», the magazine directed by Giuseppe Bottai, and the speech by Benito Mussolini *Punti fermi sui giovani*, published in the same magazine on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1930. See P. Nello, *Mussolini e Bottai: due modi diversi di concepire l'educazione fascista dei giovani*, «Storia Contemporanea», vol. VIII, n. 2, 1977, pp. 335-366; L. Passerini, *La giovinezza metafora del cambiamento sociale. Due dibattiti sui giovani nell'Italia fascista e negli Stati Uniti degli anni Cinquanta*, in Levi, Schmitt (edd.), *Storia dei giovani*, cit., pp. 386-421.

<sup>9</sup> See N. Zapponi, *Il partito della gioventù. Le organizzazioni giovanili del fascismo, 1926-1943*, «Storia Contemporanea», July-October 1982, pp. 569-633; C. Betti, *L'Opera nazionale balilla e l'educazione fascista*,



of orientation of the Italian youth in the regime's organizations, on 8 October 1930 the *Fasci Giovanili di Combattimento*, designed to welcome boys and girls between the ages of 18 and 21, were established<sup>10</sup>.

A further and more effective intervention on this front occurred in the second half of the 1930s, following the conclusion of the war in Ethiopia and the proclamation of the Empire. With the Royal Decree of 27<sup>th</sup> October 1937, Benito Mussolini established the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*, the «unitary and totalitarian organization of the youth forces of the fascist regime», which «responded directly to the Secretary of the National Fascist Party», into which both the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and the *Fasci giovanili di Combattimento*<sup>11</sup> merged. Among the designated aims of the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* were in particular «the spiritual, sporting and pre-military preparation» of the Italian youth and the «teaching of physical education in elementary and junior high schools»<sup>12</sup>.

Starting especially from the second half of the 1920s, in parallel with the development of organizational and institutional aspects and the launching of initiatives for the diffusion and establishment of fascist youth organizations through the peninsula, the Mussolini regime undertook to anchor such training offer to a veritable *mystique of duty and heroism* to be promoted through specific publications directed to the Italian youth. The aim of such publications was to instill in the new generations the «fascist spirit» destined to turn them into «new Italians», that is to «redo not the appearances of the human life, but its content, the man, the character, the faith»<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. *The origins of the «pedagogy of the fascist exemplarity»: the cult of the origins and the mystique of duty and heroism*

As already mentioned, the dissemination among the ranks of the Italian youth of an educational perspective inspired by a sort of «mystique of duty and heroism» was entrusted to a series of publications destined to circulate both in school rooms – in the form of «additional readings» together with schoolbooks – and in the local premises of

Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> See R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Vol. 2: Lo Stato totalitario, 1936-1940*, Torino, Einaudi, 1981, pp. 126-135. For further interesting documentation, see A. Starace, *Fasci giovanili di combattimento*, Milano, Mondadori, 1933.

<sup>11</sup> See Zapponi, *Il partito della gioventù. Le organizzazioni giovanili del fascismo, 1926-1943*, cit., pp. 569-633. For an extensive documentation, also see A. Starace, *Gioventù italiana del Littorio*, Milano, Mondadori, 1939.

<sup>12</sup> R.D.L. 27 ottobre 1937, n. 1839 – Istituzione della *Gioventù italiana del Littorio*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», XVI, n. 267, 12 November 1937, parte prima, pp. 4057-4059. Cf. E. Gentile, *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1993, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> P. Piovani, *Funzione educativa del Fascismo*, «Politica nuova», 1-5 November 1941. See also G. Pini, *I giovanissimi*, «Il Popolo d'Italia», 5 February 1927. For an authoritative confirmation of what is being said, see B. Mussolini, *Messaggio per l'anno IX (27 ottobre 1930)*, in Id., *Opera Omnia*, edited by E. e D. Susmel, Firenze, La Fenice, 1951-1980, 36 vols., XXIV, p. 283.

the youth organizations of the regime – as tools of «moral and political education» of the members.

It is the case, first of all, of texts such as *Giovinezza* (1922), *I vincitori continui. Per una traccia ideale dell'Avanguardismo fascista* (1926) and *Balilla* (1927) by Asvero Gravelli<sup>14</sup>, one among the first and most committed leaders of the student groups within the National Fascist Party and, from 1923, secretary of the *Fascist Youth Avant-garde*. His works were destined to begin this peculiar line of publications and to inspire a great deal of the following literary production of the same kind<sup>15</sup>.

It is also the case of publications such as *La storia e l'opera del fascismo* (1931) by Luigi Pratesi, *Giovinezza eroica* (1931) by Giuseppe Di Sandro<sup>16</sup>, and of the booklets *Vita fascista. Per i Balilla e le Piccole Italiane* (1932, 2 voll.) and *Vita fascista. Per le Avanguardie, per i Giovani e le Giovani Italiane* (1933) by Piero Domenichelli, promoter and director of the well known series «Quaderni di propaganda fascista per i giovani e per il popolo» by the Florentine publisher Bemporad<sup>17</sup>. Other examples are Giuseppe Sangiorgi's *Balilla* (1934) and the homonymous text given to the press in the same year 1934 by Pietro Camporilli, with which the Roman publisher Ardita inaugurated the collection of books for the fascist youth «Collana di monografie sull'ardimento italiano in ogni tempo. Gioventù eroica»<sup>18</sup>.

Finally, there are also later publications belonging to the same thread like *Giovinezza in marcia* (1937) by Ottorino Paraninfo and *Giovinezza Eroica* (1938) by Renzo Bianchi<sup>19</sup>.

There is a series of booklets distinct from the official publications of the Central Presidency and the Provincial Committees of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and, later, of the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* (statutes, regulations, collections of fascist hymns and chants, brochures and manuals of physical and premilitary education, etc.), which were generally issued by teachers, journalists and party officials directly involved in the activities of youth organizations. They are written with a plain language and are of modest typographical and editorial style but nonetheless rich of illustrations in black and white and in color, and their low cost was meant to encourage a wider distribution, which is testified by their frequent reissues and reprints.

The aim of such educational publications was to perpetuate in the younger generations «the memory of those who managed to increase the power and the glory

<sup>14</sup> A. Gravelli, *Giovinezza. Opuscolo di propaganda fascista*, Roma, Direzione del P.N.F., 1922; Id., *I vincitori continui. Per una traccia ideale dell'Avanguardismo fascista*, Roma, Editrice Libreria del Littorio, 1925 (2<sup>a</sup> ediz. 1926); Id., *Balilla*, presentazione di S.E. Benito Mussolini, Milano, Edizioni Alba, 1927.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Canali, Gravelli, Asvero, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-2009, 73 vols., vol. 58, 2002 (available online at: [www.treccani.it](http://www.treccani.it)).

<sup>16</sup> L. Pratesi, *La storia e l'opera del fascismo. Corso di cultura fascista per la nuova gioventù italiana*, Livorno, Tip. Benvenuti e Cavaciocchi, 1931; G. Di Sandro, *Giovinezza eroica*, Milano, Liber Editrice, 1931.

<sup>17</sup> P. Domenichelli, *Vita Fascista. Per i Balilla e le Piccole Italiane*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1932, 2 vols.; Id., *Vita Fascista. Per le Avanguardie, per i Giovani e le Giovani Italiane*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1933.

<sup>18</sup> G. Sangiorgi, *Balilla. Asterischi dedicati all'educazione della gioventù italiana*, Bari, Tip. Giuseppe Favia, 1934; P. Caporilli, *Balilla*, Roma, Ardita, 1934.

<sup>19</sup> O. Paraninfo, *Giovinezza in marcia. Appunti di cultura fascista*, Milano, Optima, 1937; R. Bianchi, *Giovinezza Eroica*, Roma Gioventù Italiana del Littorio, 1938.

of the Homeland»<sup>20</sup>. In other words, their purpose was to instill in the young people of the youth organizations of the regime the «intimately fascist» spirit and the warlike virtues of the generation «tempered by the fire of the battles on the Karst» and of the «glorious maniples of the Black Shirts» that had saved Italy from the «Bolshevik fury» in the immediate post-war period:

We must create – said Mussolini in this regard in October 1926 –; we of this age and this generation, it is up to us, I tell you, to make the face of the homeland physically and spiritually unrecognizable in ten years. In ten years, comrades, Italy will be unrecognizable! We will have transformed it, we will have made something else of it. [...] We will create the new Italian, an Italian that will not resemble that of yesterday. These are the generations of those who made the war and are therefore intimately fascist. Then will come the generations of those whom we educate today and create in our image and likeness: the legions of the *balilla* and the *avant-gardists*<sup>21</sup>.

These instructions were the inspiration behind the first and most significant of the booklets dedicated to the Italian youth mentioned above: *Balilla* by Asvero Gravelli – published in Milan in 1927 with an authoritative presentation written by Mussolini himself –, which was to actually be the real ‘manifesto’ of the education focused on the *mystique of duty and heroism*.

From the very beginning, Gravelli stated the aim of his text: it was to make «the hope and the dream to give a unified and fascist name to all the Italian youth» come true, to promote «the fascist spirit in young people, giving them ideal guidance»:

The generation that faces life today – he wrote –, is the generation of the sun, and instinctively aimed at courageous actions. It is necessary to prepare the Homeland for her people of the future, her heroic people, to mark her destiny; to give her a clear sense of existence, and pride, loyalty, disinterest, courage, tenacity, probity as the custom of the new Italian wants. Young people are the heralds of a will for conquest and victory. [...] Fascism will teach them to meet every glorious work with the one cry: «Further beyond! Further beyond!»<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, it was necessary «to create and arouse in young people the heroic passion, [...] to imprint in the hearts of children the educational norms based on hierarchy and discipline»:

Fascist children – as the author went on – must grow in the school of honesty, rectitude, boldness and with a faith capable of eternalizing the Fascist era. [...] Young people are the driving force of Fascism and their spirit is pervaded by a deep mysticism that knows only duties<sup>23</sup>.

This work of formation of consciences, however, could not be achieved through the proposal of the old and now worn-out rhetorical formulas of traditional pedagogy, even

<sup>20</sup> A. Starace, *Fasci giovanili di combattimento*, Milano, Mondadori, 1933, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> B. Mussolini, *Al popolo di Reggio Emilia (30 ottobre 1926)*, in Id., *Opera Omnia*, edited by E. e D. Susmel, cit., vol. XXII (1926), p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> Gravelli, *Balilla*, cit., pp. 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

less by referring to empty and inconsistent models of behavior inspired by bourgeois individualism.

In order to instill in the young generations «the need to believe, to fight for an ideal, even if it costed them to sacrifice completely»<sup>24</sup>, it was necessary to educate them to «the myth of Mussolini [...] model of the virile, moral and physical qualities of the fascist man» and, at the same time, point out for them the cult of the origins through «the epic transfiguration of the memory of war and squadristism»<sup>25</sup>.

Hence the exaltation of the «war» and the reference to the «sublime and melancholic sense of dying» that should have inspired the fascist youth and nourished their heroism and passion for great ventures:

War – said Asvero Gravelli –, the spirit of war, the echo of it [...] in the soul of many adolescents, the images of Glory lit in their Hearts, the desire to be something, to do something, and the pride of a heroic feat from an instinctive mystical sense of their young life and incited by the example of fallen peers [...], the need to express [their] energy through strong and violent actions<sup>26</sup>.

But also the constant reference to the «myth of Mussolini» and his role as «guide and supreme leader of the Fascist Revolution»:

Benito Mussolini – as we read in *Balilla* –. His Name and his story already resonate as legendary. He was followed by men and children, a small handful at first, then, through heroism and sacrifice, a cohort and a legion, finally a people, a redeemed people who sang and knew how to die because they wanted to win. So many children fell like this, facing the sun, among the wheat spikes, or in the ambushes! Because only the young know how to die!<sup>27</sup>.

In the rest of the treatise, Asvero Gravelli stressed the specific virtues that should have inspired the children in the youth organizations of the regime on several occasions:

Child, you rise to a school of heroism and shape your soul, you base your life on many sacrifices. [...] You must prove yourself worthy to wear the fascist uniform: you must feel the pride of being better than others. The Black Shirt means daring, and the courage that is given by the honesty and purity of the soul must be your first virtue. [...] The beauty and joy of feeling Italian and fascist must shine in you. You are the man of tomorrow and the Homeland will be entrusted to your heart and its greatness will be your victory. [...] You must be the new Italian. [...] The new generations have the sacred duty to guard jealously the legacy of virtue and heroism inherited from our great ones and to be at the forefront of every movement that leads us to a superior greatness of our Italy<sup>28</sup>.

At the same time, the author highlighted the «heroic spirit» and the «common ideals» that should have bound indissolubly the new generation of *Balilla* and *Avant-gardists* «to the Martyrs of Fascism fallen in the radiance of their youth»:

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> La Rovere, «*Rifare gli italiani*»: *l'esperimento di creazione dell'«uomo nuovo» nel regime fascista*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> Gravelli, *Balilla*, cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-31.

Your Saints – wrote Gravelli to the young fascists, quoting Mussolini – are Balilla and Mameli, the adolescents Curtatone and Montanara, Oberdan and Rismondo, and the countless others that from the '15 to the '18 left the classrooms for the trenches, went to the assault shouting: *Long Live Italy!* And today they rest in small, forgotten cemeteries. Italian youth of all the schools and all the worksites, let the Homeland not miss her radiant future: let the 20<sup>th</sup> Century see Rome, center of the Latin civilization, ruler of the Mediterranean, as the beacon of light for all the peoples<sup>29</sup>.

The need «for a serious spiritual orientation for young people» and for an education of the consciences inspired by the *mystique of duty and heroism* necessarily implied a reference to the example «of the Fallen and the Martyrs of the Fascist Faith», whose deeds, specifically narrated and made the object of a real cult, should have inspired the thoughts and choices of the children and the young men of the regime.

It is not surprising that, especially since 1926 – year of the foundation of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* – the *pedagogy of the fascist exemplarity* advocated in *Balilla* by Asvero Gravelli has found a systematic and growing reception in the varied educational publications for the youth referenced above.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, we will now examine the work that can in all respects be considered most representative of this *pedagogy of the fascist model*, namely the already mentioned volumes on *Vita Fascista* for the new recruits in the youth organizations of Mussolini by Piero Domenichelli, printed between 1932 and 1933 by Florentine publisher Bemporad.

The two booklets *Vita Fascista. Per i Balilla e le Piccole Italiane* were a collection of tales of war and heroism («Racconti per i Balilla»), and of biographical profiles of the heroes and the martyrs of the First World War and the fascism of the origins («Giovinezza eroica dell'Italia guerriera» and «Martiri della Rivoluzione Fascista»), whose purposes were to build a Balilla «of few words, of cold courage, of tenacious industriousness, of blind discipline»; a young Italian «unrecognizable for the Italians of yesterday, as wished by the Duce»<sup>30</sup>.

Among the countless «heroic young boys» of the Great War narrated by Piero Domenichelli we find first of all Vittorio Montiglio, whose biography of «fighter and martyr of the Italian and fascist cause» allowed the author to establish a direct connection and a close link between the generation that had fought in the trenches of the First World War and the one that had become the protagonist of the fascist revolution culminated with the march on Rome of 28<sup>th</sup> October 1922:

The figure of the young hero Vittorio Montiglio has something legendary [...] He had two brothers at the front [in the Great War], two heroes decorated several times, and burned with the desire to reach them for his own honor [...], he was just fourteen years old. [...] His war life is a succession of heroic acts and serene disregard for danger. [...] The war was over for everyone, except for Vittorio Montiglio. The March on Ronchi and the period of Fiume came. He fled to Fiume and became a legionnaire. He took part in the whole D'Annunzio venture. [...] On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1924, while he was traveling to the Aviation Camp of Ghedi, he was attacked by some communists who were terribly annoyed by

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Domenichelli, *Vita Fascista. Per i Balilla e le Piccole Italiane*, cit., I, p. 29.

his heroism and his great love of the Homeland, and he was badly wounded. [...] The young hero, decorated with a gold medal at seventeen, is the living symbol of the fiery youth who fought the war, of those child soldiers who with their passion gave Italy the greatest victory against Powers prepared and armed to the teeth<sup>31</sup>.

The narration of «indomitable courage», of «heroic deeds», and of the glorification of the choice to sacrifice «for the good and glory of the homeland» was also the focus of the rapid biographical profiles of children and young people such as *Il Caporalino* of Pieve Tesino, in the Valsugana valley, «the eleven-year-old boy who wore the glorious uniform of the Italian soldier» and gave his life for his homeland «like a true soldier»<sup>32</sup>; or the very young squadrista *Antonio Strucchi*, «who died in the ambush of Casale, slaughtered by the Bolsheviks»<sup>33</sup>.

More articulated and rich in details was the narration of the deeds of the two heroic children *David Marcello* and *Aldo Sette*, whose unconditioned dedication to the Italian cause had made them martyrs. The first one, *David Marcello*:

Inspired by the ardor and the boldness of the Italian soldiers, he felt as strong and bold as they were and asked to fight. [...] so David Marcello became soldier and was able to fulfill his duty until the sacrifice of his life. *An example of heroism to Italian children, who will learn from him the firmness and the courage to fight against all the difficulties of life for the good and the glory of the Homeland*<sup>34</sup>.

Whereas the other one, *Aldo Sette*:

He was seventeen years old and was one of the Avant-gardists of the Fascio di Greco Milanese. It was the sad period of 1921 when the communist madness completely dominated the spirit of the people. In Milan, the ruthless struggle against the fighters and those who still loved the Homeland was stronger than elsewhere. [...] In the afternoon of 20<sup>th</sup> March 1921, a small group of fascists from Greco Milanese who took part in the commemorative ceremony of the Five Days of Milan were returning home singing, accompanied by militants from Milan who wanted to escort their companions. [...] The young fascists were largely unarmed, and the opponents, aware of this, came upon them and began to beat them. The young Aldo Sette was the only one who remained on the spot, standing straight, he defended himself by throwing rocks at his assailants, who were firing everywhere. To the young hero who, with his hair in the wind and his gaze firm and serene, was defending Italy with stones from the disturbance of the red madness, the comrades shouted: – Sette, pull back, they are going to kill you! – Never again! – answered the boy. – Come forth, my companions! Long live Italy – and he threw a stone as last defense. A rifle shot to the head left him dying. After a few minutes, Aldo Sette died<sup>35</sup>.

The third volume of *Vita Fascista. Per le Avanguardie, per i Giovani e le Giovani Italiane*, printed in 1933 by Piero Domenichelli and mainly addressed to older boys, had a different angle compared to the first two volumes. It included a large collection of texts signed by journalists, writers and prominent members of the National Fascist Party, and

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-110.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-119.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-135.



a series of Mussolini's speeches and anecdotes related to heroic episodes and significant events of the First World War and the origins of fascism. Their purpose was to recover the memory of the Italian youth that had sacrificed on the battlefields and to recall the «sacred duty» that united the young heroes of yesterday to the new generations of fascists, who were training in the youth organizations of the regime – veritable «gymnasiums for bravery» – to take up their legacy by taking in the «mystique of extreme sacrifice for the Homeland» that had animated and guided their «fathers and elder brothers»<sup>36</sup>.

It is no coincidence that, alongside the interventions and contributions of personalities such as Paolo Orano, Margherita Sarfatti, Nazareno Padellaro, Arnaldo Mussolini, Tommaso Marinetti, Italo Balbo, and Orio Vergani, in the third and last volume of *Vita Fascista* by Domenichelli there was a wide section entitled «I nostri Martiri» celebrating the memory of the young Black Shirts fallen during the revolution that led to the victory of Fascism in Italy:

And you, the avant-gardists of today – the author wrote –, the young fascists who are getting ready with meditation and awareness and with the outward exultation of the gatherings [...], to follow up in the ranks of the militia. [You] have the duty to look for the names of our heroes and martyrs, the countless names that must join the few ones that are remembered here; and [to look for] the deeds of each one of them for the ideal book to draw from as well as from the purest and most sacred sources of the Revolution and of the Fascist Homeland, of the Fascist Life to which we are tied by bonds of blood that will never break. Gather them, ideally, our martyrs, in the luminous vision of your eyes, in the incessant and total re-enactment, in a Sublime Legion, which was the truth of the Avant-gardism from which the one of today, which is yours, derives, carries out, moves forward<sup>37</sup>.

And in what was in all respects a sort of *martyrology of fascist youth*, Domenichelli's text proposed to the reader a dozen profiles of «young heroes of Mussolini», whose deeds were recalled according to the classical canons of the *pedagogy of the fascist exemplarity* already widely applied by the author in the two other volumes of *Vita Fascista. Per i Balilla e le Piccole Italiane*.

Thus, in recalling the «sacrifice» of *Federico Florio*, the young avant-gardist «who died on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1922, hit by a communist revolver», it was emphasized how he «being just a young man revealed himself to be a Hero with an ardent soul, a vigorous spirit, a very noble heart. Indomitable and desperate fighter». And the reader was urged to imitate «the sublime beauty of his bold deeds» to «honor Italy highly»<sup>38</sup>.

Likewise, in celebrating some of the «most radiant and purest martyrs» of the heroic «days of the '21, dear to the nostalgic memory of the squadristo», the multitude of «undefeated heroes» was honored: for «the victory of the blessed Cause», «contemptuous of the danger and careless of the enemy». They had not hesitated to go towards the extreme sacrifice and to make of death «a sign to scornfully carry on their chest». Among them was *Luigi Platania*, and it was exactly the bravery of his endeavors, his total «consecration» to the «Cause of the Homeland», his being an «enthusiastic and heroic

<sup>36</sup> Domenichelli, *Vita Fascista. Per le Avanguardie, per i Giovani e le Giovani Italiane*, cit., pp. 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.



fascist», that made the ex-fighter and squadrista «fallen on the field of glory» an authentic model and standard for the youth of Mussolini: «The life of Luigi Platania is sacred – wrote the author, moved –, sacred to the Homeland, sacred to Fascism!»<sup>39</sup>.

Similar tones, even though in the face of sometimes very different events and experiences, can be found also in the other profiles of the «young heroes and martyrs of the Fascist Revolution» proposed in the third and last volume of *Vita Fascista*.

The wide section of the work of Piero Domenichelli dedicated to the celebration of «I nostri Martiri», that is to say the presentation of the exploits of some of the young squadristi who stood out for their «heroism and disregard for danger» and who had «given their lives in extreme sacrifice for the homeland» during the «Revolution of the Black Shirts», ended with a collection of speeches by Benito Mussolini. The speeches effectively proposed the key orientations that inspired fascism in regard to the education of the young Italians in the youth organizations of the regime. At the same time, it reiterated the choice to feed such education to an actual *mystique of duty and heroism*:

Young generations belong entirely to us and there are no exceptions to this very firm fundamental rule. They must be raised with the spirit proper to the fascist discipline and it is, therefore, necessary that they diligently and regularly attend the institutions set up for them by the Regime. [...] This masculine and warlike education is necessary in Italy because for many centuries the military virtues of the people could not stand out. The war fought from 1915 to 1918 is the first one, since the wars during the Roman Empire, that has been fought and won by the Italian people.

Moreover:

There must be the Italians of Fascism, as distinctive as the Italians of the Renaissance and the Italians of the latinity. Only by creating a lifestyle, a way of living, we will be able to remain in the pages of history and not only in the chronicle. And what is this way of life? Courage, first of all; the fearlessness, the love for the risk, [...] always being ready to dare both in the individual and the collective life, to abhor anything that is sedentary; [...] the pride of being Italian at every hour of the day, the work discipline, the respect for the authority [...] The movement I created will keep carrying on, long after me. Who are the Balilla? They are the fascists of tomorrow. The future of Italy is safe in their hands. Even though Italy is not entirely fascist today, it will be so, when the young of today become adults<sup>40</sup>.

### 3. *The turning point of the early Thirties: the birth of the myth of the «Heroic youth» grown up «in the shade of the Littorio»*

It was in the early Thirties that the strategy pursued until then on the ideological and political education of the new generations within the youth organizations of the regime was destined to experience a real breakthrough.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-109.

In 1932, the text *Giovinezza eroica*, edited by the Central Presidency of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, was published in order «to remove it from the ephemeral life of newspapers and preserve it as a noble example of masculine education». It collected the memory of «the actions of today». In total, there were around 161 «heroic facts» having as protagonists 181 among Balilla and Avant-gardists, to whom it is necessary to add another 60 names of «young fascists» who distinguished themselves during great catastrophes (landslides, floods, etc.) for their «heroic sacrifice» and their commitment towards the community<sup>41</sup>.

The ultimate purpose of the publication, repeatedly reissued until the fall of fascism<sup>42</sup>, was to make manifest, «regardless of any official recognition», the «heroic value of the gestures, that the Presidency of the Opera pointed to the admiration and the example of all the young Black Shirts».

In other words, the choice to bring to the attention of the Italian youth in the organizations of the regime «this long theory of names and facts, the Golden Register of the Opera Nazionale Balilla» had a dual purpose: on the one hand, to reiterate «that the newest generations of the Littorio had not taken the Name only from the heroic Genoese young boy, nor the robe only from the daring squadristo of the first hour»; on the other hand – and this is certainly the most relevant aspect –, to prove how an institution such as the Opera Nazionale Balilla, which from its origins (1926) had made «the bravery and disregard of danger its own educational norm», had already fully succeeded in the immense and colossal task of transfusing «in our young people those virtues of the Latin race, which, dormant for some time, have found in the pure and vivifying atmosphere of Fascism a new bloom and new life»<sup>43</sup>.

In this regard, if the already mentioned works of Asvero Gravelli and Piero Domenichelli, like those of the many other writers placed in the so-called line of the *pedagogy of the Fascist exemplarity*, had the purpose of instilling in the youth of the regime the «fascist spirit» and the «warrior virtues» of the generation «tempered by the fire of the battles on the Karst» and the «glorious and heroic manes of the Black Shirts» that had brought to completion «the Fascist Revolution», the new publication – with the meaningful title *Giovinezza eroica* – intended to represent a sort of implicit confirmation of the effective success of the Mussolini project to create in the Balilla and the Avant-gardists «the new integrally fascist Italian». At the same time, it aimed at ensuring that the Italian youth «shaped in the image and likeness of the Duce» by the youth organizations of the regime would provide a model and a reference point for generations to come.

Therefore, the volume *Giovinezza eroica* was placed at the crossroads between the celebration of the «Italian virtues», too long set aside and now finally placed by fascism at the base of the ideological formation of the Italian youth, and the exaltation of the

<sup>41</sup> Opera Nazionale Balilla, *Giovinezza Eroica*, Roma, Presidenza Centrale dell'O.N.B., 1932, pp. 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> The Central Presidency of the Opera Nazionale Balilla also printed two other editions of the work that had been updated and enriched with further examples, respectively in 1934 and 1937. Later, the General Command of the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio took charge of the new editions that came out in 1940 and 1942.

<sup>43</sup> Opera Nazionale Balilla, *Giovinezza Eroica*, cit., pp. 3-4.

characteristics and qualities of the «new Italian» grown «in the shadow of the Littorio» and constantly guided by the example of the Duce and his reprimand to «live dangerously». The volume was supplied free of charge to all the members of the male branches of the Opera Nazionale Balilla and made the subject of reading and collective reflection not only in the classrooms (generally as an additional teaching aid to be added to the Single State Text in primary and public schools)<sup>44</sup>, but also during the meetings and the local gatherings of the fascist youth organization. In essence, it was a collection of short narratives of episodes of civil heroism, of tales of protection of fascist institutions and defense of the established order and the social coexistence that had as protagonists Balilla and Avant-gardists of different ages, social status and geographical origin. Their generalities and data relating to their militancy in the youth organizations of the regime were provided, as well as a full-length or half-length photograph, mainly in uniform or, in rare cases, with at least the badge of the Opera Nazionale Balilla, which intended to highlight the «bold and daring spirit» and the «martial traits» of the children and young people who became protagonists of the «heroic enterprises».

Through the analysis of the synthetic but precise accounts of the «episodes of heroism» reported in the publication, the analysis of the language used and the study of the type of «virtuous facts» selected to be exalted and celebrated, it is possible to highlight how the myth of the «heroic youth», forged by the youth organizations of the regime according to the principles of Mussolini's ideology (virile education, boldness, love of sacrifice, disregard for danger, etc.) is a fundamental chapter of the most comprehensive project of building the new fascist man. Namely, this was an attempt to promote – through the memory and celebration of the «heroic youth» through the school and associationism – a civil and political education of the young Italian generations entirely inspired by Mussolini's ideal.

Focused, as already mentioned, on acts of civil heroism, on the protection of fascist institutions and on the defense of social coexistence and of the established order, the episodes narrated in the pages of *Gioventù eroica* concern, first of all, the rescue of people in danger of drowning, the extinguishing of large fires or the intervention in favor of the victims of major tragedies and natural disasters.

Thus, the thirteen-year-old Giuseppe Airaghi from S. Stefano Ticino (Milan), Balilla belonging to the 161<sup>st</sup> Legion, had been awarded the bronze medal of civil value for having jumped «with generous enthusiasm in the deep waters of a canal to the rescue of a little girl, who after falling accidentally, carried by the current, was about to drown» and «having reached her, he managed with considerable effort to rescue her»<sup>45</sup>.

Similar recognition was given to the young Ambrogio Brivio from Maderno (Brescia), Balilla of the 44<sup>th</sup> Legion, who «on the morning of 8 September VI [1928], seeing a

<sup>44</sup> See A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Il libro per la scuola nel ventennio fascista. La normativa sui libri di testo dalla riforma Gentile alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale (1923-1945)*, Macerata, Alfabetica Edizioni, 2009, pp. 135-136.

<sup>45</sup> Opera Nazionale Balilla, *Giovinetza Eroica*, cit., p. 5.

six-year-old boy fall into the water, contemptuous of the danger he was facing, he threw himself completely dressed into the water and managed to rescue him»<sup>46</sup>.

Remarkable «courage» and «disregard for danger» were also shown by Oliviero Cattarini, Trieste, Avant-gardist of the 298<sup>th</sup> Legion, who «in the night of 17 August VI [1928] in the Port of New York, with grave danger and in extremely difficult conditions, saved the life of a woman, Assunta Esposito, honoring the Italian name abroad with his gesture, his value and his modesty»<sup>47</sup>.

There were also rescue episodes that saw the heroic rescuer succumb to the fury of the waters and the sudden loss of forces, as in the case of the thirteen-year-old Pierino Bertiglia from Brusaschetto (Alexandria), Balilla of the 382<sup>nd</sup> Legion, who, «shining example of courage and contempt for danger», after diving into the Cervo stream to rescue «a companion who accidentally fell where the water was deep», caught by «a sudden sickness, immediately fell to the bottom and miserably perished victim of his generous soul»<sup>48</sup>.

Also for what concerned the fires, very frequent especially in the small rural villages, Balilla and Avant-gardists stood out for their commitment and for the courage with which they faced the flames and came to the aid of the people. As is the case of the very young *Romeo Alessio*, originally from Calanna (Reggio Calabria), Balilla belonging to the 231<sup>st</sup> Legion, who «on the occasion of a very violent fire that destroyed three houses in his village, despising every danger, participated with courageous enthusiasm in the work of extinguishing the flames and saving», earning the applause and admiration of everyone present and of the «Soldiers of the M.V.S.N. [Voluntary National Security Militia]», who had arrived to bring rescue<sup>49</sup>.

Similar acts of courage and self-sacrifice had characterized other young people such as Nicolò Mangiaracina from Palermo, Avant-gardist of the 183<sup>rd</sup> Legion, or like the Milanese Sandro Manzoni, Virginio Tagliabue and Alfredo Geffert, who also belonged to the 158<sup>th</sup> Legion, who, among the mountains of Madesimo in Valle Spluga (in province of Sondrio), «with courage and contempt for danger», had worked «in the arduous work of extinguishing a fire that developed in one of the houses in the village»<sup>50</sup>.

Actually, the «episodes of youthful heroism» and the situations of «grave danger» in which Balilla and Avant-gardists had proved themselves enough to acquire merits and awards for Civic Valor were numerous. The fourteen-year-old war orphan Secondo Ugo Castellucci, Avant-gardist of the 101<sup>st</sup> Legion in Forlì, for example, was given a public commendation for having come to the aid of an injured man during a very serious car accident who was «about to be crushed by the rear wheels of a heavy truck» and for having «rescued him [...] with serious personal risk», putting his own life in danger<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Finally, a large group of Balilla and Neapolitan Avant-gardists of the 167<sup>th</sup> Legion had received an official commendation «for having distinguished themselves in the valiant work of rescue given on the occasion of the great landslide that occurred in Via Arenella» in Naples, during which the young fascists had not hesitated to risk, with «true disregard for danger», their very lives<sup>52</sup>.

Alongside the numerous cases of civil heroism, particular attention was paid, in the pages of *Giovinezza eroica*, to the episodes related to the fight against crime and the repression of subversive activities carried out by the «enemies of the Homeland». Particularly risky, on this side, were the feats carried out by many other young fascists, as in the case of the fifteen-year-old Antonio De Lorenzo, from Praia d'Arienta (Catanzaro), Avant-gardist of the 67<sup>th</sup> Legion, who «on 13<sup>th</sup> September VI [1927], with courage and disregard for the danger, leaped in pursuit of a dangerous criminal armed with a revolver who was captured after a bitter fight»<sup>53</sup>.

Likewise, Corrado Pacini, hailing from Monsummano (Pistoia), Avant-gardist of the 212<sup>th</sup> Legion, «[after] witnessing the act of violence that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> May VI [1927] in the hamlet of Monsummano Alto, in which the Black Shirt Beretti Vittorio found his death, with noble intent he launched himself unarmed in pursuit of the murderer Palamidessi Armando, regardless that, in the meanwhile, the latter stopped and shot him with repeated gunshots»<sup>54</sup>.

The same heroism had guided the actions of Cirillo Tempini, from Edolo (Brescia), Avant-gardist of the 44<sup>th</sup> Legion, who had «courageously assisted the Financial Guard Scaletti Emilio of the Edolo brigade who was struggling with five rebel rascals», who later turned out to be dangerous subversives who were preparing attacks in the area<sup>55</sup>.

A well-deserved reward for civil valor, finally, had been won by the Avant-gardists of the 31<sup>st</sup> Legion Michele Seneca and Pellegrino Leonardis, both originally from Molinara (Benevento), who, with «absolute disregard for danger», «on 6<sup>th</sup> October VI [1927] met six rascals armed with rifles and weapons. They confronted and disarmed them, driving them back to the barracks and thus facilitating the work of purging of the RR. CC. [Reali Carabinieri]»<sup>56</sup>.

In this case as well there had been «the young fascist martyrs» who, in showing themselves among «the most daring followers of the commandment of the Duce 'live dangerously'», had paid with their lives the choice to «fulfill their duty all the way»<sup>57</sup>.

The publication in the early Thirties of the booklet *Giovinezza eroica* (1932) aimed, as was already mentioned, at providing vivid evidence of the full and substantial success of Mussolini's project to turn the Balilla and the Avant-gardists into «the new Italian[s], entirely fascist». It was also destined to arouse a sort of redefinition of the theoretical

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88-91.

cornerstones of that «pedagogy of fascist exemplarity» which had found in the «mystique of duty and heroism» its primary reference and its most organic and incisive dimension.

It is certainly true that the call to heroism and self-denial of the generation that «sacrificed herself for the Homeland in the trenches of the Great War» and «of the young Black Shirts who had given their blood tribute to the Fascist Revolution» would have continued to inspire the educational work of the youth organizations of the regime. It is equally true, though, that this work would have found a further and even more incisive reference point in the sudden awareness that the children of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, who grew up «in the shadow of the Littorio», constituted at the same time the complete expression of the «new wholly fascist Italian» and the true model and reference point for the generations to come of the peninsula.





# School Jubilees as an Opportunity for the Implementation of New Instruments of Memory Building: the Case of the 150 Years of *Scuola Magistrale* in Locarno (Switzerland)

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## *Introduction*

This paper is being written while preparations for the celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the School for teacher education in Canton Ticino<sup>1</sup>, Switzerland (in Italian: *Scuola magistrale*, opened in November 1873) are underway. In the paper's second part I will try to read this anniversary as a Public history experience, using some parts of the *Manifesto della Public History of Education*<sup>2</sup> as an interpretative framework. Since the anniversary and the main events have been realized in autumn 2023, this paper differs from the version presented at Macerata. I am deeply grateful to my Italian colleagues for the interesting discussions during the Congress and for different suggestions I received for the project.

As we know, national school systems have deeply changed from what they were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – when they used to be an integral part of public administration in the context of nation-building projects – to what they have become in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, i.e. a part of complex multileveled education systems. The evolution may explain why in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, school jubilees have been very important in multilingualistic and multicultural Switzerland. This is particularly apparent in the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century, when aggressive nationalism in neighboring countries became a threat to the Confederation's independence, as well as in the period around World War II, when commemoration was also a form of national education and “teaching into democracy”. However, it must also be considered that in

<sup>1</sup> The school's Italian name is *Dipartimento formazione e apprendimento della Scuola universitaria della Svizzera italiana* (DFA-SUPSI), the official website is [www.supsi.ch/dfa](http://www.supsi.ch/dfa) (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>2</sup> The Manifesto's version we cite is that of September 2022, findable here: <https://aiph.hypotheses.org/il-gruppo-di-lavoro-sulla-public-history-of-education> (last access: 25.03.2023).



Fig. 1. Exhibition for the 100 years of the Cantonal Education Society (1938)

federalist Switzerland, a “federation of teaching states”<sup>3</sup>, commemorations have always been focused on cantonal histories in a process of local and cantonal identity-building.

For these reasons we can easily find, in the history of Italian-speaking Switzerland, initiatives remembering the foundation of Schools and Education societies. A booklet for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cantonal School of Commerce (a school for commercial employees), published in 1945, quotes:

Since the proposals were immediately accepted by the cantonal education board, the initiatives were quickly prepared, concerning: I. the preparation of a commemorating exhibition; II. an exhibition about didactics and schooling; III. the public commemoration on 22-23 September 1945<sup>4</sup>.

In 1938, the foundation of Ticino’s Educational Society (*Società Demopedeutica*) was also commemorated with an exhibition that stressed the role of Ticino’s “father of public education” and Federal Councilor Stefano Franscini (Figure 1).

As these examples show, educational jubilees or commemorations of persons (teachers, headmasters) usually take one of the following forms:

- Exhibitions, commemorative plaques, or monuments (Figure 2)
- Public events such as conferences and congresses
- Commemorative books

<sup>3</sup> R. Hofstetter, *La Suisse et l’enseignement aux XIXe-XXe siècles. Le prototype d’une «fédération d’États enseignants»?*, «Histoire de l’éducation», n. 134, 2012, pp. 59-80.

<sup>4</sup> *Il cinquantenario della Scuola cantonale di commercio, relazione sul biennio 1943-1944 e 1944-1945*, p. 5 (our translation). The document can be downloaded here: <https://fondo-gianini.supsi.ch/444/> (last access: 25.03.2023).

In rare circumstances, we find initiatives diverging from the main path and pursuing charitable objectives aimed at the development or improvement of schools. A good example is what happened in 1902 in the village of Tesserete, where in occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the upper primary school new benches were purchased by a committee of teachers and citizens<sup>5</sup>.

However, while preparing this paper we have uncovered that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century anniversaries did not appear so important in all moments of history. For example, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the School for Teacher education at Locarno in 1973 was not at all celebrated, neither was there a public debate about the centenary. We could not find any information in newspapers, pedagogical reviews etc. (year 1973), and when interviewing alumni, they confirmed their ignorance of the anniversary.

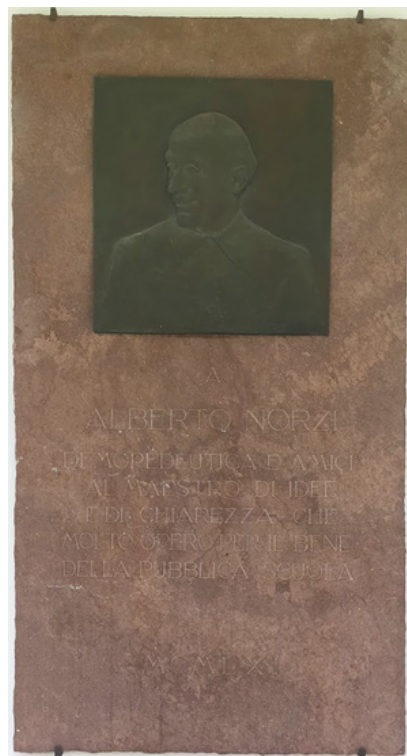


Fig. 2. Epitaph in the cloister of San Francesco Monastery, now DFA-SUPSI (Locarno)

### 1. *Point of departure: a dividing history, forgotten stories*

The institution that will be celebrated in November 2023 is thus the Cantonal Teacher Education School founded in 1873. This school was sometimes called Scuola magistrale and sometimes Scuola Normale, in line with the Swiss and European tradition of teacher education<sup>6</sup>. Until 1878 the school was located in the village of Pollegio, it was then relocated to Locarno where it has remained since then, causing a high impact on the local society and culture. Until 1942, it was a vocational post-elementary school (ISCED 3), it then evolved into a higher secondary school with vocational goals (ISCED 3) partly similar to the Italian *Istituto Magistrale* (with male and female sections). It

<sup>5</sup> O. Monti, *Osservazioni sulle visite alle scuole del Locarnese da parte di alcuni studenti della Normale Maschile di Locarno*, in W. Sahlfeld, Y. Cook, R. Falcade, O. Monti, F. Targhetta, *Leggere vecchi quaderni scolastici. Un'introduzione con letture di quaderni di allievi e maestri (1880-1920)*, Locarno, DFA-SUPSI, 2023, pp. 29-38, <https://www.supsi.ch/it/web/dfa/leggere-vecchi-quaderni-scolastici>.

<sup>6</sup> L. Criblez, *Das Lehrerseminar. Zur Entwicklung eines Lehrerbildungskonzeptes*, in L. Criblez, R. Hofstetter (edd.), *La formation des enseignant(e)s primaires. Histoire et réformes actuelles. Die Ausbildung von PrimarlehrerInnen. Geschichte und aktuelle Reformen*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2000, pp. 299-338; H.-U. Grunder, *Scuole magistrali*, in *Dizionario Storico della Svizzera*, Last update: 09.08.2012, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/028711/2012-08-09/> (last access: 28.08.2023).

must be mentioned that over this period it was the only upper secondary school in the region of Locarno (Ticino's only grammar school was in Lugano, and the Commercial upper secondary school for commercial employees was in Bellinzona), with the result that many young people attended the school but did not necessarily want to work as teachers. Students still lived (until 1986) as free pensionaries in the cloister of the ancient monastery that housed the school. Tensions due to what was perceived as poor curricular and institutional framework exploded in 1968 when Switzerland's first student rebellion began in Locarno<sup>7</sup>. In 1986 the *Scuola magistrale* became a post-secondary vocational school (ISCED 5) to be attended by students with a grammar school diploma.

The last important change was the transformation into a University of Teacher Education (ISCED 6) in 2002. It is highly symbolic that the name was changed in that moment, from *Scuola magistrale* to *Alta scuola pedagogica*<sup>8</sup>, a fact that was acknowledged but not accepted by the school's faculty. Many teachers left the school at that moment. The integration of the University of Teacher Education into the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI) was decided by the cantonal government with the aim of a better integration into the Swiss universities landscape<sup>9</sup> and higher performances in research and development.

This brief historical recount may explain why, even before launching the first celebratory initiatives, it was known that there was not a consensual interpretation of Locarno Teacher school's recent history. The following problems were especially known:

- the controversies about the curricular reforms at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century with the end of the post-secondary not academic Teacher school (ISCED 5) and the opening of the Teachers University (ISCED 6) in 2002 has never been really accepted by many of the teaching staff, with the result of strong conflicts between the rector and the faculty. Those conflicts are still fresh in the memory of many faculty members;
- the controversies about the integration into SUPSI as a result of a political decision was rejected by other faculty members who left the school in that moment.

This meant that it had to be determined if and how to make the Jubilee a dialogue between different points of view without reopening recent conflicts. The question was political, ethic, and scientific, and we thought Public History could be a way to manage these elements. The Italian Public History manifesto could help to achieve this goal:

It is essential for Public Historians to consider the public, whether specialized or not, both as privileged interlocutors and as potential protagonists of original research practices, contributing to the restitution

<sup>7</sup> F. Fiero, *La scuola siamo noi. Aula 20 tra passato e futuro*, Locarno, DFA-SUPSI, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> The question may become clearer if we remember the French and German terms: *Scuola magistrale* = École normale = Lehrerseminar, *Alta scuola pedagogica* = Haute école pédagogique = Pädagogische Hochschule. The German word *Hochschule* clearly means University, and the word *Seminar* was also used for the schools of the clergy education. On the other hand, the French words *École normale* and *Haute école* clearly belong to a terminological tradition introduced in France by Napoleon, and mean the first a secondary vocational school for teacher education and the latter a specialized university (e.g. for engineers or architects).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/organisation/bodies/chamber-of-universities-of-teacher-education/member> (last access: 03.24.2023).

of a central role to historians and history in the interpretation of contemporary society<sup>10</sup>.

It was also known that new forms and means of communication could not be ignored, such as audio, video and other multimedia content, websites, social networks and social media. That's why the whole project is realized as a collaboration between the professor of history of education (Wolfgang Sahlfeld), the school's librarians and the communication service. Integrating the different points of view in the process is very helpful. We also wanted the process to be a participatory project, not entirely realized by the project steering committee.

## 2. *A process-oriented approach*

From the very beginning, the idea was to realize more than one event, in order to “walk together” on the path to November 2023 (month when the anniversary occurs). The result of this process is, while we are writing this paper (March 2023), the following:

- since September 2022, a monthly article about events or persons in the history of DFA-SUPSI is published by the professor of history of education in the internal bulletin;
- the project's website (<https://150magistrale.supsi.ch/>) is online since February 2023;
- an exhibition with books and exercise books from the archive of DFA-SUPSI (from 8 February to 17 February 2023) was organized in the same week when the website was launched;
- in May 2023 we published a textbook addressed to the school's students entitled *How to Read an Exercise Book*, with analysis of historical exercise books coming from the DFA-SUPSI archive, as a contribution to the historical research about teacher education and the practice of teaching;
- in June 2023 a class of students who attended the Scuola magistrale from 1969 to 1973 remembered the anniversary of their primary teacher diploma, and they did it in a meeting with Prof. Wolfgang Sahlfeld and with the head of our primary teacher Bachelor curriculum, Francesca Antonini;
- a public event, open to all interested persons, was organized for 15 November 2023. This event should be open to everybody and very interactive, with workshops about the history of teacher education, meetings between our students and alumni, public debates about the future of teacher education etc.;
- an international seminary about the history of teacher education in Switzerland was organized for 24 November 2023;
- other events will follow in the year 2023-2024 (150 years after the school's first year 1873-1874), as for example a seminary about Ivo Monighetti's experiences in psychology and written language acquisition.

<sup>10</sup> *Manifesto della Public History italiana*, <https://aiph.hypotheses.org/3193> (last access: 03.24.2023).

### 3. *New discoveries due to the process-oriented approach*

Although we were conscious that records and memory are not the same for everybody in our community, we were surprised by some facts that were uncovered after launching the project's website and calling for testimonies:

- in 1969 a second Teacher education school had opened in the city of Lugano, eventually becoming completely autonomous in 1977. This second Teacher education school was closed already in 1985 due to the opening of new upper secondary schools (which made useless the second school) and the Teacher education's first academic upgrading from ISCED 3 to ISCED 5. Many faculty members of the Lugano school perceive their experience as a forgotten one and now ask us to reconstitute it in more depth;
- in the period 1985-2000, important studies about children's acquisition of reading and writing skills had been realized by the school's director at the time, the psychologist Ivo Monighetti (1938-2008). This important chapter of our history has been almost completely forgotten, although several faculty members took part in these experiences.

The contacts with those "unforeseen stakeholders" of our history led to some misunderstandings. We learned from those experiences that is very important to share the aims and the methodological decisions of the project with the public, as it is very well said in the Italian Manifesto:

Public Historians strive to ensure that the results and the methodologies of historiographical research are known by a wider public and experiment with practices of communication and research that can also lead to new and original developments in historical knowledge through interaction with the public<sup>11</sup>.

Another interesting effect of our process-based approach is that we can re-discover forgotten facts and people of our history during the processes. A good example is what happened when we constructed the website's timeline and searched information about all headmasters. During the archive research, we discovered that no picture exists, and only one document remains, about the first head teacher of the female section of the *Scuola magistrale*, Martina Martinoni. However, she seems to have been an important innovator in Swiss pedagogy, a follower of Tuiskon Ziller's method she had learnt about in the Canton of Grisons. Before this research, we had always believed that transfers of pedagogic ideas between Grisons and Ticino had not been possible<sup>12</sup>, but this has been, as we now see very clearly, an error due to the fact that we had not considered Martina Martinoni's role in the female Teacher education school at Locarno, where she taught Ziller's method for at least twenty years to all female teachers of Canton Ticino. It must be said that we found only one archive source (in a booklet about women in Ticino from

<sup>11</sup> *Manifesto della Public History italiana*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. W. Sahlfeld, *Federalismo: motore di innovazioni e transfert pedagogici? Il caso della svizzera*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 23, 2016, pp. 19-21; Id., *Pädagogische Kulturtransfers Italien-Tessin (1894-1936)*, «Rivista svizzera di scienze dell'educazione», n. 1, 2018, pp. 49-66.



1928) and that even the archives for Women's studies in Lugano<sup>13</sup> have not published a notice about her. We published this discovery in the DFA-SUPSI internal bulletin, and different individuals reacted to it enquiring why women are, in current recounts of "traditional" history of education, less considered than their male colleagues.

#### 4. *Is our Jubilee inspired by the principles of Public History?*

In the following chapter, we will try to discuss our initiatives using the *Manifesto della Public History of Education*<sup>14</sup> as a framework for a critical analysis. The first interesting point I would like to stress is the question of "social needs".

2) *Public History [...] moves from social needs and tries to create forms of co-construction of knowledge, leaving the traditional idea of vulgarization, dissemination, and transmission of historical knowledge.*

Only when thinking about the real meaning of "social needs", we discovered the importance of this point. For example, we were very surprised about the exhibition's success: among the visitors many elderly persons told us they had come to see it because they had been students of the school.

It was only when we launched the idea of a seminar about Monighetti's book *La lettera e il senso* (published in 1994)<sup>15</sup> to be held in the spring of 2024, that several colleagues began to tell about their experience as collaborators of Monighetti. Our wish is that the seminar may become a real opportunity to formalize and record their memories, allowing students to discover an important part of their school's recent history.

5) *Public History in educational and caregiving professions may be used as a powerful instrument for vocational training, for initial training as well as for lifelong learning.*

We have always been sure that the history of education can be a tool of "professional empowerment" for young teachers. In 2020, we coordinated the publishing of a publication aimed at providing students with a theoretical introduction into research in history of education and some examples of good practices, which could be helpful for those who wanted to write a Bachelor or Master thesis on the subject<sup>16</sup>. The textbook seems to be a really helpful tool for students who have never applied a historical approach to school and education related topics. As previously mentioned, in the year of the anniversary we will publish a second similar volume, focused on the use of historical school exercise books as a source for studies in the history of education. A theoretical

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.archividonneticino.ch/> (last access: 03.24.2023).

<sup>14</sup> *Manifesto della Public History of Education*, cit.

<sup>15</sup> I. Monighetti, *La lettera e il senso: un approccio interattivo all'apprendimento della lettura e della scrittura*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.supsi.ch/dfa/pubblicazioni/quaderni-didattici/storia-scuola/formare-e-formarsi-con-la-storia-dell-educazione> (last access 03.24.2023).



introduction about school exercise books as a source has been written by prof. Fabio Targhetta (University of Macerata). As an example of good practice, an interdisciplinary research about mathematic exercise books written by an expert for didactic of matematic and a historian of education will also be included. This contribution is based on exercise books written by students and teachers of the *Scuola magistrale* (end of 19<sup>th</sup> century) found in the school's archive. Another contribution focuses on exercise books of a student of the *Scuola magistrale* dating back to 1916-1920.

7) *Schools, museums, libraries and local authorities are the natural partners of Public History initiatives.*

From our point of view, one of the most powerful resources of the whole project is the collaboration of the school's librarians (since 2016). They take part in an interdisciplinary team for research, conservation and digitalization of sources for the history of education<sup>17</sup>. This is particularly helpful in a University for teacher education deprived of a school museum (they are instead very frequent in Italian universities). On the other hand, DFA-SUPSI is a small institution and without the librarians, research in history of education would not have a sufficient critical mass. The advantage of involving the librarians in the project is also another one: they have very good contacts to other archives and libraries, and interested parties (for example those who could donate us old exercise books) trust them more easily than they would a university professor (for example when bringing us old exercise books from their family's heritage). This brings us to another interesting point of the *Manifesto della public history of education*, the question of contact with the public.

6) *The activities of Public History will prefer the direct contact with the concerned persons, but they will also develop the use of communication and information technologies, based on the idea of glocalism and social empowerment. From the technological point of view, this means that Open source resources and Open access policies should be chosen.*

Concerning the question of Open access policies and Open resources, we could base our project on several existing infrastructures of the laboratory for history of education (coordinated by Wolfgang Sahlfeld). For example, on the website's timeline the user can directly access digitized versions of relevant historical documents, this is possible because these assets have been digitized, stocked in a repository<sup>18</sup> and published in an Open access mode across the laboratory's website for sources and documents about Swiss history of education<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.supsi.ch/dfa/ricerca/laboratori/rdcd> (last access: 03.24.2023).

<sup>18</sup> <https://fondo-gianini.supsi.ch/> (last access: 03.24.2023).

<sup>19</sup> <https://storiascuola.supsi.ch/fonti-2/> (last access: 03.24.2023).

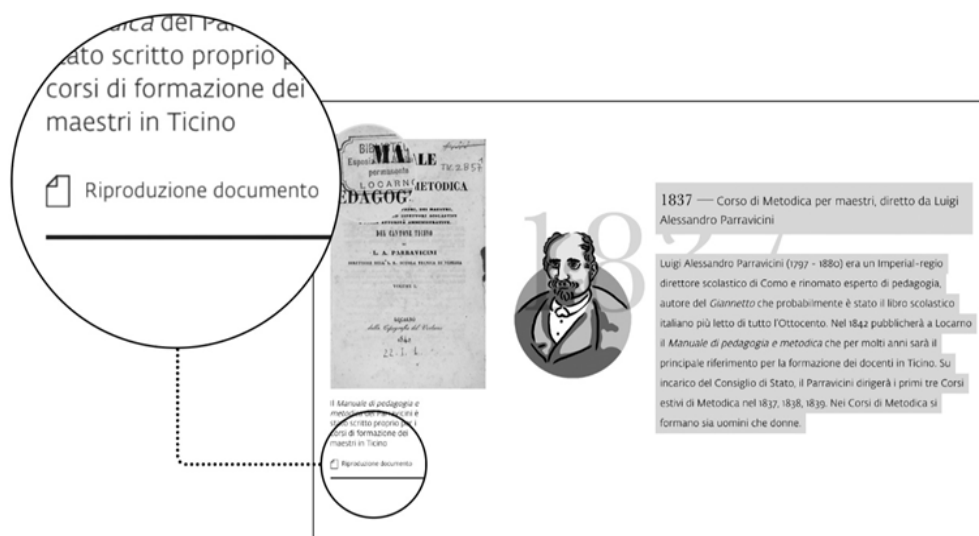


Fig. 3. Detail from the website's timeline (<https://150magistrale.supsi.ch/mostra-150-anni/>). Thanks to Adamo Citraro (DFA-SUPSI communication service) for the graphic elaboration

Once the website was finished, a section inviting members of the public to contribute their personal accounts was added<sup>20</sup>. Among the reactions to this initiative, we found particularly interesting that several ex-teachers of the Lugano Teacher education school (as previously mentioned) wanted to contribute their accounts, which had not really been our focus so far. In June 2023, I met the already mentioned group of alumni who attended the *Scuola magistrale* from 1969 to 1973, and in November they participated in the public event by contributing their memories and life experience (most of them have been primary school teachers for many decades). These are only some of many examples I could bring about the importance of personal contact and involvement of actors.

## Conclusions

I hope that this contribution, focused on a local academic jubilee, can be useful for the debate about public memory of school. I do not think I discovered something

<sup>20</sup> <https://150magistrale.supsi.ch/raccontaci-la-tua-storia/> (last access: 03.24.2023).

completely new to valorize school memory, but I hope that our experience, based on “learning by doing” and the use of a theoretical framework such as the *Manifesto della Public History of Education* will help to bring about significant ways to share memories and to create a shared understanding of the past while involving the local community in the experience.

# The Public Representation of Schools in Philately

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## *Introduction*

This paper could have been titled *Ipotesi di una sconfitta* (Hypothesis of a Defeat), borrowing the title of the acclaimed 2017 novel by Giorgio Falco for Einaudi. I had been carelessly drawn to the subject of philately by a feeling of nostalgia towards adolescence and those fleeting passions, as all-encompassing as often as they were ephemeral: I had inherited from an uncle a modest collection of stamps, of no value, but nevertheless rich. Those coloured rectangles from many different countries of the world had led me to consume geographical atlases and the famous *De Agostini Atlas Calendars*, so packed with statistics, data and cartographic information. However, it would be better not to confuse sentiment and historiographical rigour, and it is one thing to have personal memories, and quite another to conduct historical research on public memory.

When I was confronted with this issue, the first things I asked myself – as is always the case when it comes to undertaking research of a historical nature – were, as usual: what are my research hypotheses? How do I intend to interrogate the main sources of this work, namely stamps? Where the latter is of course directly related to the former. These are not idle questions; rather, let this incipit of mine not be idle, for it is intended to bear witness to the difficulties I encountered when faced with a subject that was entirely new to me and for which I could find little supporting bibliography to suggest possible avenues of research.

I therefore initially turned my attention to the effects of the representation of schools and education in philately from the point of view of public memory, but – I must confess – I soon came to very meagre conclusions. On the one hand this is due to the objective difficulty in assessing the importance not so much that a stamp may have had as an object in itself in public memory, but a specific theme reproduced in some (admittedly few) stamp series. In short, even in the face of quantitative data on the number of specimens produced, I would have had to proceed along a path fraught with fragile conjecture, precisely because it was so difficult to verify. How to assess the impact that a handful of stamps issued in the space of half a century had in the public memory? It seemed to me a vain undertaking, as well as decidedly pretentious.

So I changed my perspective: I was to no longer try to determine the effect actually achieved, but the effect the commissioner had wished to achieve. Therefore, not the end

result, but the expected result. Because the fact that issuing a commemorative stamp was not a neutral operation, but on the contrary that repercussions were expected, especially on the collective imagination, was always very clear to the commissioner.

### 1. *When stamps celebrate power*

To give a concrete example, consider the stamp issued on 3 May 1991 dedicated to the “Azuni” High School in Sassari<sup>1</sup>. It was part of the fourth issue of the *Scuole d'Italia* series, which had started three years earlier with a postage stamp dedicated to the “Ennio Quirino Visconti” High School in Rome<sup>2</sup>. The institute has 19<sup>th</sup> century origins and since 1865 has been named after Domenico Alberto Azuni, a distinguished specialist in commercial and maritime law<sup>3</sup>. Now, while it is true that the order of issue of the stamps in the *Scuole d'Italia* series need not necessarily follow a hierarchical order of the national resonance of the institute being celebrated, it is equally true that it is interesting to understand – or at least to hypothesise – the reasons that prompted the Postal and Telecommunications Administration to make a selection among all the Italian schools of ancient lineage and to assign a certain ranking in the order of issue. In that case, why was this Sassari high school included in this very small circle? Certainly for its prestige, for having been a point of reference for the city and regional ruling class, as the then headmaster, Giuseppe Bazzoni, and the then mayor of the city, Francesco Borghetto<sup>4</sup> wrote in the «Bollettino illustrativo». And reading the list of illustrious students, names that have left their mark on the national cultural and political world immediately leap to the eye, from Salvatore Satta (who is cited as a ‘storyteller’, forgetting an entire career as a great jurist, but deciding to value an enduring career as a writer due to the posthumous publication of his masterpiece, *Il giorno del giudizio* (*The Day of Judgment*), and here too there is food for thought) to Antonio Segni, Palmiro Togliatti, Enrico Berlinguer. And Francesco Cossiga. That Francesco Cossiga – who in 1991 was the President of the Italian Republic. Now, even without being too mischievous, a question arises spontaneously: was it, in the intentions of the commissioner, that the school be celebrated in this case, or was it also a bit for the president? In this case, the elaborate machine of public memory was set in motion not so much to perpetuate power as to pay homage to the existing

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 7 June 1991, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXXXIII, n. 4, 7 January 1992, p. 10; F. Filanci, *Il novellario. Enciclatologo della posta in Italia: francobolli, interi postali, bolli-franchi, storia, servizi bollature & relative valutazioni*, vol. 5: *La prima Repubblica in Posta, 1949-1993*, Milano, Cif/unificato, 2018, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303. Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 4 March 1988, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», a. CXXX, No. 23, 28 January 1989, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> F. Liotta, *Azuni, Domenico Alberto*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1962, vol. 4, pp. 751-752.

<sup>4</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di un francobollo ordinario appartenente alla serie tematica “Scuole d'Italia” dedicato al Ginnasio Liceo D.A. Azuni di Sassari*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 11, 3 May 1991, p. 2.

elites and to guarantee the ruling classes' immortality. As Bauman has written, «the lives of rulers “transcend mere everydayness”. Their biographies become history»<sup>5</sup>. And this power to orient the judgments of posterity from the traces of history is ensured for the ruling classes by their role and control of the mechanisms with which they can intervene in public memory, glorifying certain names and/or episodes, dropping the veil of silence on others that may be inconvenient or divisive. In this sense, Mario Isnenghi teaches us that «absences, historical gaps, are as valid as choices as presences»<sup>6</sup>.

Similar considerations can be made about the stamp dedicated in 1999 to the Scuola Superiore Normale in Pisa, attended, as also reported in the «Bollettino illustrativo», by the then President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, as well as former President Giovanni Gronchi.

These stamps are part of the *Scuole d'Italia* series (later renamed *Scuole e università*) which started in 1988 with an issue celebrating the “Visconti” High School in Rome. It was, as explained in the «Bollettino illustrativo» by the President of the *Accademia dei Lincei* Francesco Gabrieli, himself a former student of Visconti, the «first Italian secondary school in Rome, with a chronological primacy that soon extended to the didactic and moral field, and still endures today». An important investiture, for an institute – the first secular one in the capital, no longer just of Christianity – that represented the scholastic venue favoured by the Roman upper middle class and by the «new allogenic elements (read: coming from Piedmont and Lombardy) that assimilated into it».

The following year, 1989, it was the turn of the “Giuseppe Parini” High School in Milan, alongside the stamp of the University of Pisa<sup>7</sup>. This was an important novelty for Italian collectors: for the first time, in fact, a thematic serial featured two different graphics<sup>8</sup>. In this case, too, the choice fell on a prestigious institute, frequented by the city's upper middle class – the school was close to the editorial office of the «Corriere della Sera» – which made the headlines in 1966 for the famous case of the school newspaper «La Zanzara», which made a significant contribution to the change of social customs in post-miracle Italy, an episode also mentioned in the «Bollettino illustrativo» in the text edited by the then headmaster, Giorgio Porrotto, and the head of the school's historical archive, Mariacarla Motta.

But what are these «Bollettini» that I have mentioned several times? Numismatic enthusiasts will certainly be familiar with them. They are sheets published to comment on the issue of a stamp. In the first part, all data are given analytically, from the colours to the watermarks, the print run, the ministerial decree, the name of the designer, the value, the series to which it belongs, etc. The second part, on the other hand, and the one that is most interesting for our purposes, reproduces in lengthy texts, signed by illustrious

<sup>5</sup> Z. Bauman, *Il teatro dell'immortalità. Mortalità, immortalità e altre strategie di vita*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1995, p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> M. Isnenghi, *Alle origini del 18 aprile*, in M. Gervasoni (ed.), *Mappe dell'immaginario. Per una storia culturale del contemporaneo*, Milano, Unicopli, 1999, p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 11 November 1999, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXL, n. 284, 3 December 1999, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Filanci, *Il novellario*, cit., p. 309.

personalities – from the Minister of Education to eminent figures from the world of culture and pedagogy up to and including the headmasters of celebrated schools – the official reasons that inspired the production of the stamp. Through analysis of the excerpts it is possible to grasp, reading between the lines, the gap between history and memories and the political nature of the choices or certain biographical reinterpretations. These texts, moreover, respond to a specific grammar, codified over decades of publications by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications: a short piece of writing with an eminently hagiographic slant, aimed at magnifying, without excessive critical investigation, the figure of the commemorated or honoured institution, with a not always rigorous attention to historical reality – I am speaking of objective data, not interpretative theses – and a tendency to draw a veil of impartial approval. In the case of schools, moreover, the impression is that, on the whole, the intention was to celebrate, with the institution, the educational tradition of that specific city and, by extension, of the whole of Italy.

With the third issue, November 1990, we go to southern Italy and find the University of Catania and the “Bernardino Telesio” Classical High School in Cosenza<sup>9</sup>. In this case, the «Bollettino» is of great interest because it reveals part of the motivation behind Telesio’s candidature. Its headmaster, Giuseppe Ciacco, in describing the area of the city where the institute is located, wrote of the need to initiate a work of recovery and revitalisation of the old town centre, calling it an initiative of pressure and stimulus to which, in his opinion, the commemorative postage stamp could have made a valuable contribution<sup>10</sup>. In short, a socially useful outcome of an action, that of public memory, usually aimed at strengthening a sense of identity. In this case, we can speak of strengthening the sense of belonging to a community with the aim of producing concrete effects on the very urban fabric of that community.

## 2. *Which school do they want to celebrate?*

But let us return to the choice of the commemorated schools. The institutes chosen to be celebrated in the *Scuole d'Italia* series share two significant characteristics: firstly, high schools (and in one case a high school for science) of ancient lineage were chosen, confirming the pre-eminence historically assigned in our country to humanistic studies. Secondly, and I would say closely related to the first point, the status of elite schools, attended by the upper middle class and destined to train the future ruling class. In short, the public memory, if we are to refer to the issuance of commemorative stamps with a school theme, in the intentions of the commissioner must be cemented around very precise identity symbols: not the school of all, the popular one, but the one attended by a

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322. Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 20 November 1990, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXXXII, n. 118, 22 May 1991, pp. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di due francobolli ordinari appartenenti alla serie tematica “Scuole d'Italia” dedicati all'Università degli Studi di Catania e al Liceo Bernardino Telesio di Cosenza*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 21, 5 November 1990, p. 3.



specific social class. Institutes with their own tradition, often pre-dating the unification of Italy, with their own internal rituals, state-run but exclusive high schools, to use a trendy term. It seems to me the perfect snapshot of a school, the Italian one, for a long time elitist and selective.

I have so far spoken of high schools or universities which, however prestigious or linked to illustrious students, do not represent a singularity on the national scene. However, the case of the Nunziatella Military School in Naples<sup>11</sup> and the State Institute of Art in Urbino<sup>12</sup> is different. Both are two unica: respectively one of the oldest military training institutes, not only in Italy, and the other, founded in 1861, was transformed in 1924 into the first and only National Institute for Book Decoration and Illustration.

The norm of high schools with an excellent student body and ancient lineage had thus been broken, but only to celebrate unique schools, also exclusive in their own way and, in any case, destined to train excellences. Excellences to be promoted and entrusted to public memory because they are able to play a pedagogical role and to set an example.

Instead, the postage stamp issued on 15 October 1955 to celebrate the centenary of vocational education in Italy, which was intended to coincide with the centenary celebration of the “Girolamo e Margherita Montani” Industrial Technical Institute in Fermo, which took place on 14 and 15 October and was attended, among others, by the then President of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi, falls into another category, that of the invention of tradition<sup>13</sup>. The choice, without in any way detracting from the Marches institute, was entirely arbitrary and did not take into account older school experiences that had arisen in areas with greater industrial vocation (I am thinking, to give just one example, of the San Carlo Industrial Technical Schools in Turin, founded in 1848). It was Mario Pantaleo, Director General for Technical Education at the Ministry of Public Education from 1948 to 1958, who wrote the «Bollettino illustrativo»<sup>14</sup>, defining the Fermo institute as «the most effective example and model for the realisation and consolidation of other initiatives that were being undertaken at that time in the field of professional education»<sup>15</sup>. In this case it is a double bind – the attribution of a primordial role to the Fermo school and the postponement of the centenary by a year, given that it had been founded in 1854 – probably determined by the need, once the theme of vocational education had been established, to find a concrete element to anchor the celebrations to, so as to give substance to a concept (vocational education, to be precise)

<sup>11</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di un francobollo celebrativo della Scuola militare Nunziatella, nel 2° centenario della fondazione*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 17, 14 November 1987. See also Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 15 October 1987, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXXIX, n. 211, 8 September 1988, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di due francobolli ordinari appartenenti alla serie tematica “Scuole e Università” dedicati all’Istituto Statale d’arte di Urbino e alla Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 34, 27 November 1999.

<sup>13</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (edd.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> See the biographical entry in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *DBE. Dizionario Biografico dell’Educazione 1800-2000*, Milan, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, vol. II, pp. 277-278.

<sup>15</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di un francobollo commemorativo del centenario dell’istruzione professionale in Italia*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 12, 15 October 1955, p. 3.

that would otherwise be abstract. The impression is that in this case they wanted to look for the occasion and a real reference to be fixed in the public memory.

Even the postage stamp for the “Cavour” Scientific High School in Rome, issued in 2001<sup>16</sup>, in the search for reasons to support its eminence on the national scene, contains a historical forgery: in the «Bollettino», the then school headmaster Gian Giuseppe Contessa described the Cavour as the «first scientific high school to be founded in Rome and perhaps in Italy»<sup>17</sup>. Now, since the first teaching was started in the 1926-27 school year, it is not really possible that it was the first scientific high school in Italy, having been established by Giovanni Gentile in 1923, the year in which the Nievo Scientific High School in Padua was founded, to mention just one case.

### 3. *Memory manipulation*

Another example of the invention of tradition applied to philately is the one featuring Vittorino da Feltre. Issued on 10 May 1978, on the occasion of the sixth centenary of his birth, the stamp depicts Rambaldoni in profile, wearing a banded cap on his head<sup>18</sup>. His legacy was outlined in the «Bollettino» by Mario Pedini, the Christian Democrat Minister of Education, who referred to the ethical-religious foundation of the Feltre pedagogue’s educational *magisterium*:

a man of culture, educator of young people, a pedagogue, strongly committed to realising the principles of the unity of culture at the school he established, which has since remained exemplary, Vittorino infused young people – patricians, nobles and poor commoners who attended it – with the stimuli that came to him from a Christian outlook on life, exercised through continuous inner conquest and expressed in faith and deeds<sup>19</sup>.

The attribution of an Italian pedagogical supremacy, identified in the figure of Vittorino da Feltre, had a way of expressing itself, as Valentino Minuto has well identified in his research<sup>20</sup>, not only in philately, but in monuments, epigraphs and commemorative speeches, all aimed at reaffirming Italian superiority in the art of pedagogy.

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 20 September 2001, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXLII, n. 263, 12 November 2001, pp. 28-29.

<sup>17</sup> *Il libro dei francobolli d'Italia. Valori postali 2001*, Roma, Poste Italiane, 2001, pp. 82-85.

<sup>18</sup> Filanci, *Il novellario*, cit., p. 219.

<sup>19</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di sei francobolli ordinari appartenenti alla serie ordinaria “uomini illustri”*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n.n., 10 May 1978, pp. 2-3. See also Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 27 April 1978, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXIX, n. 355, 21 December 1978, pp. 9143-9144 and Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 28 June 1978, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXX, n. 58, 28 February 1979, p. 1904.

<sup>20</sup> I refer to the doctoral thesis by V. Minuto, *Memoria e potere. I monumenti a personalità della scuola dall'Unità agli anni '70 del Novecento*, Università degli Studi di Macerata, PhD course in Education, Cultural Heritage and Territories, 35<sup>th</sup> cycle, a.y. 2022-2023, and in particular section 3.1 entitled *Vittorino da Feltre. Il monumento al Principe degli educatori* (Vittorino da Feltre. The monument to the Prince of Educators), pp. 88-119.

This Christian-based interpretation provided by Minister Pedini to the Vittorino da Feltre postage stamp arrived in 1978, at the height of the season of historic compromise (indeed, issued the day after Aldo Moro's body was found). In this regard, it is good to remember how public memory of personalities from the past, even the rather distant past, changes according to alterations in power structures, as Halbwachs recalls:

the image of a dead person is never fixed. As it sinks into the past, it changes, as certain features fade and others re-emerge, depending on the point of view from which one looks at it, that is, depending on the new conditions in which one finds oneself when turning towards it<sup>21</sup>.

Another school-themed stamp stands out for its religious references, the one issued on 2 May 1992 to mark the third centenary of the foundation of the *Istituto Maestre Pie Filippini*<sup>22</sup>. The vignette reproduces two distinct episodes from the life of St Lucia Filippini, taken from the decoration of the altar of the saint's crypt in Montefiascone, in the province of Viterbo. In the first, Lucia is seen taking her vows and receiving a large crucifix from the hands of a high prelate. In the scene depicted immediately below, on the other hand, the nun is shown giving a lesson, with a book on her knees, to a small group of six girls. The impression one gets is that of a consequentiality between the two events: first Lucia receives Christ's message and then she becomes His spokeswoman. It is no coincidence that the portrait drafted in the «Bollettino» by Sister Renata Tariciotti, Superior General of the *Istituto Maestre Pie Filippini*, closes with the words that the foundress used to say: «I for my sake would like to multiply myself in every corner of the earth, to be able to shout from everywhere, and say to all peoples: Love God, love God!»<sup>23</sup>. The interpretation given of Filippini is therefore interesting: an educator who fought for the advancement of women through «instruction and education for work», at a time when women «lived on the margins of society, often the victim of rampant misconduct». This work to improve women's status was expressed in the training of girls of an «awareness of their own dignity and their role as bride and mother. The School, with its educational purposes, aimed at the restoration of the family and thus of society». A vision that is anachronistic at the end of the second millennium and that seems to have remained unscathed by the revolution of customs that has taken place in Italy since the 1960s.

This stamp, the only one to celebrate a private and Catholic school, is therefore linked to a world that is now outdated, but at the same time it is the forerunner of a trend, brought to its climax by late twentieth-century neo-liberalism, aimed at rediscovering the role of non-state schools, and especially religious schools. We are in the handover period between the seventh Andreotti government and the Amato government; it was shortly

<sup>21</sup> M. Halbwachs, *La memoria collettiva*, Milano, Unicopli, 2001, p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 17 June 1992, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXXXIII, n. 300, 22 December 1992, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di un francobollo celebrativo del 3° anniversario della fondazione dell'Istituto delle Maestrie Pie Filippine*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 9, 2 May 1992, p. 2.

to be the Berlusconi government that took up these stirrings and brought them to their peak.

Right at the height of Berlusconi I, in November 1994, the stamp dedicated to Giovanni Gentile was issued, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death<sup>24</sup>. The Minister of Posts and Telecommunications was Giuseppe Tatarella, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and exponent of the National Alliance-MSI – a party, for the benefit of my foreign colleagues, which was the direct heir of the fascist one. In the climate of mainstreaming the (post)fascist fringe, both politically and culturally, the choice of Gentile is not so much interesting as are the words used in the «Bollettino illustrativo» by Vincenzo Cappelletti, vice president and scientific director of the Italian Encyclopaedia. Gentile's deep merits in the cultural sphere, his scientific output, the prestigious positions he held, and the «tragic death» that put an end to a life «that had given itself the criterion and style of supreme choices and the risks they humanly entail»<sup>25</sup> were all listed, in practice listing his adherence to fascism as a supreme and risky choice. The latter was prompted – the only explicit concession to fascism in the long text – by Gentile's interpretation of fascism as «the continuation of the resurgent right and the promise of a return to a strong and responsible statehood». Words that only a few years earlier would have seemed difficult for the political and cultural world to agree with and that were part of the successful revisionist trend that was gaining strength in those very years.

The closing is emblematic in this regard:

The speculative height of Gentile, his conviction of a vital relationship between culture and society, the creative fecundity of his work and the extreme and sacrificial symbol of his death, are looked upon with reverent respect by those who hope and prepare today for a definitive fulfilment of the Risorgimento, in the arrival of the Italian tradition and the country in all its present, creative reality, in its consolidated freedom and in the fervour of its civil dialectics<sup>26</sup>.

Another example of a sugar-coated interpretation of the past comes from the «Bollettino» illustrating the postage stamp<sup>27</sup> issued in August 1970 to mark the centenary of Maria Montessori's birth<sup>28</sup>. Maria De Unterrichter Jervolino, president of the Opera Nazionale Montessori, did not spend a single word on the fascist and Italian ostracism of Montessori and her method, preferring to refer generically to «contrasts and difficulties

<sup>24</sup> Italian Post Office, Decree of 23 March 1995, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXXXVI, n. 108, 11 May 1995, pp. 38-39.

<sup>25</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di un francobollo commemorativo di Giovanni Gentile, nel 50° anniversario della morte*, «Bollettino illustrativo», n. 30, 21 November 1994, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Decree of 16 September 1970, «Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana», vol. CXII, n. 64, 12 March 1971, pp. 1504-1505.

<sup>28</sup> For an iconographic overview of all philatelic initiatives in the world dedicated to Maria Montessori I refer to G. Nuti, F. Bertolino, M. Filippa, *Una microstoria iconografica di Maria Montessori a 150 anni dalla nascita: figurine, monete, francobolli...*, «MeTis. Mondi educativi, temi, indagini, suggestioni», vol. 11, n. 1, 2021, pp. 113-140 and F. Bertolino, M. Filippa, G. Nuti, *L'immagine di Maria Montessori nel mondo filatelico: sguardi pedagogici*, in P. Trabalzini (ed.), *Sensi immaginazione intelletto in Maria Montessori. Dimensione estetica ed espressione di sé*, Roma, Fefe, 2020, pp. 189-209.

[also in the pedagogical sphere, of course], criticism and fanaticism», without tying them to the national context. The closing, in this sense, is somewhat paradoxical, when she reports her death in Holland and the condolences of the entire Italian political world: «by now a citizen of the world»<sup>29</sup> and, precisely for this reason, one of «the most eminent women in the history of Italy», as if there were a consequential link between the choice of exile and becoming one of the most important women in Italy<sup>30</sup>. The choice of the vignette to illustrate the stamp is also very curious: on the left is the figure of the pedagogue from the Marche region, while in the background is a group of children who, led by a teacher, perform «gymnastic movements of the Montessori pedagogical system» outdoors, even though the rendering is that of a small group of children sitting on the ground with their knees crossed and arms outstretched. In short, in the face of the wealth of Montessori materials and their recognisability, the choice of outdoor exercises seems to me to be unacceptable, if for no other reason than the difficulty, to those who are not familiar with the subject, of attributing them to Maria Montessori.

To conclude this brief report, it seems to me that we can speak of a common thread, of a common tendency that binds all the philatelic production with an analysed school-celebrative theme (therefore up to the year 2001), that is, the evident manipulation of the past also through revisionist interpretations, or rewriting of history, with celebratory purposes and exalting the entire country through the figure of illustrious personalities or historical schools, thanks to a mechanism that aimed to link the formation of a common feeling to the entrenchment of the national past in shining symbols.

<sup>29</sup> Post and Telecommunications Administration, *Emissione di un francobollo commemorativo di Maria Montessori nel centenario della nascita* (Issue of a postage stamp celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Maria Montessori), «Bollettino illustrativo», n.n., 31 August 1970, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> The note in the *Bollettino* also contains an inaccuracy when it attributes to Maria Montessori the title of the first woman to graduate in medicine in Italy.



# Ambrosian School Memories. Milan City Council's Construction of Its Own Glorious Educational Tradition from the Italian Unification through the Aftermath of World War II

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## *Introduction*

During a sitting of Milan City Council on 11 March 1954, at which the budgetary forecast for 1954 was up for discussion, then-Councillor for Education, Lino Montagna shared a report of the Council's interventions in the field of education, including measures aimed at addressing the serious impact of the recent world war on local schools<sup>1</sup>. The data showed that the schools infrastructure situation was still problematic<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the Councillor pointed out, with legitimate pride, that major efforts had already been made on this front, as well as at the economic level more generally, by the various Councils that had been in office since Liberation<sup>3</sup>. In presenting his report, he introduced a nuance that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Cronache del Consiglio Comunale. Bilancio di previsione per l'anno 1954*, «Città di Milano», vol. 71, n. 4, April 1954, pp. 151-182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170, p. 180. By the end of the war, 1,602 classrooms out of 2,052 had been destroyed or seriously damaged (Comune di Milano, *9 anni di amministrazione democratica, 1951-1959*, Quaderni della «Città di Milano», 1960, p. 202). In 1954, Montagna noted that in some primary schools it was still necessary to schedule two shifts due to a lack of space, although the repair of the damaged buildings had been completed. Given that no schools had been newly built or extended since before the war, the number of classrooms had now become insufficient. This was also because many were in use as shelters for the homeless and war refugees. The Council finally managed to resolve this issue by constructing new school buildings beginning in the mid-1950s. On the renovation and design of school buildings in this period, see I. Giustina, *L'architettura pubblica nella città: cultura, istruzione, assistenza*, in G. Rumi, A.C. Buratti, A. Cova (edd.), *Milano ricostruisce 1945-1954*, Milano, Cariplo, 1990, pp. 257-288. It should be noted that the situation in Milan was in line with an equally critical situation at the national level: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, *La scuola italiana dal 1946 al 1953*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1953, pp. 131-133, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> For further historical background on Milan between the final stages of the Second World War and the post-war period, see at least Rumi, Buratti, Cova (edd.), *Milano ricostruisce 1945-1954*, cit.; *Storia di Milano*, Vol. XVIII: *Il Novecento*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1995 (especially the essays by M. Tesoro, M. Punzo, A.M. Chiesi, A. Martinelli).



was not necessarily to be expected: a prominent local Christian Democrat, who would continue to be associated with the management of the city's educational affairs for many years thereafter<sup>4</sup>, Montagna invoked «the glorious past traditions of Milan's elementary schools» and, recalling that responsibility for primary education had been transferred from municipal authorities to the central state in 1933, he appealed for the «full and complete» handing back of the elementary schools to the City Council<sup>5</sup>.

The City Council had already expressed its desire to take back responsibility for primary education in 1950, under the mayorship of Antonio Greppi, an authoritative and esteemed exponent of local reformist socialism<sup>6</sup>. It seems strange, while the city was grappling with the many and serious challenges involved in reconstruction and undergoing a transformation that would make it an engine of economic recovery and industrialization, as well as a magnet for migratory flows from Southern Italy, that the councillors should have been insisting upon this point. Their appeal seemed to take the schools debate back in time, to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the height of the deliberations surrounding the nationalization of elementary schools, which became a reality with the Daneo-Credaro Law of 1911<sup>7</sup>. Undoubtedly, their position was driven by the desire of the city and its political leaders to distance themselves as far as possible from a measure deployed by the fascist regime to centralize education in the hands of the state, and to recover the independence that Milan, like the other provincial and district capitals, had enjoyed until the early 1930s; just as it was surely motivated in part by a parochialist attitude. However, it was also rooted in a more complex phenomenon, which was touched upon by Montagna in his speech, when he referred to the glorious past of Milan's schools: the Councillor meant to invoke a cultural tradition that had been progressively built up by the City Council since Unification, in parallel with a tireless commitment to investing in education.

Now, recent theoretical work has pointed up the ongoing heuristic salience and value of the local dimension of historical educational inquiry: specifically, it is by investigating the local dimension that we can assess how national education policies were received in practice, thereby transcending the “external” perspective offered by the history of institutions<sup>8</sup>. This essay applies such an approach to the study of memory, examining how local school memories were constructed and became stratified over time, contributing

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Chiappa (ed.), *Lino Montagna e la sua Milano*, Milano, Associazione per l'Abbazia di Mirasole, 1998. Montagna was a member of an Executive Council that remained in office from 1951 to 1956, comprised Christian Democrats, Republicans, and Social Democrats, with the external support of liberal councillors, and was led by the social democrat Virgilio Ferrari.

<sup>5</sup> *Cronache del Consiglio Comunale. Bilancio di previsione per l'anno 1954*, cit., p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176. On 19 June 1950, the Council unanimously ratified a motion calling for the city's elementary schools to be handed back to the municipal authorities, characterized as «determined to resume a moral and civic tradition that [had earned] the city so much prestige and recognition»: *Attività del Consiglio comunale nei mesi di maggio-giugno 1950*, «Città di Milano», vol. 67, n. 7-8, July-August 1950, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. Betti, *La prodiga mano dello Stato. Genesi e contenuto della legge Daneo-Credaro (1911)*, Firenze, Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> A. Barausse, C. Ghizzoni, J. Meda (edd.), «Il campanile scolastico». *Ripensando la dimensione locale nella ricerca storico-educativa*, special issue of «Rivista di storia dell'educazione», 1/2018.

in their turn to the building up of national school memories. In relation to the school policies implemented by Milan City Council from 1861 onwards, a topic that has already been studied in part<sup>9</sup>, this study homes in on the image of these measures that was put forth by the Council itself, from Unification to the period following the Second World War. It documents the efforts of the local authority to publicize the objectively impressive results achieved thanks to its educational policies, and to represent Milan as a city that was actively engaged in the education sector. This is a preliminary investigation, in which it is possible to analyse only some junctures in this lengthy historical period and only a selection of the rich sources available (such as articles in periodical publications by the Council, records of debates during Council meetings, booklets brought out by the Council on education topics, and various Councils' reports of their work).

### 1. *In the aftermath of Unification*

The political and intellectual elites of Milan viewed the Unification of Italy with a certain degree of ambivalence: while the members of the Milanese leadership class had strongly supported the cause of the Risorgimento movement, they were concerned about the city's downgrading from the capital of a large region to a city like any other within the newly established Kingdom of Italy<sup>10</sup>. This explains the references to education projects undertaken by Turin City Council in documents from the early post-Unification period, especially in the reports of the *Commissione civica degli Studi* (Civic Commission on Education), a body that had been set up to implement the goals assigned to local authorities under the Casati Law<sup>11</sup>. In comparing itself to Turin, Milan was displaying its determination to carve out a new national role for itself, not second to that of Turin, including in the field of education<sup>12</sup>. In other words, the Milanese ruling class was doing its utmost not only to build, but also to gain recognition for, a school system designed to surpass both the shortcomings of the Hapsburg system, though retaining its strengths<sup>13</sup>,

<sup>9</sup> There is no shortage of studies on the history of schooling in Milan and the City Council's role in this history (and many of these are cited in later footnotes), but there is no single work that offers a comprehensive overview of the topic. Nevertheless, the following essays remain valuable works of reference: L. Mapelli, G.B. Curami, *Milano. Istruzione comunale*, in A. Martinazzoli, L. Credaro (edd.), *Dizionario illustrato di pedagogia*, Milano, Vallardi, s.d., Vol. II, pp. 697-711; C.A. Mor, *L'istruzione elementare pubblica in Milano. Cenni storici e statistici. A cura della Commissione ordinatrice del VI Congresso dell'U.M.N. 11-12-13 settembre 1906*. Milano. *Omaggio ai congressisti*, Milano, Pallesstrini & C., 1906.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Meriggi, *Lo "Stato di Milano" nell'Italia unita: miti e strategie politiche di una società civile (1860-1945)*, in D. Bigazzi, M. Meriggi (edd.), *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Lombardia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2000, pp. 5-49; E. Colombo, *Come si governava Milano. Politiche pubbliche nel secondo Ottocento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. Ghizzoni, *Scuola e lavoro a Milano fra Unità e fascismo. Le civiche Scuole serali e festive superiori (1861-1926)*, Lecce-Rovato (BS), Pensa Multimedia, 2014, pp. 27-31.

<sup>12</sup> In this regard, in addition to the work cited in the previous note, see L. Finocchi, *Edilizia scolastica a Milano dal 1860 al 1885, «Storia urbana»*, n. 6, 1978, pp. 88-129.

<sup>13</sup> Further background on this topic may be found in works by S. Polenghi, including her edited volume:

and the limitations of the system then being put in place for the new Kingdom of Italy. The latter system was viewed as inadequate for the socio-economic and cultural needs of the nation – and especially for those of the Lombardy region – by many illustrious Milanese intellectuals, including Carlo Tenca, Mauro Macchi, Ignazio Cantù and Giuseppe Sacchi<sup>14</sup>.

Milan's emphasis on education was evident from the years immediately following Unification. An emblematic example was the distribution of prizes to students at municipal schools on *Constitution Day* (Festa dello Statuto), a holiday introduced in 1861 and set on the first Sunday in June<sup>15</sup>. Famously, the most high-profile event of the day was the opening military parade. However, the Constitution Day legislation also provided for the occasion to be marked by school prize-giving ceremonies. This was clearly intended to draw attention to the role of schools, complementary to that of the army, in constructing national identity. As I have documented elsewhere<sup>16</sup>, in 1862, Milan City Council decided that Constitution Day prizes should be given out to deserving students enrolled on post-primary courses at the city's municipal night schools. These courses had been introduced by the Council the year prior, although they were not provided for under the terms of the Casati Law. The courses targeted young people who had completed their elementary school studies and were obliged to go to work, but who nevertheless wished to further their education and enhance their future employment prospects.

The ceremony took a ritual form that remained unvaried over the years. In the presence of the highest city and school authorities, initially at the Town Hall and later in selected schools, the event began with a speech by either a Council representative or a teacher. It was no coincidence that the post-primary night school students were initially singled out to receive the Constitution Day prizes, while the distribution of awards to elementary school students took place at other times of the year. By making this distinction, the Council set out to encourage youths and adults who, at undoubted personal sacrifice, had decided to resume their education. It is clear from the speeches delivered on these occasions that the prizes were also intended to enhance these student-workers' sense of belonging to the newly established nation and to instil in them a love for the country which, by investing in their education, was proving its concern for them. A similar bond was meant to be forged between the students and the local authority, which was caring for their future as scrupulously as a parent.

Through the ritual of the award ceremony, the speeches given, and the participation of the students and their parents together with authorities and teachers, the Council was

*La scuola degli Asburgo. Pedagogia e formazione degli insegnanti tra il Danubio e il Po (1773-1918)*, Torino, SEI, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M.C. Morandini, *Scuola e nazione. Maestri e istruzione popolare nella costruzione dello Stato italiano (1848-1861)*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2003, pp. 331-340.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. I. Porciani, *La festa della nazione. Rappresentazione dello Stato e spazi sociali nell'Italia Unita*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> C. Ghizzoni, *Building the Nation. Schools and Constitution Day in Milan in the aftermath of Italian Unification*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. X, n. 2, 2015, pp. 23-45.

attempting to reinforce the unity of local school communities<sup>17</sup>, offer a positive image of the local school system to the citizenry, nurture a sense of national identity and, finally, celebrate its own role in education provision. In short, the Council's commitment to education was combined with an emphasis on developing symbolic devices and rituals that leveraged schooling to generate a sense of belonging to the city and to its educational communities<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. *Milanese schools on display: from the Exhibitions of the late 19th century to the Dizionario Illustrato di Pedagogia*

During the same historical period, Milan, like other leading Italian cities, strove to “show off” the positive outcomes it had attained in the field of education, at a range of Exhibitions (including universal, national, and especially education fairs). Only recently has Italian historical-educational research focused on how education was displayed at the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Exhibitions<sup>19</sup>, a line of inquiry that got underway earlier in other countries<sup>20</sup>. These events represent a valuable source that can help us to reconstruct not only the material dimensions of schools – the aspect most investigated to date within Italian scholarship – or their evolution from the infrastructural or educational- methodological points of view, with respect to the broader patterns of scientific, technological, and

<sup>17</sup> On this theme, see the essays collected in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017 and in the special issue J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. B. Bracco, *Tendenze educative e istanze politiche della classe dirigente milanese: i luoghi dell'identità nazionale nella toponomastica del capoluogo lombardo dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra*, in L. Cavazzoli, C.G. Lacaita (edd.), *Riforme e istituzioni fra Otto e Novecento*, Manduria, Lacaita, 2002, p. 404, who, in reference to the organization of urban spaces, place naming and the occupation of symbolic spaces, emphasized the «awareness of their pedagogical role» displayed by successive City Councils in Milan during the first decades following Unification.

<sup>19</sup> The salience of this theme is drawn out in J. Meda, *Mezzi di educazione di massa. Saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra XIX e XX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, pp. 156-158, and is treated even more extensively in these subsequent studies: A. Barausse, *Mostre didattiche, musei pedagogici e musei scolastici in Italia dall'Unità all'ascesa del fascismo. Nation building tra processi di scarolarizzazione, modernizzazione delle pratiche didattiche e relazioni transnazionali*, in A. Barausse, T. de Freitas Ermel, V. Viola (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul patrimonio storico-educativo*, Lecce-Rovato (BS), Pensa Multimedia, 2020, pp. 109-150; M.C. Morandini, *All'insegna dell'innovazione: la scuola all'Esposizione generale di Torino del 1884*, «Pedagogia oggi», vol. XIX, n. 1, 2021, pp. 116-123; F.D. Pizzigoni, *Tracce di patrimonio. Fonti per lo studio della materialità scolastica nell'Italia del secondo Ottocento*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2022, pp. 142-227.

<sup>20</sup> The following studies were the first to investigate this theme, while further background may be found in works cited in the previous footnote: M. del Mar del Pozo Andrés, *Presencia de la pedagogía española en las exposiciones universales del XIX*, «Historia de la Educación», n. 2, 1983, pp. 165-172; M. Lawn (ed.), *Modelling the Future. Exhibitions and the Materiality of Education*, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2009; K. Dittrich, *Experts Going Transnational: Education at World Exhibitions during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, PhD Thesis, University of Portsmouth 2010, 2 vols.; A. Escolano Benito, *La educación en las Exposiciones Universales*, «Cuestiones Pedagógicas», n. 21, 2011/2012, pp. 149-170.

artistic progress within which they were showcased. Rather, analysis of education exhibits (in terms of their organization, the layout of spaces, or patterns of prize-giving) also sheds light on the image of schooling that they were intended to transmit and on the actors who contributed, through their presence and through the contents of their displays, to disseminating this image and thus to generating collective school memories.

Milan City Council enthusiastically accepted the invitation of the Ministry of Public Education to send documentation on its schools to the Paris International Exhibition of 1867<sup>21</sup>. «Patria e Famiglia», the press organ of the Milanese Pedagogical Society, directed by Giuseppe Sacchi, described the material dispatched to the World Fair in the following terms: there were the reports of the Civic Studies Commission, «a series of magnificent albums» containing «the best essays» produced by the elementary school students, copies of the schoolbooks then in use, «the splendid photographic images of Italy's chief artistic masterpieces [customarily] given as school prizes», and «drawings of new school buildings and gymnasiums illustrating the health-related improvements made to [the city's] schools». To the great disappointment of the Italians and of the journal's editorial staff, none of this material was actually put on display at the Fair. Rather, it was thrown «haphazardly» under tables, to make room «for a musty collection of wild pines from the Apennines». The disconcertment of the authoritative publication was not assuaged by the bronze medal given «like the last relic that slipped off a banqueting table» to the Milanese drawing schools, nor by the medals of honour awarded to the Milanese institutes for the blind and deaf-mutes as well as to the Pedagogical Society itself<sup>22</sup>.

The Society went about compensating for the mortifying treatment of the Milanese and Italian exhibitors in France through its participation in the fifth National Education Congress in Genoa in 1868, which included Italy's first ever education fair<sup>23</sup>. A significant number of the 517 exhibitors at this event were from Milan, representing the city's civil society, publishing, and schools network. Milan's contribution to advances in education, as showcased in Genoa, won the recognition of the Jury: out of 79 medals of honour awarded, Milanese institutions received 27. Of these, four were awarded to municipal schools and one to Milan City Council itself for «the outstanding organization of its primary schools»<sup>24</sup>.

The following year, at the Exhibition held in parallel with the Turin education congress, Milan, as one of the participating cities, obtained further recognition of its efforts to provide education to the working classes, again receiving a medal for its contribution to advances in elementary schooling<sup>25</sup>. It is beyond the scope of this essay to comprehensively

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *La pedagogia italiana innanzi all'Esposizione universale del 1867*, «Patria e Famiglia» (henceforth PeF), vol. VI, 1866, pp. 428-439; *Gli istituti educativi d'Italia all'Esposizione universale di Parigi*, *ibid.*, vol. VII, 1867, pp. 97-99; *Gli istituti educativi d'Italia all'Esposizione universale di Parigi*, *ibid.*, vol. VII, 1867, pp. 129-130.

<sup>22</sup> *Milano all'esposizione didattica di Genova. Relazione pubblicata a nome della Società Pedagogica Italiana*, *ibid.*, vol. IX, 1869, pp. 3-21 (citation on pp. 3-4).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. G. Sacchi, *L'Esposizione pedagogica a Parigi Lettera I<sup>a</sup>*, *ibid.*, vol. VII, 1867, pp. 187-190.

<sup>24</sup> *Milano all'esposizione didattica di Genova. Relazione pubblicata a nome della Società Pedagogica Italiana*, *cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. F. Palladino, *Medaglia Premio VI Congresso pedagogico italiano-Comune di Milano (1869)*, «Banca

review the participation of Milan and its schools in subsequent Exhibitions, including educational ones. However, one further Exhibition worth highlighting is the Universal Exhibition held in Vienna in 1873, where unlike in Paris, Milan performed more than satisfactorily. At this event, one of its best schools was awarded, namely the Secondary School for Girls, which in 1869, had been held up by the Ministry of Public Education as a model to be followed by all local authorities. The Jury awarded this institution with the Progress Medal for compositions in Italian and two honourable mentions for drawing and needlework<sup>26</sup>.

The National Exhibition of Arts and Industries held in Milan in 1881 served to further confirm the image of education that the city wished to project, in this case by virtue of the positivist and entrepreneurial culture that drove the event. Milan was no longer competing so much with nearby Turin, but rather with the foreign cities that had hosted the international Exhibitions (first and foremost Paris and London). Through this Exhibition, Milan consolidated its image as the «moral capital», «perhaps the most powerful identity-related myth expressed by Italy's bourgeois industrialist class»<sup>27</sup>, and sought to be recognized as a model of efficiency and enterprise, in contrast with Rome, the «legal capital».

The Milanese intellectual class and bourgeoisie set out a new path for the forthcoming industrialization, which – in light of lessons learnt from other countries where a capitalist economy had been established for longer – could resolve the social conflict generated by the industrial development model. This pathway attempted to combine a strong «work ethic» with «municipal welfare» for the poorest classes. Thus, it has been observed that: «Milan may be defined as a “moral capital” insofar as promotion of the individual is accompanied by the efforts of an exemplary local authority that sees to the needs of the entire community»<sup>28</sup>. Welfare, charity, and education were the «urban sectors» where the inevitable social inequalities could be remedied<sup>29</sup>. This project informed the organization and layout of the Milanese exhibition. Of the fair's eleven sections, one was entirely dedicated to *Education, technical instruction, welfare, and charity*; the Hall assigned to

dati delle onorificenze conferite a esponenti e istituzioni del mondo della scuola e dell'educazione», DOI: 10.53219/1856, published on 05.06.2022 (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/medaglia-premio-vi-congresso-pedagogico-italiano-comune-di-milano>; last access: 23.08.2023).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Nel XXV anniversario della fondazione della Scuola Superiore Femminile di Milano 1861-1886*, Milano, Bernardoni, 1886, p. 25. On this school, which would later be named after Manzoni, see at least M. Fugazza, *L'istruzione secondaria a Milano e l'inchiesta Scialoja*, in C.G. Lacaita, M. Fugazza (edd.), *L'istruzione secondaria nell'Italia unita*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2013, pp. 235-257.

<sup>27</sup> S. Onger, *Le esposizioni di arti e industrie*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/le-esposizioni-di-arti-e-industrie\\_%28Il-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Tecnica%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/le-esposizioni-di-arti-e-industrie_%28Il-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Tecnica%29/) (last access: 15.02.2023); cf. also E. Decleva, *L'Esposizione del 1881 e le origini del mito di Milano*, in *Dallo Stato di Milano alla Lombardia contemporanea*, Milano, Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1980, pp. 181-211; I.M.P. Barzaghi, *Milano 1881: tanto lusso e tanta folla. Rappresentazione della modernità e modernizzazione popolare*, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), Silvana Editoriale, 2009; G. Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale. Identità, speranze e contraddizioni della Milano moderna*, Milano, Bur, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> G. Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale. Letteratura e pubblicistica a Milano fra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Edizioni di Comunità, 1982, pp. 106-107.

<sup>29</sup> Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale. Identità, speranze e contraddizioni della Milano moderna*, cit., pp. 119-120.



the exhibiting schools and welfare agencies was located near the Work Gallery and the Machine Room<sup>30</sup>. This layout would have led visitors to immediately and vividly grasp the contiguity and complementarity of the cornerstones in the myth surrounding Milan.

Analysis of the exhibitors at the Milan Fair suggests that this agenda was only partially successful, however. First, educational methodology was not initially included among the categories of exhibit<sup>31</sup>, given that the event had originally been conceived as exclusively industrial in nature. Second, the teaching aids on display showed Italy to be lagging other countries and were out of step with contemporary trends in Italian education, which in reality were more dynamic than the Milanese exhibits suggested. Nevertheless, examination of the 1881 Exhibition in relation to its portrayal of ongoing progress prompts a somewhat different judgement concerning the image of schools and education that it conveyed. For example, we can draw valuable insights from a series of the works that were published in parallel with the exhibition, and which offer a snapshot of various aspects of city life: namely, *Mediolanum*, a work in four volumes published by Vallardi<sup>32</sup>, *Milano 1881*, brought out by Ottino<sup>33</sup>, and *Milano e i suoi dintorni*, issued by Civelli<sup>34</sup>. Specifically, *Mediolanum* included an extensive essay on education by Benedetto Prina, a secondary school teacher, poet, and history expert, and one on schools for working-class students by Pietro Ravasio, also a teacher and author of history textbooks<sup>35</sup>. The two pieces described the school system in Milan following a layout that was shared by all the essays in the four volumes: first a historical reconstruction, beginning with classical antiquity (because, as Prina pointed out, if historical background is lacking, it is impossible to grasp the peculiarities of social institutions and interpret their purpose); next, statistical data on developments in education; and finally, a presentation of the state of the art. Both authors repeatedly praised the enterprising spirit of Milanese society and of Milan City Council and its school system. However, in keeping with the ethos of the 1881 Exhibition and the positivist culture underpinning it, «the rhetoric of words was [counterbalanced] by the solidity of figures»<sup>36</sup>. And so, Prina quantified the municipal elementary schools, the funding allocated to elementary education by the City Council, the number of pupils and teachers, and the delivery of teacher training.

This cultural outlook, with its emphasis on figures and outcomes, including in the domain of education, was not abandoned following the Exhibition, but drove further and lasting efforts on the part of the City Council. Beginning in the 1884-1885 school year, the Council published a «Yearbook» on the municipal schools<sup>37</sup>. From a simple list of the

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Guida del visitatore alla Esposizione Industriale Italiana del 1881 in Milano*, Milano, Sonzogno, 1881, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Pizzigoni, *Tracce di patrimonio*, cit., pp. 156-179.

<sup>32</sup> *Mediolanum*, Milano, Vallardi, 1881.

<sup>33</sup> *Milano 1881*, Milano, Giuseppe Ottino, 1881.

<sup>34</sup> *Milano e i suoi dintorni*, Milano, G. Civelli, 1881.

<sup>35</sup> B. Prina, *L'istruzione in Milano*, in *Mediolanum*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 328-358; P. Ravasio, *Scuole popolari*, *ibid.*, pp. 373-386.

<sup>36</sup> Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale. Identità, speranze e contraddizioni della Milano moderna*, cit., p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> The following are the different titles under which the yearbook was published over the years: «Scuole comunali di Milano. Personale docente» (from 1884-85 to 1887-88); «Scuole comunali di Milano. Docenti»



elementary schools, with their locations, the names of the teachers, and the number of their pupils, the publication gradually evolved into a thick volume, which continue to be produced until 1933, with information on the public education department, the number of pupils, the number and names of the school inspectors, headteachers, teaching staff, and the services offered by individual schools (meals, showers, hot water, etc.).

In keeping with the approach that had flanked the 1881 Exhibition, the industriousness of the City Council was not only documented in terms of figures and organizational charts, but also by articles published in another periodical produced by the Council itself, namely «Città di Milano», which ran from 1891 until the 1970s<sup>38</sup>. Many informative articles appeared in this journal over time: there were both quantitative and qualitative analyses, with a focus on leading projects, figures, and events in the life of Milanese schools, including in past years and centuries. While the contributors sought to trace the roots of the city's educational tradition to periods that long preceded Italian Unification, they also invited the reader to envisage the future and the goals to be pursued to further improve education in the city.

The City Council's drive – from Unification, and then, increasingly effectively, from the 1880s onwards – to generate a shared identity around the city's school system and to gain recognition for it outside of the local context – in short, to «invent» a tradition – won a key national-level endorsement thanks to the publication, in the period spanning the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, of the famous education encyclopedia *Dizionario Illustrato della Pedagogia*, edited by Luigi Credaro and Antonio Martinazzoli and published by Vallardi. Specifically, the second volume of this work contains an entry entitled: *Milan. Municipal education*, edited by Leonida Mapelli and Giovanni Battista Curami. The *Dizionario* devoted no other entries to Italian cities and the editors' reasons for featuring Milan alone are laid out in the opening lines of the entry in question:

Given that we cannot offer an account of the peculiar features of municipal education in all, or even in the largest cities, some of which boast most glorious ancient and modern traditions, we wish to at least mention Milan, the moral capital of Italy, whose wealth, industriousness, and enterprise have borne exemplary fruit in all periods. And we mainly cover education for the working classes, which was and is, the special responsibility of the municipal authorities. As we draw closer to the present day, the tendency towards uniformity, which is a consequence of the increasing influence of the central government, is making the different cities more similar to one another. It follows that the reader, based on our description of Milan, will be able by analogy to also formulate a rough idea of the current dynamics and trends shaping education for the working classes in the other cities of the Kingdom<sup>39</sup>.

Milan was therefore presented as a city that combined ancient traditions with modern efficiency and as an ideal model not because it was to be emulated, but because

(from 1888-89 to 1903-04); Comune di Milano – Riparto Istruzione «Annuario» (from 1904-05 to 1925-26); Comune di Milano – Ripartizione dell'educazione «Annuario» (from 1929-30 to 1932-33).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Comune di Milano, «Città di Milano. Bollettino municipale mensile di cronaca amministrativa e statistica» (1891-1927); the monthly bulletin then continued to be published under the title «Milano» (1928-1943) and from 1947 was brought out as «Città di Milano. Rassegna mensile del comune e bollettino di statistica».

<sup>39</sup> Mapelli, Curami, *Milano. Istruzione comunale*, cit., p. 697.

it illustrated how education was developing or would shortly develop in other Italian cities. Standardization was underway by virtue of national education policies and of modernization process induced by developments in educational theory, which were being disseminated throughout Italy thanks to the work of education journals and specialised publishing houses, a sector in which Milan was then one of the leading powerhouses<sup>40</sup>.

The Milanese school system described in the authoritative *Dizionario* was the same as that portrayed at the time of the 1881 Exhibition. Curami explicitly stated that he had drawn extensively on the previously cited essay by Prina in *Mediolanum*. It should be remarked that Curami's piece, minus some passages celebrating the local authority and prejudicially hostile towards the Habsburg policies in place during the Restoration period, remains a broad and well-documented overview, with the additional merit of being backed up by detailed statistical summaries of the state of Milanese schools across the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. *The continuation of the "tradition" in the Twentieth century*

It is beyond our scope here to offer a detail analysis of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Suffice it to say that, during this period, Milan confirmed its status as an international player by hosting the Universal Exhibition of 1906<sup>41</sup>, while the City Council, led by a diverse range of political coalitions (from the popular councils of Giuseppe Mussi and Giovanni Battista Barinetti to the moderate-Catholic council of Ettore Ponti to the socialist councils of Emilio Caldara and Angelo Filippetti between 1914 and 1922<sup>42</sup>), continued to reinforce and improve the school network, striving to ensure that its positive attainments were known both within and outside the city.

Hobsbawm observed that processes of «invention of tradition», in this case of educational tradition, and the defence of invented tradition, typically come more clearly to the fore at times of change<sup>43</sup>, as we saw in Milan following Unification and at the early stages of industrialization. And these dynamics recurred later, at further key junctures. For example, when the municipal authority lost its autonomy in the educational sphere by virtue of the Royal Decree of 1 July 1933, which centralized control over elementary schools in the hands of the State, completing the process of nationalizing primary

<sup>40</sup> Cf. G. Chiosso, *Giornali e giornalisti per la scuola nel secondo Ottocento*, in Id. (ed.), *I periodici scolastici nell'Italia del secondo Ottocento*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1992, pp. 7-44; E. Marazzi, *Libri per diventare italiani. L'editoria per la scuola a Milano nel secondo Ottocento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. P. Audenino, M.L. Betri, A. Gigli Marchetti, C.G. Lacaita (edd.), *Milano e l'esposizione internazionale del 1906. La rappresentazione della modernità*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to review the literature on the governance of Milan in the historical period under study. Regarding education, cf. I. Giustina, *Scuole, teatri, ospedali. I luoghi della promozione dell'uomo*, in G. Rumi, A.C. Buratti, A. Cova (edd.), *Milano nell'Italia liberale 1898-1922*, Milano, Cariplo, 1993, pp. 237-265.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. E.J. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (edd.), *L'invenzione della tradizione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987 (1 ed. *The invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, University Press, 1983), especially p. 7.

education that had been initiated in 1911. In 1934, the Council signed an agreement with the central state for the following five-year period, relating to the “Caterina da Siena” and “Rosa Govone” vocational schools for girls and a series of other elementary and vocational schools applying innovative methods or serving special educational needs<sup>44</sup>: the “Rinnovata” School run based on the Pizzigoni method, the “Umberto di Savoia” and “Duca degli Abruzzi” open-air schools, the “Giulio Tarra” school for students with impaired hearing and speech, the “Zaccaria Treves” school for the mentally abnormal, and the “Sofia Carmine Speroni” School for the “lame, mutilated, and rickety”<sup>45</sup>. The agreement specified which items of expenditure would be covered by the municipal authority to enable these schools, which stood out on the Italian education scene due to their specific aims and methods, to function as effectively as in the past. A few years later, in 1937, the Municipality also published dedicated monographs, with rich photographic illustrations, with the aim of documenting the history of these schools and the uniqueness of their educational offerings<sup>46</sup>.

In the same period, the Council also printed a photograph album on the “Umberto di Savoia”<sup>47</sup> open-air school, again with a view to publicizing, but also to pictorially celebrating, the modernity and educational approach of this institution. The open-air school was originally the brainchild of the socialist Council led by Caldara (1914-1920). It was first opened on an experimental basis in the summer of 1918. After the fascists rose to power, they immediately grasped the educational value of the open-air format and invested in the school to ensure that its architectural structure and layout could be preserved over the following years. Undoubtedly, the multipronged effort by the City Council to play up its achievements in the field of education, as we have just briefly reviewed, also served the propagandistic ends of the fascist regime. Nevertheless, the fact that this effort was made precisely when the municipal authority had lost its autonomy in the domain of primary schooling suggests that it was in continuity with the policies of

<sup>44</sup> This law (cf. Articles 27-34) provided for the stipulation of special agreements between the State and local authorities concerning the functioning of special schools: R.D. 1<sup>st</sup> July 1933, n. 786, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», Parte prima, 13 July 1933, n. 161, pp. 3153-3159.

<sup>45</sup> *Convenzione tra il Ministero della Educazione Nazionale ed il Comune di Milano, per l'applicazione del R.D. 1<sup>o</sup> luglio 1933, n. 786, relativamente alle Scuole Speciali*, in Archivio Civico del Comune di Milano, fond «Storico», series «Beneficenza pubblica», folder 7, file 4.

<sup>46</sup> Comune di Milano, *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Caterina da Siena”*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937; Id., *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Rosa Govone”*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937; Id., *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Rinnovata”*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937; Id., *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Umberto di Savoia” (Scuola all'aperto)*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937; Id., *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Giulio Tarra” per sordomuti e logopatici*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937; Id., *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Zaccaria Treves” per l'assistenza medico-pedagogica dei fanciulli anormali psichici*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937; Id., *Monografia della regia scuola speciale già comunale “Gaetano Negri” per rachitici, storpi e mutilati*, Milano, Stucchi, 1937.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Comune di Milano, *Scuola all'aperto “Umberto di Savoia” per alunni gracili*, [Milano], n.d. [while this document is undated it is certainly from the 1930s], in Archive of the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE) in Florence, fond «Fototeca storica». On this Milanese institution, cf. C. Ghizzoni, *La scuola a Milano durante la Grande Guerra*, «Archivio Storico Lombardo», 2005-2006, pp. 307-358 (especially pp. 320-322); *La Scuola del Sole. Cent'anni del Trotter a Milano tra sperimentazione educativa e impegno sociale*, Milano, La Città del Sole-Amici del parco Trotter ODV, 2022.

the previous decades. Once more, the Council's aim was to consolidate and perpetuate the Milanese educational tradition, by keeping public attention focused upon it.

It is therefore not surprising that, as reflected in the words of Councillor Montagna at the earlier-cited Council meeting of 1954, the defence of this tradition should again have been resumed after the war, when, despite the diligent efforts of the Council to aid in the reconstruction of the city's schools, the Ministry appeared deaf to its request for greater decision power in relation to primary education. Notably, on that occasion, as at other previous and subsequent sittings of the Council, the demand for autonomy was also supported by representatives of different political forces including the opposition, who, while critical of the Council in office, were convinced that the municipal authority should be in charge of education<sup>48</sup>; this position was often backed up by data concerning concrete measures, such as the experimental timetables launched in some primary schools to meet the needs of working parents, new forms of welfare, investment in school buildings, and the implementation of innovative teaching-learning methods under the banner of activist pedagogy.

These frequent calls throughout the early 1950s for greater autonomy for municipal authorities in the primary education sector would go unheeded, as we know. Nevertheless, Milan's efforts in this field and the «glorious tradition» evoked by Councillor Montagna in 1954 would once again earn recognition outside of the local area and, this time, from the highest authority of the Italian state. In 1955, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Public Education, the President of the Republic awarded the gold medal for outstanding achievement in culture and education to the Municipality of Milan<sup>49</sup>. This prestigious award served to acknowledge the city's contribution to advances in education and schooling and to further nurture the «glorious tradition» that it had painstakingly built up over the course of a century.

<sup>48</sup> In addition to the earlier-mentioned Council Meeting of 19 June 1950, other budget debates in 1954 and 1955 included motions on autonomy in the field of education, as recorded in: *Cronache del Consiglio Comunale. Bilancio di previsione per l'anno 1954*, cit.; *Cronache del Consiglio Comunale. Bilancio di previsione per l'anno 1955*, «Città di Milano», vol. 72, n. 5, May 1955, pp. 304-328 and n. 6, June 1955, pp. 373-388.

<sup>49</sup> L'Assessore all'Educazione, *La medaglia d'oro dei benemeriti della cultura al Comune di Milano*, «Città di Milano», vol. 72, n. 11, November 1955, pp. 615-617.

# Representations of Disability in the Great Turin Exhibitions at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1884-1911)

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The article examines three exhibitions: the first held in 1884, the only date that does not coincide with a special event in Italian history; the second in 1898, fifty years after the coming into effect of the *Statuto Albertino*; and the third in 1911, which was staged in Rome as well as Turin, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy<sup>1</sup>.

The multiple sources consulted include: the official documentation produced by the organizing committee (programmes and circulars, catalogues and lists of exhibitors, newsletters and periodic updates, records of prizegivings)<sup>2</sup>; press coverage and articles in specialized journals; material held at Turin institutes for the disabled that participated in one or more of the exhibitions.

This theme has not previously been investigated within history of education research. The aim of the paper is to address the resulting gap in the literature by offering a chronological and comparative account based on the analysis of a set of novel sources.

## 1. *A rich and diverse participation*

The catalogues of the three different editions of the Exhibition show that disability featured in these events as a richly composite theme, not only in terms of the different types of disabilities represented, but also in terms of the plurality of perspectives and angles brought to bear upon them: alongside educational institutes for deaf-mutes, the blind, rickety, and mentally retarded, the exhibitors included private individuals, inventors of methods and tools for the study of various disciplines, societies set up by the disabled themselves, and local associations and bodies that ran projects for persons with disabilities as part of a broader charitable-welfare programme. By way of example,

<sup>1</sup> On this topic, see U. Levra, R. Rocca (edd.), *Le Esposizioni torinesi 1805-1911 specchio del progresso e macchina del consenso*, Torino, Archivio storico della Città di Torino, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these documentary sources may be consulted online. Cf. <https://www.museotorino.it/site/media/books> (last access: 06.02.2023).

the machines for teaching Braille presented by a teacher, Antonietta, from the Casa di Bologna, which were awarded the silver medal for the education section in the 1884 Exhibition, fell under the heading of “disability exhibit”<sup>3</sup>; as did the Society for Mutual Aid among the Deaf-Mutes of Lombardy<sup>4</sup>, or the Ligurian Committee for the Education of the People and the Teaching League of Verona, which provided education to rickety children<sup>5</sup>. Disabled pupils also took part in fringe events organized around the exhibition: the international gymnastics competition for schools held in parallel with the 1911 Turin Exhibition is a representative example<sup>6</sup>.

Due to space constraints, and for the purposes of this essay, I restrict my analysis to the participation of institutions for the care and education of disabled persons. A look at the available data enables us to quantify the presence of such bodies at the exhibitions. In 1884, 20 institutes for the disabled took part in the event: an almost equal number of these were devoted to care of the deaf and the blind, respectively (10 versus 8), with a far smaller number dedicated to rickety children (just two). The absence of any reference to the mentally retarded is not surprising: institutions for this group only began to appear in Italy during the 1890s. The overall number of institutes for the disabled at the 1898 edition was slightly higher: 23, with the participation, for the first time, of the institute for phrasthanics directed by Gonelli Cioni, which we shall return to later, and a disproportionately high number of schools for the deaf and dumb (13 compared to six for the blind and three for the rickety). This preponderance is presumably explained by Italy’s longer tradition of education for the deaf.

Fewer institutes for the disabled took part in the 1911 exhibition compared to the two earlier editions: a mere 15 altogether, comprising five institutions for the deaf, six for the blind, three for rickety children, and only one for the mentally retarded<sup>7</sup>. This fall-off seems even more marked if we consider that six of the participating institutes were based in Turin itself. It was likely due to the international character of the 1911 event, which was logistically more extensive and with a far more diverse range of exhibitors than either the 1884 or 1898 fairs<sup>8</sup>, and thus less suited to promoting the work of Italian

<sup>3</sup> L’Esposizione generale italiana in Torino nel 1884. *Catalogo ufficiale. Divisione II. Didattica*, Torino, UTET, 1884, p. 57 and *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria. Torino 1884*, Torino, Stamperia Reale, 1884, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> L’Esposizione generale italiana in Torino nel 1884. *Catalogo ufficiale. Divisione IV. Previdenza ed assistenza pubblica*, Torino, UTET, 1884, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> L’Esposizione generale italiana in Torino nel 1884. *Catalogo ufficiale. Divisione II. Didattica*, cit., pp. 67–68 and *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria. Torino 1884*, cit., p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> This gymnastics competition, organized by the Italian Federation in conjunction with the Office in charge of coordinating all the European gymnastics federations, was held in Turin on 11–14 May 1911. Many educational institutions for persons with disabilities took part in the event, winning prizes and accolades. The weekly magazine «La domenica del sordomuto» reported on the participation of «Forza e Parola», a team representing the deafmutes of Bologna, who won gold and silver medals in several different events.

<sup>7</sup> The fifteenth institution was a School for the Dumb and Deafmutes based in Paotinfou (Tchéli) in China. Cf. *Catalogo ufficiale dell’Esposizione internazionale di Torino 1911*, 3 Vols., Torino, Fratelli Pozzo, 1911, pp. 36, 761 and 1096.

<sup>8</sup> Special issue F. Evangelisti, A. Pes (edd.), *Le Esposizioni: propaganda e costruzione identitaria*, «Diacronie», vol. 18, n. 2, 2014.

institutions for the disabled. The Turin institutes were the only ones to participate in all three exhibitions, largely because they were locally based: these were the Institute for the Blind, the Royal Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, and the Prinotti Institute, which was also for the deaf<sup>9</sup>. With regard to geographical location more generally, the participating institutes came predominantly from Northern Italy (64%) rather than from the centre (21%) or south (14%) of the country. This breakdown is in line with the distribution of such institutions, which were concentrated in northern areas where private benefactors and municipalities/provinces were more likely to have the resources to finance them by sponsoring free places<sup>10</sup>.

The material exhibited was extremely varied: from documentary outlines of the origins, history, and administrative and educational systems of individual institutes (statutes, regulations, budgets, statistics, monographs, photographs, curricula) to displays of the students' handwriting and drawing. There was no shortage of handicraft produced by the pupils themselves: while in the case of deaf students, the products on display were typically the output of their shoemaking, dressmaking, and woodworking activities, in the case of blind students they were more likely to take the form of rush weaving and wickerwork. Sometimes demonstrations were held so that some of the disabled could show off their manual skills to visitors. The institutions also made a significant contribution to the festivities organized as part of the exhibitions: for example, the Milan Institute for the Blind offered a series of concerts at the 1884 edition<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. *The civil society perspective*

The circulars sent by the organizing committee to the political and schools authorities, as well as the descriptions of the various sections of the exhibitions to be found in the catalogues, reflect a tendency to situate the contribution of educational institutes for the disabled in one of two domains: education and private or public welfare. In relation to the 1884 and 1898 editions, the documentary sources contain explicit references to educational works for the blind, deaf and dumb, and rickety in terms of school buildings and furnishings on the one hand, but on the other hand, also in terms of methods and textbooks, including in Braille, for reading, writing, geography, music and vocational learning. While the materials from the 1911 exhibition no longer explicitly describe

<sup>9</sup> The Royal Institute for Deafmutes had been set up in 1838, thanks to funding from the monarchy among other sources, while the Royal Institute for the Blind, whose founding was driven by the Turin city councillor with responsibility for public education, Ernesto Riccardi di Netro, had been inaugurated in 1879. The work of the priest, don Lorenzo Prinotti, encompassed a series of projects for the deaf (from an educational institute for poor women deafmutes, to a parish-based spiritual and recreational centre, a kindergarten, and a free service assisting the deaf and dumb with finding employment and handling workplace issues).

<sup>10</sup> R. Sani, *L'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia prima e dopo l'Unità. Itinerari, esperienze, discussioni*, in Id., *L'educazione dei sordomuti nell'Italia dell'800. Istituzioni, metodi, proposte formative*, Torino, SEL, 2008, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> On the concerts that took place on 18-19 May 1884, cf. «Gazzetta Piemontese», vol. XVIII, n. 135, (15 May) 1884, p. 2 and n. 138, (18 May) 1884, p. 1.



institutions for the disabled in these terms, the criteria for assigning awards and honours make it clear that they continued to be included under multiple categories of vocational training. Thus, the Prinotti Institute for poor deaf-mutes in Turin received a prize for both the “industrial education” category and the “special and advanced training schools” category, while the Vittorio Emanuele Institute for blind children in Florence won a gold medal in the category «works furthering industrial, commercial and agricultural education by the government, provinces, city and town councils, companies and other public and charitable bodies»<sup>12</sup>.

This difference between editions may be explained, at least in part, by evolving perspectives on the presence and significance of the schools-education sector at this kind of event. Tellingly, the title of the education section went from *Mostra Didattica* (Education Exhibition) in 1884 to «Vocational education and teaching. Schools-advanced training workshops and laboratories» in 1911, with an explicit shift to focusing on schools whose goal was to «prepare the youth among the common people for economic struggles and success in the workplace and to provide industry with an educated and expert workforce with the capacity for self-improvement and for improving its work tools and methods»<sup>13</sup>.

Institutions for the disabled could also apply to exhibit in the social security and public welfare section<sup>14</sup>, which was first introduced at the 1884 Exhibition in response to a positivist climate that held science to be an instrument of progress, including in terms of improving society. Further evidence for this outlook is provided by a questionnaire that was distributed to the exhibitors with a view to systematically collecting data on the state of welfare in Italy, in keeping with a new approach which, as the expression of a secular philanthropy, was destined to replace the charitable works of Catholic organizations. This approach is expressed by Daneo in his report on the exhibition:

A dispassionate examination [...] of Italy's charitable works and institutions might prompt changes, even radical changes, to many of them, and likely a logical and coordinated general reorganization of all of them, and – eradicating the humiliating almsgiving approach that still prevails in very many them – might find, among the rich resources of public welfare, immense scope for salvation from the miseries that still afflict a considerable proportion of Italian communities and areas.

Spontaneous, slow, and gradual transformation is already actively underway. The display panels of the exhibiting institutes [...] and the many recent amendments to their statutes and regulations proved the extent and dynamic nature of the – previous and ongoing – accomplishments of the winds of revolution in this field, which once seemed so conservative<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Esposizione internazionale delle industrie e del lavoro, *Elenco generale ufficiale delle premiazioni*. Torino 1911, Torino, Momo, 1912, pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Esposizione internazionale dell'industria e del lavoro, *Relazione della Giuria*. Torino 1911, Torino, Officine grafiche STEN, 1915, Vol. I, p. 301.

<sup>14</sup> At some of the exhibitions, the students' productions were put on display in the regional pavilions. For example, at the 1898 exhibition, the work of pupils at schools for the disabled in Cagliari – the main city in Sardinia – were showcased in the Sardinian pavilion. On the participation of the Cagliari Institute for Deafmutes at the 1898 event, cf. A.I. Argiolas, *I sordomuti di Cagliari all'Esposizione di Torino. Relazione sull'Istituto dei Sordomuti della Città di Cagliari presentata al Comitato provinciale per l'Esposizione di Torino*, Cagliari, Tip. Muscas, 1898.

<sup>15</sup> E. Daneo, *Esposizione italiana in Torino 1884. Relazione generale*, Torino, Stamperia Reale G.B. Paravia

In the pavilion devoted to societal problems, institutions for the deaf and dumb, blind, rickety, and mentally retarded were included among the other educational and care institutions for children and youth.

Although institutions for the disabled were given the opportunity to choose between two different sections of the exhibition, it is equally the case that – as they were conceptualized and perceived by the organizers – their «natural venue, in light of their charitable character and aims»<sup>16</sup>, was thought to be the welfare pavilion.

This interpretation was in line with the view of the contemporary Italian political class, whose members tended to see institutes for the disabled as solely charitable works and, therefore, as falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior. Not surprisingly therefore, proposals to extend compulsory education to deaf and blind children, which had been brought repeatedly before Parliament since the 1870s, had never been acted upon<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, some of the main promoters of the Turin Exhibitions were also authoritative national leaders: first and foremost, Tommaso Villa (1832-1915), a parliamentarian with the Historic Left who served as President of the Chamber of Deputies and several times as government minister<sup>18</sup>.

In any case, the participation of educational institutions for the disabled in the exhibitions was highly valued by the committees with responsibility for organizing the exhibitions. In both 1884 and 1898, almost all the institutes listed in the official catalogue received an award of some kind, whether a certificate of honour, a medal (gold, silver, or bronze), or honourable mention. In 1911, the proportion of institutions to receive prizes decreased but remained significant, at around 50%. Numerous institutes even received multiple awards at the same edition: for example, in 1898, the Genoa Institute for Deaf-mutes won three silver medals in three separate categories (education, graphic arts and related industries, and public welfare)<sup>19</sup>.

The reasons given for awarding these prizes provide us with insight into the meaning and value attributed to institutions for the disabled and to their role in providing for socio-economic needs in their local areas. Many and various were the merits highlighted by the juries called to assess their work. First, the adjudicators emphasized the ground-breaking nature of some of the institutes, which were to be emulated both in Italy and beyond. The adjudication sheet in support of an award given to the director of the Institute for Phrenasthenics in Vercurago, a town in the province of Lecco, conveyed this sentiment as follows:

e C., 1886, Vol. I, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> *Assistenza Pubblica. Circolare d'invito ad esporre*, «Bollettino ufficiale. Esposizione generale italiana. Torino 1898», n. 13, (25 July) 1897, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> On the evolving legislation on education for the deaf and dumb, cf. Sani, *L'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia prima e dopo l'Unità*, cit., pp. 30-37.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. S. Montaldo, *Patria e affari. Tommaso Villa e la costruzione del consenso tra unità e grande guerra*, Torino, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Esposizione d'arte sacra antica e moderna, *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della giuria. Torino 1898*, Torino, Fratelli Pozzo, 1898, pp. 36, 92 and 187.

Cav. [Sir] Gonelli Cioni has won a battle: he has managed to secure acceptance for the setting up of schools for phrenasthenics and to prove that these are necessary.

In Italy, there were already institutes for the blind, for the deaf and dumb, for petty delinquents or youths in need of reform, and even for the insane; there was absolutely no form of asylum for idiots, for the feeble-minded.

He has filled this gap, he has offered practical evidence of how phrenasthenics may be educated, and of what improvement may be expected of them; he has rescued many unhappy people from being ridiculed on the streets. His merit is special and most great<sup>20</sup>.

The adjudication sheets also focused on the excellent/good/fair outcomes attained in the teaching of school subjects and of manual skills, which were attested to by the depth, quality, and variety of the students' work, and which reflected the deployment of the most recent teaching practices (for example, the use of the oral method in the education of deaf-mutes). This explains the awards to organizations that made a particular contribution to the dissemination of new methodologies via the publication of specialized journals: from «L'educazione dei sordomuti» (The education of deaf-mutes) brought out by the Pendola Institute of Siena (gold medal winner) to «Rassegna di pedagogia e d'igiene per l'educazione dei sordomuti e la profilassi dei sordomutismi» (Review of pedagogy and hygiene for the education of deaf-mutes and the prevention of hearing and speech impairments), published by Prof. Ernesto Scuri, director of the Institute of Naples (silver medal recipient)<sup>21</sup>.

Much was made of the social contribution of projects that, in addition to filling gaps in the charity system and enabling the inclusion of disabled individuals in the employment sector, also offered welfare services to the community: just as the Prinotti Institute in Turin housed poor deaf women «who due to a lack of education and old age are in need of a place of refuge»<sup>22</sup> and set them up with jobs through its employment service, so the Genoa Institute for the blind took in older men who had lost their sight on the battlefield, and Turin's Institute for the Rickety offered free medical examinations and advice to the community at large.

Praise was also lavished on the skilful administration of the institutes as well as on the considerable energy and resources invested by private individuals in setting up and maintaining them, in accordance with the policy agenda of the liberal state which – due to cultural factors, political considerations, and budgetary constraints – typically delegated to civil society the task of providing support for disadvantaged groups<sup>23</sup>.

Some of the language used reveals a “do-gooder”, pitying kind of attitude: from

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> For a more in-depth treatment of these two journals, cf. L. Gobbi, *Tommaso Pendola e la rivista «Dell'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia» (1872-1884)*, Tesi di Laurea, Facoltà di Magistero, Milano, Università Cattolica del S. Cuore, a.a. 1994-1995; R. Sani, *Rassegna di pedagogia e igiene per l'educazione dei sordomuti e la profilassi dei sordomutismi*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *La stampa pedagogica e scolastica in Italia (1820-1943)*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1997, p. 531.

<sup>22</sup> *Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria. Torino 1884*, cit., p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> On the policies of the liberal state in the welfare sector, cf. F. Della Peruta, *Le opere pie dall'Unità alla legge Crispi*, in *Problemi istituzionali e riforme nell'età crispi*, Roma, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1992, pp. 195-250.

“unhappy” rickety children to “poor” deaf-mutes to “unfortunate” blind people before whom “the soul is naturally moved”. Similar feelings are described in the article *La mostra didattica* (The education exhibition), which appeared in one of the official publications on the 1884 exhibition. The anonymous author tells of the compassion that he experienced, while visiting the «sorrowful work-themed gallery», at the sight of blind people reading rapidly in Braille from a slate, writing and counting “with special tools”, weaving mats, doing crochet, and knitting; he asks himself whether it is right to «almost make their infirmity into a spectacle» for an increasingly large audience<sup>24</sup>. This sentiment, mixed with wonder and amazement, tugs at the heartstrings:

Who – the writer asks – could walk by these objects, which have been produced by such diverse groups of the underprivileged and derelict, without feeling moved? [...] It seems virtually impossible that some of these works were produced by those whose minds are not assisted by their eyes<sup>25</sup>.

A similar reaction may be observed on the part of the general public, as for example, in commentaries published in the newspaper «Gazzetta Piemontese» on the two earlier-mentioned concerts given by the students of the Milan Institute for the Blind at the 1884 Exhibition. An article by the Turin music critic, Giuseppe Ippolito Franchi-Verney di Valletta, is particularly emblematic. Franchi-Verney masterfully describes the quick succession of inner emotions experienced by the audience, from their arrival in the concert hall to the performance of the various pieces on the concert programme:

Among those who entered the concert hall on Sunday, how many truly expected an artistic result from this experiment with the blind? Only a tiny few, I am ready to wager – says the critic – and it may well be that none of the listeners could swear in conscience that they had not been prompted to attend by a sentiment of commiseration. [...] All those who had come with the sincere but modest intention of acting on their feelings of charity towards the unfortunate found themselves, by mid-concert, confronted with a truly artistic event: the tearful, melancholic mood shifted to a joyful, I would almost say glorious one, and a thousand palms clapped enthusiastically for a group of poor unhappy outcasts, who were now leading them to experience new, most sweet emotions<sup>26</sup>.

The critic himself cannot conceal his excitement and wonder at the skill and level of excellence attained by the blind performers: from the orchestra that proved its ability to play music of all kinds, to the choir, which he defines as «absolutely the most perfect» he had heard in the course of his career. A performance that was all the more astonishing in light of the singers’ physical imperfections, such as the «weakening of the vocal cords» and «weakness of the chest» that are caused by blindness.

<sup>24</sup> Naturally, Turin’s own Institute for the Blind was present at the Exhibition, offering a demonstration of the art of Braille printing. Cf. *I ciechi all’Esposizione*, «Gazzetta Piemontese», vol. XVIII, n. 166, (17 June) 1884, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> A.A., *La mostra didattica*, «Torino e l’Esposizione italiana del 1884. Cronaca illustrata», n. 30, 1884, p. 235.

<sup>26</sup> G.I. Franchi-Verney della Valletta, *Concerti dei ciechi milanesi*, «Gazzetta Piemontese», vol. XVIII, n. 141, e (21 May) 1884, p. 2.

### 3. *Self-representation*

All the exhibitors at the great fairs, including educational institutions for persons with disabilities, were required to mark on the application form the sector of the exhibition in which they intended to take part. This was a meaningful choice that reflected how exhibitors perceived their own identity and role, including in relation to the specific context of the event. Scrutiny of the official catalogues of the three editions suggests that the educational institutes for the disabled were more inclined to position themselves in the field of welfare: there were 27 applications for this sector compared to 20 for the education sector. In the absence of further information, we may assume that each institute opted for the category that best matched its own aims and characteristics or the type of material that it planned to exhibit. The display of large numbers of artifacts produced in the vocational workshops suggests a keenness to point up the institute's positive impact, in terms of fostering the social integration of their students by helping them to learn a trade. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the main overall purpose of the exhibitions was to showcase the degree of well-being and economic development achieved by the Italian nation, including – by 1911 – in comparison with other European countries.

The pattern of self-categorization just outlined was likely further influenced by the aforementioned tendency of the political leadership to view educational institutions for the disabled as purely charitable organizations, again, in keeping with the sentimental, “do-gooder” approach that typically characterized attitudes towards persons in this category. Finally, it should be emphasized that registering for the event as charitable institutes meant paying lower participation fees.

The data prompt still further observations relating to the different types of disability. For example, only among the institutions for the deaf do we find cases of dual participation (both education and welfare sections). This is not surprising considering that in relation to deafness in particular, from the 1870s onwards, specialized journals and conference motions had been at the forefront of a systematic and sustained campaign for recognition of deaf persons' right to education and of the educational value of interventions for the hearing-impaired. Nor is it surprising that almost all the institutions for rickety children applied to exhibit in the welfare section: these organizations were clearly more healthcare-oriented than the others. Even the Turin institute, which had been founded in 1872 with a view to offering an effective combination of education and medical treatment, subsequently underwent a process of progressive medicalization during the 1880s<sup>27</sup>.

Also worthy of note is the – minimal – impact of the great exhibitions in specialist journals with a focus on education for the disabled. Only in their respective, variously titled, news columns, where they habitually reported on key current events with implications for the disabled, did they briefly touch upon the participation and awarding

<sup>27</sup> On the background to, and history of, this project, cf. M.C. Morandini, *Tra educazione e assistenza: la scuola speciale per ragazzi rachitici di Torino*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 7, n. 2, 2012, pp. 241-257.

of the institutes at the various editions of the Turin fair. The reasons for this were made clear by Giovanni Battista Anfossi in an article published in 1884 in «Dell'educazione dei sordomuti» (On the education of the deaf and dumb):

I will not neglect – he says – to let the teachers of the deaf and dumb know what our great Turin Exhibition has gained from the various institutes. And I will gladly fulfil this task, both to serve these institutes the praise that they deserve and also to better publicize the rich life that underpins the flourishing of our Italian institutes<sup>28</sup>.

In several cases, the details provided to the journals' readers had been drawn from local press coverage, as though to emphasize the positive consequences for local communities of the awards received by the institutes at national/international events. Emblematic of these news stories was the write-up in «La Nazione» of Florence on the conferring, in 1898, of a gold medal upon the Tommaso Pendola Institute of Siena and of silver medals upon Vittorio Banchi and Giulio Ferreri, who were head and deputy head of this institute, respectively:

The honours won at the Turin Exhibition are of special importance because they reveal the scientific merit of the director and teachers at our Institute, given that the R. Istituto Pendola did not send work produced by its students [...], choosing instead to exhibit key educational and scientific publications by its heads and teachers [...], and the monthly journal «L'educazione dei sordomuti» (The education of deaf-mutes). It is the great merit of this periodical [...] to have demonstrated the superiority of spoken language over signing<sup>29</sup>.

This kind of self-referential logic was less evident in popular magazines whose readers were benefactors, the disabled, and their families: indeed, the illustrated periodical «Giulio Tarra», as well as «La Domenica del Sordomuto», offered more general information about the exhibitions, concerning, for example, the total number of visitors and the prize-giving ceremonies<sup>30</sup>.

The Turin institutes of education for the disabled have conserved “traces” of their participation in the 1888, 1894, and 1911 Exhibitions. It is evident from the documentary sources that part of the original material has been lost. A prime example is the missing status of gilded bronze facsimiles of the 1898 medals commissioned by the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb for affixation to the diplomas issued by the Exhibition jury<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, this institute is the only one which, currently still in operation in the local area albeit under a different name and organized differently to the past, holds a substantial

<sup>28</sup> G.B. Anfossi, *L'Esposizione nazionale italiana*, «Dell'educazione dei sordomuti», vol. XIII, n. 4, 1884, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> *Il R. Istituto Pendola dei Sordo-muti in Siena premiato all'Esposizione di Torino*, «La Nazione», vol. XL, n. 282, (9 October) 1898, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> In 1911, the weekly magazine «La Domenica del Sordomuto» covered the king's visits to the Exhibition in a couple of short articles. Cf. n. 38 (17 September), p. 303 and n. 42 (15 October), p. 334.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Minutes of the meeting of 11 March 1899 (n. 669), in Archivio dell'Istituto dei sordi di Torino (Archives of the Turin Institute for the Deaf, henceforth ARIST), series «Verbalì delle adunanze», m. 22, f. 1, pp. 2-3. The material concerning the Exhibitions includes posters featuring rubber labels and pictures of various kinds of medals.

archive that includes the collected minutes of the institute's board meetings as well as a set of files catalogued under the heading *Conferences, Lotteries, Exhibitions, Competitions*. On the one hand, the archived minutes, letters, and forms offer detailed information on the complexities involved in registering for the exhibitions<sup>32</sup>; on the other hand, they provide us with insight into the image that the institute set out to present to visitors. A first key emphasis was on retracing and showing off the historic memory of the institution, via the preparation of a monograph<sup>33</sup> and the production of pictures of the building.

A large advertisement placed in the official 1911 catalogue, which cost the institute 35 lire (indeed, four lines of text per exhibitor were free of charge, after which each line cost one lira), allows us to deduce the type of information that was intended to constitute the institute's "calling card" and to illustrate the effectiveness and quality of the education it provided to its students: from a description of the workshops offered (tailoring, shoemaking, and carpentry in the male section; sewing and embroidery in the female section) to a long list of medals and awards received<sup>34</sup>. The will to persuade visitors of the positive outcomes attained on both the educational and medical fronts is also reflected in the reports of the board of directors of the Turin institute for rickety children. The 1898 report, which contains a list of the documents and artefacts presented at that year's exhibition, not only cites statistics and examples of the students' work, but also refers to clay casts modelling both the deformed limbs of pupils selected for treatment and their straightened and healed limbs following intervention<sup>35</sup>.

I have not set out, in this brief presentation, to offer an exhaustive account of the topic in hand, but rather to offer a starting point for a new and promising line of inquiry aimed at reconstructing the strategies and initiatives deployed to spark communication, dialogue, and exchange between the sphere of disability on the one hand and political leaders and civil society on the other.

<sup>32</sup> For further details, cf. *Concorso Esposizione Torino 1898*, in ARIST, *Conferenze, lotterie, Esposizioni, concorsi*, m. 24, f. 4/2.

<sup>33</sup> This was the same monograph that had already been presented at the Milan Exhibition of 1881 with the addition of a letter outlining the main changes that had taken place in the intervening period in the moral, intellectual and financial running of the Institute.

<sup>34</sup> *R. Istituto Sordomuti*, in *Catalogo ufficiale dell'Esposizione internazionale di Torino 1911*, cit., p. 702, n. 2426. Cf. *Esposizione Internazionale di Torino pel 1911*, in ARIST, *Conferenze, lotterie, Esposizioni, concorsi*, m. 24, f. 4/3.

<sup>35</sup> *Relazione morale* (8 June 1899) in Istituto per rachitici Regina Maria Adelaide in Torino, *Verbale, Relazioni. Revisione dello Statuto organico. Cariche sociali. Elenco dei soci onorari*, Torino, Tip. Eredi Botta, 1899, p. 10.



# Procession to the “Honorable Son”: Memory and Representations in the Funeral Rites of Felipe Tiago Gomes (Brasília/DF and Picuí/PB – Brazil, 1996/2011)

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## *Introduction*

Certainly, acts of commemoration should not be limited to religious and patriotic celebrations; praise and funeral pomp are also celebrations; I would say that they developed in the time of relatives and friends, halfway between private memory and social memory [...] Every time we pronounce or write the phrase: “in memory of...”, we inscribe the names of those we bring to memory in the great book of co-memory, which in turn is inscribed in the greater time<sup>1</sup>.

Thinking about the death of an individual as an object of History was a new exercise for the authors of this text. In this writing, we opted to condense theoretical and methodological aspects of the studies we had developed so far and make a discussion based on tensioning elements of life, death and sensibilities. Thus, the object of this study is the death rituals of a character strongly linked to the field of education in Brazil: Felipe Tiago Gomes. This individual was the subject of a broader research, which was based on the perspective of historical biography<sup>2</sup> to take the life of such a character as an object of analysis.

In that study, different nuances of the existence and trajectory of Felipe Tiago were addressed, however, no attention was paid to the outcome of these. In the epigraph at the head of the paper, Ricoeur<sup>3</sup> emphasizes that «praises and funeral pomp are also celebrations» and concludes his idea by exposing that when we use the phrase «in memory

<sup>1</sup> P. Ricoeur, *A memória, a história e o esquecimento*, Campinas, Editora da Unicamp, 2007, p. 60 (translated from the Portuguese version).

<sup>2</sup> F. Dosse, *O desafio biográfico: escrever uma vida*, São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur, *A memória, a história e o esquecimento*, cit.

of...», we register the names of subjects in the memory of a wider time. Inspired by this philosopher's assertions, the objectives of this article are to investigate the procedures adopted in relation to the conduct of the funeral of Felipe Tiago Gomes, scrutinize the forms of appropriation and representation in relation to the honored person, identify and analyze the feelings and sensitivities manifested during the funerals. Funeral ceremonies performed for the character and, finally, discuss the contribution of these ceremonies to the mythmaking of the character.

### 1. "Don Quixote of Brazilian education": Felipe Tiago Gomes and the National Community Schools Campaign

Felipe Tiago Gomes was the founder of the educational sponsor *Campanha Nacional de Escolas da Comunidade* (National Community Schools Campaign), an institution that has been active since 1943 and is responsible for different educational establishments in Brazil. Having become aware of a Latin American educational movement, Felipe decides to promote something similar among law school students who accept the idea and begin to devise ways to put it into practice. Thus, the Poor Gymnastics Campaign (CGP) was created, which aimed to assist those who did not have the opportunity to attend school, especially at the junior high level. Over the years, the institution expanded and gained new contours, being named the *Campanha Nacional de Escolas da Comunidade* (CNEC).

In addition to the adoption of a supposedly non-political and non-partisan position, Felipe's devotion to Saint Francis of Assisi<sup>4</sup> contributed to the construction of representations that configure him as a kind of saint or even a martyr of education. As a devotee of this saint, Felipe renounced material goods and the accumulation of income and possessions. Throughout his career at the CNEC, he obtained as little as possible for himself, having in his name only what was necessary to live. He did not even have money in reserve for health expenses, a fact that was always remembered and mentioned by those who lived with him. More than once, Felipe had to undergo heart surgeries, which were funded by friends and members of the CNEC, since he had nothing in store for himself. Due to his advancing age, Felipe starts to accumulate some savings, however, these are used to cover Campaign expenses, such as compensation for teachers and employees, when the sponsor goes through a serious crisis, in the mid-1990s. The weakening of the institution during this period is pointed out as one of the causes of the deterioration in the health of the founder, who faces situations of anguish and discouragement with the directions of the maintainer.

But despite his health limitations, his... the precariousness of his health, the professor did not give up being present in all the facts, establishing guidelines, defining strategies and seeking ways to achieve

<sup>4</sup> Saint Francis of Assisi was a friar of the Catholic Church, founder of the *Regra dos Frades Menores*, a mendicant order characterized by vows of poverty and material abnegation.

this, which has always been his greatest battle and which I believe, which all Brazilians believe, was the most striking example of... acceptance of challenges little understood, except rhetorically in this country that transforms this challenge into a magnificent work, this campaign that spreads throughout Brazilian society has generated public men, citizens of the greatest magnitude, based on this dream, this... that is Don Quixote of Brazilian education<sup>5</sup>.

In September 1996, Felipe Tiago died due to heart complications. His departure took place in the midst of the financial crisis of the sponsor, which, at that moment, ran the risk of no longer being able to maintain itself. Felipe was always too close to one of his sisters, Maria Gomes, who accompanied him during most of his career, being considered a mainstay for the man who lived in the midst of travel and negotiations. Both did not consolidate affective relationships with spouses, nor did they have children. Maria was in poor health, a situation that worried him and which is also pointed out as one of the factors for his weakening and illness. However, he ends up passing away before his sister, and the latter arrives to accompany his funeral ceremony, but dies quickly, just a few weeks after her brother's burial.

## 2. *The finitude of life as an object of history: theoretical and methodological discussions*

The theoretical contributions that support the discussion proposed in this text are linked to Cultural History, a field of History that allows themes such as death, the rituals and practices involved in it, to be objects of research. On this aspect, Ariès<sup>6</sup> states that it is surprising that "the sciences of man" have been so discreet about death, an inherent aspect of human existence whose treatment varies according to the socio-historical context, as pointed out by the books of the mentioned author<sup>7</sup>. Ariès's studies on death and what it awakens in human beings contemplate perspectives and practices adopted and developed in the West, especially in Western Europe, from antiquity to contemporary times, so that the relationship of other societies and context are not addressed by the author. We emphasize this, because the writing presented here is based on this perspective regarding the finitude of life, its rites, feelings and sensations, but we understand that they are not the only manifestations regarding death developed by human beings.

The farewell to life is apprehended in different ways by human beings, and this moment is seen in a very singular and subjective way. Death, as well as other stages of life, awakens human sensitivity, through feelings, emotions and sensations particular to each one who says goodbye, such as sadness, longing, fear, faith, loneliness, gratitude, among others. These feelings are expressed through the body and the senses, either by crying or smiling, by the feeling of cold or heat, or by looking into the distance and silence, or by

<sup>5</sup> P. Gustosa, *Despedida*. Brasília/DF, Daniel Vídeo-Produções, 1996 (original VHS; edited by Sebastião Garcia de Sousa; recording time: 3h52; translated from the Portuguese version).

<sup>6</sup> P. Ariès, *História da morte no Ocidente*, Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> P. Ariès, *O homem diante da morte*, São Paulo, UNESP, 2014; Id., *História da morte no Ocidente*, cit.

screaming, lamenting or words of remembrance involving the deceased. They are distinct and diversified behaviors, however, that explain the way which each person faces death.

On this subject, Pesavento and Langue<sup>8</sup> explain that sensations and emotions are ways in which sensibilities are manifested in our daily lives. This occurs when our senses encounter reality and are affected physically or psychically. Although death is a physical phenomenon, which causes the disruption of the life of a being in relation to others, it ends up psychically affecting those who continue in life, which allows the emergence of different emotions and their different forms of manifestation. Thus, one of the ways of dealing with the pain of loss can be to conduct increased ceremonies, posthumous tributes or the production of material objects that seek to immortalize the memory of the lost person. These actions end up having a double meaning, that of honoring those who left and that of satisfying those who remain.

Regarding the practices of death rituals, Elias<sup>9</sup> points out that there is a “social convention” that standardizes the behavior of people in funeral acts, both in gestures and in words and expressions to be said. These adopted behaviors were created in order to help people to pass more easily through this moment of finitude of life and overcome the loss of someone with whom they lived. However, there are contradictions in the use of these expressions, especially by the younger population, as they understand this behavior as old and outdated, often not expressing the real feelings and emotions that human beings wish to express on these more delicate occasions.

In order to analyze the processions of the “honorable son”, we will resort to specific concepts of cultural history, such as practices and rituals, problematizing the ways in which society relates to death. We understand that these practices and rituals are carriers and producers of representations, mythologizing, sensibilities and feelings in relation to death, building a memory of the being who says goodbye to life. In Figure 1, we present a scheme with the concepts and theorists that underlie this research.

For the construction of the empirical collection, we resorted to documents mobilized in previous research on the character and the educational supporter founded by him. Thus, the materials mentioned in items *a* and *c* of Figure 2 already belonged to the personal archive of one of the authors of the text, so they were resumed, read and cataloged according to the cut presented here. The empirical material mentioned in line *b* consists of the audiovisual reproduction of stages of the funeral of Felipe Tiago, which took place in 1996. The material, now archived in digital media, was originally produced on VHS on the initiative of the deceased’s family, which, as it seems, hired a production company to capture images and testimonies during the rite. Thus, the referred material is around 3 hours and 50 minutes long, where photographs of the deceased in ceremonials and Campaign schools are interspersed, family moments and testimonials from friends, CNEC members and family.

<sup>8</sup> S. Pesavento, F. Langue (edd.). *Sensibilidades na história: memórias singulares e identidades sociais*, Porto Alegre, UFRGS, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> N. Elias. *A solidão dos moribundos*, Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 2001.

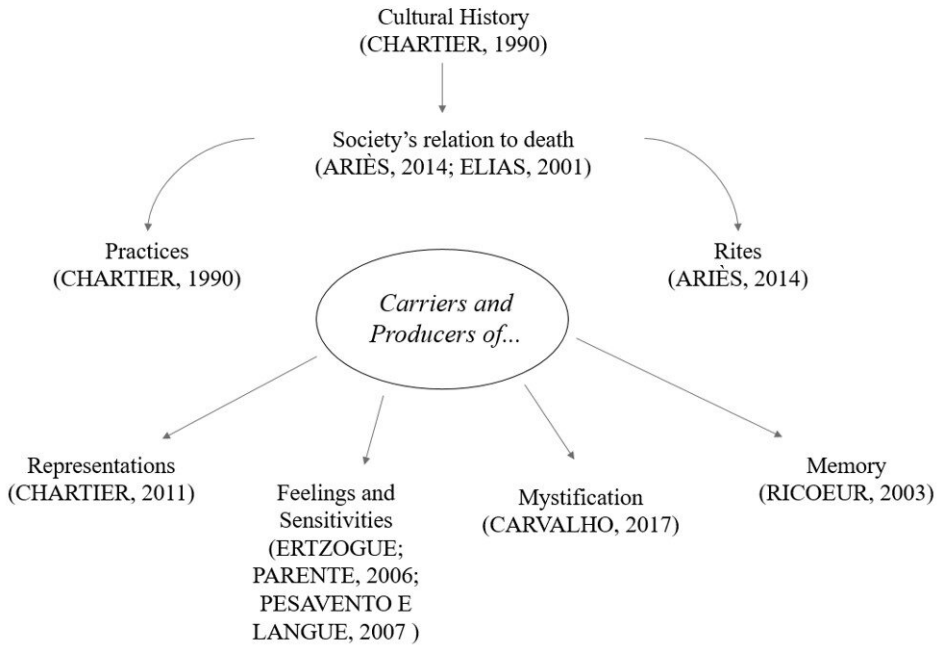


Fig. 1. Theoretical scheme

Document	Localization	Tipology	Characteristics
a) Book: "A Campanha: Felipe Tiago Gomes".	Distributed in cenequista schools.	Institutional book.	Work organized on demand by journalist Gisele Macedo, allusive to CNEC's 75th anniversary.
b) Video produced when Felipe Tiago died in 1996.	Material provided by Felipe's family.	Audiovisual material.	Professional audiovisual production. It presents the funeral rites of Felipe Tiago, as well as testimonials from friends, family and CNEC members.
c) Photographs.	Obtained in different spaces and repositories.	Imagical content.	Selection of photographs and images referring to the two funeral rites performed for Felipe Tiago Gomes, the one from 1996, on the occasion of his death, and the one from 2010, when his remains were transferred to his hometown. This collection is composed of 15 images.

Fig. 2. Table with the list of investigated documents

The recording presents the testimonies collected at the funeral itself, some of them having been uttered in the presence of the coffin with the body of the deceased, all of these were transcribed, totaling a document with 27 pages. The pronounced content does not seem to have been prepared in advance, but rather spontaneously. We highlight this because, certainly, this influences the way the dead person is remembered, as well as the feelings manifested in relation to him, since, as Pesavento and Langue<sup>10</sup> pointed out, our sensitivity is touched upon and feelings and emotions are manifested, from the reality we face. In this case, we noticed that the interviewees were immersed in their emotions that were incited by the entire context that the moment encompassed, and their reports were full of nostalgia, longing, gratitude and praise for the deeds of the deceased, a practice highlighted by Ariès<sup>11</sup>.

As for the photographs mentioned in line *c*, they were collected in previous research to produce data on the character in question. Some of them were captured during a visit to the memorial organized in honor of Felipe Tiago in the city of Picuí/PB, while the others were gathered on internet sites.

After discussing the theoretical and methodological references that underlie our writing and presenting the systematized empirical evidence, we move on to the analysis of the Felipe Tiago rituals conducted in Brasília/DF, 1996, and Picuí/PB, 2010.

### 3. *Procession to the “honorable son”: the funeral rituals for Felipe Tiago Gomes Rite of 1996 – Brasília/DF*

Felipe, who had suffered from heart problems for years, died of a heart attack on 21 September 1996, after a period of hospitalization. As Ariès<sup>12</sup> points out, the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its increments caused the treatment of diseases and illnesses to leave the domestic environment, for the space of asepsis, hygiene and hospital discipline. In this case, Felipe's hospitalization and its outcome occurred after a period of structural changes and financial problems that led the sponsor to a serious crisis, a fact that may have been an aggravating factor for his health. In addition, the health of his sister Maria Gomes also worried him, and such concerns were added, as his nephew recalls:

[...] I mean, he was worried about that situation, the other day I went back, I even offered him the help he needed, he wanted to urinate and the nurse, that protocol, I went there and, as his nephew, I had a freedom, you know, I helped him because he was diabetic and, but then unfortunately he died on the Saturday that there was one, a great recognition of every cenequista in Brazil. Brasília even stopped at his funeral because I already had a certain knowledge, both the police and military police scouts in Brasília, when a car with a fireman, the same thing we did for the transfer from Campina Grande to Picuí<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Pesavento, Langue (edd.), *Sensibilidades na história: memórias singulares e identidades sociais*, cit.

<sup>11</sup> Ariès, *O homem diante da morte*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> V.S. de Maria, *Interview*; interviewer: Ariane dos Reis Duarte; Brasília/DF; July 2017; recording time: 1<sup>h</sup>45 (translated from the Portuguese version).

An interesting aspect to be highlighted in this narrative is the fact that the commotion experienced in Brasília, the country's capital, was not exactly spontaneous. The death of the founder of CNEC did not arouse the consternation of the people and their demonstration in the streets. The funeral procession through the city, pulled by a fire engine, is possible through the nephew's contacts, who mobilizes them in favor of holding a ceremony that he considered worthy of his uncle's greatness. With that, we want to emphasize that the commotion surrounding Felipe's death, although intense, does not transcend his circle of family members and CNEC members. Although the sponsor has a national scope, the character in question is not someone popularly known, not even when mentioning those who worked in favor of education in the country. There is no space for such questions to be discussed in this text, however, it is important to mention that there is, in his funeral procession, an attempt to produce a commotion that transcends the cenecist circle.

Although there was an effort for the figure of Felipe to be propagated on the day of his funeral in the city of Brasília and to encourage emotion in the wider public, his rite of passage had a more intimate connotation and was carried by emotions translated into gestures, actions and words as we had the opportunity to observe in the video recording made at the time. The facial and body expressions in front of each other and beside the coffin, the chants and prayers performed by the participants, as well as the testimonies of those who accompanied him for many years in life, express the sensibilities of those present, reproduced by the feelings and emotions of goodbye.

Oliveira *et alli*<sup>14</sup> draws attention to the fact that structures of feeling do not affect all people in the same social circle in the same way. We understand this statement, since feelings are a subjective order and, therefore, of each individual. Although sadness was present among the deceased's friends, family members and colleagues in the Cenecist network, words of gratitude, faith and hope permeated the narratives of those present: «[...] we are all very sorry, but as spiritualists that we are, we know that the seed has to die in order to produce more fruit, Felipe is a new seed that is born today»<sup>15</sup>; «[...] God could solve everything, and God solved it in the best possible way, transforming it into the seed [...]; the seed that will certainly bear fruit»<sup>16</sup>. The words of hope, in the form of a seed left by Felipe Tiago to Brazilian education, are also found in the testimony of Marcos Maciel<sup>17</sup> (September 1996), a former student of the cenecist network and, at the time, vice-president of the Federative Republic of Brazil:

<sup>14</sup> M.A.T. de Oliveira, L.C.B. Oscar, J. Gregório, G.H.G. Lacerda, *Referenciais teórico-metodológico nas pesquisas em história da educação: para uma história das relações entre sensibilidades, tempo livre e formação*, in K. Braghini, K. Munakata, M.A.T. de Oliveira (edd.), *Diálogos sobre a educação dos sentidos e das sensibilidades*, Curitiba, Editora da UFPR, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> C. Augusto, *Despedida*. Brasília/DF, Daniel Vídeo-Produções, 1996 (original VHS; edited by Sebastião Garcia de Sousa; recording time: 3h52; translated from the Portuguese version).

<sup>16</sup> L. Vieira. *Despedida, Despedida*. Brasília/DF, Daniel Vídeo-Produções, 1996 (original VHS; edited by Sebastião Garcia de Sousa; recording time: 3h52; translated from the Portuguese version).

<sup>17</sup> Brazilian politician, Vice President of the Republic between 1995-2003, when he was affiliated with the extinct Liberal Front Party (PFL). Like other political personalities in Brazil, he was a student of the sponsor founded by Felipe Tiago.



That's why I leave here in this moment of pain, in this moment of sadness with the passing of Professor Felipe Tiago Gomes, I want to leave at that moment, also my certainty, that his journey will not be interrupted, and certainly wherever he is and will be in good place, faith in God, he will certainly be able to verify that the seed he left planted here, [will continue] to germinate, thus bearing much fruit, so that we can build more social justice in our country, through education<sup>18</sup>.

It is possible to see that the consternation caused by Felipe's departure gives rise to the desire that his existence continues to influence posterity, so that his life does not end with his death. This attempt to make Felipe present even after his death will gain more specific contours when his nephew decides to transport the remains of his uncles, Felipe and Maria Gomes, to the family's homeland. One of the factors that motivated him to take the decision to take his "honorable son" back to Picuí was precisely the fact that he did not allow his uncle to be forgotten by the city that had helped him so much. In this way, he works to get his uncles removed from the Campo da Esperança cemetery in Brasília/DF, where he was lying with his sister in a wing destined for the authorities (Figure 3). Thus, in the following section, we will analyze the rites developed in this second ceremonial.

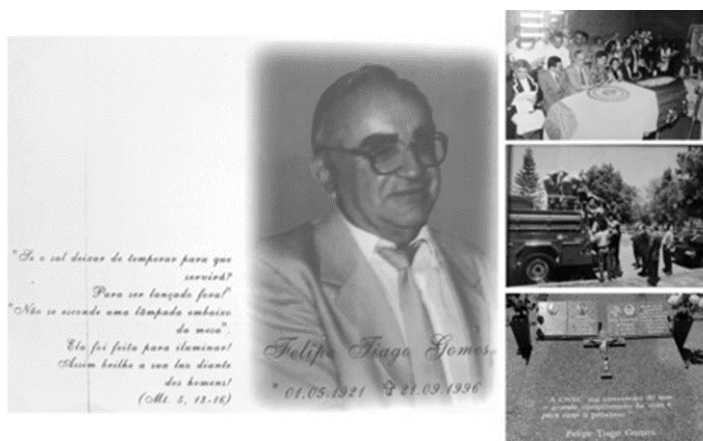


Fig. 3. Tributes to Felipe Tiago in Brasília/DF, 1996 (private collection of the author)

<sup>18</sup> M. Maciel, *Despedida, Despedida*. Brasília/DF, Daniel Vídeo-Produções, 1996 (original VHS; edited by Sebastião Garcia de Sousa; recording time: 3h52; translated from the Portuguese version).

#### 4. Rite of 2011 – Picuí/PB

In 2010, Mr. Valdemiro Severiano manages to implement one of his ideas to honor his uncle, the creation of a memorial in the house where the Gomes family lived. This venture was organized and financed by his nephew, who took it upon himself to honor and keep his uncle's memory alive. Following these steps, the then mayor of Picuí, a former CNEC employee, mobilized public power to build a statue on a promontory overlooking the city (Figure 4). The following year, in order to mobilize the local population around his uncle's memory, Dr. Miro organizes a referendum to assess the residents's wishes regarding the transport of the remains of Felipe and Maria Gomes to their homeland. With this, a meticulous effort is evident so that Felipe's life is constantly remembered, as the plebiscite does not arise from a spontaneous demand from the countrymen of that character. However, the representations about the event construct it in a different way, as we can see in the excerpt from Macedo's<sup>19</sup> paper about the transfer.

[...] in a surprising vote, more than 99% of those who participated in the election voted 'yes'. At the will of the people, on 15 January 2011, in the presence of authorities, residents, relatives and ceneclist collaborators, a historic ceremony was held to receive the mortal remains of the two famous sons of Picuí.

[...] Arriving in the city, the convoy was received by a warm audience, to the sound of Filarmônica Coronel Antonio Xavier, which presented the Brazilian National Anthem, sung in chapel by all those present.

The caravan continued to Memorial Dr. Felipe Tiago Gomes, on *Avenida 24 de Novembro*, where several tributes were paid, and the remains were taken to the pedestal of his statue, installed at the top of the city of Picuí, after the pronouncement of the authorities and famous ceneclists<sup>20</sup>.



Fig. 4. Tributes to Felipe Tiago in Picuí/PB, 2010 (private collection of the author)

<sup>19</sup> G. Macedo, *A campanha: Felipe Tiago Gomes*, Uberaba, CNEC Edigraf, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Macedo, *A campanha: Felipe Tiago Gomes*, cit., p. 191 (translated from the Portuguese version).

The above excerpt allows us to perceive the meticulousness with which the second funeral ceremony was organized. The procession began with the disembarkation of the funerary urns at the city's airport from Campina Grande, which is 120 km from Picuí, which were traveled in a fire truck, so that not only the people of Picuí were mobilized with the ceremony, as a transfer of this type certainly does not go unnoticed on the streets. Here, in addition to the attempt to keep the memory of Felipe Tiago alive, it is possible to observe the feeling of the nephew, positioned on the right in the first photo of figure 4, for the deceased uncle who shows gratitude and nostalgia. This figure also makes it possible to understand how the city received the procession of the Gomes brothers, as well as the position of the memorial statue that received the remains of both. The funerary urns were taken to the statue, where, after a celebration, the mortal remains were left. In the days before the ritual, the local press invited countrymen to receive the «most honorable countryman»<sup>21</sup>.

After the ceremony, the urns used to transport the remains became part of the memorial collection organized in honor of Felipe Tiago. Thus, even an accessory used on a temporary and punctual basis became part of the apparatus of praising the “honorable son”.

### *Conclusions*

This study had, among other objectives, to investigate the procedures adopted in relation to the funerals of Felipe Tiago Gomes, founder of CNEC – Campanha Nacional de Escolas da Comunidade. Despite having established a large network of schools and being diligently active in the area of education, Felipe was not known outside his educational circle. In this environment, he received great prestige, being represented and nominated by colleagues as a teacher, educator and pedagogue, activities that he never conducted. His death provoked a strong commotion in the cenecist community, which mobilized in order to build and maintain a memory around the character. In view of this, two funeral celebrations were dedicated to Felipe Tiago, one on the occasion of his death, in September 1996, in the city of Brasília/DF, and another one in 2010, when his remains were transferred to the character's birthplace, Picuí/PB, located in the northeast.

In the ritual conducted in Brasília, the family was organized to hire a film crew to record scenes from the ritual, as well as testimonies from people about their relationship with the deceased, as well as aspects of his life and work. The analysis of the narratives enabled us to identify the syncretism that permeates religious practices in Brazil. Furthermore, the testimonies provided revealed the feelings and emotions expressed by the sensitivity of each one who had the opportunity to follow the trajectory of Felipe Tiago at the CNEC. The research related to the funeral ceremonials for Felipe Tiago also allowed us to investigate other practices carried out in order to create this *post mortem*

<sup>21</sup> Based on information from the blog «Picuí é notícia», available on 03.07.2023.

memory of the character, such as the procession with the mortal remains in a fire truck through the city in both rituals, the tributes carried out through of flowers and wreaths, memory of mourning, applause, prayers and songs dedicated to the deceased, the walk organized by family members and CNEC members with banners and sayings in gratitude to its founder. In the city of Picuí, particularly, there is also an organization of the local population to receive their "illustrious son", a kind of public adoration of the deceased, with the construction of a large monument, in order to make him a mythical being of local education.

In this way, we understand that such practices demonstrate an effort by this community of memory to keep the character present in the imagination of his countrymen and the CNEC educational circle. In addition, it is possible to observe rites and practices that refer to the religious syncretism existing in Brazil, where, among other manifestations, public characters are worshiped and honored with an almost religious devotion, becoming a kind of martyr of their segment.



# Metamorphosis of School Memory: the Case of Adelfo Grosso between Individual, Collective and Public Memory

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## *Introduction*

Today, school memory studies have been consolidated both nationally and internationally, as witnessed at the conference held in Seville in 2015 and more recently in Macerata in 2022, the result of a Project of Relevant National Interest entitled “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”<sup>1</sup> which investigated and catalogued the various forms of school memory – individual, collective and public – in an online portal<sup>2</sup>. Generally, the study of public memory has already demonstrated how street and building names are assigned by the ruling classes, who select personalities deemed as exemplary models for the community, consistently with their vision of the world, for naming streets, plaques and buildings<sup>3</sup>. The public memory of schools also falls within this field of study, describing the representation

<sup>1</sup> International Symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues”, Seville 22-23 September 2015, which was followed by the publication of the book of abstracts and of the book edited by C. Janes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Springer, 2017. This contribution elaborates, also in the title, the report presented at the International Conference “The School and its Many Pasts” organized in Macerata (12-15 December 2022).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/> (last access: 29.12.2022).

<sup>3</sup> M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950; J. Le Goff (ed.), *La nuova storia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1977, pp. 347-399; P. Nora (ed.), *Entre Mémoire et Histoire*, in Id., *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. I, Paris, Gallimard, 1984; P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989; B. Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani. Spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell'Italia unita (1870-1900)*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1991; M. Isnenghi, (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Simboli e miti dell'Italia unita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996; Id., *La storia nelle vie e nelle piazze*, in M. Petrantoni (ed.), *Memorie nel bronzo e nel marmo. Monumenti celebrativi e targhe nelle piazze e nelle vie di Milano*, Milano, Federico Motta Editore, 1997, pp. 39-49; J. Assmann, *La memoria culturale. Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997; A. Huyssen, *Present Pasts. Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*, Stanford, Stanford University, 2003; J. Assmann, *Cultural memory and early civilization. Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011; A. M. Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011; C. Mancuso, *Miti del Risorgimento a Palermo. Spazi urbani e simbologie patriottiche (1860-1911)*, «Mediterranea Ricerche storiche», n. 11, 2007, pp. 545-576; U. Fabietti, V. Matera, *Memorie e identità. Simboli e strategie del ricordo*, Milano, Meltemi, 2018.

and idea of school and education promoted by the ruling classes and consecrated in an inscription on the wall<sup>4</sup>. So what therefore is the subject of a memory expressed on a plaque or the name of a school or a road? The reasons often appear in the wording of the inscription, but this is also the point of arrival of a much longer process that may last years or even decades before reaching the public memory, which therefore represents the peak of cultural intentionality that transforms the individual and collective emotional impact of the news of a death into a publicly visible, perpetual memory written on the walls. It is therefore interesting to dig into the archaeology of school memory, reconstructing the path, figures and reasons of a possible passage from the individual to the collective and public memory of the school, in order to understand the metamorphoses of the subject of that memory. To this end, we will look at the case of Adelfo Grosso, director of the male Normal School in Bologna after Unification, who remains in the perpetual memory of the city's public spaces on a stone plaque, while a classroom, park and three schools were named after him following a long and intense process of construction of the school memory, today destined for oblivion.

### 1. *A stone plaque for Adelfo Grosso: but who was he?*

Adelfo Grosso was born on 24 February 1831 in Pinerolo, in the province of Turin, where he taught in the upper primary schools, was head and teacher at the technical school, and was appointed *maestro di Lettere italiane* (teacher of Italian literature) by the Minister Quintino Sella without having to sit the state exam<sup>5</sup>. When the need arose

<sup>4</sup> P. Cunningham, *Making Use of the Past: Memory, History and Education*, «History of Education Society Bulletin», vol. 66, 2000, pp. 68-70; M. D'Ascenzo, *Creating Places of Public Memory through the Naming of School Buildings. A Case Study of Urban School Spaces in Bologna in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, «El Futuro del Pasado», vol. 7, 2016, pp. 441-458; A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, «Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere». *Memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistrali nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016; M. D'Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as a resource in history of education*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, 2017, pp. 633-657; Janes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit.; M. Brunelli, J. Meda, L. Pomante (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times* (special issue), «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019; J. Meda, *The "Sites of School Memory" in Italy between memory and oblivion: a first approach*, *ibid.*, pp. 25-47; C. Venturelli, *A stone on the wall. Collective and public memory of an eclectic primary teacher*, *ibid.*, pp. 223-237; D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters. Funeral memories as source in history of education between nation building and collective memory*, *ibid.*, pp. 279-294; V. Minuto, *L'educazione al patrimonio monumentale della scuola*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive. Atti del II Congresso Nazionale della Società italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Padova, 7-8 ottobre 2021)*, Macerata, eum, 2021, pp. 151-168; Id., *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVI, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255; Id., *Memorie di scuola a Campo Verano. I monumenti funebri a Erminia Fuà Fusinato e a Carlo Belviglieri*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XVI, n. 2, 2021, pp. 527-553.

<sup>5</sup> On Adelfo Grosso, see M. D'Ascenzo, *La scuola elementare in età liberale. Il caso Bologna 1859-1911*, Bologna, Clueb, 1997, pp. 100-102; F. Fabbri, *L'insegnamento di agricoltura nella Scuola normale maschile di*



to open the male Normal School to train primary school teachers in Bologna, at the initiative of the Province of Bologna soon after Unification, Minister Sella proposed to appoint Grosso as director, describing his characteristics

he is currently director and professor at the Administrative Technical School in Pinerolo; for his doctrine and commitment, the High Council of the Ministry granted him a teaching diploma for Italian literature, history, geography without having to sit the exam; for several years he taught in some upper primary schools, where he gained that experience of the best educational disciplines that constitute the main quality of those who have to manage an educational establishment, throughout his career he has constantly demonstrated his upright character and common sense, as well as his courteous ways<sup>6</sup>.

And so, Adelfo Grosso came to Bologna and managed the male Normal School until 1888, overseeing the organisation, coordinating the teaching staff and expanding the range of subjects. His cultural actions extended beyond the school, participating in local civil society, in educational debates and initiatives, defending the Piedmont school policies for which he clearly represented the standard bearer in the city. Indeed, during the discussion on the contents of the primary school reform in Bologna proposed by the mayor Gioacchino Napoleone Pepoli (1867-1868), he publicly intervened in writing, referring to the need for a formal and substantial application of the Casati Law, thus in favour of absolutely free schooling for the whole primary school, which had been challenged by Pepoli's proposal. Adelfo Grosso, who from 1862 also exchanged letters with the poet and teacher Giosuè Carducci, whom he affectionately referred to as «dear Carducci»<sup>7</sup>, promoted a number of educational and cultural initiatives in the city, particularly from 1870. For instance, in the years when gymnastics was being introduced into schools, Grosso adopted physical education in the male Normal School even before it became mandatory by law in 1878. He appointed Emilio Baumann, one of the main exponents of gymnastics in Italy, who taught an experimental course in the primary schools and other secondary institutes in Bologna<sup>8</sup>. From 1872 to 1875, Grosso was vice-chairman and later chairman of the «Virtus» gymnastics society founded by Baumann, offering a significant contribution to the organisation of the V Italian Gymnastics Congress held in

*Bologna 1866-1888*, in M. Tozzi Fontana, G. Dragoni (edd.), *Interpretare l'innovazione*, Bologna, Il Nove, 1997, pp. 252-267; F. Delneri, *Educare gli educatori. La Scuola normale maschile provinciale di Bologna e i suoi luoghi*, «Strenna Storica Bolognese», 2009, pp. 175-199; M. D'Ascenzo, *Alle origini delle attività sportive in Italia: la ginnastica «razionale» di Emilio Baumann (1860-1884)*, in R. Farnè (ed.), *Sport e infanzia. Un'esperienza formativa tra gioco e impegno*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2010, pp. 194-215; F. Fabbri, *Diventare maestri: la Scuola Normale maschile di Bologna*, in M. D'Ascenzo (ed.), *Tutti a scuola? L'istruzione elementare nella pianura bolognese tra Otto e Novecento*, Bologna, Clueb, 2013, pp. 55-70; M. D'Ascenzo, *Grosso Adelfo*, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione DBE* (thereafter: *DBE*), Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, vol. I, p. 692.

<sup>6</sup> Historical Archive of the Metropolitan City of Bologna, General Archive of the Province of Bologna, Year 1861, Title 23, Folder 248, Letter from Minister Quintino Sella dated 15 April 1861.

<sup>7</sup> Casa Carducci, Correspondence, Box LXII, File 45 «Adelfo Grosso», Letter dated 4 November 1862.

<sup>8</sup> D'Ascenzo, *Alle origini delle attività sportive nella scuola italiana: la ginnastica razionale di Emilio Baumann (1860-1884)*, cit.

the city in 1874<sup>9</sup>. He also collaborated with the Municipality of Bologna to recruit and train teachers, and with the local Teachers' Society, helped to revise the curricula and text books used in the primary schools. Grosso took part in the cultural and scholastic life of the city with a passion, also refusing the prestigious appointment as director and general inspector of all the primary schools in Turin in 1869<sup>10</sup>, in order to remain in the city where he had built his career and many strong friendships, also after he was widowed<sup>11</sup>. He was popular among colleagues and students alike. In 1871, for his birthday, they had organised a small two-act performance in his honour; written by vice-headmaster Luigi Savorini with music by his colleague Federico Parisini, the text was published by the students with an emblematic dedication of their fondness, gratitude and esteem

To the illustrious professor  
CAV. ADELFO GROSSO  
Director of the Normal School  
of the province of Bologna  
for his honesty and zeal towards good  
he is second to none  
and on XXIV February MDCCCLXXI  
the anniversary of his birth  
his college students  
as a sign  
of gratitude, affection and esteem  
indelible  
have published this at their own expense  
and wish to dedicate it to him<sup>12</sup>.

He was clearly very popular in his position at the Normal School among both colleagues and students, with whom he continued to correspond even after they had finished their studies and begun to teach in the schools, as emerges from the archive documents. This was a type of activity that went way beyond his institutional tasks but bears witness to the paternal and fraternal care Grosso expressed in his way of being director, evidently recognised by his students also after his death.

<sup>9</sup> M. Negroni, "Virtus" *Società di educazione fisica in Bologna* *Notizie storiche* MDXXXLXXI-MCMXXXI, s.l., s.n., n.d. (but 1931), pp. 18-42.

<sup>10</sup> *Grosso Prof. Cav. Adelfo vs. Province of Bologna*, Bologna, Stabilimento Tipografico Zamorani e Albertazzi, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Casa Carducci, Correspondence, Box LXII, File 45 "Adelfo Grosso", cit., Obituary of his wife Maria Repetto who died on 26 December 1876.

<sup>12</sup> *Una burla farsetta in due atti di Luigi Savorini musicata dal maestro Federico Parisini da rappresentare nel Convitto Normale maschile della Provincia di Bologna il carnevale del 1871*, Bologna, Tip. Mareggiani all'insegna di Dante, 1871.

## 2. *Adelfo Grosso, between individual memory and collective memory*

Adelfo Grosso died in Bologna on 21 January 1892. Two days later, on the evening of his funeral, Gustavo Guazzaloca, former student of the Normal School and teacher in the city for some time, as well as a key member of the Teachers' Society in the province of Bologna<sup>13</sup>, gave a commemorative speech also in the name of other ex-students and friends, which was then published at their expense for the memorial service a month after his death. He spoke in the first person, driven by the «profound emotion afflicting me in this saddest moment alongside this coffin [for] the supreme farewell to our dear and beloved teacher»<sup>14</sup>. Guazzaloca described Grosso as being from a «remarkable Piedmont family»<sup>15</sup> and coming to Bologna thirty years before «in the flower of his youth»<sup>16</sup>, called by the Ministry of Public Education to manage the Normal School «with the noble aim of procuring teachers for our municipalities, conforming to the needs of these new times»<sup>17</sup> and, precisely thanks to «his burning zeal and most special talents, led the school [...] reputed to be one of the best in Italy»<sup>18</sup>. Guazzaloca then turned to his ex-colleagues and students remembering Grosso's moral and intellectual qualities

oh companions, let us bow reverently to his memory, to the memory of a man of simple customs, an honest gentleman with no hypocrisy, an upright and honouring citizen, a learned teacher of fluent, committed eloquence, an active and diligent director with no wrath<sup>19</sup>

along with the «moderation of affections and the generosity of sentiments»<sup>20</sup> and what we may today define as empathy towards their inexperienced and frightened students

and that exceptionally exquisite, delicate and never diminishing feeling that, by nature, he was dispensed with, and was particularly manifested in us, poor unexpert youths hungry for the knowledge required to continue our studies in the Normal Schools, most of them coming from the peak of the high mountains and the far ends of the Province. To overcome our lacking culture, he doubled his efforts and incessantly surrounded us with the most fervent care, a patient and loving brother who strove to incite them and help them in their first, arduous studies<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Gustavo Guazzaloca (1847-1919) was vice-chairman of the Emilia Teaching Federation in 1894, promoter of new educational curricula for the city's primary schools, the female professional schools and the Secular Sunday school initiated by Luigi Bombicci, as well as author of texts on school hygiene and propaganda against alcoholism. Cf. M. D'Ascenzo, *Guazzaloca Gustavo*, in *DBE*, cit., vol. I, p. 697; S.A., *In memoria di un educatore, Raduno di vecchi insegnanti ed antichi scolari della Scuola Normale Maschile di Bologna*, «Il pensiero dei maestri», vol. IV, n. 6, 15 June 1922, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Omaggio alla memoria del cavaliere e professore Adelfo Grosso nel trigesimo della sua morte. Discorso improvvisato dal maestro Gustavo Guazzaloca la sera del 23 gennaio 1892 ai funerali del professore cavaliere Adelfo Grosso in nome degli insegnanti usciti dalla scuola normale e pubblicato per cura di amici e di allievi del defunto*, Bologna, Stabilimento Tip. Zamorani e Albertazzi, 1892, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Guazzaloca remembered Grosso's efforts to ignite the students' enthusiasm towards a career, that however was painted in its most negative aspects, due to its meagre satisfactions

a career, strewn with infinite trials and tribulations, that offers only light, sterile compensation for the untiring efforts, the forced excitement, which attacks and weakens the strongest fibres, wears down and destroys the most vigorous energies<sup>22</sup>.

The former student briefly described the director's physical appearance, his solemn gait, his high forehead, his smile, his deep blue eyes intent on comprehending the soul of his students, severe yet understanding towards them, little more than adolescents. Then he clarified the pedagogic and educational foundation that exhorted them to discern well between the real and presumed innovations of the time, and to solidly base their own pedagogy on the «glorious tradition of Italian schools that produced great teachers: Romagnosi, Rosmini, Gioberti, Capponi, Aporti, Rayneri and many other illustrious writers and pedagogists»<sup>23</sup>. For these reasons, Guazzaloca recalled the diffidence towards the new forms of «education science» of the positivism for which Grosso was attacked as a

stick-in-the-mud by foolish scribblers, as the Sicilians well defined them, who, stealing with a vengeance here and there, citing several languages and knowing none of them, manipulating curricula with neither head nor tail, spend their lives stuffing books and booklets and memorials with clumsily styled, insignificant and empty ideas swollen with words<sup>24</sup>.

Moreover, Guazzaloca talked of Grosso's work in local society as a battle against the Pepoli's proposed school reform of 1867 «which would have irreparably ruined our primary schools»<sup>25</sup>, the presidency of the Gymnastics Society and the civil employees' club. The former student was sure that «the love of your disciples will never die, that sweet memory of the venerated teacher will never fade»<sup>26</sup>, that teacher then defined as «an untainted, fearless knight, an honourable gentleman of the good old days»<sup>27</sup>, hoping that beyond the grave he would meet with Enrico Sassoli who had strongly supported the male Normal School and with «your dear idealism that was Father Girard»<sup>28</sup>, defined as the inspiration behind Adelfo Grosso's cultural and pedagogic action. The individual memory added up, progressively overlapping the collective memory linked to common youth, a profound emotion shared by all, while the language used tells of a very strong bond with «our dear, beloved teacher»<sup>29</sup>, «patient and loving brother»<sup>30</sup> consigned to memory like a soldier wearing a laurel wreath and wrapped in the flag

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

farewell friend; farewell brother; our affection and grief follow you; go, into the kingdom of death like a wounded soldier, crowned in laurel, wrapped in the flag in the name of which you fought long and bravely for your whole life<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. *Adelfo Grosso from individual and collective memory to public memory*

In the following years, the traces of the memory of Adelfo Grosso were lost, both in the archives and in the bibliographies, at least as far as the current state of research finds. Only thirty years after Grosso's death, in April 1922 an article in a local teaching journal referred to a "Gathering of former students of our male Normal School", at the *Casa del Maestro* (Teacher's Society House), «who organised a lovely ceremony»<sup>32</sup>. Behind the initiative was no longer Guazzaloca, who had since passed away, but another and younger former student of Adelfo Grosso's, Ettore Mattiuzzi, at that time director of the local primary schools and author of school texts. The gathering was an opportunity for meeting with friends united by a «cordial fellowship of old classmates»<sup>33</sup> from which the desire emerged to «re-establish a male Normal School in Bologna, for which there is a strong need»<sup>34</sup>, as it had been closed in 1888, transferring the men's Normal School to Forlimpopoli, further away in Romagna.

It was precisely Mattiuzzi, along with the teacher Edmondo Chelli and the more famous Ernesto Cappelletti, one of Grosso's former students and at that time the central director of the municipal primary schools<sup>35</sup>, again on behalf of a "Gathering of former students of the Normal School", submitting an application on 3 May 1922 to the Municipal Education Department for a rectangular stone plaque, in Verona marble, to commemorate Adelfo Grosso, affixed in via Santo Stefano 116<sup>36</sup>, the last site of the male Normal School in Bologna<sup>37</sup>. The proposed epigraph was dictated by Giuseppe Lipparini, local poet and professor, then lightly amended with the agreement of the author, as declared by the former students themselves in a subsequent note dated 8 May 1922<sup>38</sup>.

It is interesting to analyse the final text of the epigraph carved into the marble stone at the former site of the male Normal School. While in Guazzaloca's speech of 1892 the

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> S. A., *Riunione di ex allievi della Scuola Normale maschile*, «Il pensiero dei maestri», vol. IV, n. 4, 15 April 1922, p. 3. The "Casa del Maestro" (note the capital M) was in De' Foscherari street in Bologna.

<sup>33</sup> D'Ascenzo, *Mattiuzzi Ettore*, in *DBE*, cit., vol. II, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> S. A., *Riunione di ex allievi della Scuola Normale maschile*, cit.

<sup>35</sup> M. D'Ascenzo, *Cappelletti Ernesto*, in *DBE*, cit., vol. I, pp. 269-270.

<sup>36</sup> Historical Archive of the Municipality of Bologna, Administrative papers, Year 1924, Folder 918, Title V, Sect. 3 Municipal buildings, Sect. 1 Buildings, File "Plaque to Adelfo Grosso", Letter dated 4 May 1922.

<sup>37</sup> Delneri, *Educare gli educatori. La Scuola normale maschile provinciale di Bologna e i suoi luoghi*, cit.

<sup>38</sup> Historical Archive of the Municipality of Bologna, Administrative papers, Year 1924, cit. On the stone plaque see M. D'Ascenzo, *Lapide ad Adelfo Grosso e agli insegnanti della Scuola Normale Maschile di Bologna (1922)*, «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», DOI: 10.53218/1906, published on 30.08.2022 (last access: 23.08.2023).

protagonist was Adelfo Grosso, described physically, in his humanity and culture and in the role he played in the city, here the subjects of the stone were both Grosso and his patrons, i.e., the former students. The wording of the epigraph is clearly divided into three parts, joined by the memory of Adelfo Grosso whose name lies at the centre in larger characters than the rest of the text

HERE STOOD THE FIRST MALE NORMAL SCHOOL  
 THAT THE PROVINCE OF BOLOGNA MAGNIFICENTLY ESTABLISHED  
 AND MAINTAINED FROM THE YEAR MDCCCLX TO THE YEAR MDCCCLXXXVIII.  
 THE FORMER STUDENTS, IN MEMORY OF THE BELOVED TEACHERS  
 LED BY ADELFO GROSSO FROM PINEROLO,  
 A GREAT MIND AND PATERNAL HEART, LAID THIS MEMORY  
 AS A CELEBRATION OF THE HUMBLE, DAILY HEROISM  
 OF THE ITALIAN SCHOOL AND ITS TEACHERS.  
 YEAR MCMXXII<sup>39</sup>.

The first three lines remembered the site of the male Normal School established by the province of Bologna, which ran from 1860 to 1888: therefore *in primis* the place and promoter of the school, that is, the Province of Bologna.

The next three lines remembered the former students as the promoters of the stone itself in memory of their teachers («the former students in memory of the beloved teachers») and their head, the director Adelfo Grosso, with information on his origins and moral and intellectual characteristics, “great mind” (high, supreme) and “paternal heart” (with the love of a father).

The third part gave the last reason for the plaque, «the celebration of the humble, daily heroism of the Italian school and its teachers», the daily fatigue of the teaching profession, defined as heroic.

The stone therefore firstly celebrated the place, then the former students as patrons, the teachers of the school and their director, finally emphasising the difficulties of teaching as indeed a heroic task. It seemed almost a cry of pain, a public, evidently shared confirmation of the tough condition of the teacher, a condition not sufficiently appreciated by the community, as in fact had been reported in the pages of the teaching periodicals and trade associations for decades. Here, in this epigraph, the former students defined Grosso as the “head”, using a language befitting the time of war and the political debate that followed, marked by profound animosity that then led to the rise of Mussolini.

The plaque was unveiled on 4 June 1922. The speed with which the stone was proposed, laid and inaugurated – less than one month – is quite amazing. Probably the idea had already been taken on board some time before, the collective consensus was unanimous and moreover, among the promoters was also Cappelletti, a former student of Grosso and at that time the central director of the city’s primary schools, who had helped to complete all the authorisations needed in the municipal administration. The unveiling of the plaque was accompanied by a public ceremony organised by the former students,

<sup>39</sup> The first text read as follows: “Wise and beloved teachers” rather than beloved teachers; most beloved mind rather than “great mind”.

who gathered «to manifest their fellowship and remember their director, Adelfo Grosso and their teachers»<sup>40</sup>. The inauguration was quite complex, and also strange. Many students came also from various parts of Italy, as well as the municipal and state civil authorities, including the Prefectural Commissioner Vittorio Ferrero and the Director of Education, with the support of the *Cassa di Risparmio* and the Province of Bologna. Around 70 former students gathered that morning in front of the “Carducci” primary school in Via Dante, then walked the short distance to the home of the poet Giosuè Carducci, welcomed by Albano Sorbelli, director of the museum, in front of which they laid a laurel wreath as a tribute. From there, the group moved to Via Santo Stefano 116, in front of the site of the former Normal School, received by Prof. Di Tizio, and then returned to the “Carducci” School, where in the hall, adorned with plants and tricolour trophies, the former students welcomed the authorities. Short speeches were made by Mattiuzzi, Lipparini, the former student Enrico Fornioni, now director of the primary schools in Piacenza<sup>41</sup> – who talked of his time at Grosso’s Normal School – and finally Francesco Bonatto, educational director of Bologna, representing the Municipality of Pinerolo from where he, like Grosso, came<sup>42</sup>. Precisely while they were at the “Carducci” School, the stone plaque was unveiled in Via Santo Stefano, a spatial leap of around 300 metres

in the meantime, the memorial stone on the wall beneath the arches was unveiled, and a postcard bearing a portrait of Prof. Grosso was distributed<sup>43</sup>

quite an unusual fact and told in just three lines, preceded on the other hand by the great emphasis on a kind of feast of schools and teaching, with almost goliardic tones (toasts, lunch in a restaurant, etc.) which evidently had the function of a collective school memory aiming to re-establish a male Normal School in the city of Bologna «because Bologna, the centre of education, cannot and must not be lacking in a seedbed for primary school teachers»<sup>44</sup>.

The focus of the story of the inauguration of the plaque was no longer Adelfo Grosso in person but rather the desire to strengthen the identity of the students around their teacher and restore a new male Normal School to the city. The intensity of the individual and collective memory of the first few days following the death of Grosso, to whom little space was devoted in the article, appeared faded. The passing time, thirty years, had soothed the pain, the stone celebrated the former teacher but in fact celebrated the whole teaching profession with all its difficulties. This is confirmed by another later public event, when once again Mattiuzzi, commemorating Vittorio Savorini, former teacher at the male Normal School in Bologna who later moved to become headmaster in Teramo,

<sup>40</sup> S. A., *Raduno di vecchi insegnanti ed antichi scolari della Scuola Normale Maschile di Bologna*, «Il pensiero dei maestri», vol. IV, n. 6, 15 June 1922, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> D’Ascenzo, S. Spadea, *Fornioni Enrico*, in *DBE*, cit., vol. 1, p. 570.

<sup>42</sup> D’Ascenzo, *Bonatto Francesco*, in *DBE*, vol. 1, cit., p. 584.

<sup>43</sup> S. A., *Raduno di vecchi insegnanti ed antichi scolari della Scuola Normale Maschile di Bologna*, cit.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



remembered precisely that inauguration ceremony for the plaque named after Adelfo Grosso

the former students of the former Normal School, around 35 years after the school had closed [...] gathered together by their colleagues from Bologna, came from all over Italy and, respectful and moved, laid a stone outside that glorious school so that it and its teachers could be rightly remembered<sup>45</sup>.

A few months later, on 27 November 1922, a group of former students wrote to the Prefectural Commissioner asking to name a school after Adelfo Grosso and

choose the school (to be named after the worthy Educator) in an important place in the country (Corticella, S. Viola etc.) to remind how He, with such special love and rare wisdom, trained the rural schoolteachers<sup>46</sup>.

On 5 February 1923, the Prefectural Commissioner Vittorio Ferrero issued a decree stating that the new school in Via Libia would be named after Adelfo Grosso, considering the road to be part of the rural area. The new municipal council, led by the Mayor Umberto Puppini, revoked the previous prefectural decree because – as reported by the former students – Via Libia was not a rural area – and approved the naming of the primary school in the rural area of Arcoveggio, in the former Villa Ronzani bought from Cavalier Alessandro Ronzani by the council, after Adelfo Grosso. It was 18 April 1924.

### *Conclusions*

From these findings, Adelfo Grosso was the subject of school memory for a long time, more than thirty years after his death, considered a kind of “guiding star”, a bright light that slowly faded and today has waned completely, fallen into the oblivion of local and national school memory and history, despite the traces of public memory on the city walls: in fact, the school in former Villa Ronzani is still named after him, and today is a nursery and preschool, with a classroom at the front named “Adelfo Grosso” standing in the park of the same name: the primary school was moved to a new and more suitable site in the mid-70s, keeping the same name.

The school memory of Grosso remained vivid at least as long as his former students were alive, gathered around a kind of archetypal figure of the educator, father and brother and a model of virtue, before whom they defined themselves “former students”, “companions” and “classmates”. It is not surprising, as memory is linked to people, it survives time only when written and/or impressed on the walls. What appears relevant from this case study

<sup>45</sup> R. Istituto Tecnico “Comi” di Teramo, *Vittorio Savorini commemorato dai suoi alunni e dalla sua Scuola nel VI anniversario dalla morte*, Teramo, Tipografia Cioschi, 1932, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Historical Archive of the Municipality of Bologna, Decrees of the Prefectural Commissioner, 5 February 1923. It was not possible to recover the letter of 27 November 1922 due to incomplete documentation.

is the passage of the forms of memory from individual and collective to public. In this case, there was a sort of metamorphosis of the memory over the thirty years between his death, the plaque and the naming of the first school. While Guazzaloca's commemoration in 1892 was full of references to Grosso's physical appearance, educational and professional talents and to the former student's state of mind, with a brief mention of the difficulties of the teaching profession, in 1922 the figure of the director was less evident, faded between the celebration of the place of the male Normal School, the community of teachers and former students in their everyday heroism. Perhaps the time that had passed since Grosso's death progressively weakened the emotion of remembrance and his memory, in favour of a plurality of figures including the patrons who, celebrating the founder, also celebrated themselves, in a kind of highly identitarian collective ritual, hanging on the nostalgia of youth and the subtle denunciation of the teaching category, crushed between the "duty to be" and the harsh reality of everyday school work, as denounced elsewhere in school journals and political and social battles from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The memory of Grosso became hazier, while the central issue became the social criticism of the teachers' condition because, as indicated by Halbwachs

remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered<sup>47</sup>.

In the passage of the school memory of Grosso from individual to collective and finally to public, therefore, the subject of the memory slowly changed: the person remembered is no longer only Adelfo Grosso but the patrons, i.e., the teachers, who are described as hanging between an ideal "duty to be" and the hard, tiring, everyday heroism. It is in this way that studying the collective and public memory of school offers further elements for understanding the representation of schools and their teachers, bringing a profession hanging between promised honours and allotted burdens back to the fore.

<sup>47</sup> Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, cit., p. 69.



# A Monument in Memory of the Teachers

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## *Introduction*

During the Austro-Hungarian period, a large number of teachers came to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) from other parts of the Monarchy. Namely, BiH did not have institutionalized education until the arrival of Austria-Hungary, and there was not a sufficient number of professional teaching staff. It took time to train local staff, and the new government wanted to establish a state school as soon as possible. In order to succeed, the experts in the field of education and schooling were needed. Very soon the proven staff from the Monarchy, mostly from Croatia, arrived in BiH and started to work on the organization of the school system. Teachers from the Monarchy and their educational activities soon became the mainstay of the new government in achieving its educational goals. They went to remote areas, convincing parents about the usefulness of education for their children but also for themselves. They became the main advisers for agriculture, household and health. They were often the only one literate in the village, and the villagers turned to them for advice and help. In the cities, teachers were the initiators of journals, correspondents, organizers of exhibitions, book presentations, conducting various sections, within the educational and cultural societies of the time. Teachers were backbones of the social community at the time, although often their role and commitment in society was understood without special forms of reward. There was also discrimination against civil servants and their salaries, and teachers decided to organize into associations to help them exercise their rights. These associations were a kind of union with funds to help the widows and orphans of deceased teachers. They also struggled to improve their working and living status and often wrote about it in the pedagogical journals that were established at the time, «Školski vjesnik» and «Učiteljska zora». These journals, while maintaining its focus on educational issues, gave also a great place to a reflection on the educational and school practice, especially the government's attitude towards the teaching profession<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in journals, one can find how much aid was sent to the family of the deceased teacher, how much aid the state allocates for these purposes, etc. Obituaries about teachers were published in these journals, as well. They mentioned teachers' dedicated work, pedagogical activity and contribution to the entire

<sup>1</sup> S. Šušnjara, *The Position of Teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. VIII, n. 1, 2013, pp. 97-102.

community. «... the *obituaries* particularly emphasized the civil and patriotic virtues of the disappeared teachers and their role in the promotion of a national identity and of the love for the country among the younger generation»<sup>2</sup>. There is also a noticeable difference in highlighting the virtues of late teachers. Female teachers were dedicated workers with a maternal sense of upbringing and justice, while male teachers were active in social roles and carriers of awareness of the importance of education.

However, the male commemorations underline energy, vigour, intelligence, educational worthiness, patriotism, while the female ones highlight the virtues of a profession still focused on the maternal dimension, which required silent and humble industriousness inspired by the ethics of sacrifice for the school, the family and the country. These two different narrative registers confirm the historical construction of the male and female teaching identity, perpetuating long-term gender stereotypes<sup>3</sup>.

This is also evident in the obituary published by the magazine «Učiteljska zora» on the occasion of the death of teacher Ela Kranjčević, which mentions her gentle nature and motherly approach to students, while her husband was primarily mentioned as a great poet, teacher and a dedicated editor of the magazine *Nada*. At the beginning of the obituary, her personal information and the schools where she taught are listed, followed by her quality as a teacher and the activities she carried out for the common good. At the end of the text, however, the following is highlighted: «In the memory of the great Croatian poet Silvio Strahimir Kranjčević, the figure of his wife will always stand worthy, not only as his friend, but also as an exemplary worker in the educational field of Bosnia and Herzegovina»<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the obituary that his contemporaries addressed to him is revealing.

He started working as a teacher at trade schools, those institutes, which were supposed to provide general education to older youth of the bourgeois and peasant classes. An ideal task, and Silvije understood and carried it out ideally. But a new, broader field of activity opened up to his mental strength through his school work, when he became a teacher of future teachers, those first torchbearers of national education, through his employment at the teacher's school. Then Silvije does not separate himself from the teaching profession, because there he carries out his educational mission beneficially. And as a poet, he raised a whole generation of young, enthusiastic successors<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Between rhetoric celebration and social marginalization. The teachers' and headmasters' memory and celebration through the obituaries published in the school and teachers' magazines in the first century after the unification (1861- 1961). 2<sup>nd</sup> part*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XI, n. 2, 2016, pp. 121-150.

<sup>3</sup> M. D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters. Funeral memories as source in history of education between nation building and collective memory*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 279-294.

<sup>4</sup> «Učiteljska zora», 1911, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sskranjcevic.hr/zivotopis.ASP?PisID=1&odGodine=1908&currentPage=1221> (last access: 10.02.2023).

Although his wife died two years after him, the monument reads: «Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević and his wife Ela». She was not given space to write her maiden name or full name.

Therefore, I would like to present in this paper, the life and work of these two prominent individuals who indisputably testify to the consciousness of the people of that time and their gratitude for the effort and commitment they gave to Bosnia and Herzegovina that was not their home country. The writer and educator Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, who arrived in BiH from Croatia and found his life companion there, teacher Gabrijela Kašaj who was born in Slovenia, will be presented in this paper. As it was not the custom to erect tombstones in BiH at the time of their activities, the memory of these two people represents a certain phenomenon and the application of practices that are only later established and become common. Public memorials to individuals linked with education were rare and this was a reason to investigate it properly.

While the obituaries in teaching journals enlighten the collective teaching memory built “from inside”, other sources show the social representation of the teacher identity, for example the commemorations of teaching staff in public and/or official speeches given by the authorities, sometimes during the unveiling of name stones or the inauguration of school buildings named after school staff<sup>6</sup>.

The identity of the teacher was therefore also determined by the manner in which the last tribute was paid to him. And this showed how important and valued the teacher's profession was in a certain community. Usually, the memory of a certain teacher remained written in the collective memory and thus reminded those who remain of the values and messages of the teacher's vocation. With their lives, they witnessed dedication and courage, as evidenced by generations of students whom they motivated and through their own example led to the responsibility of life. «The elementary school teachers did not just increase their status through increased education, or by being active in Parliament, or by taking a large number of courses in their spare time. Their increased status was also detectable in the way in which they remembered their past, erected monuments and buried their leaders»<sup>7</sup>.

The function of cultural memories is the legalization of the current social order. Connerton points out that «the participants of any social order must accept a common memory in advance»<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the memory of the past conditions their experience of the present. Without collective memory there is no culture and without it there is no identity. The cultural memory of a nation is the result of a collective sifting of facts to create a story that society retells in order to preserve its memory<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters*, cit., p. 290.

<sup>7</sup> J. Landahl, A. Ullman, *The politics of immortality: the funeral of an education minister and teacher unionist*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 261-278 (in particular, p. 273).

<sup>8</sup> P. Connerton, *How societies remember*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> R. Dreher, *Oduprte se laži*, Split, Verbum, 2022, p. 124.

### 1. *Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević and Gabrijela Kašaj*

Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, a poet and teacher who marked the Bosnian-Herzegovinian area with his work, was born in Senj, Croatia, on February 17, 1865. After graduating, he was sent from the Senj Seminary to Rome, where he was to prepare for the priesthood. However, after eight months, he realized that there was no call to the priesthood and returned to Zagreb, enrolling in a teacher's course. He was trained as a teacher in civic schools in 1886, and was able to teach Croatian and German, as well as geography and history. For a time, he worked as a free trainee at the Senj elementary school. After that, he moved to Bosnia, where he was appointed teacher of the trade school in Mostar, then moved to Livno, later to Bijeljina and finally to Sarajevo to the Teachers' School, in 1894<sup>10</sup>. Jergović describes Kranjčević as a national teacher who cared for the poor:

... a good and honest Croat in the Austrian service, who, however, prefers the locals, whatever their religion, than the Swabians. He had a beautiful, proud moustache, which gave him the appearance of a bun, and the Sarajevo's people would be wary of such as soon as they could, but they gladly accepted him into their company, as long as there was peace and tranquillity. Although, Kranjčević was not overly sociable. Such, it was said, were the people in his neighbourhood. Mindful and polite, but watch their own business<sup>11</sup>.

Gabriela Ela Kašaj, was born in Slovenija on November 20, 1876, in the family of border captain Franjo Kašaj who was transferred to Sarajevo. Her father Franjo spoke French and his daughters, Ella and Slava, learned this language following their father's instructions. Thanks to her knowledge of the French language, in 1897 Ela met the Croatian poet Kranjčević, who was attending her private lessons in French with a friend, Milaković. This resulted first in the engagement from which the scrapbook has been preserved and then in the wedding in the Sarajevo Cathedral, 1898 on his 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Their best man at the wedding was a colleague and friend, Josip Milaković. Four years later, their daughter Ivana Višnja (1904-1983) was born<sup>12</sup>.

Immediately after the wedding, he published his best collection of poems "Izabrane pjesme" and in 1902 he also published "Trzaje". Around 1903, he began to get sick, so he underwent three operations for bladder stones. Almost a quarter of Kranjčević's monthly salary went to his problems with the bladder or kidney stones. «Pharmacies with doctors have eaten up my beautiful summer house», noted the poet<sup>13</sup>. After unsuccessful treatment in Sarajevo, at the end of 1906 he moved to Vienna<sup>14</sup>. Namely, he had to pay for all the expensive health care services in the Vienna hospital himself, where, according to the doctor there, he arrived too late and after he was stunned by the doctors in Sarajevo. Of his 433 kroner salary, 112 kroner went to his medical expenses. His wife Ela translated

<sup>10</sup> *Kronologija života. Ljetopis Silvija Str. Kranjčevića*, «Hrvatski Narodni Godišnjak 1999», 1998, pp. 41-42.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.jergovic.com/ajfelov-most/don-serafim-kod-kranjcevicevih/> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.biografija.com/silvije-strahimir-kranjcevic/> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/velika-iskrena-ljubav-u-sjeni-teske-bolesti-4005885> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sskranjcevic.hr/djela.ASP?PisID=1&KatID=124> (last access: 10.02.2023).





Fig. 1. S.S. Kranjčević



Fig. 2. Ella Kranjčević



Fig. 3. S.S. Kranjčević and Ella Kranjčević

from French and sewed at home for little Višnja, so that they could survive from day to day<sup>15</sup>. While in Vienna, his friend Meštrović, a world's famous artist, made a portrait of him. The bronze ebb of that portrait in high relief is today in the Museum of Literature and Theatre Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>16</sup>. While he was undergoing treatment, he exchanged letters with his wife. Those letters testify to sincere love that the force of the disease turned into a painful story of separation, search and hope<sup>17</sup>. Eight months of severe illness did not help and he returned to Sarajevo, where his agony soon began. He died in 1908 in Sarajevo and was buried in the cemetery of St. Joseph<sup>18</sup>. For him, Jergović writes:

During his life, he was the one of thousands who came to other place of the Monarchy, and he was an imperial and royal official, with whom the people of Sarajevo were not impressed more or less than any

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/velika-iskrena-ljubav-u-sjeni-teske-bolesti-4005885> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>16</sup> S. Mutapčić, *Grobnica Silvija Strahimira Kranjčevića u Sarajevu*, «Hrvatski narodni godišnjak 2006», n. 53, 2005, pp. 206-216.

<sup>17</sup> More than 200 of the poet's and almost all of his wife's letters – about 250 – originate from the years of the poet's illness (1902-1908), which ended in his premature death. A total of 567 letters of the two spouses were collected and published in the book *Skriveni svijet of Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević: Elina and Silvijeva pisma: 1897-1908*, by the author Miščin Danijel. See more: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/velika-iskrena-ljubav-u-sjeni-teske-bolesti-4005885> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>18</sup> I. Potocki, *O životu Silvija Strahimira Kranjčevića*, «Hrvatski narodni godišnjak 2008», n. 55, 2007, pp. 53-57.

other official. And as the only great honour commemorated by Kranjčević, the memory of his funeral remains, one of the most significant that Sarajevo remembered in the twentieth century...<sup>19</sup>.

After caring for her husband, whose illness lasted for a long time, Ella did not even manage to recover from grief, but she had to travel to Zlatar to take care of her sick mother. After her mother's death, she began to get sick herself. She went to the Goerbersdorf Spa, but the disease progressed and she died of lung disease in Zagreb in 1911. As the custom dictated, the wife was to be buried next to her husband, and her body was transferred to Sarajevo, where she was buried in the same tomb where Kranjčević lay<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. *Being a teacher in BiH*

«Teachers' professional pride stemming from doing important cultural and national work, which would actually be visible years later through their students' results, but which is otherwise, in general, less noticeable, encouraged teachers to erect memorials to deceased colleagues who left their mark in history...»<sup>21</sup>. It was only at the funerals of the teachers that their true value and difficult life and work path was revealed, and it was an opportunity for those responsible to get acquainted with the hardships that these valuable individuals encountered. Their teaching role did not end with leaving the classroom or school. No, they were constantly under public scrutiny and their behaviour could be the target of criticism or condemnation. When the teacher Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević fell ill, the whole of Sarajevo talked about it. He was considered by the public view as member of the special category of the "honest citizen" who was carrying out his high task as a poet and educator, therefore he had produced a «benefit for the whole country, thus becoming "worthy" of "being commemorated"...»<sup>22</sup>.

As an already well-known poet, Kranjčević came to Sarajevo in 1894, where he began working as the editor of the literary magazine «Nada», published by the Provincial Government of BiH. At the time when he was absent, he was replaced in this position by his colleague teacher and friend Josip Milaković, who also wrote and was happy to associate with writers of the time. Kranjčević's wife stated that many poets and writers had to thank Kranjčević for the quality reworking of their works in terms of content and form in order to be published in «Nada». «It was hard work for him, but he worked»<sup>23</sup>. When this magazine stopped publishing, Kranjčević was temporarily appointed school

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.jergovic.com/subotnja-matineja/silvije-strahimir-kranjcevic-bez-ikoga-svoga/> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.sskranjcevic.hr/djela.ASP?PisID=1&KatID=124> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>21</sup> B. Šuštar, *Faded Memories Carved in Stone: Teachers' Gravestones as a Form of Collective Memory of Education in Slovenia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, in: C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> Ascenzi, Sani, *Between rhetoric celebration and social marginalization*, cit., p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> E. Kašaj *Moj Silvije*, «Hrvatski narodni godišnjak 2008», n. 55, 2007, p. 61.

supervisor for the city of Sarajevo in 1904. However, Archbishop Stadler filed a written protest against the appointment and threatened to keep the doors of confessional schools closed due to earlier disputes with Kranjčević. The government and the ministry accepted the protest and withdrew their appointments. After five months during which he did not hold any service, Kranjčević was appointed professor and headmaster of the Trade school in Sarajevo, in 1905.

Trade schools were conceived as institutions for exclusively professional economic education, but they, in the words of Ljuboje Dlustuš, government commissioner and advisor for education, from the very beginning became «nurseries of a conscious and enlightened middle class», and this is the first and most important condition for the progress of one country, «to the alert national consciousness and persistent commitment of the people for their interests and the interests of the country»<sup>24</sup>. Thus, in practice, these schools became general education schools. Pedagogues, teachers and professors from Croatia who served in BiH made a significant contribution to promote education, starting with the aforementioned advisor Dlustuš and ending with Kranjčević's friends Nikola Maraković and Josip Milaković. Ljuboje Dlustuš also wrote that: «It goes without saying that our Silvije quickly found a suitable place in such a framework, and that he understood his task in that place from the very beginning»<sup>25</sup>. That job occupied him so much that he did not have a moment to devote to other jobs. He himself wrote scripts for teaching geography and history so that students could better understand and adopt the material. As a director, he loved students, helped them at every opportunity, defended them and mitigated harsh punishments. How many times did he say: «These are children, they cannot be demanded the same as adults, and if they are restless, it means life, health»<sup>26</sup>. As a teacher and editor of *Nada*, Kranjčević worked responsively. In 1905 he was elected a full member of the Croatian Pedagogical and Literary Association in Zagreb<sup>27</sup>.

Gabriela Ela Kranjčević was a teacher at a Muslim elementary school for girls but also taught French at female high school<sup>28</sup>. She was known as a gentle and calm person. It is evident from the documents that she tried to provide the girls in that school with quality education and good working conditions. Thus, she asked the Government to provide them with more adequate space for work, because the existing, private house in which the school is located did not have enough space for work. She even made a sketch of what the school space in the house should look like that could meet the required standards<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> D. Jelčić, *Kranjčević u Bosni i Hercegovini. Dvadeset i dvije godine: 1886-1908*, «Hrvatska revija», n. 1, 2016 <https://www.matica.hr/hr/480/mladi-kranjcevic-i-pravastvo-25640/> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> E. Kašaj, *Moj Silvije*, «Hrvatski Narodni Godišnjak 1999», 1998, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Kronologija života. Ljetopis Silvija Str. Kranjčevića*, 1998, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.sskranjcevic.hr/djela.ASP?PisID=1&KatID=124> (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>29</sup> Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine, Dopis Zemaljskoj vladi u Sarajevu, Uprava ženske muslimanske škole, 1906.

### 3. *Relation to monumental heritage*

The occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina the former Ottoman province to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1878 enabled the sudden penetration of the achievements of the Western European civilization circle. One of them was the fine arts. Unlike most European countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina has not had a tradition of erecting sculpturally designed memorials in public space. After centuries of Ottoman rule, this country received its first public monuments, busts, figural reliefs and statues only with the establishment of a new social and political order, in the time of Austro-Hungary. Institutionalized commemorative practices resulting in the construction of monuments have become part of the new administration's interest. In addition to dynastic and war monuments, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, under Austro-Hungary, the erection of monuments in honour of famous people began for the first time. The civil class, which in other areas during the 19<sup>th</sup> century initiated the construction of such memorials, is just beginning to form in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mostly thanks to the immigrant population. Due to the lack of local artists, but also due to the requirements of the client, the Catholic Church, the ruling structures of cultural societies and a small civic elite, the work of art is most often entrusted to foreign authors. Commemorative practices most often resulted in memorials that on the one hand served to preserve the memory of individuals and events, and on the other hand to affirm the values of those social strata that raised them<sup>30</sup>.

Figural sculpture was an almost indispensable element on monuments because with the help of depictions of historical figures, and then allegorical content and personifications, it should clearly indicate the models and ideals of emerging nation states and growing civil strata, and ruling dynasties that seek to maintain the image of the power of their empires<sup>31</sup>.

Among the few domestic initiatives supported by the Provincial Government was the construction of a monument to Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, a teacher and poet. It is significant not only because it was successfully achieved but also because it was of a 'civil' character, and was aimed at worshipping the "domestic" personality<sup>32</sup>. It was encouraged by educational and cultural circles who wanted to pay tribute to their deceased colleague, and it was realized with the help of voluntary contributions collected both in the country and abroad. «At the same time, they had to increase the prestige and authority of the category within the public opinion and the ruling classes of the country»<sup>33</sup>. Thus, their initiative resulted in a monument that is one of the most representative works of secession

<sup>30</sup> A. Baotić-Rustanbegović, *Skulptura u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme austrougarske uprave 1878-1918*. Doctoral Thesis, Department of Architecture (Supervisor: Irena Kraševac), Zagreb, Filozofski Fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2018, p. 188.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266-270.

<sup>33</sup> Ascenzi, Sani, *Between rhetoric celebration and social marginalization*, cit., pp. 97-117.

in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and whose construction was entrusted to one of the then most important Croatian sculptors, Rudolf Valdec<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4. *Initiative for the construction of monuments and collection of donations*

As written sources show, the idea of building a monument to Kranjčević came to light only a few days after his death. On October 31, 1908, Kranjčević's comrades, writers and educators met at the Croatian Club, where they agreed to perpetuate the memory of him in a most honourable manner<sup>35</sup>. Tugomir Alaupović, professor in Sarajevo (1904-1910), headmaster of the Great Gymnasium in Tuzla (1910), advisor in the department of education and supervisor of secondary schools in BiH (1913-1915), Osman Nuri Hadžić, professor and writer, Josip Milaković, teacher both the poet and Milan Prelog, a professor at the grammar school in Sarajevo, formed a committee for the construction of the monument, and took on the task of collecting donations for the raising memorial stones on the grave. At the beginning, the response was weak, some alms came to them from Ljubljana and Prague, while few donations arrived from Croatia. After the public invitation was sent again in 1910, 1.000 crowns were collected and the realization of the monument began. The committee for the construction of the monument accepted the proposal of the sculptor Rudolf Valdec, who conceived the sculpture of the "restrained genius". The friendly relations between Valdec and Kranjčević determined the choice of shapes and symbols for this tomb<sup>36</sup>. As Kranjčević's wife Ela also died in the meantime, it was agreed with Valdec that a joint memorial would be built, on which the names of both spouses would be inscribed. Along with the construction of the monument, the collection of money for its construction continued. In October 1911, the committee again called on the public to contribute because it was necessary to raise more than 5.000 crowns, for which the construction of a monument was agreed with Valdec. Since the sculptor was a friend of Kranjčević, he did not collect his royalties, but the money raised was used to cover the costs of purchasing materials, making and erecting monuments. Despite the engagement of special commissioners in larger cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia, the collected contributions were not enough, so part of the costs was left to the Writers' Association in Zagreb, and other Croatian cultural societies and various institutes were appealed. Although the monument was scheduled to be completed by October 29, 1912, when the anniversary of Kranjčević's death would be marked, this did not happen. The monument was completed and delivered to Sarajevo at the end of 1912, and its ceremonial unveiling was postponed to next year. The monument was erected on the Koševo cemetery during the Christmas holidays «so that the newspapers did not even

<sup>34</sup> Baotić-Rustanbegović, *Skulptura u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme austrougarske uprave 1878-1918*, cit., pp. 266-270.

<sup>35</sup> J. Milaković, *Kranjčevićev spomenik*, «Napredak: hrvatski narodni kalendar», n. 8, 1914, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Mutapčić, *Grobnica Silvija Strahimira Kranjčevića u Sarajevu*, cit., pp. 206-216.

know about it», and it was «shielded with boards» until August 1913<sup>37</sup>. The committee feared that for the monument, since it was over, no one would want to make any more contributions and in addition to seven and a half thousand crowns, as much as it cost at the time, money of 1.500 crowns had to be raised for its delivery to Sarajevo<sup>38</sup>. Due to all the above, teacher Milaković personally visited cities and institutions in Croatia from which he collected the necessary amount, and the Committee was forced to seek help from the Provincial Government<sup>39</sup>.

### 5. Contribution of the Provincial Government and unveiling of monuments

Recalling Kranjčević's service and the role he played in creating cultural opportunities in the country under Austro-Hungarian rule, the committee asked the government to co-finance the construction of the monument, and 1.500 crowns was donated for the monument to the late poet<sup>40</sup>. «The memory of male teachers appears focused clearly on the contents of their civil, cultural and educational works»<sup>41</sup>. The ceremonial unveiling of Kranjčević's monument was finally held on September 28, 1913, not on the anniversary of the poet's death, but on the opening day of the *Hrvatsko Kulturno Društvo* (HKD) *Napredak* palace<sup>42</sup>. The reason for moving the ceremony was of a practical nature. Namely, on the occasion of the opening of *Napredak* palace, «various Croatian corporations» had already gathered in Sarajevo, and «the time was more appropriate» for the unveiling ceremony of the monument. In addition, the monument was handed over to HKD *Napredak* for safekeeping on that occasion<sup>43</sup>. In addition to representatives of Croatian associations, the ceremony was also attended by government officials, writers, workers and schoolchildren. There were certainly individuals and institutes that contributed financially to the construction of the monument, and only the sculptor Valdec, who was on a trip to the United States, was missing from the ceremony<sup>44</sup>. Already during the ceremony, it was pointed out in the press that the monument is «a symbolic beautiful work of art which makes a strong impression»<sup>45</sup>. The memorial was unveiled by

<sup>37</sup> Milaković, *Kranjčevićev spomenik*, cit., pp. 117-125.

<sup>38</sup> Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine, fond «Zemaljske vlade za Bosnu i Hercegovinu», 1913, k. 231, š. 93-100/2 – Odbor za podignuće Kranjčevićeva spomenika; *Zemaljska vlada za Kranjčevićev spomenik*, «Sarajevski List», n. 135, 15 June 1913, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Milaković, *Kranjčevićev spomenik*, cit., pp. 117-125.

<sup>40</sup> Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine, fond «Zemaljske vlade za Bosnu i Hercegovinu», 1913, k. 231, š. 93-100/2 – Odbor za podignuće Kranjčevićeva spomenika; *Zemaljska vlada za Kranjčevićev spomenik*, «Sarajevski List», n. 135, 15 June 1913, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters*, cit., p. 287.

<sup>42</sup> Otkriće Kranjčevićevog spomenika, «Sarajevski list», n. 206, 29 September 1913, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Otkriće spomenika pjesnika Kranjčevića, «Napredak: hrvatski narodni kalendar», n. 8, 1914, p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> A. Adamec, *Rudolf Valdec*, Zagreb-Samobor, A.G. Matoš, 2001, p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> Otkriće Kranjčevićevog spomenika, «Sarajevski List», n. 206, 29 September 1913, p. 3.





Fig. 4. «Restrained genius», relief from the tombstone of Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, 1911-1912, 82 x 163 x 37 cm., Brač marble and bronze (Cemetery of St. Josip, Koševo, Sarajevo)

government adviser Dr. Tugomir Alaupović<sup>46</sup>. On that occasion, he pointed out «Let the whispered genius from the poet's grave always remember the eternal struggles between blood and spirit, heaven and earth, light and darkness, so that their energetic and young wings never stick to hell on earth, taken out of the reach of reality and life»<sup>47</sup>. Such speeches could be considered «as sources useful for building historical-educational knowledge, not only for their reconstruction of biographies but also for the social, political and cultural consideration of school staff in a precise historical moment and, in the long term, the evolution of the social image of teachers»<sup>48</sup>.

As Milaković states, “restrained genius” was actually a symbol of the poet himself «in the eternal struggle with life and the world»<sup>49</sup>. Allegedly, Valdec imagined him that way, inspired by Kranjčević's poems. Reading them «he felt something that gasped and held his breath, something that he wanted to reveal stronger and stronger and take off what was holding him back, folding his wings, pinning his head, handcuffs»<sup>50</sup>. In addition to the “restrained genius”, Kranjčević's tombstone was supposed to have «relief figures of the poet and his wife»<sup>51</sup>. They were supposed to stand under the commemorative inscription, and for their production they were waiting for Valdec's return from the United States<sup>52</sup>. Probably due to the outbreak of war, they were never realized, and the idea of horticulturally enriching Kranjčević's grave site was also not realized. Regardless of this

<sup>46</sup> Mutapčić, *Grobnica Silvija Strahimira Kranjčevića u Sarajevu*, cit., pp. 206-216.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>48</sup> D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters*, cit., p. 280.

<sup>49</sup> Milaković, *Kranjčevićev spomenik*, cit., pp. 117-125.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



fact, the monument is a complete work of art and a masterpiece of «symbolic and poetic content»<sup>53</sup>. Kranjčević's monument is exceptional in the context of artistic circumstances in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The monument is a representative work of art "in the open" and it is also one of the few memorials where the sculpture moves away from academic expression<sup>54</sup>. The commemorations of teacher in public and official speeches given by the authorities during the unveiling of name stones correspond in a certain way to the social representation of the teacher identity. Public commemorations not only provide information on professional biographies but also underline the social relevance of some teachers who remain in the collective teaching memory. «These speeches can also be considered as sources useful for building historical-educational knowledge, not only for their reconstruction of biographies but also for the social, political and cultural consideration of school staff in a precise historical moment and, in the long term, the evolution of the social image of teachers»<sup>55</sup>.

As we have seen from the above, the *Hrvatsko kulturno društvo Napredak* was in charge of maintaining the monument, and it did so until 1947, when the activities of this Society were banned in the new state of Yugoslavia. After 1990, *Napredak* resumed cultural and educational activities. Thus, this society took steps to restore the monument that was in rather poor condition and a lot of steps and actions had to be taken in order for its renovation to be carried out successfully. Thus, on November 1, 2006, together with the City of Sarajevo, a reopening of the monument in Sarajevo was held. The exemplary Cardinal Vinko Puljić blessed the tomb. Members of *HKD Napredak* and other admirers of Kranjčević maintained this grave and every year for All Saints came to light candles and pray for the poet's soul. The same day the monument is reopened, the poet's bust, built by sculptor Vojin Bakić in the 1970s, was returned and placed in the park across the BiH Presidency building<sup>56</sup>.

### Conclusion

From all that has been said, it is evident that the Austro-Hungarian era was revealing in every respect and that new cultural and artistic shifts were being established in the areas that belonged to it. The educational staff occupied an important place in the promotion of schooling and literacy. Teachers were the bearers of all activities that were important for everyday life and the promotion of culture. They also wrote textbooks, books, verses. They supported each other in these endeavours

<sup>53</sup> A. Adamec, *Na temu: Sputani genije, spomenik Kranjčeviću Rudolfa Valdeca – remek-djelo secesije*, «Odjek», n. 1, 1983, pp. 15-20.

<sup>54</sup> Baotić-Rustanbegović, *Skulptura u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme austrougarske uprave 1878-1918*, cit., p. 275.

<sup>55</sup> D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters*, cit., p. 280.

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.sarajevo.ba/hr/article/1608/zvanicno-obiljezen-zavrsetak-restauracije-nadgrobnog-spomenika-silvija-strahimira-kranjcevic> (last access: 10.02.2023).

and empowered each other on this difficult path, which often did not bring any material benefits except spiritual ones. They were not only the popular educators but they were also very much involved and committed in the ethical and civil growth of their students. It is obvious that teachers were the initiators of important humanitarian actions, and in this case, they made many efforts to keep the memory of the poet and teacher Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević. His wife was buried with him, but her abbreviated name was only mentioned in the function of his wife and not a teacher and educator, who herself wrote and remained remembered among her students and colleagues. The monument, which was erected and renovated, testifies to a time, customs and visions, and experts agree that it is a true work of art of «symbolic and poetic content»<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Adamec, *Na temu: Sputani genije, spomenik Kranjčeviću Rudolfa Valdeca – remek-djelo secesije*, cit., pp. 15-20.



# Obituaries to Teachers on the Pages of Periodicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Oleksandr Mikhno

Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine (Ukraine)

## *Introduction*

Obituaries are an extremely interesting and original source of educational history that has recently attracted the attention of researchers from different countries. For example, the topic of academic obituaries is covered in the articles by Bruce Macfarlane and Roy Y. Chan *The last judgement: exploring intellectual leadership in higher education through academic obituaries*<sup>1</sup> and Julian Hamann “*Let us salute one of our kind*”. *How academic obituaries consecrate research biographies*<sup>2</sup>. In a thorough work *Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere: memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistral nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)* Anna Ascenzi and Roberto Sani, by examining the obituaries, reconstruct the evolution of the image of the teacher at different historical stages and in the light of different ideological, political and cultural contexts<sup>3</sup>. In Ukraine, in connection with the processes of decommunization and decolonization of Ukrainian humanities, in recent years, researchers of the history of education have been paying more attention to the peculiarities of the development of national schooling in different periods of Ukrainian history. One of the sources that allow us to look at the processes of the past from a new perspective is obituaries for educators in pedagogical journals.

The purpose of this article is to present statistical, factual, and bibliographic information about obituaries of Ukrainian educators on the pages of periodicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; to analyze obituaries published in Ukrainian Soviet pedagogical journals of the 1920s-1980s.

The first stage of any scientific research is the source research heuristic. This is the name given to this stage by the French luminaries of source studies Charles Victor Langlois, and Charles Seignobos in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in their classic work *Introduction to the Study of*

<sup>1</sup> B. Macfarlane, R.Y. Chan, *The last judgement: exploring intellectual leadership in higher education through academic obituaries*, «Studies in Higher Education», vol. 39, n. 2, 2014, pp. 294-306.

<sup>2</sup> J. Haman, «*Let us salute one of our kind*». *How academic obituaries consecrate research biographies*, «Poetics», vol. 56, n. 3, 2016, pp. 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> A. Ascenzi & R. Sani, *Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere: memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistral nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2016.

*History* (1898), the first chapter of which is entitled *Searching for Documents (Heuristics)*<sup>4</sup>. Critical analysis and interpretation of sources on a particular research problem are preceded by the question of their existence, quantity, and place of storage. The obituaries we will analyze below were published in 20<sup>th</sup>-century pedagogical journals stored in the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine (Kyiv).

### 1. Results and discussion

In 2014, the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine launched the publishing series «Pedagogical Re-publications» with the aim to popularize and update little-known or forgotten works of Ukrainian educators of the past and thematic selections of materials on a certain problem. In 2022, the ninth edition of this series was published – the book *In memoriam: nekrolohy na storinkakh ukrainskykh pedahohichnykh chasopysiv kintsia XIX – pochatku XX st. (za materialamy fondiv Pedahohichnoho muzeiu Ukrainy)*<sup>5</sup>. In the following, when quoting obituaries, we will refer to this edition.

The obituaries in the book are organized into six sections. We present them in the form of a table. The titles of Ukrainian pedagogical journals are given in English after the slash /.

Table 1. Systematized information on obituaries published in Ukrainian pedagogical journals from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century

Section title	Journals in which obituaries were published	Number of obituaries
Obituaries in periodicals of the late 19 <sup>th</sup> and early 20 <sup>th</sup> centuries	Biblioteka dlia molodizhy / Library for Youth (Chernivtsi, 1885–1914), Literaturno-naukovy visnyk / Literary and Scientific Herald (Lviv, 1898–1932), Svitlo / Light (Kyiv, 1910–1914), Uchytelske slovo / Teacher's Word (Lviv, 1912–1939)	17
Obituaries in the periodicals of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921	Vilna ukrainska shkola / Free Ukrainian School (Kyiv, 1917–1920), Prosvitnianyn-kooperator / Educator-Cooperator (Romny, 1919–1920)	15
Obituaries in publications of the western region of Ukraine in the 1930s	Ridna shkola / Native School (Lviv, 1932–1939), Ukrainska shkola / Ukrainian School (Lviv, 1925–1934, 1938–1939, 1942–1944) Shliakh vykhovannia i navchannia / The Way of Education and Training (Lviv, 1927–1939)	16

<sup>4</sup> C.V. Langlois, C. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1898.

<sup>5</sup> O. Mikhno (ed.), *In memoriam: nekrolohy na storinkakh ukrainskykh pedahohichnykh chasopysiv kintsia XIX – pochatku XX st. (za materialamy fondiv Pedahohichnoho muzeiu Ukrainy)*, Vinnytsia, FOP Kushnir Yu.V., 2022.

Obituaries in Ukrainian Soviet periodicals of the 1920s-1980s	Literatura v shkoli / Literature at School (Kyiv, 1951–1963), Pochatkova shkola / Primary School (Kyiv, 1969 – present), Ukrainska mova v shkoli / Ukrainian Language at School (Kyiv, 1951–1963), Ukrainska mova i literatura v shkoli / Ukrainian Language and Literature at School (Kyiv, 1963–1994), Doshkilne vykhovannia / Preschool Education (Kyiv, 1951 – present), Shliakh osvity / The Way of Education (Kharkiv, 1922–1930, since 1931 – Komunistychna osvita / Communist Education, since 1945 – Kyiv, Radianska shkola / Soviet School)	35
Obituaries in publications of the Ukrainian diaspora in the 1980s-2010s	Vidhuknitsia / Respond (Toronto, Canada, 1988 – present), Ridna shkola / Native School (New York, USA, 1964 – present)	24
Obituaries in publications of the period of restoration of independence of Ukraine (since 1991)	Pedahohika i psykholohiia / Pedagogy and Psychology (Kyiv, 1993–2019), Postmetodyka / Postmethodology (Poltava, 1993 – present), Fizychnе vykhovannia v shkoli / Physical Education at School (Kyiv, 1996–2012), Dzvin / The Bell (Lviv, 1990 – present)	5

We chose the section *Obituaries in Ukrainian Soviet Periodicals of the 1920s-1980s* for detailed analysis because it is the largest in terms of time (70 years) and quantity (8 pedagogical journals and 35 obituaries). In order to trace the trends in the writing and publication of obituaries for Ukrainian teachers in the Soviet era, we used a historical and chronological approach. Based on the periodization proposed by Orest Subtelny in his book *Ukraine: A History*<sup>6</sup> we have identified 5 periods, the names of which accurately characterize the socio-political situation in Ukraine in the 1920s-1980s and help us understand the context in which Ukrainian education and pedagogical science developed. Let us briefly characterize each period and the obituaries published at that time.

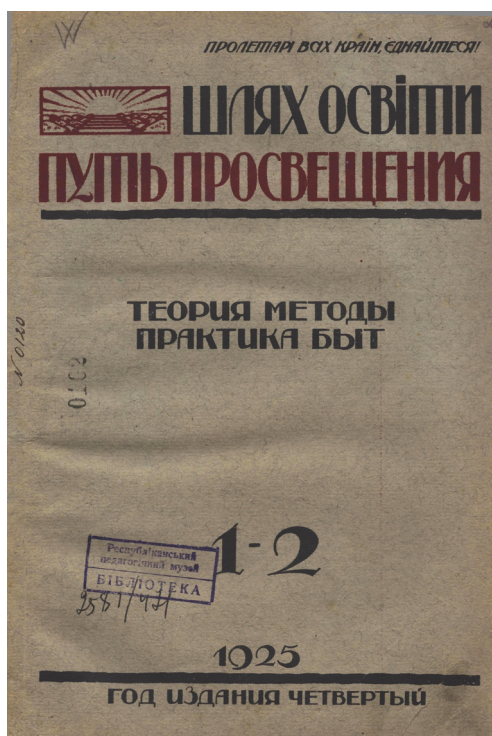


Fig. 1. The cover of the journal «Shliakh osvity», n. 1-2, 1925 (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

<sup>6</sup> O. Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009.

### 1.1 1920s. *Soviet Ukraine: The Innovative Twenties*

In the 1920s, the Ukrainian school and pedagogical science were actively developing in line with European trends. Obituaries for teachers were published in the leading pedagogical journal «Shlyakh Osvity», which was published in Kharkiv in 1922, first in Russian, then in Ukrainian and Russian in 1925, and in Ukrainian in 1927. Four out of seven obituaries presented here are written in Russian and three in Ukrainian. The obituaries are dedicated to both well-known educators Mykola Sumtsov (1854-1922) and Kostiantyn Lebedyntsev (1878-1925), and ordinary teachers Vasyl Romanovskyi (1865-1922), Tikhon Kotov (1895-1923), Valerii Fesenko (1870-1925), and others. The texts of the obituaries are extremely detailed and contain descriptions of the main stages of the deceased's life and a detailed assessment of his teaching activities. All obituaries of this period have authors, though sometimes they are signed with cryptonyms. For example, in the obituary of V. Fesenko, M. Holubenko provides a detailed description of the deceased's life and work, which is concretized with interesting facts: «French, German, English, Italian were accessible to him, Scandinavian languages, Polish and Czech were also languages he used»<sup>7</sup>, «he had a huge library, more than 2500 volumes, which he collected at his own expense»<sup>8</sup>, «the main work of V.M. Fesenko and the main legacy left is a mathematics classroom» with «the accessories and the numerous of photographs and many drawings that illustrate the history of mathematics in one way or another»<sup>9</sup>.

### 1.2 1930s. *Soviet Ukraine: The Traumatic Thirties*

An extremely difficult period in the history of Ukraine (at that time, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic or Ukrainian SSR), when the leadership of the Soviet Union, led by Stalin, deliberately organized the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine, the genocide of the Ukrainian people and mass political repression to establish totalitarianism in the USSR. The victims of the Holodomor and repression were many teachers, who were and remain an important socio-professional group in Ukrainian society. Since teachers shaped the worldview of the average citizen, they have always experienced distrust and sometimes hostility from the Soviet regime<sup>10</sup>. Today, it is impossible to estimate the number of teachers repressed in Ukraine. According to Yevhen Stryzhak, more than 20,000 teachers and higher school professors were repressed or politically persecuted in Ukraine in the 1930s<sup>11</sup>. However, this data are not complete, and the figures are approximate.

<sup>7</sup> Mikhno, *In memoriam*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>10</sup> M.V. Bryvko, *Politychni peresliduvannia y represii proty vchyteliv Ukrainy v 1920–1930-kh rokakh*, «Osvita ta Pedahohichna Nauka», vol. 177, n. 2, 2021, pp. 56-74.

<sup>11</sup> Y. Stryzhak, *Represii 1930-kh rr. ta yikhni naslidky dlia kadrovoho zabezpechennia serednoi i vyshchoi shkoly USRR*, Cherkasy, Vertykal, 2007, p. 60.



In the context of the above, obituaries in pedagogical journals of the 1930s were almost never published. We managed to find only two obituaries in journal «Komunistychna osvita»: one for the head of the Kyiv Commission for Juvenile Offenders, Yevhenia Ginzburg (?-1933), and the other for the Russian teacher Maria Pronina (1893-1936), reprinted from the Pravda newspaper (Moscow). The texts of both obituaries are very brief and uninformative, but strike with communist rhetoric: there is no mention of her date of birth in Ye. Ginzburg's obituary, but it is noted that she «always stubbornly fought for a clear Marxist-Leninist ideology»<sup>12</sup>, and M. Pronina is called «an enthusiast of socialist construction», «a faithful assistant to the party and the Soviet government» and «a Stalinist educator»<sup>13</sup>. The tendency to fill a teacher's obituary with phrases about his devotion to the Communist Party and the Soviet system instead of a true description of his life and work would dominate Soviet pedagogical journals until the collapse of the USSR. It is worth noting that during the 1930s, six editors-in-chief of the journal «Komunistychna osvita» changed. Three of the six editors-in-chief were repressed: Oleksandr Polotskyi (1886-1938), Hryhorii Bodanskyi (1900-1937), and Israel Hait (1894-1938) were shot. Of course, no obituaries were published for these educators killed by the Communists.



Fig. 2. The cover of the journal «Doshkilne vykhovannia», n. 6, 1968 (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

### 1.3 1940s. Ukraine during the Second World War, Reconstruction and Retrenchment

From 1941 to 1945, pedagogical journals were not published in Ukraine. Starting from 1945, the leading pedagogical journal «Radianska Shkola» published five obituaries of famous scholars and teachers. This is a new trend: from that time on, pedagogical journals did not publish obituaries for ordinary teachers. The published obituaries were

<sup>12</sup> Mikhno, *In memoriam*, cit., p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

devoted for well-known Ukrainian educators: mathematician Kostiantyn Khlebnikov, psychologist Petro Rubinstein (1887-1945), literary critics Oleksandr Doroshkevych (1889-1946) and Serhii Rodzevych (1888-1942), and President of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR Oleksandr Bohomolets (1881-1946). The obituary texts are small, 1-2 pages long, briefly describe the biography of the deceased and include a mandatory paragraph about his or her activities during the war. During this period, the final phrase appears in the texts, which in various variations will be constantly used in Soviet obituaries. In the obituary for O. Bohomolets, this template phrase reads as follows: «The bright image of the outstanding scientist-patriot and statesman of our country, Oleksandr Oleksandrovych Bohomolets, will forever live in the memory of the Soviet people»<sup>14</sup>.

#### 1.4 1950s and 1960s. *The Thaw*

This period is characterized by a certain revival in the cultural life of the USSR, including in the field of education. Several new pedagogical journals appeared. They published 14 obituaries for Ukrainian educators, mostly scientists: educational historian Mykola Dadenkov (1885-1955), philologists Mykola Hrunskyi (1872-1951), Ilya Kyrychenko (1889-1955), Yevhen Tychyna (1895-1955), pedagogical scientists Sava Chavdarov (1892-1962), Oleksii Rusko (1906-1964), and others. The texts of obituaries of this period are quite large in length, ranging from 2 to 4 pages, and are built on the same template: each stage of the deceased's life and work is characterized from an ideological perspective. For example, in the obituary of Ilya Kyrychenko we read: «The life of Ilya Nikitovich is typical of many Soviet scientists»<sup>15</sup>. «All his scientific work was conducted under Soviet rule. He belonged to that new type of researchers who, through their scientific work, are directly involved in the practice of socialist construction»<sup>16</sup>. The use of such verbal rhetoric was a requirement of the time, but at the same time, the obituaries contain a fairly complete biography of the deceased and a positive assessment of his or her creative heritage. In general, the language of obituaries is as neutral as possible; sincere statements are rare and therefore perceived as an exception: «An irreconcilable enemy of easy success, cheap effect, narcissism, self-confidence, and indifference, he was a model of modesty, tireless creative activity, passion, and possessed a rare ability to listen to the voices of his young students and friends»<sup>17</sup>. Another feature of obituaries of this period is the absence of authors: obituaries are either unsigned or signed with the impersonal construction «Group of Comrades»<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 201, 212.

### 1.5 1970s and 1980s. Stagnation and Attempts at Reform

As Ukrainian educational historian Olha Sukhomlynska aptly puts it, «during this period, the emasculation and devastation of the Soviet canon, its rhetorical content, and divergence from reality were most evident»<sup>19</sup>. So, a common phenomenon of Soviet reality in the 1970s was a double morality, and Ukrainian schools paid great attention to the ideological orientation of education, to the education of a «Soviet person»<sup>20</sup>. In the 1970s, the Soviet school was a social institution fully regulated and controlled by the Communist Party and the state. The task was to form a person according to a standard, a general pattern of certain behavior, worldview, and political views. During this period, the role of the school in the formation of a citizen in Soviet society was one of the priorities of state policy, not inferior to family upbringing, and in most cases even exceeding its importance. The ideological component

in education in the 1970s was very significant, but compared to the previous periods of the 1930s and 1960s, it was already purely declarative. After all, they were talking about the communist future, but the actual reality was different. That is why obituaries of teachers from this last period of the USSR's existence are extremely brief (1 page) and describe not their contribution to the development of schooling and pedagogical science, but their devotion to Soviet ideals. Each of the seven obituaries of this period necessarily characterizes the teacher as a «communist teacher», «a principled communist», «a fiery patriot of the socialist homeland», «a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since 1940», «ardent communist», «member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union», «a loyal son of the Communist Party»<sup>21</sup>. Obituaries have no authors or are signed by a large group of people, which was a characteristic feature of the Soviet period of the 1970s and 1980s: V. Sukhomlynsky's obituary was signed by 24 people, A.

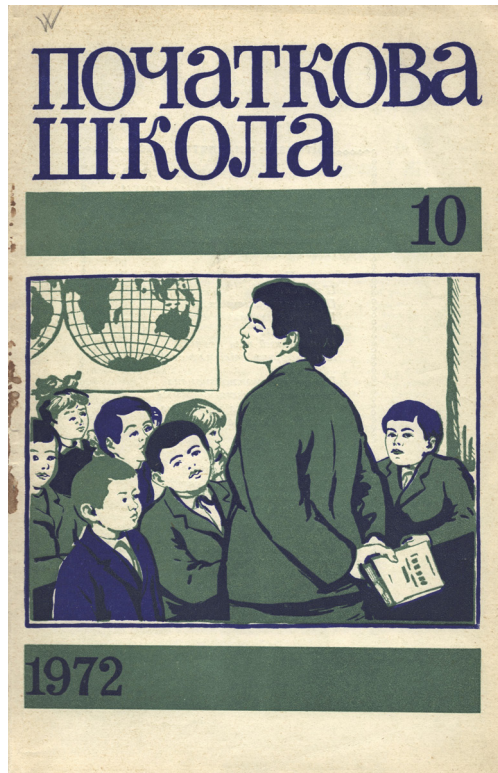


Fig. 3. The cover of the journal «Pochatkova shkola», n. 10, 1972, (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

<sup>19</sup> O. Sukhomlynska, *Radianska pedahohika yak ideolohiia. Sproba istorychnoi rekonstruktsii*, «Shkilnyi Svit», n. 4, 2015, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> O. Mikhno, *Fenomen pedahohichnoi kharakterystyky uchnia: vid Ushynskoho do Sukhomlynskoho*, Vinnytsia, FOP Kushnir Yu. V., 2020, p. 298.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhno, *In memoriam*, cit., pp. 219, 221, 222, 224, 228, 230, 233.



Fig. 4. Obituary for Vasyl Sukhomlinskyi (1918-1970). Journal «Radiantska shkola», n. 10, 1970, p. 109. (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

Soviet pedagogical journals of the 1920s-1980s. If the teacher did not quite meet this criterion but made a significant contribution to the development of pedagogical science and schooling, it was written about it in the obituary as follows: «raised his ideological and political level», «systematically worked to improve his or her ideological and theoretical level»<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, the obituaries of teachers of the Soviet period are extremely ideologized and full of Soviet rhetoric. Therefore, the question arises: how can we use these obituaries today, are they a relevant source for the history of education? Currently, Ukrainian humanities, in particular the history of education, is undergoing active processes of decolonization and decommunization, catalyzed by the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in 2014 and Russia's full-scale invasion of sovereign Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In the process of decolonization, Ukrainian scholars are seeking to reconsider the Soviet period of

Holovko's one was signed by 48, and O. Kornichuk's by 92 people.

The ideologization of schooling and pedagogical science in Ukraine during the Soviet period can be illustrated by the use of vocabulary specific to an obituary for an educator. We have calculated that words such as «teacher» and «teacher's» were used 40 times, «education» 62 times, «students» 15 times, and «memory» 29 times in 35 obituaries from the 1920s to the 1980s. At the same time, the word «Soviet» was used 102 times, «party» 25 times, «Soviet government» 19 times, «Lenin» 23 times, «socialism» 23 times, «socialist» 23 times, and «communist» 24 times.

All Ukrainian educators of that time, whose obituaries were published in Soviet pedagogical journals, acted within the strictly regulated framework of the Soviet totalitarian regime, and scholars of education wrote and published their works guided by Marxist-Leninist methodology. It can be argued that it was the teacher's devotion to the communist ideology that was a condition for the publication of an obituary in Ukrainian

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 196.



Ukraine's history, to find out what is valuable from that period and what should be rejected and condemned.

Here is an example of such a reconsideration based on a decolonial approach, using the text of an obituary for the Ukrainian educator Vasyl Sukhomlynskyi (1918-1970). The short obituary (1 page) contains the obligatory information for that time: he was born into a poor peasant family, participated in the Great Patriotic War (the name of the Soviet-German war of 1941-1945, which was used in the USSR and is now used in Russia), wrote more than thirty books, his work was highly appreciated by the party and government, and was awarded two Orders of Lenin, the Order of the Red Star, and numerous medals<sup>23</sup>. At the same time, the obituary does not say that Sukhomlynskyi was a child writer and wrote more than 1500 fiction miniatures (fairy tales and stories) for children, which are «a concentrated expression of both his artistic perception of the world and his pedagogical ideas»<sup>24</sup>, nor does it mention his main book, *I Give My Heart to Children*, which was first published in Berlin in 1968<sup>25</sup>, earlier than in the USSR, which was a precedent in Soviet times. The book was immediately published in the USSR the following year, 1969. The obituary also does not mention such works by Sukhomlynskyi as *Believe in Human* (1960), *The Spiritual World of the Pupil* (1961), and *Human is Unique* (1962), the very titles of which distance their author from official Soviet pedagogy, which was engaged in the construction of the «Soviet person». For Sukhomlynskyi, respect for the child, and unconditional support for childhood was a pedagogical truth that contradicted the trends in education at the time. Currently, the heritage of V. Sukhomlynskyi is being studied by scholars (in the period 1991-2021, thirty-two theses on his heritage were defended in Ukraine) and used by modern Ukrainian teachers in their pedagogical work. The reason for this is that although Sukhomlynskyi lived during the Soviet period and accepted the Soviet identity as the official identity of the time, he remained in the history of Ukrainian education because of the fact that his Ukrainian identity outweighed the Soviet one. That is, it was his Ukrainian, not Soviet, identity that gave him the opportunity to generate and embody the ideas of humanism, spirituality, and family education in his pedagogical work, relying on the culture of the Ukrainian nation, where «historical memory and an expressive cultural component (artistic, literary, musical) are always present»<sup>26</sup>.

As we can see, the decolonial approach allows us to get rid of the mono-identity doctrine. Can we consider only Soviet identity to be important for teachers of the Soviet period? Obviously, no, we cannot. However, we cannot mechanically “drag” every teacher of the Soviet era from one identity to another, from Soviet identity to Ukrainian identity. But we can definitely emphasize the presence of Ukrainian identity in many teachers of the Soviet period. That is, we can add the identity that was not accepted in Soviet times,

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>24</sup> O. Sukhomlynska, *Deiaki aspekty evoliutsii spryiniattia tvorchosti V. Sukhomlynskoho: doroha dovzhynoïu v 40 rokiv*, «Istoryko-pedahohichnyi almanakh», n. 1, 2012, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> W. Suchomlinski, *Mein herz gehört den Kindern*, Berlin, Volk und Wissen, 1968.

<sup>26</sup> O. Sukhomlynska, *V. Sukhomlynskyi pro patriotyzm: teksty i konteksty*, «Pedahohichnyi poshuk», n. 4, 2016, p. 7.

including in obituaries, and, taking into account the Ukrainian identity, try to look at the heritage of the Soviet-era teacher from a new perspective and evaluate this heritage from new methodological positions.

### *Conclusion*

After analyzing thirty-five obituaries for Ukrainian educators published in eight pedagogical journals in the 1920s-1980s, we came to the following conclusions:

- obituaries of famous educators and ordinary teachers of the 1920s are the most informative: they fully describe the life of the deceased and contain a reasonable assessment of his or her pedagogical heritage;
- in the 1930s, obituaries for educators were almost never published, which we explain by the formation of a totalitarian regime in the USSR, which was established by means of political repression and the Holodomor of 1932-1933 organized in Ukraine, a genocide of the Ukrainian people that led to huge human losses, including among educators;
- since the 1940s, the texts of obituaries have been less and less reflecting the individuality of the educator, and are written according to the standard scheme «born – studied – a member of the of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – author of such works – list of soviet awards»;
- obituaries for ordinary teachers gradually disappeared from pedagogical journals; since the 1950s, they have been exclusively obituaries of famous scholars, professors, and writers;
- the ideologization of Soviet education in the years 1930-1980 is reflected not only in the content but also in the language of obituaries, which are filled with Soviet rhetoric;
- some obituaries have authors, some – without authorship or signed with cryptonyms or impersonal constructions such as «editorial board», «group of comrades». There are obituaries signed by a large group of people;
- obituaries prove that education in Ukraine in the 1920s-1980s was Ukrainian Soviet education, which was gradually becoming less Ukrainian and more Soviet;
- the application of the decolonial approach to the analysis of obituary texts makes it possible to objectively assess the contribution of a Soviet-era educator to the development of Ukrainian education and schooling.

In the future, obituaries of Soviet-era teachers can be used to analyze changes in pedagogical theory and practice in the years 1920-1980 and in biographical studies based on a decolonial approach. Another interesting area for further research is the comparison of obituaries for Ukrainian educators of the 1920s-1980s published in Ukraine and abroad, in particular in the publications of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States and Canada.

# Medals, Diplomas and Lifetime Allowances. Honours as a Form of Promotion for a Public Policy of School Memory

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## *Introduction*

The awarding of honours as distinctive marks to acknowledge merit in the field of education and learning is a practice that was introduced in Italy in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became widespread via many different channels. First, through the national award systems of honors, then by means of the merits awarded at events designed to involve individuals, associations and entities interested in the process of development of the school and educational system in its different articulations. Such practices nurture that cultural process that contributes, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the construction, invention and consolidation of the school's public memory upon which the historiography of education has focused recently<sup>1</sup>. The political and pedagogical functions of honors<sup>2</sup> acquire a distinctive meaning in relation to the different historical periods and ideological, political and cultural settings in which they were conferred, involve multiple parties, define *lieux de mémoire* and produce objects such as insignia or distinctive marks that reveal their symbolic meaning embedded in everyday practice. Merits are awarded not only by institutional entities such as monarchies, presidencies of the republic, ministries,

<sup>1</sup> We refer to those investigations, which – stimulated by studies on the policies of memory by historians such as Hobsbawm, Nora and Terdiman, or on the cultural forms of memory by anthropologists such as Connerton – have identified various forms and “places of school memory”. The investigations that have begun to explore this area of research include those reported in the following volumes C. Yanes Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; J. Meda, *The «Sites of School Memory» in Italy between memory and oblivion: a first approach*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 25-47; R. Sani, A. Ascenzi, *Oscuri martiri eroi del dovere. Memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistrali nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016. For a more comprehensive bibliography of the studies that have developed over the past few years, see the references in <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/le-nostre-pubblicazioni> (last access: 13.03.2023)

<sup>2</sup> On the general subject of honors, see E. D'Aquino, *La fonte degli onori*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1995. On those referring to education in the forty post-unification years, see A. Barausse, «Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...». *Public memory and awards of honour of public education in Italy from the Unification to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 1, XIV, 2019, pp. 185-206.



municipalities, but also by associations and educational institutions. The spaces of public award and recognition during the second half of the nineteenth century increased in number: so, in addition to the celebratory moments occasioned by the conferral of merits by the Ministry, we can record those held on occasion of local and national educational exhibitions; national and local pedagogical congresses, magisterial congresses, celebratory commemorations for the founding of institutes of education or universities, celebratory commemorations of educators. The heuristic value for school historiography derived from the historical analysis of the conferral of honors and distinctive awards is relevant both when viewed from the perspective of identifying the specific policies and practices on which the merits are based, and with respect to the symbolic and material study of the decorations that accompanied the conferral of merits. From the limited research to date, it is possible to hypothesize that honors practices and policies have been oriented to support the development of basic schooling processes through the practices of merit and emulation. But also to promote the professionalization of faculty and school officers through the symbolic power of the decoration/distinctive mark. Honors acquire the meaning of a «tool for constructing the identity of benevolent groups and institutions», as already pointed out by Sani and Ascenzi in analyzing another type of sources that lends itself to similar considerations: the obituaries<sup>3</sup>. Another aspect related to the awarding of honors is to build/invent a school tradition especially in secondary institutions, art academies and universities; one further, but not least, aspect to be investigated is the use and function played by honors and distinctive marks in conveying the propaganda of nationalist values and ideology during the fascist regime.

The awarding of honors is associated with the distribution of insignia consisting of medals, parchments, diplomas and money prizes, and the decorations have become increasingly important to the extent that they have nurtured an initially handcrafted and later industrial network for their production. It has been observed that the distinctive mark itself, especially the medal, represents a particularly suggestive path for historical research:

The historical research that can be conducted through the medal awarding is undoubtedly quite fascinating, as the medal constitutes a reliable document that preserves in its durable material the places, times, and motivations of a historical event, but it can also convey the image of a character or place, and the symbolism that reflects the thought of the times<sup>4</sup>.

Such considerations may have their value even if we limit the investigation to the decorations in schools and educational settings.

<sup>3</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, «*Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere*». *Memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistrali*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> *150 anni di medaglie Johnson 1836-1986*, Milano, Stabilimento S. Johnson, 1986, p. 37.

1. *The «meritorious» in the field of education and learning. The ministerial honors between methodological issues and heuristic potentials*

The conferral of medals and awards such as public honors in the field of public education originated with the birth of the national school system. The school historical investigation has the opportunity to draw on a rather broad spectrum of sources to reconstruct the complex picture of the honors conferred in the field of education and learning. In the case of honors promoted by the Italian state through ministerial institutions, we must, first, venture into the identification and, then, the analysis of the normative sources that established a specific honor. Laws, decrees, circulars as necessary tools to focus on the origin of the honors and their characteristics. Looking at the production of regulations, we have to observe a certain evolution, which, however, involves several ministries. Early research revealed the definitely important role played by the Ministry of Education, which, starting in 1865, through a specific circular established the awarding of a prize in money and the honor of bearing the decoration of the Order of Ss. Maurice and Lazarus. This was followed in 1866 by a new circular in which Minister Berti instituted the annual award of a silver and a bronze medal alongside with the distribution of book prizes to teachers who were particularly noted for «spreading good teaching among the people»<sup>5</sup>. The subject of honors awarding returned to the heart of school policy in the early 1890s when Minister Boselli wanted to revive the institute of merit conferral in connection with the push to renovate the role of the school, considered by the Crispi government to be indispensable for promoting national identity and supporting nationalist instances<sup>6</sup>. As part of a more comprehensive review of planned interventions in the distribution of subsidies to primary and popular education in favor of municipalities, it was resolved to grant «gratifications to particularly meritorious teachers of primary education». The minister instituted special medals and diplomas of merit in favor of the «most distinguished teachers and people who had shown in special way to favor education and learning»<sup>7</sup>. The school historical research, however, has yet to return a more in-depth insight related to the directions taken by policymakers with regard to awarding honors to school personnel. It is worth mentioning that the teaching staff of secondary schools and universities, as well as the officers of the central or peripheral school administration, were awarded chivalric honors more and more frequently, specifically the different ranks of the Crown of Italy, an honor established in 1868<sup>8</sup>. The issue revamped furtherly at the turn of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the educational system was the subject of special attention from the political class that found itself at the head of the ministries in charge for educational matters. It was between 1894 and 1899 that the Ministry of Education developed a series of measures designed to introduce the granting of life allowances.

<sup>5</sup> With regard to these measures cf. Barausse, «*Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...*», cit., p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. Duggan, *Creare la nazione. Vita di Francesco Crispi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Royal Decree n. 63 of 29 January 1891 («*Gazzetta Ufficiale*», n. 54, 6 March 1891). See Barausse, «*Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...*», cit., p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> Royal Decree n. 4251 of 20 February 1868 (*Collezione celerifera delle Leggi, Decreti, istruzioni e Circolari dell'anno 1868 ed anteriori*, Firenze, Presso gli Editori, 1868, pp. 321-322).



Fig. 1. *Medaglia ai benemeriti della educazione popolare* (1891), obverse and reverse (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/medaglia-di-bronzo-i-benemeriti-della-popolare-istruzione-1891>; last access: 10.02.202)

In 1894 Minister Baccelli established four pensions to meritorious elementary teachers from resources allocated to the Mauritian order fund<sup>9</sup>; this measure was supplemented by that of spring 1895, intended to extend the benefit of merit allowances to female elementary school teachers who were precluded from accessing the honors provided for the Mauritian order of chivalry, which were reserved exclusively for men<sup>10</sup>.

Meanwhile, in a further decree, the minister arranged for permission to «publicly display the sign of honor» received, that is, the medal that was supposed to display on one side the effigy of the king, and on the other an oak wreath with the words «to the well-deserving of popular education»<sup>11</sup>. New life allowances were, then, established by Royal Decree 22 January 1899. The increasing presence of women in the elementary teaching staff and, more generally, the process of professionalization of the teaching staff contributed to create new specific conditions for the awarding of merits. So, at the beginning of the new century, a further extension of regulatory interventions to broaden the forms of conferring honors and rewarding school personnel was witnessed. The Minister of Public Education Nasi, in fact, issued in 1902 a provision by which he extended the access to merit allowances to well-deserving school managers and female school managers who

<sup>9</sup> Royal Decree 30 December 1894 «Withdrawal from the Mauritian Order fund for four pensions to meritorious elementary school teachers» (*Collezione celerifera delle Leggi, Decreti, istruzioni e Circolari dell'anno 1895 ed anteriori*, Rome, Stamperia Reale, 1895, p. 255).

<sup>10</sup> Royal Decree n. 84 of 24 March 1895 (*Collezione celerifera delle Leggi, Decreti, istruzioni e Circolari dell'anno 1895 ed anteriori*, Rome, Stamperia Reale, 1895, p. 569).

<sup>11</sup> Royal Decree n. 358 of 2 June 1895 (*Collezione celerifera delle Leggi, Decreti, istruzioni e Circolari dell'anno 1895 ed anteriori*, Rome, Stamperia Reale, 1895, p. 856).

had been in service for at least 35 years<sup>12</sup>. Alongside the existing merits, a special honor was established in order to emphasize the values of fidelity and consistency expressed by teachers and female teachers, namely, the special gold medal for the VIII lustrums of elementary teaching, that is, 40 years of uninterrupted service<sup>13</sup>. The institution of merits was suspended when the Parliament decided to abolish, from the 1903-04 financial budget, the fund allocated for the purchase of medals, so as to allocate resources to the development of evening and festive schools, instead. It was Minister Orlando who had to intervene in 1904 to restore the system of merit awards for elementary education by rationalizing it and replacing it with the previous one by Royal Decree n. 633. The provision on the one hand intended to rectify the increase of requests, which had posed problems for the financial sustainability of the system<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, it sought to provide for a reform of the system that would guarantee the recognition of honors to the various professional categories that were contributing to the development of basic education, by establishing diplomas of merit and life allowances for both teachers and female teachers, for elementary school directors, for teachers of kindergartens and nursery schools<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, it perfected the awarding of a special tribute bestowed by the State, the diploma and gold medal, to «modest teachers who had reached the culmination of their careers»<sup>16</sup>. These provisions would also be incorporated and systematized by the new regulations presented by Minister Rava in 1908. But the conferring of honors would not have involved only public education. As early as 1902, in fact, the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade would also intervene to institute the conferral of merits on those teachers who had distinguished themselves for the development of industrial secondary schools of applied art in industry, design and business<sup>17</sup>. The birth in 1911 of the Ministry of Colonies would lead to the establishment of the diploma and medal to the meritorious in the field of education in colonial territories<sup>18</sup>. That the first fifteen years

<sup>12</sup> Royal Decree n. 79 of February 27, 1902 («Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 72, 27 March 1902, p. 1328).

<sup>13</sup> Royal Decree n. 80, 27 February 1902 («Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 72, 27 March 1902, p. 1329).

<sup>14</sup> Expenditures on merit checks, especially of retired teachers, far exceeded the expectations of the PI leadership who had mistakenly relied on the 40-year requirement as a factor in curbing applications. However, the high number of applications (400 in 1902 alone) forced the PI leadership to review the situation.

<sup>15</sup> The decree provided for the awarding of three types of diplomas of merit-graded Class I, Class II and Class III and the granting of merit checks and pensions for teachers and managers. Gold, silver and bronze medals were to be awarded for the diploma, and the maximum number of diplomas that could be awarded varied in relation to the number of inhabitants of the province. Thus it was possible to award no more than one 1-class, two 2-class and four 3-class diplomas each year for teachers in a province that did not reach or exceed five hundred thousand inhabitants. Where the population was smaller it was provided that teachers would be awarded one 1-class diploma every two years, one 2-class diploma and two 3-class diplomas every year. Royal Decree n. 633 by which diplomas of merit were granted to persons who lent themselves for the benefit of primary education and infant education («Gazzetta Ufficiale», n. 293, 17 December 1904, pp. 5981-5983).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Royal Decree for conferring medals and honorable mentions of merit for industrial and commercial training n. 112 of 3 April 1902 (*Official Collection of Laws and Decrees of the Kingdom of Italy*, vol. II, Roma, Stamperia Reale, 1902, pp. 1311-1313).

<sup>18</sup> The diploma with medal was awarded annually to «inspecting, management and teaching staff of public Colonial schools of all types and grades, in recognition of particularly diligent and effective work in favor of education in the Colonies» based on the provisions of Royal Decree n. 1386 of 19 August 1932 («Gazzetta



Fig. 2. *Medaglia per gli otto lustri d'insegnamento elementare* (1902), obverse and reverse (Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, now in: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/medaglia-doro-di-benemeranza-otto-lustri-dinsegnamento-elementare>; last access: 10.02.2023)

of the twentieth century were a fertile time for the broadening of the spectrum of honors for the school world is also testified by the attempts to introduce honors awarded from other ministry authorities, or to change the system already in use. In this regard, it would be worth investigating the attempts initiated by Minister Tittoni in 1906, in conjunction with the Directorate General of Italian Schools Abroad, to establish an honorific award to those who had distinguished themselves in Italian schools abroad<sup>19</sup>. Just interesting seem to be the minister's interventions, in 1909, to revise the regulations for awarding only medals, rather than diplomas, considering them a more appropriate way to encourage the culture of countering illiteracy<sup>20</sup>.

Ufficiale», n. 254, 3 November 1932).

<sup>19</sup> Among the Cabinet papers of Minister Tittoni is a subfile *My studies and project* (which later remained unfinished) to award teachers abroad with medals of merit from which it can be seen that the possibility of establishing a medal of merit to be awarded to teachers of schools abroad or to individuals who had acquired special merits was planned from the beginning of the century. At that time the proposal, submitted to and approved by Under-Secretary Alfredo Baccelli, was then blocked by Minister Prinetti. In December 1906 the proposal came up again to Minister Tittoni on the basis of a report first then a draft prepared by the inspectorate on December 11 and December 20, 1906, respectively. See the Inspector General's Report of 11 December 1906 in Historical Archive of the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome, series «Archivio di Gabinetto del Ministro Tittoni (1906-1909)», folder 5, dossier «Schools Abroad», sub-dossier «Studi miei e progetto (rimasti poi sospeso) per conferire ai maestri all'estero medaglie di benemeranza».

<sup>20</sup> Central Archive of the State in Rome, fond «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», series «Direzione generale istruzione primaria e popolare» (henceforth: ACS, MPI, DGIPP), 1897-1910, folder 258, dossier PG,





Fig. 3. *Medaglia ai benemeriti della scuola nelle colonie* (1932), obverse and reverse (Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, now in: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/diploma-di-ii-classe-con-medaglia-ai-benemeriti-della-scuola-nelle>; last access: 10.02.2023)

The medals, diplomas, and money prizes show us the changes that have taken place in the definition of strategies for promoting public school memory by political elites over the long period of national history. The archival sources, rather than the normative ones, allow us to know better the profiles of those who, whether institutions or individuals, were subject to evaluation by the local education authorities with the aim of being nominated for the awarding of merits. The first surveys testify the evolution of the public representation of school personnel and, over the first forty years, the moments of discontinuity in the promotion of the teaching model functional to the nationalisation process and the development of primary education. In particular, the rewarded and emphasised qualities of meritorious teachers were those of hard work, dedication and consistency over time, long professional practice and activities in rural contexts, the mediating role with local communities, the contribution to educational expenses by private individuals or municipalities<sup>21</sup>. The analysis of the archival record also sheds some light on the changes introduced during the first decades of the twentieth century aimed at supporting, along with the civilizing process operated by the school staff, the professionalization of the teaching staff by acknowledging the possession of greater pedagogical skills and culture in relation with the standards of pedagogical modernization brought by the Herbartism<sup>22</sup>.

No less important is the in-depth study that school history research must conduct, then, in relation to the legislative and regulatory production promoted during the twenty-

sf. Planned reform of the General Regulations in the part concerning Diplomas of Merit (this reform had no further effect).

<sup>21</sup> Barausse, «*Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...*», cit., *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> See, in this sense, the reasons contained in the proposals for conferment preserved in the numerous envelopes in the series DGIPP (ACS, MPI).

year fascist period. In this context, we are faced with a process of fascistization even with regard to honors and symbols. The first surveys attest, in fact, an interesting evolution of the merit awarding system, which involved not only teachers of all grades, directors of kindergartens or elementary schools, but also those who worked in supplementary educational institutions, especially in the ONB, the OND or the GIL, even abroad and in the colonies. However, the process of fascistization of honors conferring was followed by changes in the symbolism of the distinctive signs, which – of course – acquired an identitarian meaning even with the aim of exercising greater control<sup>23</sup>. The increase in awards conferral and in the production of diplomas, medals or merit stars during the Twenty-year period followed, however, only partially the direction aimed towards enhancing the progressive politicization and loyalty of school and management personnel to the regime<sup>24</sup>. The next step, recorded in the years of republican Italy, is no less relevant for a deeper understanding of the dynamics related to the awarding of honors. In fact, following the provisions that were issued in the early 1950s, it was planned that diplomas and medals would be awarded to the meritorious of culture<sup>25</sup>.

## 2. *Making memory with medals: “Tribute medals, commemorative medals, award medals”*

The awarding of honours is associated with the distribution of insignia consisting of medals, parchments, diplomas, money prizes, and the decorations follow a classification derived from the very nature of the honour. So, as noted by numismatic scholars, alongside official medals, i.e. those awards, both military and civil, that were conferred and distributed by the authorities of a state, a province, a municipality or an institution, we find ‘unofficial’ medals that are often the result of the public initiative of organisations, schools or professional associations, as well as private individuals<sup>26</sup>. These also include those of a school and educational nature. The awarding of distinctive marks to recall merit in the field of education and learning was a practice that had been introduced and widespread in connection with events intended to attract individuals and associations involved in the development process of the school system in its various articulations. This was the case, for example, of events promoted to recall and publicise the progress in the industrial field such as the Universal Expositions, namely, those exhibitions promoted

<sup>23</sup> With regard to the school and educational honors instituted during the regime, their chronological sequence and the evaluations of the commissions in charge of conferring them, see the essay by A. Barausse, *Le onorificenze scolastiche agli «apostoli dei tempi nuovi»*. *Memoria scolastica pubblica e rappresentazione del personale scolastico durante il fascismo. Parte prima*, «History of Education and Children's Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 1, 2023, pp. 277-291 and Id., *Memoria scolastica pubblica e rappresentazione del personale scolastico durante il fascismo. Parte seconda*, «History of Education and Children's Literature», vol. XVIII, n. 2, 2023, pp. 125-147.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> The new honor was established by Law n. 1093 of 16 November 1950, and the awarding was regulated by Presidential Decree n. 4553 of 18 December 1952.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. Brambilla, *Le medaglie italiane negli ultimi 200 anni*, Milano, s.n., 2012 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), vol. 1: 1784-1900, pp. III.



from the mid-nineteenth century in London in 1851, that from the 1960s onwards also began to include a section dedicated to education and teaching, in order to highlight those entrepreneurial subjects, such as publishers, involved in the production of items intended to modernise education<sup>27</sup>. At such events, publishing companies or producers of educational material could gain public recognition through the awarding of a medal. The collections of medals preserved today give us many examples such as the prize medal that was coined at the International Exhibition held in Milan in 1906 to reward the best exhibitors at the Educational Exhibition<sup>28</sup>. A similar process was introduced at educational exhibitions promoted at local, provincial, municipal or national level. The request expressed by the Prefect of Bergamo to Minister Correnti to include the awarding of prizes in money and medals at the Provincial Educational and Fine Arts Exhibition held in September 1870, and to compete with the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce in the awarding of merits, was not an isolated one<sup>29</sup>. But the practice of awarding medals affected the school and the pedagogical movement more directly during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the occasions of conferences or celebrations that saw the participation of parties more directly involved in the processes of schooling, who had proved to be more sensitive to the prospects of innovation suggested by the pedagogical movement during its development. The national pedagogical congress held in Genoa in 1868 introduced of the practice of awarding gold, silver or bronze medals to those individuals, educational institutions, business entities, who had presented an original and useful product for the development of the educational system according to the perspectives advocated by the Ministry of Public Education, or the representatives of the pedagogical movement<sup>30</sup>. It is not possible here to count the many awards granted at the ten national pedagogical congresses held between 1861 and 1880, but the proceedings of the meetings indicate in detail the type of award granted for the production of didactic materials rather than educational writings or textbooks or works of various kinds

<sup>27</sup> Not much research has been done on universal exhibitions in Italy. See F. Targhetta, *“Uno sguardo all'Europa”. Modelli scolastici, viaggi pedagogici ed importazioni didattiche nei primi cinquant'anni di scuola italiana*, in M. Chiaranda (ed.), *Storia comparata dell'educazione. Problemi ed esperienze tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2010, pp. 155-176. In the Anglo-Saxon area, an interesting work has been edited by M. Lawn (ed.), *Modelling the future: exhibitions and materiality of education*, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2009; in the Latin American area, a pioneering study is that published in Brazil by M. Kuhlmann Jr., *As Grandes Festas Didáticas. A Educação Brasileira e as Exposições Pedagógicas Internacionais (1862- 1922)*, São Paulo, Edusf, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> The medal included in the obverse the effigy of the King facing left and in the reverse, in a circle, a reference to the Ministry of Education and, in a second circle, to the Milan International Exposition with a field in the center with the indication to the Educational Exhibition, and a blank space for the insertion of the name of the awardee.

<sup>29</sup> In this particular case, two gold medals were produced and awarded to Professor Antonio Tiraboschi for his Bergamasque-Italian dictionary and to the presidency of the provincial school board for the collection of provisions and circulars. ACS, MPI, series «Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti», sub-series «Esposizioni, congressi, mostre e conferenze», 1860-1894», folder 1, dossier «Bergamo. Esposizione Provinciale 1870».

<sup>30</sup> *Atti del quinto Congresso pedagogico italiano tenuto in Genova nel settembre del 1868*, Genova, Città di Genova, 1868 (cited in A. Barausse, *Mostre didattiche, musei pedagogici e musei scolastici in Italia dall'Unità all'ascesa del fascismo. “Nation building” tra processi di scolarizzazione, modernizzazione delle pratiche didattiche e relazioni transnazionali*, in Id., T. de Freitas Ermel, V. Viola, *Prospettive incrociate sul patrimonio storico-educativo*, Lecce, PensaMultimedia, 2020, p. 113).



Fig. 4. *Medaglia omaggio per il VI Congresso Pedagogico di Torino* (1869), obverse and reverse (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/medaglia-premio-vi-congresso-pedagogico-italia-no-comune-di-milano>; last access: 10.02.2023)

displayed in the educational exhibitions that accompanied the congress. The numismatic collections of the city museums of Milan preserve, for example, the medal awarded to the municipality of Milan for merits related to the development of elementary education in the context of the educational exhibition that was organised in parallel with the 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Pedagogical Congress held in Turin in 1869<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, the practice also gradually spread to the magistral congresses, local or national, which from the 1880s onwards, became more and more frequent<sup>32</sup>. The practice extended – as documented by the many tribute medals or award medals, most of which have yet to be identified and catalogued – to celebratory events commissioned by local authorities for the establishment of kindergartens, school and educational institutions or for celebrations connected to the foundations of universities, or those paying tribute to personalities who worked both locally and nationally in the fields of education, as well as university lecturers, councillors or ministers. Various examples and specimens of such “marks of honour”, which represent a variation on national awards, can be found in the conservation sites. For example, on the occasion of the inauguration of the kindergarten named after the Milanese patriot Maurizio Quadrio on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1886, a medal was coined that is now kept in the Milan civic collection. To celebrate fifty years of work in the field of kindergartens in Milan, a medal in honour of Giuseppe Sacchi was also manufactured

<sup>31</sup> See R. Martini, *Catalogo delle medaglie delle civiche raccolte numismatiche. V: Secoli XVIII-XIX. 4: Regno d'Italia (1861-1900)*, Milano, Comune di Milano, 1999, p. 28 and tav. XIV, n. 2968.

<sup>32</sup> See for example the medals minted on the occasion of the national pedagogical congresses in Naples in 1871 and Venice in 1872, kept in the Civic Collections in Milan (*Ibid.*, pp. 35-36, n. 2997 and n. 2998).



Fig. 5. *Medaglia omaggio per l'inaugurazione dell'Asilo infantile "Maurizio Quadrio" (1886)*, obverse and reverse (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/medaglia-omaggio-asilo-infantile-maurizio-quadrio>; last access: 10.02.2023)



Fig. 6. *Medaglia omaggio alla Festa degli Alberi del Ministero dell'Istruzione (n.d.)*, obverse and reverse (Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato)

in 1886<sup>33</sup>. But there are many areas of educational nature that were the occasion for celebratory moments that produced memories. Among the many examples, it is enough to mention one of the various celebrations of the Festival of Trees, probably the one held in Rome in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for which a medal was engraved on commission from

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112, n. 3329.

the Ministry of Education with an allegorical composition of the Festival of Trees based on a design by the artist Duilio Cambellotti<sup>34</sup>.

Just as frequent, in medal collections and catalogues, were the tribute medals awarded to university or secondary school professors whose years of teaching or directing the institutions where they practised their profession were commemorated, such as the medal awarded in 1898 to Carlo Uttini for fifty years of teaching or the one created in 1935 in honour of Luigi Credaro on the occasion of his retirement<sup>35</sup>. To celebrate Luigi Comaschi's dedication to the development of public education, the municipality of Bergamo produced a medal in 1881 as a tribute to its councillor<sup>36</sup>. The honorary medals made for the ministerial offices of Carlo Matteucci, Cesare Correnti or Pasquale Stanislao Mancini are just some of the many specimens that only a systematic study could bring to light<sup>37</sup>.

Moreover, the awarding of medals represented an increasingly widespread practice to accompany aspects of 'everyday school life': insignia or distinctive signs destined to qualify, through rituals and celebrations, significant moments in the life of schools along with sports competitions or festivals and exhibitions. These include the awarding of prizes to primary and secondary school pupils. Prize medals, together with prize books, gradually became one of the many instruments employed in education to stimulate the achievement of school success, the so called "pedagogy of the prize"<sup>38</sup>. This is a long-term strategy that we find not only in the course of everyday school life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but also in that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a phenomenon that finds its way into the most significant literature such as De Amicis' *Cuore*<sup>39</sup> and is accompanied by a specific production whose more or less standardised specimens are reproduced in the catalogues disseminated by school publishers<sup>40</sup>. Rarely, and more out of numismatic interests, have we paused to analyse this type of merit in the school context intended to support schooling practices. These award medals, therefore, were already present in pre-unitary practices, but became more and more frequently part of the "toolkit" used by schools to educate through the practice of emulation by using a sign of distinction. A practice that, according to some testimonies, was intended to impose itself on the use of parchments<sup>41</sup> and that, at times, was destined to stir up controversy when, in some

<sup>34</sup> The mint specimen is kept at the Museo della Zecca di Roma Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.

<sup>35</sup> <https://numismatica-italiana.lamoneta.it/moneta/W-ME67A/279> (last access: 02.03.2022).

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/onorificenze/medaglia-omaggio-luigi-comaschi-1881> (last access: 03.03.2023).

<sup>37</sup> Martini, *Catalogo delle medaglie delle civiche raccolte numismatiche*, cit., p. 8, n. 2892, p. 59, n. 3095 and p. 105, n. 3299.

<sup>38</sup> On the "pedagogy of the prize" see E. Marazzi, *Libri per diventare italiani. L'editoria per la scuola a Milano nel secondo Ottocento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2014, pp. 215 ff.; on "prize books" G. Chiosso, *Libri di scuola e mercato editoriale*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2013, pp. 141-146.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the chapter on 4 February *Una medaglia ben data*.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, the medals and certificates of merit proposed in the *Catalogo del materiale scolastico per gli asili infantili e le scuole elementari*, Firenze, Bemporad e Figlio, 1916, pp. 91-94.

<sup>41</sup> «It would be appropriate to abolish, in schools, those little nods of lithographed paper called diplomas of honor. I know that when I was attending elementary school and gymnasium, together with many of my fellow students, now for one excuse and now for another I had to voluntarily give up the medals I deserved; but do



cases, the distribution of prize books exclusively began to be preferred to the awarding of medals. This is testified by what happened in Genoa, as reported by the local newspaper «Il Secolo XIX»:

This year we have an old novelty, the awarding of books and not the usual medals. The usefulness of the book is indisputable, but medals were more welcomed by the awardees and their parents. The medal is more suitable as an award, because it has no political or religious character. Can the same be said of prize books? Did they make a choice to please atheists and religious, radicals and moderates? At the Office of Public Education they struggled to find special books suitable for prizes and couldn't find any: I am told they bought some books, stockpiles for real [...] <sup>42</sup>.

The distribution of medals became part of an increasingly widespread ritual within the schools made up of ceremonies, recitations, and preparations that, in some cases, also aroused resistance, as when, in Genoa, were recalled the long hours of rehearsals for the clothes to be worn, the parades through the streets of the city of little girls “with their hair closed in countless paper cornets” that seemed to clash with the educational aims of the schools themselves <sup>43</sup>.

### 3. *The “memory factories”*

The analysis of the material sources represented by the various symbolic objects, emblems, distinctive signs that make up and express the school memory is not secondary. And there are several levels of analysis that can refer not only to the material characteristics of the decoration but also to the symbolic ones possessed by the emblems, often the result of the creativity of engravers or sculptors. Moreover, the development of honours is also linked to other assumptions, including that of the subjects that materially produced the signs of distinction functional to the representation of public merit. There were several “memory factories”, i.e. the subjects that commissioned or produced the decorations: the state, through the mints, entrepreneurial subjects, in particular publishing companies.

Among the factors, which are certainly not secondary, that explain the growth in the spread of the practice of honours/merit in schools, private colleges, academies and universities, is the presence of a more significant number of production entities in the country. These are mints or artisan or entrepreneurial societies that feed the circuit of the production and circulation of medals. Where the person commissioning the production of the medal was a state entity, as in the case of ministries, then we are faced with the fundamental presence of the mints. At the beginning of the unification experience we are faced with the spread of mints that in the pre-unification context exercised the function of

not believe that any of us had any pleasure in it» (S. Paglieri, *Le medaglie di Ferrea*, Genova, Istituto grafico S. Basile, 1983, p. 25).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; but see also *Libri e medaglie*, «L'Unione dei maestri elementari», vol. XXIII, n. 44, 1 September 1892, p. 357.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

producing coins and medals. Significant was the role of the mints in Turin, Florence and, later, Rome, which, after the closure of the pre-unification mints in 1892, was destined to become the only State mint, also with regard to the honours produced for schools. The state mints through their engravers took charge of the production of the medals that accompanied the awarding of medals to the meritorious of popular education. Completely missing is the research in the field of school and educational history on the role played by these institutions in supporting the Italian public administration in the production of medals on the topics of education and learning. Nor are there any analyses that have shed light on the role played by engravers. I am thinking, for example, about the profile of Giuseppe Ferraris whose initials appear on the medal produced by the Turin mint in 1870<sup>44</sup>. Or that of Filippo Speranza, from Viterbo, who learned the art of engraving from Paolo Mercuri in Rome; he first entered the engraving studio of the papal mint and, after the conversion of the Rome mint into the Royal Mint of the Kingdom of Italy, soon became the chief engraver of the Roman mint and one of the few, if not the only, engraver to put his name on the coins of Kings Umberto I and Vittorio Emanuele III. His name is clearly visible on some specimens of medals awarded to the meritorious of popular education. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the role of other producers either. In the medal industry during the first post-unification decades, in addition to the mints, private artisan or proto-industrial companies were also involved. Between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was precisely the growth in demand for medals intended for reward, tribute or celebratory forms, generated by the development of various educational institutions, that encouraged the commitment of proto-industrial or industrial enterprises.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of local experiences gained strength in response to commissions from schools, universities and academies. In the capital of Liguria, an initial impulse towards engraving medals with a school subject was given by Giuseppe De Giovanni, whose workshop produced the medal of the Liguria Committee for Popular Education, that of the Debarbieri boarding school and the Arzeno Commercial Boarding School. However, among the particularly important initiatives that can be mentioned here as possible further investigations into school-educational medals are those promoted in Genoa and Milan by Pietro Ferrea and Johnson. Pietro Ferrea, who trained at the Liguria Academy of Fine Arts in Genoa in 1861, mainly learnt engraving for industrial purposes. But the engraver from Liguria succeeded in conquering the market for prize medals to be distributed in schools, which gradually replaced parchments<sup>45</sup>.

The market for the “daily” medal posed different requirements than those that had to be specifically designed: for the award medals, a generic coinage combined with a calibrated variation of the inscription was sufficient. Generally, the obverse depicted the social emblem of the institution while the reverse specified the occasion of the award. Ferrea managed to secure a commission from the municipality of Genoa to produce award medals for primary school pupils. In 1891, the small firm was awarded the supply

<sup>44</sup> Martini, *Catalogo delle medaglie e delle Civiche raccolte numismatiche*, tav. XV.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

of medals after the temporary suspension of what were considered to be substitutes for medals such as books. The early twentieth century saw a new phase of expansion and spread of the medal market, whose importance as an artistic object increased, aided, moreover, by the introduction of new machinery and techniques such as the pantograph. Ferrea in Genoa secured commissions for the prizes awarded to the pupils of the civic schools. In 1900, 468 medals were distributed to schoolchildren and 811 to schoolgirls: a supply destined to ensure good work for the factory together with the production of award medals to public schools or tribute or celebratory medals that also involved teachers, such as the one commissioned for gym teacher Sartori about to emigrate to Buenos Aires<sup>46</sup>.

Gradually, however, Ferrea had to face competition from Stefano Johnson of Milan. Established in the 1830s on the initiative of Giacomo Johnson as a workshop where stamped metal buttons and coats of arms were made, later under the direction of his son Stefano it was further developed into a medal manufacturer and at the same time changed its company name to «Stefano Johnson – Medal Factory». In the post-unification decades, the production of medals continued to encounter the favour of a diverse public, made up of associations, public and private organisations, religious orders and members of the Milanese nobility. But in the course of the 80s, the company underwent further consolidation, transformation and technological modernisation, and increasingly met the demand for medals from the world of school and education<sup>47</sup>. On this side, we see the involvement of engravers who played a significant role in the production of a specific medal series aimed at school memory and awards. For Johnson, for example, artists such as Putinati, Manfredini and Broggi produced engravings for the Accademia delle Belle Arti and Scuola Brenzoni in Verona, for the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Venice in 1887 or for that of Milan in 1893. Broggi, on the other hand, produced engravings for the Carini Prize of the University of Brescia. But the celebratory centenaries of universities or the foundation of new institutes represent an equally rich opportunity to produce medals. Examples include the medals produced to mark the 4<sup>th</sup> centenary of the University of Brescia in 1902, the 5<sup>th</sup> of the University of Turin celebrated in 1905, the 1<sup>st</sup> centenary of the University of Palermo in 1906 or the foundation of the Italian university in Trieste in 1903. These medals are characterised, in terms of style, by the presence of allegories in classical style or the reproduction of ancient seals and coats of arms<sup>48</sup>.

Furthermore, the question arises as to the extent to which these companies were subjected to competition from the school-publishing companies, which, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, began to produce, as part of the teaching aids, the award medals

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup> V. Johnson, *Una famiglia di artigiani medaglisti*, Milano, Stabilimento Stefano Johnson, Alfieri & Lacroix, 1966.

<sup>48</sup> An interesting sampling of this type of medal is offered to us by the catalog produced on the occasion of 150 years of medals produced by the Johnson company *150 anni di medaglie Johnson, 1836-1986*, Milano, Stabilimento Stefano Johnson, 1986, pp. 103-104.



and certificates or diplomas of merit, albeit in a standardised form, as documented in the publishing catalogues<sup>49</sup>.

A more systematic investigation of the medal collections held not only in the archives of companies such as Johnson, but in the various museums, would allow us to identify the different types of decorations. Significant examples are the collections of the *Museo della Zecca dello Stato*, the medal collections in Palazzo Massimo in Rome, in Palazzo Rosso in Genoa, and in the Museo Correr in Venice, the numismatic Cabinet and medal collection in Milan, the medal collection in the Galilei Museum in Florence. A deeper study of the specimens collected in the catalogues produced to date by both companies and museums<sup>50</sup> could recompose the picture of a medallic production on school and educational themes that is totally absent from school-historical analysis and enrich our knowledge of a very complex phenomenon, that of school memory.

<sup>49</sup> See the already mentioned *Catalogo del materiale scolastico per gli asili infantili e le scuole elementari*, cit., pp. 91-94; or the *Catalogo del materiale scolastico per gli asili infantili e le scuole elementari per l'anno scolastico 1911-1912*, Torino, G.B. Paravia & C., 1911, pp. 81-84.

<sup>50</sup> Examples include catalogs produced by Johnson for the industrial sector such as the *Catalogo delle medaglie e delle civiche raccolte numismatiche*, cit., passim.

# “Minor Educators”? Traces of the Public Memory of the School, between the Official History of Education and the Community’s History. The Case of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913)

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## *Introduction*

The contribution is in the strand of studies known as the public memory of the school on which historical-educational research in recent years has opened innovative research lines. The main research question this study seeks to answer is: how did the public memory of educators, especially those whom official historiography has often considered “minor figures”, contribute to the construction of the identity of a school community and, more generally, of a local community? To this end, we will analyse how many and what forms the public celebration of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913) took within the community of Ripatransone (in the Marche Region), in which the educator was born and carried out his educational work. Before this question can be answered, the methodological framework and the working tools used in the research must be defined.

To this extent, it is appropriate to illustrate the concept of public memory of the school as elaborated in the three-year research project PRIN (Project of Relevant National Interest) entitled “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”<sup>1</sup>. Guided by the University of Macerata and supported by other Italian universities (Florence, Bologna, Cagliari, Molise and Basilicata), this project led to the creation of three online databases intended for the census of the different traces and testimonies that convey the memory of the school<sup>2</sup>. To achieve this objective, a series of interpretive categories, methodological tools and digital repositories have been identified, fine-tuned, and implemented during the mentioned project. The author of this paper, as

<sup>1</sup> R. Sani, J. Meda, “*School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation*”. *An innovative and internationally oriented research project*, «History of Education & Children’s Literature», vol. 17, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26.

<sup>2</sup> See the web portal *Memoria Scolastica*: <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche> (last access: 10.03.2023).

member of the research unit of Macerata University, has specifically contributed to the creation of the *Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola* (Database of the Public Memories of School). In this database have been gathered and catalogued objects – such as plaques, tombstones, statues, monuments, as well as postage stamps or coins etc. – which commemorate events, places, and figures of the history of Italian schools. It is therefore useful to recall the methodological framework and concepts underlying the very definition of school memory, specifically the subcategory addressed in this paper: the public memory of the school.

### 1. *The school memory: features and specificities of a new research field*

The research on school memories conveyed by oral sources, or expressed through ego-documents such as autobiographies, memoirs, diaries etc.<sup>3</sup> is an area that historians and educational historians have explored extensively. On the contrary, the collective and public memory of the school have long remained considered a historiographical unimportant object. In recent years, this trend has been reversed and studies and research have multiplied. An important turning point was the international symposium “School Memories. New Trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues” held in Seville on 22-23 September 2015. On that occasion, an in-depth debate was launched, and many scholars explored different aspects of the school memory as a concept<sup>4</sup>. From then on, it was possible to fine-tune the theoretical coordinates for investigating the school memory as a whole concept, that can be defined a set of modes and forms that commemoration of the school’s past can take. School memories are, in fact, the fruit of an experience that is commonly shared by people and through generations, especially in societies with widespread schooling<sup>5</sup>. Precisely because of this shared experience, an old schoolbag, a Bakelite inkwell, or a vintage school desk can be easily recognised as part of our past, or from the childhood memories that have been passed on to us by our parents, grandparents, friends etc. By virtue of this cultural sharing of a common past, already in a 2014 article I defined school objects as *powerful social objects*<sup>6</sup> (a category I borrowed from the museological work and research

<sup>3</sup> For a first classification see A. Viñao Frago, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

<sup>4</sup> C. Yanes, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories: New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> A. Viñao Frago, *La historia material e inmaterial de la escuela: memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educação», vol. 35, n. 1, January-April 2012, pp. 7-17, <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=84823352002> (last access: 11.02.2013). See of the same autor *La historia material y Memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educatio siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 17-42.

<sup>6</sup> M. Brunelli, *Las fotografías escolares como objetos sociales: Primeras reflexiones sobre el uso educativo y social del patrimonio en el museo de la escuela*, in A.M. Badanelli Rubio, M. Poveda Sanz, C. Rodríguez Guerrero (edd.), *Pedagogía museística: prácticas, usos didácticos e investigación del patrimonio educativo. Actas de las VI Jornadas Científicas de la SEPHE*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid – Facultad de Educación, pp. 203-217.

carried out by Nina Simon)<sup>7</sup>, which just in the museum environment are able to exert their natural power to catalyse people's attention, to elicit personal reminiscences of the school past and to spontaneously bring individuals (even strangers) to share their past experiences. Although this is the most tangible and vivid expression of the memory of school experience, nevertheless many other collective and public expression exist, and equally capable of shaping an intangible school heritage which is shared and kept alive by entire communities.

## 2. *The three facets of the Memory of the School*

Based on these premises, the international community of educational historians has come to identify three possible dimensions – distinct but complementary and often interconnected – in which school memory can take shape. These three dimensions can be defined as follows.

The *Individual School Memory* is intended as the individual practice of self-representation of oneself and one's school past. This self-representation can be offered by alumni as well as former teachers or school administrators by means of oral or written testimonies. Ego-documents are a crucial source that can integrate or even explain information offered by other traditional sources. The *Collective memory of the school* is the collective practice of remembering and (re)building the educational past. This practice is carried out by the cultural industry – i.e. by literature, film<sup>8</sup>, music, etc. – which not infrequently builds a stereotypical image of the school based on the idealisation of the past, or stemming from the stratification of personal memories of entire generations, or finally arising from the (re)interpretation of the past produced by the cultural tools and codes available in that moment. As such, this representation may change over time and even alter our knowledge of the past, but it nonetheless contributes to forming our collective imagery. Finally, the *Public memory of the school* can be meant as a *public practice* of the school's memory, and constitutes the least explored and most recent field of historical-educational research. As such, it has been one of the most innovative focuses of the PRIN's activities. But what is the working definition of "public memory of the school" developed and used for the purpose of this research?

<sup>7</sup> N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz-CA, Museum 2.0, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See the essays collected in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019.

### 3. *Toward a working definition of public memory of the school*

In 2019, the journal «History of Education & Children's Literature» published a monographic section in the first issue of the volume XIV (June 2019), which was entitled *Memories and public celebrations of education in contemporary times*. In the presentation of the section, we proposed a tentative definition of the public memory of the school intended as a:

multiplicity of forms which were elaborated, in the context of the official representations and public commemorations promoted by local and national public institutions, on the basis of a precise «politics of memory» or «public use of the past» designed to harness consensus and reinforce feelings of belonging to a specific community<sup>9</sup>.

With the aim to correctly identify and study all the traces and sources linked to these representations, it was necessary to reflect contextually both on the forms that these manifestations can take and on the occasions and purposes that generated and nurtured them. Regarding the occasions on which the memory of the school was publicly celebrated and represented, and with what specific aims, it is possible to identify the following:

- ceremonies in honour of individual figures both from the world of education (pupils and educators, administrators, school managers as well as funders, patrons and benefactors of educational institutions) and from the world of pedagogy (pedagogists, ministers of education or great authors of children's literature, etc.), who deemed significant both for the educational community as well as for the wider community (from the local community to the national community). The occasions and purposes of such ceremonies mainly refer to public funeral ceremonies promoted by relatives, friends, colleagues or authorities<sup>10</sup>; celebration of birth or death anniversaries; naming of streets, squares and/or school buildings<sup>11</sup>;

- public ceremonies and/or anniversaries for important events, awards or recurrences relating to public education, such as: ceremonies or anniversaries of the foundation of a specific educational institution; centenaries and anniversaries relating to the enactment of fundamental laws, institutions of orders and/or degrees of education, university jubiliations; the awarding of honours and the awarding of medals and diplomas of merit and memory to individuals as well as to municipal, school or association institutions;

<sup>9</sup> M. Brunelli, J. Meda, L. Pomante, *Memories and public celebrations of education in contemporary times. Presentation*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 11-21.

<sup>10</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Between rhetorical celebration and social marginalisation. The teachers' and headmasters' memory and celebration through the obituaries published in the school and teachers' magazines in the first century after the unification (1861-1961)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XI, n. 1, 2016, pp. 97-117 and vol. XI, n. 2, 2016, pp. 121-150.

<sup>11</sup> On the study of toponymy, in particular, see M. D'Ascenzo, *Collective and public memory on the walls. School naming as a resource in the history of education*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XII, n. 1, 2017, pp. 633-657; Ead., *Creating places of public memory through the naming of school buildings. A case study of urban school spaces in Bologna in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*, «El Futuro del Pasado», n. 7, 2016, pp. 441-458.

– realisation of museums and/or musealization of symbolic places: other occasions and ways through which the public representation and/or celebration of the world of the school take place are the realisation of museums specifically dedicated to the representation of the history of the school, or to the celebration of figures linked to the world of the school. In particular, the musealisation of schools (recognised as the fulcrum of the community's history) and other symbolic places (as in the case of Montessori's birthplace in Chiaravalle)<sup>12</sup> is a crucial step that leads to a series of additional initiatives, events, and commemorative activities. These activities can help strengthen public memory, which over time takes on new forms and modalities.

Such a thorough elaboration of the concept and subcategories of school memory, and in particular of the public memory of the school, has made it possible to identify new material sources which – in addition to and alongside the traditional sources – today allow us to explore new perspectives on the school history, as we shall see later in the article.

#### 4. *New sources: the forms of public memory of the school*

The work carried out during the PRIN project, which led to the identification, analysis and careful reflection on the occasions and purposes with which the school was publicly celebrated and represented, made it possible, in parallel, to identify the *forms* in which these public representations were in fact substantiated.

In fact, these representations took the form of a wide range of traces, which for us constitute to all intents and purposes historical sources of documentary, printed, iconographic, material, and finally, of monumental<sup>13</sup> nature, that can be identified in the following typologies:

1. *commemorative plaques and plaques*: in honour of individual personalities from the school world or on the occasion of particular events (e.g. founding of schools, awarding of prizes) or specific anniversaries relating to the history of the school;
2. *statues, portraits, busts and half-busts, or commemorative monuments* (the latter characterised by the presence of architectural elements);
3. *coins and banknotes*, but also *postage stamps, medals* and numismatic series celebrating and commemorating individual personalities from the world of education and schooling or special anniversaries;

<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth study of the symbolic places of education see J. Meda, *I «luoghi della memoria scolastica» in Italia tra memoria e oblio: un primo approccio*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, Eum, 2020, pp. 293-314.

<sup>13</sup> On the monumental heritage, I refer to the methodological and propaedeutic essay on the mentioned PRIN project by V. Minuto: *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255.

4. *printed obituaries, funeral orations, commemorative pamphlets* printed by committees for honouring deceased teachers, *epitaphs* (burial inscriptions) and *funerary monuments* in monumental cemeteries, or *cenotaphs* (funerary monuments but without the mortal remains) and other testimonies related to the funeral ceremony;

5. *honours, certificates of merit and award medals*<sup>14</sup>, *for merit or in memory* dedicated to individuals as well as to educational institutions.

These different practices of public celebration of the school history can each be used separately for every single figure, as is usually the case. But in the case of outstanding personalities, it can happen that these different forms are all used together to celebrate and commemorate (even at different historical moments, in the past or also in recent times) the same figure. This is what has happened in the case of Maria Montessori whose fame and cultural legacy continue to be celebrated to this day, in Italy and abroad, in many and different forms such as statues, plaques, portraits and busts, coins or medals or postage stamps<sup>15</sup>. Regardless of the wealth of forms that celebration and commemoration has taken it is nevertheless a fact that the most recurring testimonies to public school memory in the area are the stone heritage, mostly consisting of epigraphs (more or less enriched by decorative, architectural or figurative elements such as portraits, busts, etc.). This extensive and widespread heritage, however, refers not so much to nationally known figures but rather – as in most cases – to teachers and educators considered “minor” by official historiography, but who played a significant role in the history of places, territories and their school communities.

Thus we come back to the initial research question: how have these public memories of individual educators conditioned, or still condition today, the formation of a community's identity, and not only of the school community but also of the wider community of the local area? With this aim, we carried out an exploratory investigation that examined a local educator from the Marche region, the teacher Emidio Consorti (1841-1913).

### 5. *Emidio Consorti and official historiography*

Emidio Consorti is the typical figure of the teacher of a small center who, by virtue of his personal qualities, initiative, and intuition, manages to emerge from the province and rise to national and international prominence in his era<sup>16</sup>. The Marche educator was

<sup>14</sup> A. Barausse, “*Ricambiare l'amore che portano all'educazione...*”. *Public memory and awards of honour of the Public Education in Italy from the Unification to the end of XIX Century (1861-1898)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, pp. 185-205.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, cf. the interesting research by M. Filippa, F. Bertolino, *Il collezionismo al servizio della ricerca. L'immagine ed il pensiero di Maria Montessori nei memorabilia popolari*, which was presented during the international conference “The School and its Many Pasts: School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation” (Macerata, 13-15 December 2022).

<sup>16</sup> On the figure and work of Emidio Consorti see C. Cellini, *Emidio Consorti e la scuola di lavoro manuale a Ripatransone*, Rocca S. Casciano, L. Cappelli, 1894; G. Castelli, *L'istruzione nella provincia di Ascoli Piceno*



born, in fact, on 14 December 1841 in Ripatransone, a small center in the province of Ascoli Piceno, in the rural hinterland of the Marche region. After qualifying as a teacher, at the age of 23 Emidio Consorti was called in 1864 to teach in the Ripatransone primary school. In the years from 1874 to 1895, he served as didactic director for all the schools in the municipality, until he obtained the formal qualification of Director in 1898. In his double role, Emidio Consorti had the opportunity to experiment the «educational manual work» he conceived and fine-tuned in the decade 1878-1887. Thanks to his experiments, Consorti set up a *Museo scolastico-pedagogico* made up of all the artifacts produced by his pupils and the teachers involved during the training sessions in primary schools. Such a collection was already perfectly complete and well organised in 1884, when it was presented at the Italian General Exhibition in Turin together with the popular circulating library («Biblioteca popolare circolante») set up by Consorti himself<sup>17</sup>; but it was precisely that «valuable *Museo Pedagogico*» that won the admiration of contemporaries to the point of earning the Bronze Medal decreed by the Jury of the Turin exhibition<sup>18</sup>.

By virtue of his achievements, in 1887 Consorti was called to join the delegation of teachers sent by Education Minister Michele Coppino to the Nääs school<sup>19</sup> founded in Sweden in 1872 by August Abrahamson and developed by his nephew Otto Salomon. Here Consorti attended the summer course for teachers, where he learned the basics and teaching techniques of *Slojd*. In his pedagogical lectures, however, Consorti makes it clear that the foundations of his own method (which differs from the Swedish method) had already been developed by him during his years as a primary school teacher. In this regard, Consorti claims that «At the school in Ripatransone, I had always applied the

*dai tempi più antichi ai giorni nostri*, Ascoli Piceno, L. Cardi, 1899; G. Napoletani, *Gli uomini rappresentativi delle Marche. Il prof. cav. Emidio Consorti*, «Rivista marchigiana illustrata», n. 2, 1907, p. 72; R. Mariani, *Fatti e figure nella storia della istruzione elementare in provincia di Ascoli Piceno*, Ascoli Piceno, Società tipografica, 1926; *Ripatransone in memoria di Emidio Consorti*, «I Diritti della scuola», vol. XXXII, n. 38, 23 August 1931, p. 599; *Onoranze centenarie a Emidio Consorti*, «Le Cronache Scolastiche. Rassegna quindicinale dell'istruzione media», vol. XXVII, n. 7, December 1941, p. 53; I. Picco, *Il lavoro nella scuola*, Roma, Faro, 1949; G. Galeazzi, *Emidio Consorti e il lavoro manuale educativo*, «Pedagogia e Vita», n. 6, 1981, pp. 611-622; *Emidio Consorti*, in *Enciclopedia pedagogica*, directed by M. Laeng, Brescia, La Scuola, 1989, Vol. 2: *Cabrini-Duss*, columns 3157-3158; M.C. Moro, *La figura pedagogica di Emidio Consorti e il lavoro manuale educativo*, Degree Thesis, University of Trieste, Academic Year 1994-1995; E. Diletti, *Notizie biografiche*, in E. Diletti, G. Galeazzi, W. Michelangeli (edd.), *Il lavoro manuale educativo. Il sistema pedagogico. Le conferenze*, Ripatransone, Amministrazione Comunale, 1997, pp. 53-62; *Consorti, Emidio*, in A. Giannetti, F. Regi, S. Virgili, *Personaggi Piceni*, Vol. II, Fermo, A. Livi, 2009 (*ad vocem*); M. Brunelli, *Consorti, Emidio*, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000 online*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, pp. 384-385.

<sup>17</sup> See the *Catalogo Ufficiale delle Divisioni II e III. Didattica e produzioni scientifiche. Esposizione generale Italiana in Torino, 1884* (Torino, Unione Tip. Editrice Torinese, 1884), where the Consorti's museum is mentioned within the *Categoria 7 (Statuti, Regolamenti e notizie relative alle Istituzioni promotrici dell'istruzione, sorte per iniziativa di cittadini e di corpi morali)*, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Reported in the magazine «La Scuola Elementare Marchigiana», vol. II, 1884, p. 344.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. P. Villari, *Il lavoro manuale nelle scuole elementari*, Roma, Tipografia Sininberghi, 1888; G. Castelli, *Relazione a S.E. il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione sull'ordinamento del lavoro educativo nelle scuole elementari*, «Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica», Supplement of 26 January 1899, pp. 163-269; G. Gabrielli, *Notizie sulla spedizione di Nääs per il lavoro manuale*, «I Problemi della pedagogia», n. 4, 1957, pp. 390-398.

principle of plurality [*scil.*: the use of multiple forms of schoolwork: Froebelian work, drawing, clay, wire work, cardboard, and woodwork]. I had already sensed that principle by myself since 1878, and I then applied it in all its forms as far back as 1881»<sup>20</sup>. A statement, the latter one, which is confirmed by the prize received in Turin in 1884. In view of the growing interest in his method, in 1889 Consorti opened in Ripatransone a teacher training course together with the first national congress on the method. Since then, the «autumn courses» experienced growing success to the point that in 1899 in Ripatransone as many as 329 elementary school teachers and preschool educators arrived from all over Italy. By virtue of Consorti's success, in 1894 the Ministry authorised the establishment in Ripatransone of the «Luigi Mercantini» Normal School, which was equipped with a special section devoted to the educational manual work. These courses ran continuously until 1914, after Consorti's death on 19 February 1913. Although at the time the Ripatransone teacher played a significant role on a national and international level, Emidio Consorti is today still considered a minor figure by official pedagogical and didactic historiography. And this is in contrast with the awards he received at the educational exhibitions of the time, the mentions in journals and monographs of the time, and the fact that – also after that many similar courses on educational manual work sprang up all over Italy – Ripatransone always remained the driving force behind this didactic methodology<sup>21</sup>. This is not the place to examine the impact of Consorti's work on the teaching and pedagogical reflection of the time, both at national and international level. Instead, we will analyse Consorti's legacy and representation in the public and collective memory of «his» community.

#### 6. *Emidio Consorti in the public/collective memory of the Ripatransone community*

Thanks to the theoretical and methodological reflection developed during the PRIN project, we now have clear criteria of classification, as well as protocols of description of the traces of the public memory of the school. Such tools allow us to identify, classify and interpret the ways in which Consorti has been the object of public (or collective) celebration/commemoration, both in the past and in more recent times. An initial classification has allowed us to identify the following forms of public commemoration and celebration, most of which are currently included in the *Database of the Public Memory of the School*: 1) Public commemoration: a marble memorial plaque with bronze bust and bas-relief, was affixed by the city authorities in 1925 on the occasion of celebrations for the fallen soldiers of the Great War (Figure 1)<sup>22</sup>; 2) Public commemoration through toponymy: a

<sup>20</sup> E. Consorti, *Conferenza «La mano: organo prodigioso dell'umana attività». Forme di lavoro manuale educativo: unità o varietà?*, in Diletti, Galeazzi, Michelangeli (edd.), *Emidio Consorti. Il lavoro manuale educativo. Il sistema pedagogico. Le conferenze*, cit., pp. 307-317, in part. p. 312.

<sup>21</sup> For an in-depth analysis see M. Brunelli, *Alle origini del museo scolastico. Storia di un dispositivo didattico al servizio della scuola primaria e popolare tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 49-55.

<sup>22</sup> M. Brunelli, *Lapide con busto in bronzo di Emidio Consorti a Ripatransone (1925)*, in R. Sani, J.

town street was named after Consorti around the years 1925-1927; 3) Public centenary celebration of birth: a commemorative plaque was placed on the teacher's birth house in 1942<sup>23</sup>; 4) Public celebration by the school community: naming of the secondary school "Emidio Consorti" in Ripatransone.

To these forms of public celebration/commemoration we can add further initiatives, events, and ways in which the Ripatransone community has publicly honoured the figure of Consorti. In particular, in 1993 a study conference in honour of Emidio Consorti was held, followed by the publishing of Consorti's writings (his handbook for educators *Sistema pedagogico del lavoro manuale educativo*, and his lecture notes *Conferenze sul lavoro manuale educativo*) printed at the expense of the municipality in 1997<sup>24</sup>; in 1999, the Emidio Consorti Prize was established, awarded to the most deserving secondary school pupils and teachers (section: Master of Italy Prize); in 2013, the centenary of Consorti's death was celebrated with cultural events, conferences and historical commemorations dedicated<sup>25</sup>; in 2014 The *Museum of Peasant and Artisan Civilisation in Ripatransone* (established in 1990) was refurbished and equipped with a section specifically dedicated to the *School of educational manual work* set up in 1889 by Emidio Consorti<sup>26</sup>.



Fig. 1. Marble memorial plaque with bronze bust of Emidio Consorti and bas-relief, in Ripatransone (1925). Photo-credits: Diana Cocco (Comuni-italiani.it). Source: [www.memoria.scolastica.it](http://www.memoria.scolastica.it)

Meda (edd.), *Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola*, Vol. 2, Macerata, eum, 2022, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-con-busto-bronzo-di-emidio-consorti-ripatransone-1925> (last access: 13.03.2023).

<sup>23</sup> M. Brunelli, *Lapide a Emidio Consorti a Ripatransone (1942)*, in Sani, Meda (edd.), *Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola*, Vol. 2, cit., <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/lapide-emidio-consorti-ripatransone-1942> (last access: 13.03.2023).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Diletti, Galeazzi, Michelangeli (edd.), *Emidio Consorti. Il lavoro manuale educativo. Il sistema pedagogico. Le conferenze*, cit.

<sup>25</sup> R. Spinuzzi, *1913-2013: death centenary*, «Il Mascalzone.it», February 2013 [https://www.ilmascalzone.it/archivio\\_storico/2013/02/il-belvedere-del-piceno-rende-omaggio-al-pedagogista-emidio-consorti/](https://www.ilmascalzone.it/archivio_storico/2013/02/il-belvedere-del-piceno-rende-omaggio-al-pedagogista-emidio-consorti/) (last access: 08.09.2022).

<sup>26</sup> The museum collections dates to 1990 and are the fruit of private donations. The first exhibition was arranged in the premises below the Ildebrando Malavolta school and was then moved in 2014 to its current location, the Ex Cantine Cardarelli, covering an area of 502 square metres. The demo-ethno-anthropological *Museum of Rural and Artisan Civilisation in Ripatransone* contains the section *School and Toys*, presenting the reconstruction of a multi-classroom dating back to the years 1940-1950s, and the section *The school of manual-*



Fig. 2. *A greeting from Ripatransone*. Travelled postcard, unreadable date but around. 1908; printed by Quirino Capriotti in Ripatransone (private collection of Marta Brunelli)

## 7. Other forms of public and/or collective memory

In addition to these traces, the application of the same classification criteria and interpretive tools developed and tested during the *School Memories* project has allowed me to identify further forms of public and collective commemoration of the Consorti figure that need additional investigation and, probably, should be included within the mentioned database of the Public Memory of the School. I refer to some celebratory postcards issued during the years when the Consorti's school was in operation. On the antiques market and in some private collections, in fact, I have come across some examples of postcards depicting different subjects but all celebrating the figure of Emidio Consorti and his work as an educator of national importance and, at the same time, as an honourable member of the community. In two *Greetings from Ripatransone* postcards, the educator's portrait stands out in the foreground and being flanked by the photographs of the most significant buildings of Ripatransone: in the

first case, the façade of the Town hall (postcard printed in Rome, by A. Fiocchi Editore, Via Principe Umberto, 58; untravelled postcard, s.d. but ca. 1900-1913. private collection); in the second case, the postcard depicts the main entrance of the *Royal School of Educational Manual Work* being surmounted by the portrait of the «Direttore Prof. Cav. Uff. Emidio Consorti» surrounded by a laurel wreath symbolising wisdom and glory (Figure 2).

## 8. The many and different traces of the public and collective memory of the school: the case of Emidio Consorti

In the other two cases the postcards make direct reference to the autumn teacher training courses held by the Ripatransone School and to which teachers and educators came from all over Italy and even abroad, and precisely they refer to the 1909 course

*educational work*, exhibiting original artifacts from the Consorti's school such as models and geometric cut-out works, as well as cardboard, wire, plaster and wood artifacts.





Fig. 3. *A greeting from Ripatransone*. Postcard representing the facade of the Town hall with the portrait of Emidio Consorti. Untravelled postcard, without date but ca. 1900-1913 (private collection)

(Figure 4) and, even before, to the 1900 course. The latter ones is a souvenir-postcard celebrating the *12<sup>th</sup> Course of educational manual work in Ripatransone*, which took place in the months of July-September 1900: the illustration represent a female figure (in a typical Art Nouveau style) holding a quill pen in the right hand, and a scroll with the motto «Ars et Labor» in the left; the entire scene is framed by laurel branches and dominated by the coat of arms of the Municipality of Ripatransone (private collection).

The spread and distribution of these postcards need further investigation: some postcards lack significant typographical data whilst others refer, in one case, to a publisher in Rome (A. Fiocchi) and probably contracted by a local client from Ripatransone; and to the local printer Quirino Capriotti from Ripatransone, in the other case. By now we may assume that the probable promoters of such a production must have been the municipality of Ripatransone, or the Direction of the school, or even local printers and, finally, local photographers. In fact, we know that the group-image of the teachers of the 1909 reproduced in the postcard in Figure 4 comes from a photographic shot by photographer G. Domizi on the 21<sup>st</sup> annual course: in the centre stands out Prof. Emidio Consorti surrounded by professors and educators enrolled in the autumn course of that year<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> One copy of the original photograph is kept by the Historical Archive of Potenza Picena (see S. Ciasca, P. Onofri, *Nel 1913 moriva il prof. Emidio Consorti di Ripatransone, fondatore in Italia del lavoro manuale*



Fig. 4. Postcard dated 1909. The photograph depicts a group of student teachers from the autumn courses in Ripatransone portrayed on the steps of the municipal palace (private collection)

Regarding the reasons and purposes of these objects, both the public entities (the municipality or the school) and private individuals (local printers and photographers) had different but overlapping interests in creating and printing the mentioned postcards. The intent with which these souvenir postcards were produced is, in fact, not purely celebratory but above all commercial: according to the information of the time, the Consorti's school was a strong presence in the local and national collective imagination and as such attracted aspiring students from all over Italy. From this perspective, the annual courses represented an economic engine capable of driving an important induced activity created by the arrival and prolonged stay of so many people, elementary school teachers and preschool educators, both public and private, as well as pedagogues, trainers and observers who were staying in Ripatransone for some weeks. Coming not only from

*educativo, legato alla città di Potenza Picena per il suo migliore allievo, il prof. Umberto Boccabianca*, 8 aprile 2022, I santesi-Weblog, <https://isantesi.wordpress.com/2022/04/08/nel-1913-moriva-il-prof-emidio-consorti-di-ripatransone-fondatore-in-italia-del-lavoro-manuale-educativo-legato-alla-citta-di-potenza-picena-per-il-suo-migliore-allievo-il-prof-umberto-boccabianca/>, last access: 09.11.2022).

Italy but also from abroad (as known from the contemporary testimonies and confirmed by the presence of the term "postcard" translated into fourteen languages, from German to Russian), these guests – true pioneers of an *ante litteram* Educational Tourism – were patently the first customers interested in buying a postcard to send to their friends, loved ones or colleagues as well as to keep as a souvenir of their study-travel. At the same time, these postcards functioned as an excellent vehicle for commercial propaganda aimed at publicising the school and its innovative teaching methodologies: travelling within and beyond national borders, these images helped to further promote the role of the school founded by Consorti in Ripatransone, increase its fame and importance and, finally, attract more and more teachers and educators<sup>28</sup>.

### 9. *New forms of collective memory: school memory 3.0*

I would like to conclude this review on the sources and forms of school's public and collective memory by referring to the panorama offered by the Web regarding the figure of Emidio Consorti and his educational and cultural legacy. Today the Ripan educator is, in fact, also present on the web where there are various channels and tools that contribute to celebrating his memory and commemorating his figure on recurring anniversaries. An initial survey of the web reveals some interesting online resources dedicated to Emidio Consorti. Firstly, the weblog "I Santesi"<sup>29</sup>, named after the ancient name of the community of Potenza Picena, defines itself as a «Blog of news and historical characters from ancient Monte Santo to present-day Potenza Picena». In recent years the blog has dedicated and continues dedicating articles and posts on the figure of Emidio Consorti (Figure 5) as well as to one of Consorti's closest collaborators, Umberto Boccabianca who came from Potenza Picena. Secondly, the presence of videos on YouTube channels of local history lovers is particularly interesting for the aim of this research. A case in point is the video *Ripatransone in 1901. Beautiful period photos*: posted on 13 November 2020 by Vincenzo Travaglini on his YouTube channel, the video presents – between min. 2.45 and min. 3.17 – a series of historical photographs depicting the male and female students who attended lessons at Emidio Consorti's school in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 7). Finally, I would like to mention two FB accounts: the first one is *The Habitual Tourist*, edited by

<sup>28</sup> On the celebratory, propagandistic, and advertising functions of postcards of educational/school subject, we refer to the volume edited by A. Viñao Frago, M.J. Martínez Ruiz-Funes, P.L. Moreno Martínez: *Tarjeta postal ilustrada y educación (España, siglos XIX-XX)*, Murcia, Editum, 2016. See also the virtual exhibition *Tarjeta postal ilustrada y educación (España, siglos XIX-XX)* that – promoted by the Centro de Estudios sobre la Memoria Educativa (CEME) and first set up at the Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Murcia (December 13-23, 2016), and then at the Centro cultural "Ramón Alonso Luzzy" in Cartagena (February 16-March 31, 2017) – is currently accessible through the Museo Virtual de Historia de la Educación (MUVHE) of the Universidad de Murcia, <https://www.um.es/muvhe/exposicion/tarjeta-postal-ilustrada-y-educacion/#panel-0> (last access: 11.03.2023).

<sup>29</sup> *The Santesi Weblog. Rinascita culturale ed impegno civile*, <https://isantesi.wordpress.com/> (last access: 11.03.2023).



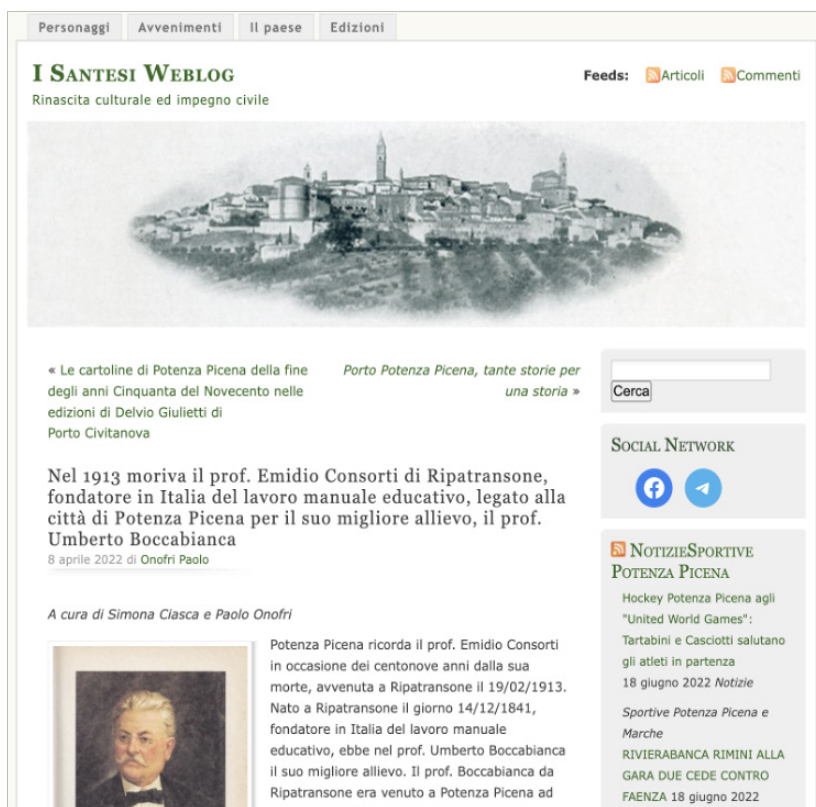


Fig. 5. Article commemorating the anniversary of Emidio Consorti's death. From the Weblog "I Santesi".

the cultural association of the same name (based in Castignano, AP)<sup>30</sup> and the second is *Visit Ripatransone* (and related website) edited by the Ripatransone Tourist Office (Figure 6)<sup>31</sup>. Both these accounts/websites are aimed at promoting tourism in the surrounding areas and both the promoters – a cultural association on the one hand, and the tourist office of a local administration on the other – deemed it necessary to dedicate one or more pages to the figure of the pedagogue from Ripatransone.

These few, early examples help to understand how the presence of Emidio Consorti constitutes an inseparable element of the history and identity of the communities of this area, which do not miss an opportunity to celebrate an anniversary or to remind tourists of the location of the pedagogue's birthplace or to point out the presence of Consorti's educational collections in the *Museum of Rural and Artisan Civilisation* in Ripatransone.

<sup>30</sup> *The Habitual Tourist*, <https://www.facebook.com/HabitualTourist/> e <http://www.habitualtourist.com/> (last access: 11.03.2023).

<sup>31</sup> *Visit Ripatransone*, [https://www.facebook.com/visitripatransone/?locale=it\\_IT](https://www.facebook.com/visitripatransone/?locale=it_IT) (last access: 11.03.2023).

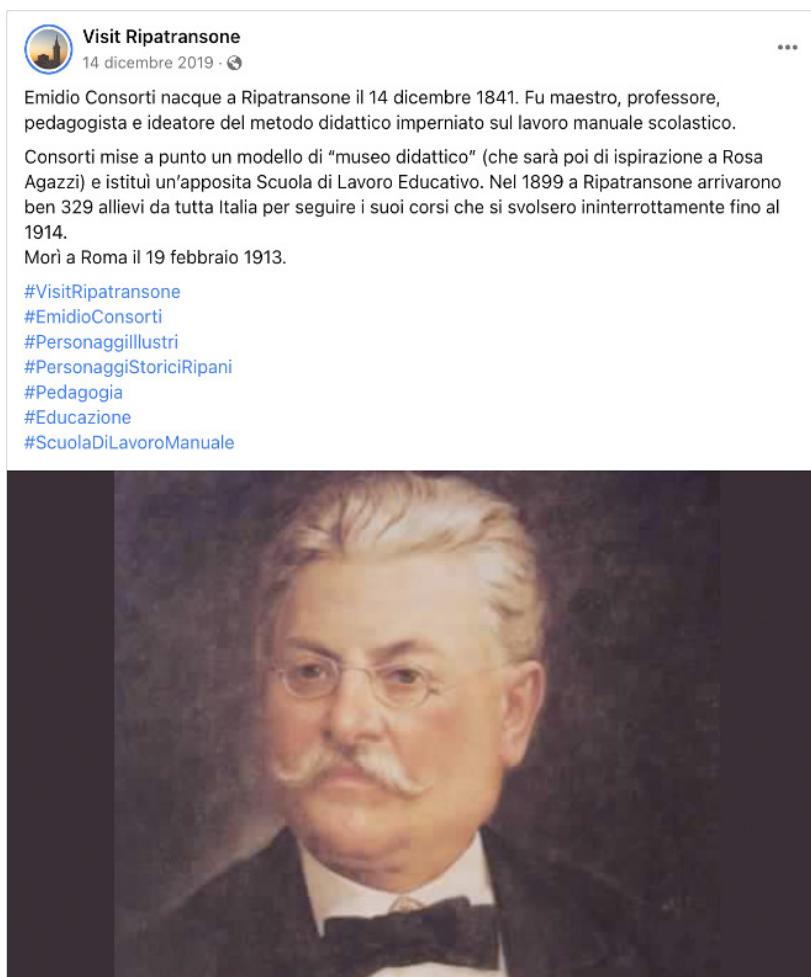


Fig. 6. Post on Emidio Consorti from the FB account "Visit Ripatransone".

The collective and public celebration of the figure of the Marches educator thus takes on new forms and languages, even in the context of Web 3.0.

### *Conclusions*

The PRIN research has provided the first, fundamental tools needed to identify and interpret the traces of school, public and collective memory not only relating to the renowned figures of school history and pedagogy, but also and above all to many so-called



Fig. 7. *Ripatransone in 1901*. Video posted on Vincenzo Travaglini's YouTube Channel (13 November 2020). At min. 2.45 appear historical photographs of teachers attending the autumn courses of Emidio Consorti.

'minor' educators. The latter, in fact, find themselves in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, they are considered to be less relevant by the official historiography and, on the other hand, they are the real recipients of the majority of the monumental heritage on our territory.

The study of these traces – plaques, epigraphs, slabs, statues, busts, monuments, etc. – has given different outcomes and completely opposite results: some times, these sources are only a discoloured echo of figures whose memory has slowly but inevitably faded in the collective memory; other times, on the contrary, they have allowed us to come across personalities whose memory is still strong and rooted in the territories where they lived, worked and left a vivid legacy – as is the case with Emidio Consorti. But in all instances, researching, analysing, and describing these sources of the public and collective school memory have helped us to focus on and better understand the dynamics and ways in which communities have kept intact or totally severed the ties that bind them to the most significant figures of their own past. But it is above all the persistence of such threads, which testifies to how strong the sense of identity can be nurtured by the school past

in a community, whether it is a small community confined to a local sphere or a larger community, even extended to a national sphere.

Based on the findings, it is possible to state how important it is studying the evidence of the public memory of the school on two distinct levels: on a first, "horizontal" (or quantitative) level, i.e. by identifying how many and which school-related figures have been commemorated and celebrated locally and nationally; and on a second, "vertical" (or qualitative) level, aimed at carrying out an in-depth analysis of each individual educator in order to understand how many and which commemoration/celebration initiatives have been implemented, for what purpose and with what timing (only in the past, or also in the present).

Based on these initial research findings, the figure of Emidio Consorti has remained alive in Ripatransone and, although considered a minor educator in official educational historiography, the rootedness of this figure in the collective imagination of the home community is still able to testify how significant was the role he played between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Actually, the gap between official historiography and the actual role that so-called 'minor' educators have played in the history of the school (and local communities) seems to correspond to the same gap existing between the official school history and the public memory of the school. In the light of these considerations, it is hoped that the development and study of the database of the public memories of school can also open up a new perspective on these "minor" figures<sup>32</sup>, and allow to keep on exploring the value of the (plural) histories of the school as it was concretely lived, acted and developed by teachers and educators whose memory is still firm and alive in the territories and communities.

<sup>32</sup> A. Barausse, C. Ghizzoni, J. Meda, «*Il campanile scolastico*». *Ripensando la dimensione locale nella ricerca storico-educativa*, «Rivista di storia dell'educazione», vol. V, n.1, 2018, pp. 7-14.



# Meritorious Experts of Physical Education: the Obituaries of the Gymnasiarchs in the Liberal Age

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## 1. *Research aims: methodological premise*

This work will adopt the methodology outlined by Sani and Ascenzi in «*Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere*», where the authors traced back

the evolution of the model of the gymnastics teacher and school officers through different historical periods and different ideological, cultural and political scenarios, researching in depth [...] the role of education and school in the process of national identity building, and the promotion of the values of citizenship throughout the centuries-long phase of united Italy<sup>1</sup>.

The use of obituaries as a privileged source<sup>2</sup> in education-history studies was pointed out by Chiosso and Sani. In 2009 they explained the reasons for using the obituaries in the project underlying the publication of the «Biographical Dictionary of Education 1800-2000». In this work, obituaries were the fifth type of source used to compile biographical entries<sup>3</sup>. The paper applies the heuristic identified by Sani and Ascenzi, who took inspiration from the recent historiographical paradigm of the School Memories emerging in the Spanish literature<sup>4</sup>. This approach was discussed at Seville's International

<sup>1</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, «*Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere*». *Memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistrali nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Zazzara, *Poetiche del lutto, politiche della memoria. Epitaffi di storia tra biografia e autobiografia*, in M. Isnenghi et alii (edd.), *Le rotte dell'io: itinerari individuali e collettivi nelle svolte della storia d'Italia*, Napoli, Scriptaweb, 2008, pp. 297-325.

<sup>3</sup> See G. Chiosso, R. Sani, *Conservare la memoria. Per un dizionario biografico dell'educazione*, «History of Education & Children's Literature» (henceforth HECL), vol. 4. n. 2, 2009, p. 464.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Escolano Benito, *Memoria de la Educación y Cultura de la Escuela*, «Revista de Estudios y Experiencias en Educación», n. 3, 2003, pp. 11-25; A. Viñao, *La historia material e inmaterial de la escuela: memoria, patrimonio y educación*, «Educação», vol. 35, n. 1, 2012, pp. 7-17; C. Yanes Cabrera, *El patrimonio educativo intangible: un recurso emergente en la museología educativa*, «Cadernos de história da educação», n. 2, 2007, pp. 71-85; J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-10.

Symposium on School Memory in 2015<sup>5</sup>. Sani and Ascenzi pointed out that obituaries can be a significant source of school memory as far as this memory is bound to «a collective and/or public recollection practice of the school past, its protagonists and practices, through the medium of the press, where the dimension of individual and collective memories are all but one»<sup>6</sup>. The obituaries published in the didactics journals highlight the collective didactics' memory from the inside<sup>7</sup>, showing «the evolution that characterised the model of a teacher»<sup>8</sup> in Italy, both in schools and universities<sup>9</sup>.

The present paper contributes to a better understanding of the official memory of the first generation of the so-called gymnasiarchs, as Gregorio Valle defined them in his famous Parliamentary intervention in 1902. According to Valle, the first generation of gymnasiarchs included «old apostles saved by death, full of holy youth enthusiasm, whose eyes are still filled with the vision of that great ideal repeated over and over again: *let us make the Italians, let us make their character, let us make the citizen-soldier*»<sup>10</sup>. In particular, focusing on the period between the secession of the Federation of Italian Gymnastics Societies (henceforth FIGS) from the Italian Gymnastics Federation (henceforth IGF) in 1874 and the reconciliation in 1887<sup>11</sup>, the analysis would privilege recurrent elements in the obituaries. Indeed, there is evidence of efforts to reunite a fragmented gymnastics movement that had been put at the margin of the education debate of the time and other opposite tendencies aiming at radicalising the conflict between Obermann's Turin School and Baumann's Bologna School<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the paper recollects the profile of the leading gymnasiarchs as teachers during the challenging period of institutionalisation of gymnastics in Italian schools<sup>13</sup>. The study of obituaries – «proper celebrations of those lay civilisation missionaries»<sup>14</sup> – helps scholars correctly frame their biographies within

<sup>5</sup> See J. Meda, R. Sani, *Il Simposio internazionale su «La Memoria Escolar. Nuevas tendencias en la investigación histórico-educativa: perspectivas heurísticas y cuestiones metodológicas»* (Siviglia, 22-23 settembre 2015), «HECL», vol. 11, n. 1, 2016, pp. 603-609.

<sup>6</sup> E. Scaglia, *I necrologi dei maestri elementari italiani: da "Spoon River" a fonti inedite per la storia della scuola e dell'educazione*, «HECL», vol. 13, n. 1, 2018, p. 600.

<sup>7</sup> See M. D'Ascenzo, *Remembering teachers and headmasters. Funeral memories as source in history of education between nation building and collective memory*, «HECL», vol. 14, n. 1, 2019, p. 280.

<sup>8</sup> A. Ascenzi, E. Patrizi, *Per una storia dell'esperienza magistrale in Italia tra Otto e Novecento: il caso della maestra elementare marchigiana Maria Riccini (1892-1975) tra nuove fonti e nuove metodologie di indagine*, «HECL», vol. 13, n. 2, 2018, p. 423.

<sup>9</sup> See L. Pomante, *Professors' obituaries. A valuable source for studying the history of university and higher education*, «HECL», vol. 15, n. 2, 2020, pp. 353-388.

<sup>10</sup> G. Bonetta, *Corpo e nazione. L'educazione ginnastica, igienica e sessuale nell'Italia liberale*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1990, p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *Per la libertà e la grandezza della patria: la nascita della federazione nazionale ginnastica nel 1887*, in C. Crivellari (ed.), *Paradigmi della pedagogia*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2018, pp. 199-218.

<sup>12</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *L'insegnamento della ginnastica al di là del campanile: genesi e sviluppo delle associazioni nazionali fra gl'insegnanti di ginnastica nell'Ottocento*, «Rivista di storia dell'educazione», n. 1, 2018, pp. 385-405.

<sup>13</sup> See P. Alfieri, *Le origini della ginnastica nella scuola elementare italiana. Normativa e didattica di una nuova disciplina*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2017, pp. 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> F. Targhetta, *Il romanzo d'un maestro di Edmondo De Amicis: le ragioni della sua recente riscoperta*, «HECL», vol. 11, n. 2, 2016, p. 460.



a broader context of identity-building<sup>15</sup>. A thoughtful work of contextualisation can «give new and deeper meanings to the choices and actions of individual teachers and strengthen, at the same time, their feeling of belonging to the category»<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. *The obituaries of pioneers: the Risorgimento and Gymnastics*

Thanks to the scrutiny of the specialised national magazines, the author singled out 94 death notes published between 1869 and 1918. Among these notes, however, only 47 expressed condolences for gymnastics teachers, the others referred to members of the societies<sup>17</sup> and their relatives<sup>18</sup>. This work adopted a diachronic interpretation that identified three different phases when coeval historical events had a crucial impact on the obituaries. As a result, the research revealed a community seemingly united but lacerated by conflicts arising from adopting different gymnastics teaching methods<sup>19</sup>. The echoes of the Risorgimento<sup>20</sup> characterised the first phase (1861-1903). For instance, in February 1885, the obituary of Antonio Vincenzi from Finale Emilia recalled that the teacher «was extraneous to party struggles. He effectively served the country in the fields of independence and freedom, and later in the more modest, but not less worthwhile, battlegrounds of education and instruction, being committed to them with the zeal of an apostle»<sup>21</sup>. The obituary of Ernesto Ricardi di Netro, president of the Royal Gymnastics Society of Turin, pointed out the efforts he made in favour of national unity:

he was a valiant soldier who fought fervently in the Italian Independence Wars and earned several medals for military valour. He founded and fruitful cooperated in the development of several education and philanthropic institutions; he was an indefatigable promoter of gymnastics education in schools, a member of the Parliament and a skilled manager<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Perry, «*Red Ellen Wilkinson: her ideas, movements and world*», Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ascenzi, Sani, «*Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere*», cit., p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. the obituary of Antonio Orsolato, who died in Capua at the age of 20, described him with the following words: «artillery reserve officer; strong fibre [...] brilliant brain – goodhearted, and infinitely beloved by his friends that he cheered up during meetings with his pleasant manners» (C. Saibante, *Necrologio*, «Periodico della Società Ginnastica Educativa di Padova», vol. 1, n. 3, 1875, p. 1).

<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, there were short obituaries dedicated to the relatives of the associations' members: see the review contained in «Bollettino Mensile della Società Ginnastica Milanese "Forza e Coraggio"», vol. 11, n. 106-107-108, 1894-1895, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> See G. Bonetta, *Nelle palestre del regno. Le vicende della ginnastica educativa nell'Italia postunitaria*, «Lancillotto e Nausica», vol. 39, n. 1, 2009, pp. 16-25.

<sup>20</sup> See S. Pivato, *Far ginnastica e far nazioni*, in A. Noto, L. Rossi (edd.), *Coroginnica: saggi sulla ginnastica, lo sport e la cultura del corpo, 1861-1991*, Roma, La Meridiana, 1992, pp. 32-43.

<sup>21</sup> I. Agnini, *Necrologio*, «La Ginnastica. Organo ufficiale dell'Associazione italiana dei Maestri di Ginnastica (henceforth AIMG) e della Federazione delle Società Ginnastiche Italiane (henceforth FSGI)», vol. 19, n. 2, 1885, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> C., *Necrologio*, «L'Istituto. Foglio settimanale illustrato d'Istruzione e di Educazione», vol. 40, n. 15, p. 240.

Obituaries of this first phase also show references to the Colonial Wars<sup>23</sup>. For example, the obituary of Giovanni Maurer, a member of the Milanese Gymnastics Society «Forza e Coraggio» who passed away in 1893, mentioned his engagement in favour of the survivors of the fights in Ethiopia: «When the unfortunate events of Dogali and Saati took place, [Maurer] gave the presidency a gold medal so that, in the name of «Forza e Coraggio», it would be offered to the bravest survivor of those battles»<sup>24</sup>. Ironically, the obituaries of the first gymnasiarch, Rodolfo Obermann<sup>25</sup> were not affected by the chaotic situation arisen on the day after the secession of 1874<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, Obermann was praised for contributing «to widespread Gymnastics in Italy»<sup>27</sup>. The obituary published in «La Ginnastica» celebrated Obermann with greater emphasis. This magazine represented the official press institution of the IGF before the secession. The editors entrusted Francesco Ravano<sup>28</sup>, who would later join the secessionist flank, with the task of writing the memorial note: his obituary stands out as one of the rare cases where the authorship is known. Ravano wrote:

just today, at this moment, a black-bordered mourning paper, delivered by mail from Turin, notifies us of the painful loss that Italy, the Gymnasiarchs, family and friends suffered, the loss of the distinguished inaugurator of the Modern Gymnastics among us, the wise master, the tender husband and beloved father, of the dear and jovial friend. Cav. Giovanni Rodolfo Obermann is not here anymore, nature deprived us of one of its rare creations! To better admire him or for a new training? Our intimate sorrow averts us to answer, our tears coming from our hearts will give voice to this question. – To your enduring memory, every gymnast shall print in their heart your name, and your short pilgrimage will make ripe fruits grow, for so beautiful and generous your example was<sup>29</sup>.

Other elements emerge from the obituary of Cesare Caveglia<sup>30</sup>. It underlined the need to stop the ongoing secession: «Italian gymnasts shall follow his example and steadfast, unanimous and united, they shall work according to the imprints he left and the dictates of Obermann»<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> See G. Finaldi, *Esperienza e memoria di Dogali*, in M. Isnenghi, S. Levis Sullam (edd.), *Le tre Italie: dalla presa di Roma alla settimana rossa (1870-1914)*, Torino, UTET, 2009, pp. 395-400.

<sup>24</sup> Giovanni Maurer, «Bollettino Mensile della Società Ginnastica Milanese «Forza e Coraggio»», vol. 9, n. 86-87, 1893, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> See A. Magnanini, *Obermann Rodolfo*, in R. Sani, G. Chiosso (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000*, (henceforth DBE), Editrice Bibliografica, Milano, 2013, vol. II, pp. 249-250.

<sup>26</sup> See P. Ferrara, *L'Italia in Palestra. Storia, documenti e immagini della ginnastica dal 1833 al 1973*, Roma, La Meridiana, 1992, pp. 98-101.

<sup>27</sup> *Necrologie*, «Il Progresso Educativo», vol. 1, n. 7, 1869, p. 288.

<sup>28</sup> In the obituary published on the FIGS magazine, Ravano was celebrated as «an authentic apostle of Physical Education; one of those who worked not thinking about their own profit but devoted to the sublime, human ideal: the training of a healthy, strong, brave youth, [which can be] useful to themselves and to the Country» (D. Marchetti, *Francesco Ravano*, «L'Educazione Fisio-Psichica» (henceforth EFS), vol. 12, n. 6, 1930, p. 87).

<sup>29</sup> F. Ravano, *Necrologi*, «La Ginnastica. Bollettino della Federazione Ginnastica Italiana (henceforth FGI)», vol. III, n. 10, 1869, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> See Red., *Caveglia Cesare*, in Sani, Chiosso (edd.), DBE, cit., vol. I, p. 315.

<sup>31</sup> *Necrologio*, «Periodico della Società Ginnastica Educativa di Padova», vol. II, n. 7, 1876, p. 4.

The obituaries singled out during this first historical phase mainly refer to Italian gymnasiarchs. The valuable exception is the first page of «La Ginnastica» devoted to the memory of the German Augusto Ravenstein, one of the organisers of the international conference in Frankfurt am Main in 1880<sup>32</sup>. This obituary gave evidence of the chaotic situation of contemporary Italian gymnastics. Inner opposing factions weakened the movement: the German gymnasiarch was remembered as «an impartial friend of all Italian gymnasts [...] [and] a fervent supporter of the merging of the two federations»<sup>33</sup>. There were also scantier death notices lacking those elements aimed at building an education community of teachers. These cases mainly concern teachers who died at a younger age<sup>34</sup> and focused on their ardour in teaching gymnastics rather than other issues<sup>35</sup>.

### 3. *Obituaries in Giolitti's Age: Gymnastics at the service of the ideal of the soldier-citizen*

The passing of the first generation of gymnasiarchs which occurred during the nineteenth century and continued in the first two decades of the twentieth century, repurposed, even in Giolitti's age, a series of representations already analysed. These representations expressed the ideal of gymnastics at the service of the nation-building process<sup>36</sup>. The obituary of Gregorio Draghicchio provides an example. Published by Romano Guerra<sup>37</sup> in the IGF Bulletin, it emphasised that Draghicchio was an Italian living in unredeemed territories:

from that faraway strip of land of Istria, in that tiny harbour bathed by the blue Adriatic Sea, the Gymnastics Society performed its first solemn act, enrolling in our Federation, to demonstrate a feeling of belonging, affection and bonds to the Italian family. And Gregorio Draghicchio, a real patriot by

<sup>32</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *Il Congresso internazionale di ginnastica di Francoforte (1880) nelle relazioni curate da Sebastiano Fenzi*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 26, 2019, pp. 241-253.

<sup>33</sup> Augusto Ravenstein, «La Ginnastica. Organo ufficiale dell'AIMG e della FSGI», vol. 15, n. 9, 1881, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> It is worth mentioning the example of Mansueto Segalini's obituary, who died when he was 26 years old: «He united in himself the qualities of a distinguished teacher and the skills of a remarkable gymnast. [...] Beloved by all members, he carried out with clever zeal the charge of assistant coach of the Società ginnastica milanese, which he coached several times» («La Ginnastica. Organo ufficiale dell'AIMG e della FSGI», vol. 15, n. 9, 1881, p. 4).

<sup>35</sup> «In his salad days, being 27, he [Curzio Malatesta] was stolen from his dear gymnastics studies [...] grieving for the emptiness left behind by the dead colleague among the youngest passionate lovers of gymnastics, we put a flower on his fresh grave, sure to interpret the feelings of all kind and generous souls» (*Necrologio*, «La Ginnastica. Organo ufficiale dell'AIMG e della FSGI», vol. 16, n. 12, p. 4).

<sup>36</sup> Remembering the General Nicola Heusch (1837-1902), Guerra observed that his contribution had been crucial to organise a gymnastics competition on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rome's annexation to the Kingdom of Italy. The competition turned out to be «a revelation for the public and politicians, who suddenly realised that a Gymnastics Federation existed in Italy, and it was a lively power that could have granted great benefits to the country» (R. Guerra, *Il generale Nicola Heusch*, «Bollettino della FGI», vol. 14, n. 10, 1902, p. 74).

<sup>37</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *Romano Guerra*, in Sani, Chiosso (edd.), *DBE*, cit., vol. I, p. 698.

nature, might have rejoiced at the warming words of our vice president M.P. Sanarelli when he greeted in the name of Italy the flag of the Società Parentina<sup>38</sup>.

The teachers that passed away in this phase still represented the pioneering model of the “apostle of gymnastics”<sup>39</sup>. They gained early military training, therefore aimed at «serving their home country and educating Italian youth in the gyms»<sup>40</sup>. The obituary written for Senator Gabriele Pecile (1826-1902) proved to be the occasion to argue about the existence of opposing methodological orientations regarding the teaching of gymnastics:

he never spoke against any idea or any method, and witnessed long discussions he limited himself to exclaiming with his good-natured air of him: *It's all good, all of you are somehow right; what matters is that gymnastics is performed one way or another*. And his opinion revealed a piece of wisdom impossible to deny. As a matter of fact, if physical education in Italy did not develop was not due to the adoption of one method rather than a different one, but to the far more severe and painful fact that had never been thoughtfully implemented, notwithstanding the method<sup>41</sup>.

The death of Giuseppe Pezzarossa (1851-1911) is a relevant case study<sup>42</sup>. Despite the end of the nineteenth-century secession, the obituaries published on Pezzarossa's death are an excellent example of how his passing was faced differently based on the still recognisable areas of conservatives and innovators in the gymnastics field. The official obituary, published in the *Gymnastics Federation Bulletin*<sup>43</sup>, contrasts with the one that appeared in the *Association of Gymnastics Teachers* magazine. Baumann's followers<sup>44</sup> limited themselves to mentioning the death of the Apulian teacher<sup>45</sup>. On the opposite, the bulletin of the National Institute for the increase of Physical Education (henceforth NIPE) stressed the event and underlined the merits of Pezzarossa as a teacher and entrepreneur.

<sup>38</sup> R. Guerra, *Gregorio Draghicchio*, «Bollettino della Federazione Ginnastica Nazionale (henceforth FGN)», vol. 14, n. 6-7, 1902, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> This statement, quoted by Dyreson, fits cav. Alfredo Mengozzi – deceased in 1907 – «that was not only full of noble qualities but also one of the most distinguished supporters and apostles of physical education for the youth» (*Necrologie*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 19, n. 1-2-3, 1907, p. 20). See M. Dyreson, *Mapping Sport History and the History of Sport in Europe*, «Journal of Sport History», vol. 38, n. 3, 2011, p. 401.

<sup>40</sup> *Necrologio – Cav. Giuseppe Benedetti*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 23, n. 12, 1911, p. 165.

<sup>41</sup> R. Guerra, *Gabriele Pecile*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 14, n. 17, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *Storia della ginnastica nell'Italia meridionale: l'opera di Giuseppe Pezzarossa (1851-1911) in Terra di Bari*, Progedit, Bari, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> «He never missed one single meeting with us, he gathered the likableness and affection of all components of the great federation family because of his goodness, and fine brain. All the pieces of equipment for the next federation competition are the last evidence of his smart work» (*Necrologio – Cav. Prof. Gaetano [sic] Pezzarossa*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 23, n. 3, 1911, p. 47).

<sup>44</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *Una fonte storica per lo studio della figura dell'insegnante di ginnastica: «L'Educazione Fisio-Psichica» (1911-1914)*, «Nuovo Bollettino CIRSE», vol. 8, n. 2, 2013, pp. 95-102.

<sup>45</sup> «With deep sorrow we were informed of the death of our dear and valiant colleagues Camparini Enrico of Reggio Emilia, Longhi Giuseppe of Alessandria, Pezzarossa Giuseppe of Bari» (*Necrologi*, «EFS», vol. 1, n. 5, 1911, p. 4).

Recalling that Pezzarossa had been a representative of the Central Committee of Bari's section, the obituary states: «may the Institute's heartfelt condolences reach the family of the meritorious man of physical education, the brilliant inventor of gymnastics equipment, and the valiant teacher»<sup>46</sup>. Giuseppe Oberti died the same year, and his obituary once again celebrated the apostolic nature of the gymnastics teacher education mission, which he directed to Genoa's youth. The Ligurian town, which «for over forty-five years boasted of having him among the best school educators [...] he was always a trustful pioneer in each and every noble charitable and patriotic initiative», desired to celebrate him together with the gymnasts «who valued him as the indefatigable apostle strengthening in the young the noble principles of humanity and national grandeur»<sup>47</sup>.

Giovanni Battista Bizzarri instead belonged to the opposite faction: in his obituary, written by Giovanni Orsolato, a reformer himself, the author ignored the events that may recall the readers the split within the gymnastics movement. On the contrary, he remarked the efforts made in favour of physical education:

[Bizzarri] led the first society of gymnastics teachers, he was the editor-in-chief of the first newspaper *La Ginnastica*; he was among those selected to take part in the commission that in 1881 [1880, Author's Note] attended the world gymnastics celebration in Frankfurt, and at his own expenses, together with the beloved Cajol, Draghicchio and the writer of this note, he embarked on an educational tour that led us to visit the greatest German gymnasiums, including those in Stuttgart directed by Dr Jäger, who named him the Jahn of Italy. What a precious collection of dear and sacred patriotic and gymnastic memoirs he kept in his house, and how delighted he was to show them to his visitors!<sup>48</sup>

Writing in memory of Angelo Mosso<sup>49</sup>, who passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1910, although recognising his efforts for the reform of gymnastics, Giuseppe Monti<sup>50</sup> did not spare him from criticising

which [his theories] were of little pedagogical and psychological value. Those who knew the school well could not blindly accept the innovations advocated by Mosso, and easily found their flaws. There's no denying the fact that many valuable and good things were done when the books of Mosso circulated widely. Many people fail to recognise that the revamp observed today in national physical education and the enhancement of its teachers are mainly due to the work of the great physiologist of Turin<sup>51</sup>.

Some other controversies emerged in Mosso's obituary by Romano Guerra, which he published in the NIPE bulletin. The author illustrated the critical issues related to Mosso's project to change the responsibility of the administration of physical education «from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of War; a proper education heresy that

<sup>46</sup> *Necrologio*, «L'Educazione Fisica. Bollettino dell'Istituto Nazionale per l'incremento dell'Educazione Fisica (henceforth INIEF)», vol. IV, n. 9, 1911, p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> La Direzione, *Giuseppe Oberti è morto*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 23, n. 10-11, 1911, p. 47.

<sup>48</sup> G. Orsolato, *Necrologio. Gio. Battista Bizzarri*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 16, n. 4, 1904, p. 111.

<sup>49</sup> See G. Chiosso, *Mosso Angelo*, in Chiosso, Sani (edd.), *DBE*, cit., vol. II, pp. 212-213.

<sup>50</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *Monti Giuseppe*, *ibid.* pp. 197-198.

<sup>51</sup> G. Monti, *Angelo Mosso*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 22, n. 11-12, 1910, p. 219.

demonstrated, to what extent lately, the noble educational theories of the great master had been changed and led astray<sup>52</sup>. In addition, being Mosso a reformist, he was criticised by Guerra «to entrust the physical exercise to an outer institution»<sup>53</sup>.

#### 4. *The Great War: the accomplishment of the civilising and revitalising mission of gymnastics*

During the First World War, the first generation of gymnasiarchs counted renowned deceases<sup>54</sup>. In 1916, Pietro Gallo died<sup>55</sup> and the following year, Emilio Baumann did too<sup>56</sup>. They were considered the principal supporters of the reformist area. Those teachers, together with other colleagues such as Arnoldo Cibir from Venice, belonged to «that group of precursors, who taught during those difficult times characterised by a sentiment of hostility and indifference of the educated and uneducated public, and were rewarded not higher than labourers. Still, those men had the faith; the necessary perseverance to win a fierce battle, and so they did. The young shall never forget them»<sup>57</sup>. At the death of Gallo, the official bulletin of IGF celebrated his engagement in armed nation building<sup>58</sup>, and he was especially appreciated for his far-sighted vision, given the coeval war needs:

now the splendid fruits of the selfless work of those men will be harvested; now that the war revealed the truth, successors can get back to the past work with a broader breadth; their action is the reason to exist for our Federation that aims at moulding physical education the way He wanted it. He was among the glorious founders of our Institute that considered gymnastics a part of a renovation programme, a firm necessity for any further national development<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> R. Guerra, *Necrologio – Angelo Mosso*, «L'Educazione Fisica. Bollettino dell'INIEF», vol. IV, n. 6, 1910, p. 95.

<sup>53</sup> D.F.A. Elia (ed.), *Palestre e stadi. Storia dell'educazione motoria in Italia*, Milano, Mondadori Università, 2020, p. 136.

<sup>54</sup> It's worth noting that Senator Francesco Todaro also died in this period (1839-1918), who had been President of the FGI between 1898 and 1909 (see *Necrologio – Francesco Todaro*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 30, n. 11, 1918, pp. 157-162).

<sup>55</sup> See S. Dorigo, *Gallo Pietro*, in Chiosso, Sani (edd.), *DBE*, cit., vol. I, p. 610. See also D.F.A. Elia, *Per una promozione dei mezzi di educazione di massa nella ginnastica: l'opera di Pietro Gallo (1841-1916)*, «HECL», vol. XII, n. 1, pp. 507-525 and G. Crovato, A. Rizzardini, *Costantino Reyer e Pietro Gallo. Le origini degli sport moderni a Venezia*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> See D.F.A. Elia, *The Italian way to gymnastics: Emilio Baumann's "psycho-kinetic theory"*, «HECL», vol. 10, n. 2, 2015, pp. 277-296 and P. Alfieri, «A qual fine vero e proprio debba rispondere la ginnastica nelle scuole. Emilio Baumann e la manualistica ad uso dei maestri elementari all'indomani della legge De Sanctis», «HECL», vol. 8, n. 2, pp. 195-220.

<sup>57</sup> *Necrologio – Arnoldo Cibir*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 30, n. 6, 1918, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> The success of this model is due to «his ability to promote the nation-in-arm ("Nation in Waffen"), thanks to the general conscription that abolished birth and class privileges and involved all young men defending the home country observing their sacred duty». G. Conti, «Fare gli italiani». *Esercito permanente e "nazione armata" nell'Italia liberale*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Il Ginnasta, Necrologio – Pietro Gallo*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 29, n. 4, 1917, p. 57.



On the other hand, in the obituary written for Baumann's death, the contrasting visions, featuring the debate between his mentor's – Obermann – conservative methodology and the reformist one of his pupils from Bologna, were sublimed in the name of a kind of patriotism consolidated by war events.

now that the most terrible of wars urged our Country to give the utmost proof, to show how much there is of good and solid in the lineage, the mind goes to these precursors of the Italian Arcadia that half a century ago operated for a more human education, more vigorous, worthier of free men<sup>60</sup>.

### Conclusions

Although the investigation involved a plurality of printed papers published in the historical period taken into consideration, the number of obituaries found is not entirely satisfactory to define the traits of the elaboration of the memory of the first class of gymnastics teachers. Their task was to educate the working class and rural masses through the strict observance of the specific features of the gymnastics programmes of 1878<sup>61</sup>, namely «order, discipline, precision and conciseness of command, prompt and total obedience»<sup>62</sup>. In addition, they were expected to provide a model for an authoritative but friendly guide for their pupils<sup>63</sup>. A short comparison of the data collected in the Central State Archives for Normal Schools, dating back to the end of the school year 1885/1886, allowed to identify 69 gymnastics teachers<sup>64</sup>: a higher number than that emerging from the data collected in the obituaries during the whole Liberal Age. The current state of the research shows the existence of a memory of the teaching community of gymnasiarchs, built on the evaluation of the patriotic nature<sup>65</sup> of their educational work for the *nation-building* process. This memory tends to reverse the epistemological statute of a discipline considered weak<sup>66</sup> operating in a national context that made the affirmation of gymnastics difficult due to the poor importance given to the teachers of this discipline<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Il Ginnasta, *Necrologio – Emilio Baumann*, «Il Ginnasta. Organo Ufficiale della FGI», vol. 29, n. 10, 1917, p. 160.

<sup>61</sup> Elia (ed.), *Palestre e stadi*, cit., pp. 61-67.

<sup>62</sup> M. Ferrari, M. Morandi, *I programmi scolastici di 'educazione fisica' in Italia. Una lettura storico-pedagogica*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2015, p. 97.

<sup>63</sup> M. Ferrari, *I 'programmi' italiani di educazione fisica: contesti e attori*, in M. Morandi (ed.), *Corpo, educazione fisica, sport. Questioni pedagogiche*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, p. 87.

<sup>64</sup> See *Scuole Normali. Notizie estratte dai cenni ricavati dalle autorità scolastiche sugli insegnanti di ginnastica, anno scolastico 1885-1886*, 1886, in Central State Archives, Ministry of Public Instruction (1784-1982), Libraries and General Affairs Division (1860-1898), General Archives (1860-1989), Gymnastics and Shooting Sports 1861-1894, folder 51, dossier 135.

<sup>65</sup> See M. Krüger, A.R. Hofmann, *The Development of Physical-Education Institutions in Europe: A Short Introduction*, «The International Journal of the History of Sport», n. 6, 2015, p. 737.

<sup>66</sup> M. Zedda, *L'educazione fisica: spunti epistemologici*, in Morandi (ed.), *Corpo, educazione fisica, sport*, cit., p. 46.

<sup>67</sup> See Dyreson, *Mapping Sport History*, cit., p. 401.



The pamphlets, published after the death of the masters or on celebrative anniversaries<sup>68</sup>, must be considered precious documents to widen the ways to transfer the memories related to great renowned personalities such as Ricardi di Netro<sup>69</sup>, Draghicchio<sup>70</sup>, Obermann<sup>71</sup>, Baumann<sup>72</sup>, Mosso<sup>73</sup>. However, these sources are not particularly useful in providing information about an “anonymous” mass of teachers. Further research may benefit from the consultation of local magazines to fill in the gaps in the documentation identified in national ones. So it may be possible to gain a better understanding of the local processes of the implementation of physical education and «local and regional specificities that marked the building of the Nation soon after its Unification»<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> On the twentieth anniversary of Baumann's death, his obituary was an opportunity to argue against liberal governments. They were accused of hindering the development of gymnastics and so that of the nation: «A total chaos in our role as teachers of Physical Education! We had to fight against widespread indifference, the dislike here in embryo and there manifest against our noble duty, the deaf hostility of the schools, we, forced to work in deteriorated gyms, with ridiculously low financial resources. Authority? Hierarchies? Sleeping and ignorant» (B. Preve, *XX Anniversario della morte di Emilio Baumann*, «L'EPF», 2<sup>nd</sup> series, vol. 15, n. 10, 1937, p. 147).

<sup>69</sup> See D. Chiaves, *Ernesto Ricardi di Netro: discorso commemorativo pronunciato dal senatore Desiderato Chiaves il 24 maggio 1894, festeggiandosi dalla Società Ginnastica Torinese in cinquantesimo anniversario della propria fondazione coll'intervento di S.A.R. il Duca di Genova*, Torino, Tip. L. Roux & C., 1894.

<sup>70</sup> See A. Gentile, *Gregorio Draghicchio: ginnasiarca e patriota di Parenzo*, Trieste, s.n., 1950.

<sup>71</sup> See G. Botta, *Cenni biografici del cav. Rodolfo Obermann*, Torino, Tip. Letteraria, 1869.

<sup>72</sup> See E. Feliziani, *Emilio Baumann e la sua opera. Contributo alla Storia della Ginnastica Italiana*, Como, Tip. Coop. Comense “A. Bari”, 1921.

<sup>73</sup> See A. Visentini, *In memoria degli ex-convittori Angelo Mosso, senatore del Regno, e dei caduti in Libia (1911-1912) tenente colonnello Camillo Solaro, tenente Ezio Ponso, sergente Emilio Scrivano: Orazione commemorativa, letta nel convitto civico di Cuneo in occasione dello scoprimento della lapide-ricordo*, Cuneo, Tip. G. Marengo, 1913.

<sup>74</sup> M. D'Ascenzo, *La storia della scuola tra storia locale e storia generale*, in H. A. Cavallera (ed.), *La ricerca storico-educativa oggi. Un programma di ricerca*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2013, vol. 1, p. 282.

SECTION *The “Sites of School Memory”*



# How Can History of Education Research Improve the Valorisation of the Educational Heritage in Museums and Vice Versa?

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A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of utopias.

(Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, 1891)

## 1. *Starting from the background of school and education museums*

In carrying out the research projects of the University of Latvia in which I have been involved since my retirement, I have during the past few years delved a little more into the international literature on school museums. Coupled with a quarter-century of experience as an advisor to the Municipal Museum of Education in Ypres, which closed its doors in 2016, this led to several publications, in which the question from the title of the present contribution often came up indirectly<sup>2</sup>. Rather than blindly repeating all that is discussed there, I prefer to take a different path with this short paper, and focus on some of the recent events that happened to me in the confrontation with the heritage world in my home base Flanders. Of course, this does not prevent me from continuing to take the same stand on methodological, theoretical and historiographic issues, like, for example, the intrinsic value of the historical study and valorisation of the educational past, and – as a consequence – to oppose the pursuit of constantly making it more socially or pedagogically relevant, even though this international trend is easy to understand, but in my opinion fully unnecessary.

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of Iveta Kestere's project "Integrating cultural object-based learning into university studies: the case of history of education".

<sup>2</sup> M. Depaepe, *Über den Bildungswert von Schulmuseen*, in D. Balcke et alii (edd.), *Bildungsmedien im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs. Festschrift für Eva Matthes zum 60. Geburtstag*, Bad Heilbrunn, Klinkhardt, 2022, pp. 369-378; Id., *The fragile boundary between "education" and "educationalization": some personal reflections on the often exaggerated educational aspirations of museums*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», n. 15, 2022, pp. 389-419.

Of course, it is possible that my thinking in this regard has been strongly influenced by a number of negative experiences, including abroad, where, in contrast to the situation in Flanders, school museums shot up like mushrooms at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, I visited a few of them in central Europe where a museum employee or volunteer – usually a retired teacher – played so-called “historical education” (i.e. playing “the school of yesteryear”) with children, but also with pensioners. Usually to the great delight of both groups who know how to indulge themselves in this way, but also and above all to the frustration of myself, who, as a historical researcher, wants to act as a guardian of the temporal order. Because – it has to be said – such amateurish role-playing games not only produce a grotesque (and thus highly distorted) picture of the history of education, they also pile up one anachronism after another. In Belgium, I myself have not yet seen these practices to make school histories more appealing, perhaps because there are hardly any specialized education museums left after the closure of Ypres. Nonetheless, I know that they exist and are promoted within the context of “living history”, for example in the “school of the time” at the Bokrijk Open Air Museum, about which I will talk later in this paper. But of course that kind of frustration is not directly the main point of criticism in relation to the handling of pedagogical heritage in Flanders and Belgium. Much more problematic is its general neglect<sup>3</sup>. There is not much government interest in preserving and making accessible the cultural-historical heritage left by schools and other educational institutions even though I myself and my colleagues in our research group have regularly managed to raise some money for educational history research projects over the past decades<sup>4</sup>. Yet these were often negligible amounts compared to what highly acclaimed empirical educational research managed to rake in – apparently in search of a superior “evidence-based” (and thus more “useful” and “relevant”) form of educational knowledge, which, mainly following the English and Dutch examples, has further marginalised (and even abolished) the discipline of the “history of education” in the curriculum of teacher education and in the academic study of educational sciences. And this while the interest in educational history from the angle of cultural historians in Flanders (and by extension throughout Belgium for that matter) cannot be called overwhelming either. On the contrary, both in their research and in most of their theoretical, methodological, historiographical writings, references to the history of education literature (mostly produced by historical researchers trained as pedagogues) seem to be studiously avoided, even though they would be appropriate. Take, for instance, the critical discussion on the (un)necessity of a canon for “history education” in Flemish secondary schools<sup>5</sup>. In

<sup>3</sup> Id., *Au bas de la liste des priorités? Quelques réflexions personnelles sur le traitement du patrimoine scolaire en Belgique*, in *Première rencontre francophone des musées de l'école. Actes*, Rouen, Musée National de l'Éducation – Munané, 2018, pp. 65-75.

<sup>4</sup> K. Catteuw, M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Forschungsprojekt “Pädagogisches Gedächtnis Flanderns”, «Internationale Schulbuchforschung / International Textbook Research. Zeitschrift des Georg-Eckert-Instituts für internationale Schulbuchforschung»*, vol. 20, n. 3, 1998, pp. 313- 325; M. Depaepe, M. Leon, *Une ‘lutte’ sans fin avec des ‘boîtes’? 45 ans de collection, de conservation, d’inventarisation et de valorisation des manuels scolaires au sein du Centre d’Histoire de l’Éducation de la KU Leuven*, in M. Berré et alii (edd.), *Les manuels scolaires dans l’histoire de l’éducation: un enjeu patrimonial et scientifique*, Mons, CIPA, 2013, pp. 35- 51.

<sup>5</sup> J. Tollebeek, M. Boone, K. van Nieuwenhuyse, *Een canon voor Vlaanderen. Motieven en bezwaren*,

that context, however, the justified criticism by leading cultural historians of the far too politicised background of the demand for such an instrument of control could very well be complemented by ideas on the “educationalization” of society, which have emerged in Flemish pedagogical historiography (and have also been followed internationally, but this aside)<sup>6</sup>. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to the heritage sector. Educational historical research is usually not or hardly addressed there, even for setting up exhibitions in all kinds of museums and workshops, tangential to educational history<sup>7</sup>.

Great was therefore my surprise when in 2021 I was invited by FARO, the support centre for the cultural heritage sector in Flanders, to help shape their annual “heritage day”, which in 2022 would be dedicated to the history of the school<sup>8</sup>. This resulted in a preparatory lecture, which although the Covid pandemic could not, as planned, be realised at a central meeting in Malines, but took place via life-stream from my own office. By Flemish standards, there were quite a few heritage workers who, at least according to the organisers, had followed my digital lecture with me. Nevertheless, for the organisation of that particular “heritage day” itself, which went ahead on Sunday 24 April 2022, I received only one request to speak somewhere, namely from the culture department of the city of Ostend. To which I therefore gladly complied. And recently I was also asked to help furnish a rebuilt, old little school in the Open Air Museum Bokrijk in Limburg in the way the classroom must have looked around 1900... and less than a month ago I was even allowed to go and explain in Garderen in the Netherlands before the “Association for the Promotion of the Study of Pedagogy” how important the substantive contribution of the great thinkers and founding fathers has been...

Is something really turning for the better then? And, after all the “ahistorical” display of power by the leading utilitarian ideology, are people finally becoming aware again that the “historical” dimension in human life cannot be ignored, and if they do want to fudge it, interest in it surfaces uninvited every time? I hope so, but realism – which, in addition to hope, was as much as an important handle for my history of education research – unfortunately forces me to conclude, that this does not at all eliminate the chances of discolouration and distortion of the pedagogical past. Quite the contrary, in fact. Let me first and foremost elaborate on this with some personal, undoubtedly (too?) critical comments on the signs of a possible turnaround that have just been identified, before ending with a more hopeful (but perhaps utopian?) message. In particular, what a collaboration between the heritage sector and research in history of education might ideally look like...

Brussel, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> P. Smeyers, M. Depaepe (edd.), *Educational Research: The Educationalisation of Social Problems*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2008; D.F. Labaree, *The winning ways of a losing strategy: educationalizing social problems in the United States*, «Educational Theory», vol. 58, n. 5, 2008, pp. 447-460.

<sup>7</sup> M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Educação e património cultural na Bélgica: investigação consistente espera por iniciativas museológicas*, in M.J. Mogarro (ed.), *Educação e Património Cultural: Escolas, Objetos e Práticas*, Lisboa, Edições Colibri, 2015, pp. 73-92.

<sup>8</sup> R. Daenen, H. Van Genechten, M. Van Meerhaeghe (edd.), *Inspiratiebrochure Erfgoeddag maakt School op zondag 24 april én van maandag 25 tot vrijdag 29 april 2022*, Brussel, Faro, 2021.

## 2. *Some recent experiences on the public “consumption” of educational history*

As I already have mentioned, as an educational historian, I was allowed to give a lecture in Ostend on the occasion of Heritage Day, alongside other invited guests – including more popular educationalists who comment on events in the world of education almost daily in the media. The lecture took place two times, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The theme was, in line with my earlier presentation for the heritage specialists of FARO, the relationship between educational history and school heritage – albeit that for this broader public in Ostend, I first of all wanted to talk about the history of education in Belgium (and that mainly on the basis of the development of primary schools in the past three centuries). Unlike the reportedly well-attended FARO-presentation, no more than a handful of ladies turned up twice in Ostend. Not so surprising, I thought to myself. After all, leaving aside the possible competition with better-known speakers on topical issues, who comes to listen to a scientific presentation in fine weather by the sea on a Sunday afternoon? Surely not Joe Public... and certainly not when there is also a live cycling race on television: the classic Liège-Bastogne-Liège, which would then also be won by Belgium’s greatest cycling promise Remco Evenepoel, the later world champion of 2022! But quantity, fortunately for me, does not yet say much about quality, even if the number of participants is often very decisive in the evaluation of cultural events these days – a mindset I will come back to later. Suffice it to point out here, that in my on-the-spot exposition I referred to the historical roots of the “modernist terror” of utilitarian ideology<sup>9</sup>, because such “enlightenment ideas” can be just as decisive for an ahistorical treatment of the (pedagogical) past, from which one wants to draw “lessons” for the present, both fittingly and more inappropriately, as well as for its neglect<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, I also tried to explain “scientifically” that I was not at all surprised by the gender-specific composition of my audience, because the absence of men had really not only to do with the broadcast of the cycling race, but illustrated once again how much education has become a matter for women over time.

Already during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century I have conducted fundamental research on the phenomenon of feminisation, also internationally<sup>11</sup>. But to what extent is anyone still interested in that? A question that, by extension, may be asked of all educational-historical research and that obviously also has implications for how cultural-historical school heritage is concretely addressed. For that reason, I became painfully aware that the “old” (?) playground games and/or “educational” (?) activities such as the knitting in the central hall of the former Albert School – an otherwise excellent site for exploring the school past in its “natural” environment – had more appeal than an undoubtedly “less fun” looking

<sup>9</sup> P. Smeyers, M. Depaepe (edd.), *Educational Research: Why “What works” Doesn’t Work*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> M. Depaepe, *Qualities of Irrelevance? History of Education in the Training of Teachers*, in J.E. Larsen (ed.), *Knowledge, Politics and the History of Education*, Münster, LIT-Verlag, 2012, pp. 39-53.

<sup>11</sup> M. Depaepe, H. Lauwers, F. Simon, *The Feminization of the Teaching Profession in Belgium in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, in R. Cortina, S. San Roman (edd.), *Women and Teaching. Global Perspectives on the Feminization of a Profession*, New York, Palgrave, 2006, pp. 155-183.



talk entitled “educational history and school heritage”. Yet one of the ladies came to thank me afterwards. Would she have understood, or was it out of sheer politeness, I wondered? Had I not been too difficult again? Doubt all around, then. But I was and am certainly not inclined to succumb to simplistic representations of the complex historical past of education. Nor to far-reaching “didacticisations” and/or “elementarisations”. Not only because the rich, complex and mostly paradoxical contents of the history (of education) are thus narrowed down to “subject matter”, but also because any simplification and reduction of such contents constitutes a mockery of respect for the intellectual capacities of the audience. Taking a “test” after a lecture is, in my opinion, therefore completely absurd, as much as the quantitative evaluation of the speaker by the audience, moreover. Such practices not only detract from any intrinsic interest, but also misunderstand the real nature of the forming effects of the education process (which go, for that matter, far beyond the short-term thinking of the mainstream learning psychology and technology). Which of course does not prevent such views from leading a tough life in our society.

I also recognised them, for example, in the preparation of the Dutch congress on the “founding fathers of pedagogy”. The speakers’ texts had to be in beforehand, so that a “textbook”, aimed at possible use in pedagogical courses of colleges, could be offered to the participants on the spot. After all, textbooks sell well. The instructions to the authors therefore left little to the imagination in this regard. The texts concerning the major figures in pedagogy – mine was, as expected, again counter-intuitive, as it contained another theoretical-methodological critique of the often context-less handling of such figures in function of contemporary political and pedagogical needs – had to be edited according to a clear pedagogical-didactical format. Whereby some recommendations, at least to me, came across as downright pedantic, possibly even infantilising, which, incidentally, was reinforced by the use of bold in the text. I quote (in my own translation, admittedly),

preferably keep the title short and to the point. Make sure it appeals. After the author’s name and title follows the Dutch summary of no more than 150 words. Then, in the introduction, clearly indicate the central topic. The middle section is consistent in structure. Research data, practical experiences and literature data support the argument. The conclusion and/or discussion section reflects on the main findings [...] To make the volume even more accessible for teaching, it would be nice if you could add 3-5 questions for students at the end of the chapter<sup>12</sup>.

One really does not need discourse analysis to grasp what I mean. But let me dwell further on the experiences in the congress itself. I still hear the President say at the opening session that we must continue to take advantage of knowledge “from” the past. Verily a punishing statement on the part of the higher education institutions responsible for the pedagogical training of educators and teachers, which, especially in the Netherlands, “historical pedagogy” for all sorts of reasons – some more understandable than others – have led the subject to its doom in the shortest time. But perhaps it is precisely in the use of this preposition that lies the key to the difference with the handling of the educational

<sup>12</sup> Communicated to me by an e-mail of 30 April 2021.

past as I have advocated in my work? In my view, it is not a question of employing the knowledge “from” the past, but rather the study “of” that past, because of intrinsic rather than extrinsic motives<sup>13</sup>. Which was therefore also the message I wanted to convey on the spot. What we need is not so much a quasi-universally applicable history of the “big ideas” of the founding fathers of pedagogy, but rather a “working history” (*Wirkungsgeschichte* as it is called in German) of those ideas, with which all kinds of acrobatics have been played out in the course of history, in order to make them fit the straitjacket of political-pedagogical views of the prevailing time or regime anyway...

However, the congress publication self-evidently exudes the same principles as those taken in preparation, albeit no longer as explicitly expressed in the introduction<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, there is no question of a more “historicising” (rather than educationalising) handling of the educational past. The introductory chapter, in line with the chairman’s words, narrows the legacy of thinkers almost exclusively to its contribution in the “theory” of pedagogy, which is, of course, legitimate<sup>15</sup>, but loses the point of view of history – all the more so since the questions at the end of each chapter respond, as might be expected, to the presentist use of history. For instance, at the end of an otherwise very readable contribution on Comenius, one literally asks how aspiring teachers would like to shape Comenius’s pedagogy of exploration today<sup>16</sup>.

Yet there are certainly also hopeful signs such as the effective willingness to understand what I had to say, which was evident from the multiple positive responses that I have got on the conference itself. Moreover, I feel that now – compared to more than 30 years ago – pedagogues and educationalists can stand up to the criticisms of educational innovations exposed by “historical” research better than they used to. Nevertheless, I also had to note numerous educationalising influences (even without awareness of the use of their historical background) at that same conference. Which raises the question of whether people understood the message we wanted to deliver. The simple fact that in the final text of the conference book – for which we did not even receive a proof copy – the German noun *Bildung* used by me was not even written correctly<sup>17</sup> leaves little to the imagination on the matter. But the fact that people are willing to listen, without therefore a priori abandoning the quest for relevance or for entertainment and/or for relevance in consuming the pedagogical heritage or school patrimony, marks certainly a good trend. This was, moreover, also the case at the meeting of the scientific committee in Bokrijk

<sup>13</sup> Depaepe, *The Ten Commandments of Good Practices in History of Education Research*, «Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Historiographie», vol. 41, n. 1, 2010, pp. 31-34.

<sup>14</sup> S. Nijenhuis, L. Houweling, L. Wolbert, *Het belang van pedagogische theorie voor het reflecteren op de praktijk – maar hoe dan?!*, in W. de Jong et alii (edd.), *Grondleggers van de pedagogie(k). Grote denkers over opvoeden: stemmen uit het verleden en hun weerklink in het heden en de toekomst*, Amsterdam, Uitgeverij SWP, 2022, pp. 10-21.

<sup>15</sup> M. Depaepe, *Philosophy and History of Education: Time to bridge the gap?*, «Educational Philosophy and Theory», vol. 39, n. 1, 2007, pp. 28-43.

<sup>16</sup> J. Exalto, *Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) en de pedagogiek van de exploratie*, in de Jong et alii (edd.), *Grondleggers van de pedagogie(k)*, cit., p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> M. Depaepe, ‘Van oude mensen...’ Over ‘de dingen’ die in de geschiedenis van opvoeding en onderwijs toch niet zo gemakkelijk voorbij gaan..., in *ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

(on the 12 October 2022), at which both the managers of the open air museum and the heritage workers involved showed a clear will to organise the new historical village with (the one-classroom) school in 1900 on a scientific basis, and to examine, on the basis of the available literature, which school furniture, which wall charts, which school desks, which textbooks, which books in the school library deserve a place there. And even though they continue to maintain the idea of “living history” (i.e. playing the school at work) in the museum<sup>18</sup>, it is first and foremost by gaining insight into the everyday life in the classroom of the time that they are trying to develop and shape these “experiential” activities. Which thus effectively raises the question of how research and heritage can mutually help each other.

### 3. *What would a win-win operation between heritage and research ideally look like?*

In most cases, unfortunately usually in a one-sided way, the historical education literature looks at this relationship from the point of view of research, sometimes even with the admonishing finger pointing upwards... Without wishing to take part in this, I have pointed out in several contributions how much cooperation with scientific expertise could result in better nuanced background texts of exhibited objects, and that not only in scientifically substantiated catalogues, but also in the construction of the exhibitions themselves<sup>19</sup>. Because the choice of those objects is decisive for the possible dialogue the visitor can enter into with the museum, the exhibition and/or the heritage space. And for the short- and long-term educational effects that, in my view, cannot really be planned in advance, but rather will depend on the individual encounter and its subjective processing. For avoiding exaggerated expectations in that area, some knowledge of history of education background literature seems to me equally indispensable, albeit perhaps more on a methodological level than really on the substantive. But at least the latter will also help to give in to the temptations of presentism, a-historicity and the instrumentalisation of the past in function of all kinds of ideological, political, theoretical and/or practical positions of any kind. The fact is that we have ended up in a very hodiecentrist society, staring not only at the here and now, but also with the utilitarian ideology dominating our use of time. Simply, without purpose, letting things come to us is considered, even in “free time”, as foolishness or a waste of time. This is why museum builders always want to bring something relevant, something attractive, something “instructive” – all the more so since their existence depends on the power of numbers, i.e. the number of visitors and entrance fees – without, however, considering the fact that this exaggerated craving for utilitarianism can actually destroy the chances of *Bildung*. Because in my

<sup>18</sup> <https://bokrijk.be/nl/uitstappen-voor-scholen-en-jeugdgroepen> (last access 15.11.2022).

<sup>19</sup> M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *It's All About Interpretation: Discourses at Work in Education Museums. The Case of Ypres*, in P. Smeyers, M. Depaepe (edd.), *Educational Research: Discourses of Change and Change of Discourse*, [Cham], Springer, 2016, pp. 207-222.

view, this presupposes precisely the opportunity for subjective reflection, contemplation and awareness in a non-premeditated and non-imposed situation. With this, the pre-programmed educational objectives may look much less spectacular, but in this way they nevertheless offer opportunities for more in-depth learning experiences with longer lasting effects<sup>20</sup>.

In the context of this paper, it seems to me much more important to dwell on the inverse relationship, especially the possible contribution of the heritage sector to research. This is not addressed in too many writings. And yet it can undoubtedly help fill a gap in the literature. For traditionally, much energy has been devoted to the macro aspects of the history of education: educational politics and policy, for example, because many sources, official and otherwise, have been preserved for this as well: educational legislation and parliamentary reports on it, curricula, educational programmes, school regulations, inspection reports, and so on. For a proper understanding of educational history, however, the research into what took place on the shop floor in everyday reality is even more essential: the micro-histories, as it were, of pedagogical and didactic actions in individual schools and classes, and of how these were experienced by teachers and pupils at the time. This is due not only to the fact that education historians at our academic institutions are a rather rare breed, but also to the fact that few relevant sources exist for such studies. What is preserved in education archives usually refers to the macro processes of policy discussed above and, moreover, is almost always strongly normatively coloured, which requires strong interpretative techniques for the researchers' question of ordinariness<sup>21</sup>. Upbringing and education are anyway focused on what "should" or "had to" and not on what "is" or "has been": curricula, learning objectives, school regulations, and even class diaries, lesson preparations, and the like preserved from earlier times give mainly an idea about what was expected from pupils in terms of knowledge, skills, morality (religiously framed or not) and behaviour rather than what actually happened in education... The latter often remains a kind of "black box"<sup>22</sup>, which is very difficult to shed light on from school archives.

The existing school histories – which received an enormous boost at the end of the last century as a result of the rapidly succeeding anniversaries of institutions established in Flanders around the time of the first school conflict between Catholics and Non-Catholics (i.e. "radical liberals") – are therefore not very useful for the knowledge of the actual educational process and its perception<sup>23</sup>. Most of them therefore focus on the expansion of the institution in question, its buildings, policy, finances, changing

<sup>20</sup> M. Depaepe, *Paedagogica Historica, Quo Vadis? An epilogue on the ambivalences and paradoxes of doing educational history*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 58, n. 6, 2022, pp. 974-985.

<sup>21</sup> M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Sources in the Making of Histories of Education: proofs, arguments, and other reasonings from the historian's workplace*, in P. Smeyers, M. Depaepe (edd.), *Educational Research: Proofs, Arguments, and Other Reasonings*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2009, pp. 23-39.

<sup>22</sup> J. Braster, M. del Mar del Pozo Andrés, I. Grosvenor (edd.), *The Black Box of Schooling. A Cultural History of the Classroom*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> M. Depaepe et alii, *Order in Progress. Everyday Educational Practice in Primary Schools: Belgium, 1880-1970*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2000.

directors, and so on, and can therefore be situated on the “meso” (between macro and micro) rather than on the micro level in terms of educational history. Occasionally, we do get a glimpse of “micro” situations, via (obviously always subjectively coloured) ego documents such as letters, diaries, and other testimonies, including oral ones. That “oral history” can help here, at least for the most recent period, goes without saying. The existing heritage platforms therefore seem to me to be an excellent opportunity to call on the older generations of the population, to put some things on paper on the matter, in the sense of: «put on paper your salient classroom events, enduring frustrations, as well as positive effects of classroom events, or make sure they are recorded verbally, before it is too late!»<sup>24</sup>.

At the same time, I would link to this same call the continuing demand for the collection of artefacts of educational history, no matter how difficult the triage and tracking of incoming material may be. Old textbooks, school and class photographs, school notebooks with notes, essays, homework and all sorts of other documentation on school and outside-school educational activities are best not thrown away. After all, it is on the basis of these silent witnesses of school running in the past that knowledge about it and its interpretation can take finer forms. Because subjective experiences can not only vary greatly but, as everyone knows, they are also – willingly or unwillingly – subject to blurring, discolouration and a posteriori interpretations and legitimisations in the context of self-constructed life stories. This is precisely why it is necessary to constantly confront orally acquired source material afterwards with data that come “directly” from the period studied. To carry out this “test” with historical reality, heritage workers seem to me to be well placed because through their handling of similar material they have acquired sufficient heuristics to interpret it.

But of course their possible contribution does not end there. They can also help optimise hypotheses and theoretical constructs (such as the famous “grammar of schooling”) in terms of content as a team – something I have always defended from an interdisciplinary point of view as well within educational historical research<sup>25</sup>. And that as full partners of the team. Mutatis mutandis, of course, the same applies when designing and outlining permanent collections and temporary exhibitions; through their experience, they may know best which objects best evoke subjective memories in visitors – memories that, in turn, could be recorded in one way or another, if visitors are explicitly invited to do so (in the guestbook, for instance). But processing them also requires the necessary heuristic techniques and content background.

Simply lumping everything together and contemporary discussions, such as those about possible level decline – a complaint that is moreover constantly present in educational history sources! – focusing on the duality between the virtue of tradition and the frivolity of the new (with an associated “fun pedagogy”) is certainly not without risk

<sup>24</sup> Id., *Onze onderwijsgeschiedenis*, in Daenen *et alii* (edd.), *Inspiratiebrochure Erfgoeddag maakt School op zondag 24 april én van maandag 25 tot vrijdag 29 april 2022*, cit., p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Id. *et alii*, *‘Menschen in Welten’ – Ordnungsstrukturen des Pädagogischen auf dem Weg zwischen Haus und Schule*, *«Zeitschrift für Pädagogik»*, n. 52, 2007, pp. 96-109.

of unsubtle, ahistorical conclusions<sup>26</sup>. The complexity of history is difficult to understand if one approaches it solely as a straw man for one's own, great right. It seems to me much more appropriate to do this by adopting an open-minded attitude towards the educational heritage and the surprises it has in store. And in making these experiences available, heritage practitioners undoubtedly have an important role to play. Preferably in teamwork, where there should be no hierarchical juxtapositions between theorists and practitioners, where input from different disciplines, including heritage practice, can lead to a satisfactory synthesis.

Utopian? Yes indeed, but perhaps we should still keep trying to achieve something of that ideal situation. Oscar Wilde often taken out of context witticisms<sup>27</sup>, at the beginning of the article, may help with that – all the more so because I can still see them daily on my campus. As a remnant of an exhibition on a better world, they have remained there. And when I was in charge of the rectorship of the campus, I often drew courage and perseverance from them. The best proof, then, that encountering well selected artefacts from the past can still trigger something in individual experience...

<sup>26</sup> Id., *How should history of education be written? Some reflections about the nature of the discipline from the perspective of the reception of our work*, «Studies in Philosophy and Education», vol. 23, n. 5, 2004, pp. 333-345.

<sup>27</sup> For the full text see, e.g., <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/> (last access: 16.11.2022).

# Between School Memory and Historical-Educational Heritage: the Library of the “Giacomo Leopardi” National Boarding School in Macerata\*

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## *Introduction*

Among the latest frontiers of historical research in education we can certainly include two fields of studies that are proving to be quite fruitful and harbingers of further developments, relating to school memory and historical-educational heritage<sup>1</sup>. Two areas of investigation that have their specific coordinates, but which in our opinion also show numerous points of contact that deserve to be highlighted. Hence our desire to approach a multifaceted study object with a high heuristic potential such as school libraries of historical value, to try to bring these two perspectives of investigation into dialogue<sup>2</sup>.

As far as the Italian context is concerned, an organic legislative framework on school libraries has never existed and in part still does not exist, and although their history has long been intertwined, almost to the point of confusion, with that of popular libraries, note that the first normative references date back to the founding law of the Italian national school system, the Casati Law of 1859. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first provisions on the establishment and functioning of school and class libraries were introduced, even

\* The article is the result of close collaboration between the authors. However, it should be noted that Anna Ascenzi is responsible for writing the *Introduction* and the *Conclusions*, while Elisabetta Patrizi is responsible for writing paragraphs 2 and 3.

<sup>1</sup> On the latest addresses relating to the field of studies on school memory see C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017 e J. Meda, L. Pomante, M. Brunelli (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019. On the developments of studies on historical-educational heritage, please refer to the two volumes of the proceedings of the first two congresses of the Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (SIPSE): A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria, patrimonio*, Macerata, EUM, 2020; A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, G. Zago (edd.), *Il patrimonio storico-educativo come risorsa per il rinnovamento della didattica scolastica e universitaria: esperienze e prospettive*, Macerata, eum, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> With the expression “school libraries of historical value” we mean libraries with a book heritage acquired during a certain historical period and therefore worthy of specific attention from the point of view of the history of education.



if much was left to the free initiative of teachers, pupils and local authorities, against a backdrop of a lack of state funding<sup>3</sup>. Despite the fact that several circulars were issued during the Fascist period, which had the aim of placing school libraries under government control, culminating in the establishment of the National Authority for Popular and School Libraries (ENBPS) in 1932, in general it never arrived at «particularly significant measures that allow us to glimpse the effective development of school libraries» within an organic project<sup>4</sup>. Changes were only made after the Second World War and, in particular after the delegated decrees of 1974. Despite the lights and shadows of many initiatives promoted even in recent times, school libraries as a whole have finally begun to be conceived and valued as educational resources that are capable of profitably stimulating the growth of students and supporting the professional development of teachers.

The tortuous, and in some ways troubled, story of school libraries in Italy often hides pages of great interest – above all if one focuses on school libraries founded centuries ago, i.e. endowed with a significant historical content both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view – which deserves to be explored both as a place of individual and collective memory, a repository of precise educational canons applied to a specific educational reality, and as a cultural asset for the school to be conserved, protected but also to be valued because it is part of a community's identity. This dual interpretative key which – as far as we know is completely new in terms of historical-educational research – had already been highlighted in the memorandum between the Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Environmental Heritage and Cultural Activities on 23 October 2000, where it was stated that:

the cultural asset constitutes an active element of the country's cultural growth and, in particular, libraries represent the place of historical memory, as well as being an infrastructure for accessing information and knowledge as a support for education, research, training and the dissemination of culture and, as such, complementary to the basic purposes of schools of all levels<sup>5</sup>.

Convinced of the fact that school libraries present themselves as one of the most suitable fields of investigation for exploring the strong link between school memory and historical-educational heritage, we aim to test their potential by examining a specific case study, that of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library in Macerata, which has peculiar characteristics in terms of history, consistency and relevance of the heritage preserved therein.

<sup>3</sup> A brief overview of the normative references relating to Italian school libraries is in A. Ascenzi, E. Patrizi, *The school library as an educational device. The case of the Giacomo Leopardi National Boarding School Library in Macerata*, in A. Debè, S. Polenghi (edd.), *Histories of Educational Technologies. Cultural and Social Dimensions of Pedagogical Objects. Book of Abstract*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2022, p. 405. For further information on this subject, see E. Colombo, A. Rosetti, *La biblioteca nella scuola*, Roma, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1986, pp. 13-33; M. Fiore, *La storia delle biblioteche scolastiche italiane dall'unità ai nostri giorni. Analisi storico-normativa delle leggi e delle iniziative sulle biblioteche scolastiche italiane*, Verona, Zettadue, 2005; D. Lombello, *Dalle «bibliotechine di classe» alla biblioteca scolastica nella rete nazionale*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. I, n. 2, 2006, pp. 249-281.

<sup>4</sup> Lombello, *Dalle «bibliotechine di classe» alla biblioteca scolastica*, cit., p. 269.

<sup>5</sup> [https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/news/2000/prot\\_intesa\\_mbc.shtml](https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/news/2000/prot_intesa_mbc.shtml) (last access: 24.01.2023).

### 1. The “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library in Macerata

The library of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school in Macerata was officially established in 1915, even though a first nucleus of volumes for the use of the students and teachers of the school had already been set up in the boarding school’s early years, whose origins date back to the very early post-unification period (1862). We stand before a library of great value, which has an important history behind it, as it belongs to a prestigious, ancient and still existing institution. This history is reflected in the volumes kept in the library, which allow you to travel through different eras, from the post-unification period to the post-WWII period<sup>6</sup>.

Currently, the school’s library is housed in the Center for Documentation and Research on the History of School Books and Children’s Literature (CESCO), following a loan for use contract entered into between Macerata University and the boarding school in 2008. It is of a significant size, which corresponds to almost 2000 books, making a total of 1319 works and 27 periodical publications<sup>7</sup>. These data are obtained from examining the library inventory. This document was drawn up, presumably, during the Fascist period and then updated over time, until after the post-WWII period. It contains only a small amount of essential information: inventory number, author, title and reference shelf (marked with a letter of the alphabet)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> The “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school in Macerata, initially established under the provincial government, was nationalized in 1886. In the first period of activity, the institute housed students between the ages of 6 and 12, but soon opened its doors to students from the secondary school, who became the privileged users of the boarding school. We find confirmation of the fact that the institute began to acquire books right away from the analysis of the stamps affixed to the volumes, many of which have the wording “Provincial Boarding school in Macerata”. For a first approach to the historical history of this institute, see A. Avesani, *Le scuole pubbliche nel medioevo e nella età moderna*, in *Storia di Macerata*, Macerata, Grafica Maceratese, 1988, vol. III, pp. 3-76. On the foundation of the boarding schools in Italy and on their first period of activity, see P. Pavesio, *I convitti nazionali dalle origini ai nostri giorni. Cenni storici con note e appendici*, Avellino, Tipografia Tulumiero, 1885, in partc. parte IV. For an update on the current situation of boarding schools in Italy, see the Dossier by UIL (Italian Labor Union) in 2008 [https://uilsuola.it/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/dossier\\_convitti\\_testo.pdf](https://uilsuola.it/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/dossier_convitti_testo.pdf) (last access: 02.02.2023).

<sup>7</sup> In general, there are few journals preserved in the Macerata library, however they are striking in their great diversity. They range from popular science journals (e.g. «La Natura. Rivista delle scienze e delle loro applicazioni alle industrie e alle arti» edited by Paolo Mantegazza and published by Treves) to travel (such as the monthly journals promoted by Touring Club Italiano «Le vie d’Italia» and «Le vie del mondo»), history topic («Atti e memorie» edited by R. Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche) and those devoted to teachers (eg. «Rivista dell’Istruzione», published by Maggioli, and «Scuola e insegnanti», published by B.M. italiana). There is only one journal intended for the young boys, i.e. «Ranch», of which only one issue remains (n.1 of 1<sup>st</sup> year, 1951). The presence of the first issue of the first year (1875) of the «Giornale del museo d’istruzione e di educazione» is remarkable.

<sup>8</sup> The inventory presents a large division. There is a first part ordered alphabetically based on the author’s surname, which corresponds to the oldest and most substantial nucleus of the library (1171 inventory numbers), and there is a more recent and less substantial second part (825 inventory numbers), which appears organized on the basis of the order of acquisition and which would seem to have been left out of the first reorganization of the library (this part mostly contains twentieth-century texts, but there are also texts published previously, which perhaps remained out of the first reorganization of the library).

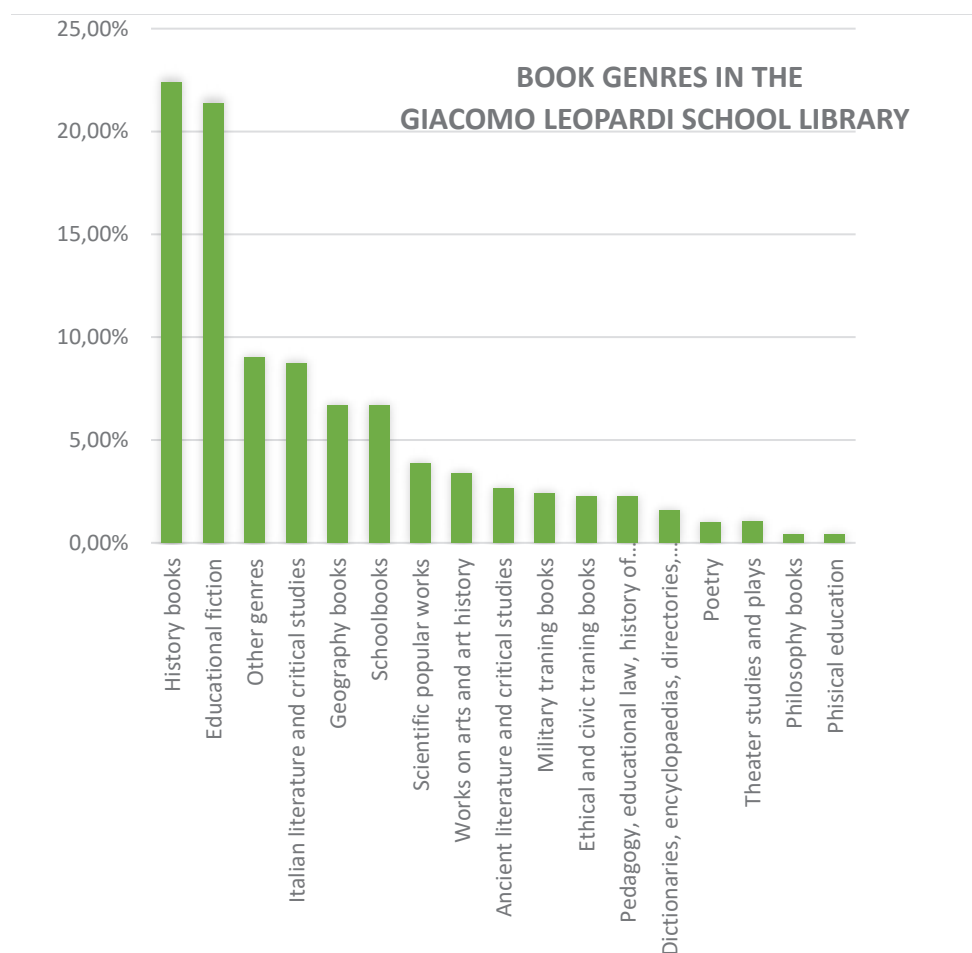


Fig. 1. Table about the book genres in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library

We proceeded to create a catalog of all the inventory units in the library, to further and clarify this initial picture. This work has allowed us to take hold of every single volume in the boarding school’s old repository and to appreciate its particularities, in many cases. Cataloging was followed by an analysis, which we conducted taking into account some specific elements: the title, to evaluate the literary genres represented in the library; the author, to understand the type of authors most present; the typographical data, to reconstruct the varying relevance of the publishers and the “chronological extent/connotation” of the library; finally, the extra-textual elements (ownership notes, dedications, student annotations, etc.), to understand the specific history of the specimens and intercept information on its readers and on the approach to the text.

The analysis of the titles returns the image of a library designed mainly for students (a particular aspect of all school libraries)<sup>9</sup> and in the second instance as a support to teaching work (Figure 1).

The most represented works are those of a historical nature, above all texts dedicated to characters and episodes of the Risorgimento period, biographies, documentary and epistolary collections of illustrious characters such as Cavour, Vittorio Emanuele II and Garibaldi, which cover 22.39% of the works in the Macerata library. This is followed by works attributable to children's and youth literature, a category in which we can also include texts intended for the education of the people, published above all in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to a lesser extent in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, periods in which – as is known – the boundary between literature aimed at young readers and that for the adult public appears rather fluid<sup>10</sup>. The presence of the most important works in the history of Italian literature which, together with critical studies, is also interesting and represent almost 9% of the library's content. The geographical works also stand out, covering almost 7% of the library and range from travel narratives to treatises with a more rigorous scientific approach, many of which are dedicated to Abyssinia. An almost similar percentage can also be found of textbooks, mostly intended for secondary school and dedicated to humanities subjects (history of Italian literature, anthologies, history textbooks). Works on art and art history, as well as popular scientific works, especially concerning animal biology, physics and astronomical geography, amount to around 4%. There are various sectors of the library representing between 2% and 3%: the great classics of Greek and Latin literature and related critical studies, publications for military training (which reveal the military imprint of the boarding school which remained in vogue until the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century), educational literature for the development of character (behavioral treatises and etiquette in particular) and texts on pedagogical and historical-pedagogical topics (concerning the history of children's literature and school legislation). There are also smaller amount of several works, still significant as a reflection of a library aimed at contemplating many educational dimensions, such as theatrical works, those on religious subjects (hagiographies, biblical commentaries, etc.) and those focused on physical education. These types of texts clearly reflect the traces of an educational project aimed at enhancing, on the one hand, the religious education of the boarders, through morning and evening prayers, Sunday catechism and mass on holidays and, on the other, also attentive to physical exercise and theatrical performances included in normal teaching activity and also among the recreational initiatives offered to students in extra-curricular hours<sup>11</sup>.

From the analysis of the titles, the presence of numerous collections also emerges, even quite prestigious ones. In fact, there are 115 of them, making a total of 308 works. Among the most relevant we can mention: *L'edizione nazionale degli scritti di Giuseppe*

<sup>9</sup> Lombello, *Dalle «bibliotechine di classe» alla biblioteca scolastica*, cit., p. 268.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Storia e antologia della letteratura per l'infanzia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, vol. I, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Regolamento del Convitto provinciale di Macerata*, Macerata, Tipografia Cortesi, 1865.

*Mazzini* (Imola, Cooperativa tipografico-editrice Paolo Galeati, 1901-1961), *L'arte per tutti* (Bergamo, Istituto nazionale LUCE – Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1930), *L'opera del genio italiano* (Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1932-1951), *Commentari dell'impero* (Roma, Unione Editoriale Italiana, 1937-1939) and the *Collezione di capolavori stranieri tradotti per la gioventù italiana* dell'editore fiorentino Bemporad (1929-1936)<sup>12</sup>.

The presence of major works, the result of impressive publishing initiatives, is also significant. Among those with a historical subject (the most numerous), we can name: the *Storia universale illustrata* edited by Wilhelm Oncken (Napoli-Milano, Vallardi-Società Editrice Libreria, 1831-1910), of which 47 out of 50 volumes are preserved; the *Storia universale* by Cesare Cantù (Torino, Unione Tipografica Editrice, 1884-1890), the *Storia del consolato e dell'impero* by Marie-Joseph-Louis-Adolphe Thiers (Firenze, Fontana e Le Monnier, 1845-1864) and the *Storia della monarchia piemontese* by Ercole Ricotti (Firenze, Barbera, 1861-1869), all owned in full. The *Nuovo dizionario geografico universale* (Venezia, Antonelli, 1827-1836), of which 12 out of 19 volumes are preserved, and the *Nuova geografia universale* by Élisée Reclus (Napoli-Milano, Vallardi-Società Editrice Libreria, 1884-1904), fully owned, stand out among the works with a geographical subject. Encyclopedic works, such as *Lexicon Vallardi. Enciclopedia universale illustrata* (Milano, Vallardi, 188?-1907), are also included, as well as great literary works that are an absolute must. These include: *I secoli della letteratura italiana dopo il Risorgimento* by Gianbattista Corniani (Torino, Pomba, 1854-1856) and *Opere* by Niccolò Macchiavelli (Palermo, Fratelli Pedone Lauriel, 1819), of which all volumes are preserved; *Opere* by Pietro Giordani (Milano, Borroni e Scotti, 1854-1862), of which 12 volumes out of 14 volumes are preserved; *Opere edite e postume* by Ugo Foscolo (Firenze, Le Monnier, 1850-1859), of which 7 volumes out of 11 are preserved and *Ricordi e scritti* by Aurelio Saffi (Firenze, Barbera, 1878-1905), received almost entirely (14 volumes out of 15 owned).

In terms of authors, the Convitto “G. Leopardi” library confirms the profile of a book collection primarily aimed at students. In fact, there are two most frequently found authors, each with 12 titles: one is an internationally renowned author of fairy tales, Hans Christin Andersen and the other is one of the best known exponents of popular science literature, Louis Figuier. Following them, with 11 titles, are two authorities of the Italian 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural panorama, Cesare Cantù, present in the Macerata library above all as an author of historical essays, and Edmondo De Amicis, valued in particular as the author of travel reports<sup>13</sup>. In third position, with 9 texts, we find the father of the Italian language, Dante Alighieri, and after him an exponent of historical writing and one of

<sup>12</sup> The Macerata Library owns: 89 volumes out of 97 of the *L'Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, 42 volumes of the collection *L'arte per tutti*, 19 volumes of *L'opera del genio italiano*, 17 volumes of the *Commentari dell'impero* and 10 volumes of the *Collezione di capolavori stranieri tradotti per la gioventù italiana*.

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the travel works by De Amicis preserved in “G. Leopardi” library, see A. Ascenzi, E. Patrizi, «Lector in fabula». *Las obras de viaje de Edmondo De Amicis a través de los ojos de los estudiantes*, in E. Ortiz García (coord.), J.A. González de la Torre, J.M. Sáiz Gómez, L.M. Naya Garmendia, P. Dávila Balsera (edd.), *Nuevas miradas sobre el patrimonio histórico-educativo: audiencias, narrativas y objetos educativos. X Jornadas SEPHE (Santander, 22-24 de marzo de 2023)*, Polanco, Centro de Recursos, Interpretación y Estudios de la Escuela, 2023, pp. 424-448.

Italian literature from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi and Giovanni Pascoli. In a subsequent position, with 7 books, one of the best-known writers of US literature, Mark Twain. Following him, with 6 and 5 works respectively, we find heterogeneous groups of authors, which are a reflection of the different faces of the library, from the historical one with Massimo D'Azeglio and Ernesto Masi to the pedagogical one with Maria Montessori, moving on to the literary one with Carlo Goldoni, Giacomo Leopardi and Luigi Capuana, without forgetting children's literature and self-help literature represented by Charles Dickens and Samuel Simes respectively. There is no lack of other areas, such as Latin literature represented by Cicero, colonial literature through the works of Arnaldo Cipolla, scientific fiction by Camille Flammarion, even an author like Niccolò Tommaseo with his dictionary of aesthetics *Dizionario d'estetica* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Milano, Fortunato Perelli, 1860) and the *Dizionario dei sinonimi della lingua italiana* (7<sup>th</sup> edition, Milano, Vallardi, 1884). Finally, if we examine the authors present in the library with 4, 3 and 2 titles, we find confirmation of the two predominant strands, namely that of historical works and that of children's and youth literature (Figure 2).

The presence of foreign authors, 228 in total, is also interesting. A number certainly lower than the Italian authors (593), but still significant, with respect to which we can detect a majority of French-speaking authors (75) and a significant presence of German-speaking (45) and English-speaking (44) authors. In terms of works in a foreign language, however, there are only 25 and they are all in French, in line with the importance assigned by the Italian school to the French language and culture until relatively recent times.

If we move on to examine the publishers represented in the Macerata library, it is not surprising to find the prominent position occupied by Treves, who is by far the most present publisher, thanks to the versatility of its editorial offer and the absolute leading role occupied by this publisher in the context of the «renewal of Italian publishing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century», together with other Milanese publishers, such as Sonzogno and Hoepli, also present in the Macerata library, albeit in smaller percentages<sup>14</sup>.

Although with a notable gap, second place in the ranking of publishers of the volumes found in the library of "G. Leopardi" boarding school is occupied by the Istituto d'arti grafiche of Bergamo, known in the field of publications of art books and art history. Long-standing publishers active in the field of education and school publishing such as Zanichelli, Vallardi, Barbera, Le Monnier, Bemporad and Paravia also have a very respectable position<sup>15</sup>, as well as early 20<sup>th</sup> century publishers very active in the school sector, such as S.E.I (Società Editrice Internazionale) of Turin, and in the field of children's and young people's literature such as Barion Edizioni (later Casa per Edizioni Popolari) of Sesto S. Giovanni (Milan)<sup>16</sup>. In any case, the lion's share goes to publishers in the Milan

<sup>14</sup> G. Chiosso (edd.), *Teseo. Tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2003, p. 597 (quotation) and pp. 597-600 (for the sheet on Treves by R. Sani).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-47 (sheet on Barbera by G. Di Bello), 65-68 (sheet on Bemporad by F. Bacchetti), 318-323 (sheet on Le Monnier by C. Betti), 614-620 (sheet on Vallardi by F. Caringi and M.C. Morandini), 641-647 (sheet on Zanichelli by M. D'Ascenzo) and 423-430 (sheet on Paravia by G. Chiosso).

<sup>16</sup> G. Chiosso (ed.), *Teseo '900. Editori scolastico-educativi del primo Novecento*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2008, pp. 53-55 (sheet on Barion by L. Lombardi) and 493-500 (sheet on S.E.I by F. Targhetta).

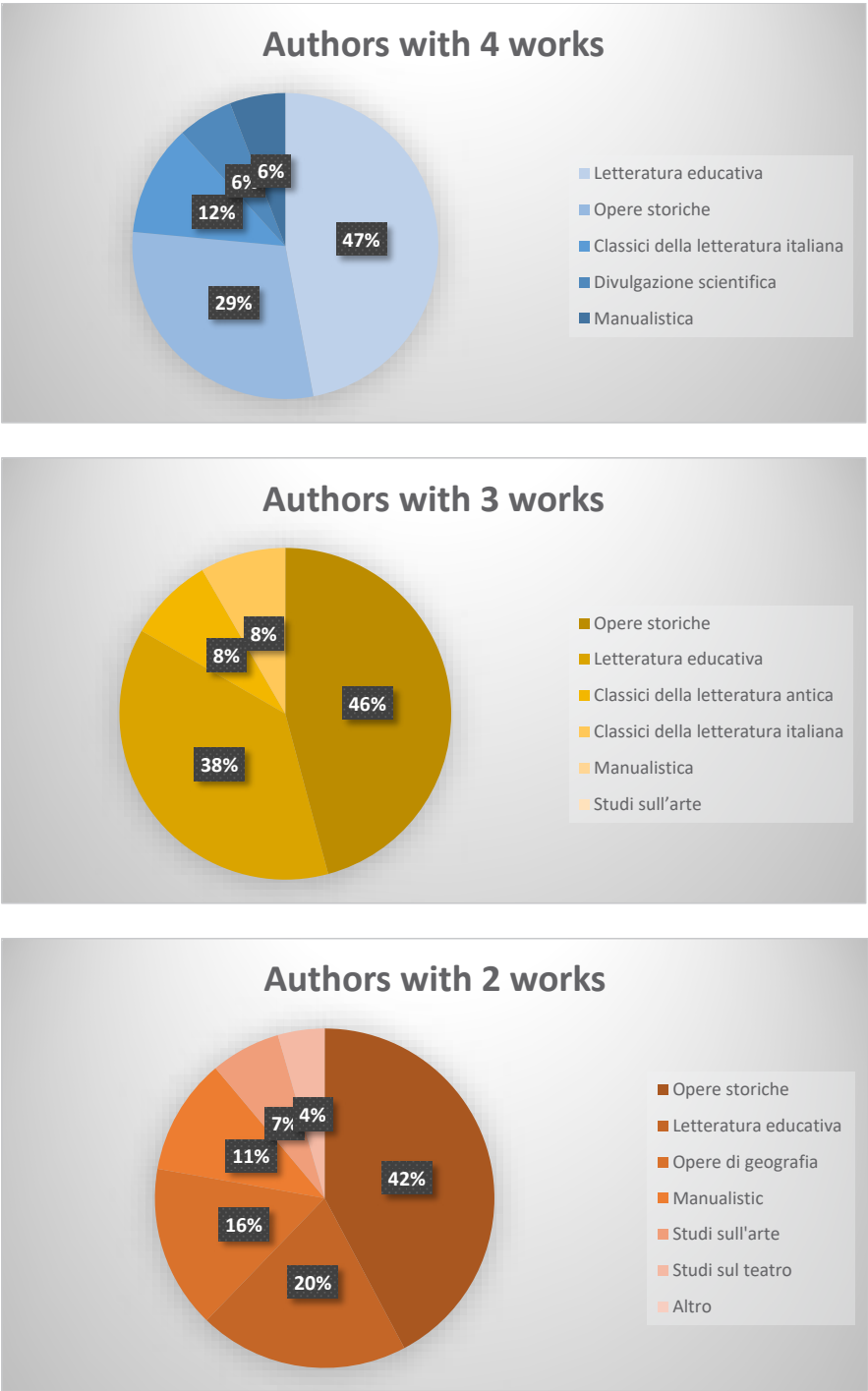


Fig. 2. Tables about the authors with 2, 3 and 4 works housed in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library



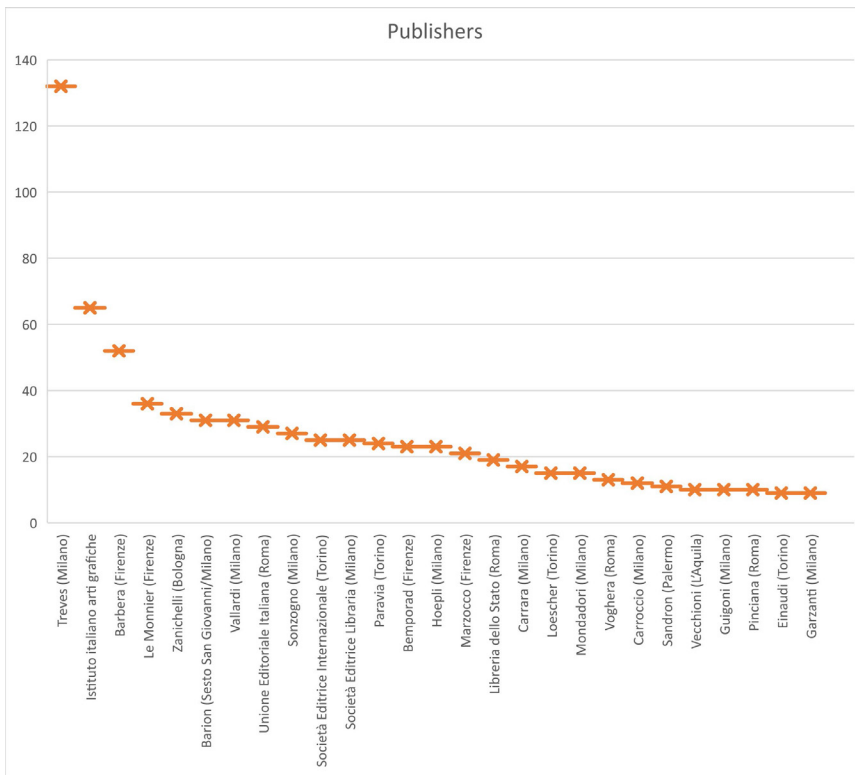


Fig. 3. Table about the publishers of the books housed in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library

area, followed by editors in Florence and Turin, which are in fact the cities with the greatest editorial density on the Italian scene (Figure 3).

In terms of the years in which books were published, it should be noted that the oldest book dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is *Il Malmantile racquistato* by Perlone Zipoli (pseudonym of Lorenzo Lippi, Puccio Lamoni di Paolo Minucci), published in Venice at the printing house of Stefano Orlandini in 1748, while the most recent work dates back to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and corresponds to the work in 5 volumes *Atti della Conferenza Nazionale sulla Scuola*, published in Palermo by Salvatore Sciascia in 1991-1992. There are only 4 works published in the 18<sup>th</sup> century found in the library of Macerata boarding school and the most conspicuous part of all the texts is printed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, although to a slightly lesser extent, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 4). The presence of a certain number of works, over one hundred, which are devoid of typographical data, as they lack paper covers and title pages is worth noting. These are works that we could define as “damaged by use”, mostly texts attributable to the sector of literature for children and young people, fiction books in general, evidently subject to intense reading by boarders.

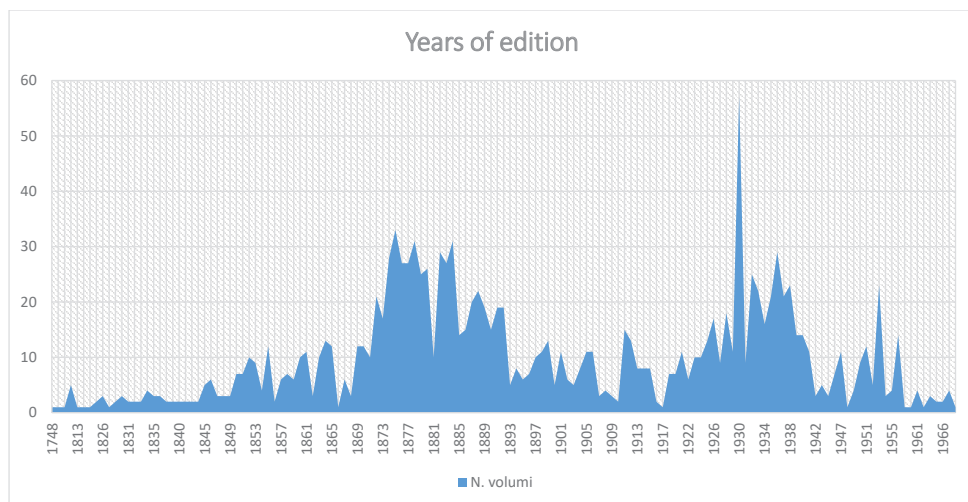


Fig. 4. Table about the years of edition of the books housed in the “Giacomo Leopardi” School Library

By examining the specimens in the “G. Leopardi” library we can also deduce data relating to book donations. The most important is the one left by the rector, probably of the boarding school, Francesco de H[...], who made a donation to the Macerata library on 27 December 1931 consisting of 40 volumes of general culture, many of which are untouched, testifying to the irrelevance of these texts to the library’s “practical purposes”<sup>17</sup>. There are another two important donations, more closely related to the mission of the library: the one by the literature professor Cipriano Ferreri, consisting of 20 volumes, mostly manuals, and all pertaining to the sphere of Italian literature, and one by the Latin professor Augusto Corradi, consisting of 6 volumes, mostly Latin classics commented by Corradi himself.

We have found two types of dedications. One consists of dedications left by parents of boarding pupils. Among these, the one that accompanies the two-volume work *Lettere di combattenti italiani nella grande guerra* by Antonio Monti (Roma, Edizioni Roma, 1935) is written by a father of two boarders as a tribute to the boarding school and in permanent memory of the excellent education provided for his sons:

Giuseppe de Gennaro

to Leopardi National boarding school in Macerata, where my sons Gian Francesco and Alessandro, boarders, during eight years of stay, they completed splendidly their classical studies, and learned what a very high duty love of Country is. – Capocalenda (Campobasso), 29 Oct. 1935. XIV.

<sup>17</sup> Archival research has not yet produced a result on this figure. However, we hope to find other research paths that allow us to obtain information on this rector.

The dedication that appears on the guard page of the children's literature classic *Peter Pan* by James Matthew Barrie (Milano, Ed. Carroccio, 1951), is more intimate and direct in the simplicity of its content which reads: «To Paul so that he may be instructed in reading. 12/7/1953. The father».

Instead, the other type of dedications found in the books of the Macerata school library has the boys as protagonists. They are dedications of boarders to other boarders, left in memory of a very intense school and life experience. These are mostly a few words, short sentences, but nonetheless worthy of a certain interest as they often allow us to grasp aspects of the relational life of the students inside and outside the boarding school. Thus, in the book *I ragazzi della via Pal* by Molnár Ferencz (Firenze, Marzocco, 1953) we read: «To dear Emilio, this little reminder from his friends Ninni and Luca Chinni. Porto S. Giorgio 15.8.1954». While in the half-title of the volume of short stories *Tre stelle e un lume spento* by Amelia Tondini Melgari (alias Fiammetta Lombarda) is written: «To my dear friend Giuliana so that you always remember your classmate Pollig and learn to live according to the laws of God. With tenderness Ludovin Paola».

There are also several volumes, mostly reading texts, which reveal that they originally belonged to a class library, a clear testimony of the coexistence of two types of library, those intended for use in the classroom and the one of a general, more cultural nature, into the classroom libraries later converged. We also have volumes such as: *L'allegro terzetto* by Eleonora Torrossi (Firenze, Marzocco, 1948) which on the handcrafted dust jacket bears the indication «book from class library of middle school section A», or the book *Niko. Il piccolo Leone. Racconto per ragazzi* by Eugenio Fornasari (Roma, Società Apostolato, 1946), which on the front facing page bears the indication «I B», or the work *I Pigmei* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (Firenze, Marzocco, 1953), on whose dust jacket the writing «Class library book, I middle school, section A, National boarding school» is found.

Finally, we should also pay specific attention to all those extra-textual elements, which, for a large group of works – just over 400, above all reading books and in some cases also school manuals – allow us to appreciate notes made by different types of readers. In several cases we have very succinct annotations (name and surname, sometimes even a chronological indication), but in some cases we also have comments that often take the form of real reviews that leave room for cross-referenced comments between various generations of readers, from which personal opinions on the content of the work emerge. We are facing an unexplored field of investigation, as for the first time we have the possibility of applying the paradigm of juvenile writings<sup>18</sup>, explored with respect to school notebooks, in the volumes of a school library. In this way, we can place ourselves on the reader's side and penetrate the individual memory “deposited” by them in a place of collective school memory, deduce elements that allow us to penetrate that completely unique and personal space of interaction that each reader interweaves with the work, acquire aspects of the reader's psychology and his approach to the text<sup>19</sup>. These elements

<sup>18</sup> On this topic, please refer to the essays included in the work that opened this line of research in Italy: E. Becchi, Q. Antonelli (edd.), *Scritture bambine: testi infantili tra passato e presente*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. U. Eco, *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*, Milano, Bompiani, 1979.



Fig. 5. Ink stains on a page of *La vita militare* by E. De Amicis (n.d.)

have an undoubted charm, but also a big heuristic potential, which allow another dimension of the school library – intended as a place of memory and as a cultural asset of the school – to be enhanced. This investigative perspective has enormous research potential and, in order to offer a small sample of the possibilities of this perspective, we will examine a text preserved in the “G. Leopardi” library, which appears largely annotated: *La vita militare* by Edmondo De Amicis.

## 2. «Military life is beautiful»: the extra-textual notes in a work by De Amicis

As we have anticipated, De Amicis is one of the most represented authors in the “G. Leopardi” library. One of the works by De Amicis preserved in the Macerata library is his first great publishing success: *La vita militare*<sup>20</sup>. This «good book of popular educational

<sup>20</sup> On this best seller by De Amicis, see S. Jacomuzzi, «Cittadini forti ... soldati intrepidi». *L'epica del quotidiano e la pedagogia dei buoni sentimenti nella Vita militare*, in F. Contorbia (ed.), *Edmondo De Amicis. Atti del convegno nazionale di studi (Imperia, 30 aprile - 3 maggio 1981)*, Milano, Garzanti, 1985, pp. 41-54; M.

literature», as it is known, was written in the first decade post-unification and is the result of De Amicis' military journalistic activity, nourished by suggestions deriving from the close links with the Florentine salon held by Emilia Peruzzi Toscanelli<sup>21</sup>. The specimen of the work held in the boarding school library is very well used<sup>22</sup>. It has been trimmed and bound, therefore some readers' notes are not legible and there are no front guard page, preface, index, paper title page and also a significant part of the text (from p. 163 to p. 194, which corresponds to the beginning of the *Carmela* tale). In general, the pages are worn and, in many cases, damaged with ink stains (Figure 5). We do not have precise indications on the year of the edition, but it is certainly a copy of the work published before 1904<sup>23</sup>, a date written in the oldest legible notation in the text, and after 1880, the year of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of work, in which De Amicis chose to remove some tales present in the first two editions.

The specimen examined by us is literally peppered with annotations of different types, which offer concrete evidence of the strong impact generated on the reading public by De Amicis' writing, already characterized in this first literary experience by a strong, enveloping and at the same time reassuring pedagogical *vis*, capable of establishing a direct line of communication with the text's users<sup>24</sup>. There are several extra-textual notes that appear in the form of a simple signature, perhaps accompanied by a date, as in the case of the one left by Massimo Lanari, who three times says he read the book on 7 October 1929 («Lanari Massimo read 7-10-29»)<sup>25</sup>. The annotations in the form of short comments, often anonymous, are equally well represented: «Nice, beautiful (book)»<sup>26</sup>, «Military life is beautiful»<sup>27</sup>, sometimes also with multiple signatures «Beautiful. Santuzzi Angelo, Barnabi Aldo, Properzi Benedetto, Mari Ninni, Fermo Permontagni»<sup>28</sup>. For the most part they are short judgments with a positive sign, but among these – as was inevitable – there is also the negative annotation of those who say: «very ugly on my opinion»<sup>29</sup>.

The presence of «cultured» notes, expressed in Latin («Hoc liber est multus pulcher»)<sup>30</sup>, French («Ce livre est beau», «Ce livre est tres bel, Isaia Biribe, Macerata 5-3-1904»)<sup>31</sup> or containing Latinisms («Letto da Barbanè Alio. Pulcherrimo»)<sup>32</sup> is striking. Among these, an anonymous note in French stands out, as it reveals a genuine attachment to the

Dota, *La vita militare di Edmondo De Amicis: storia linguistico-editoriale di un best-seller postunitario*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2017, in particular chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Dota, *La vita militare di Edmondo De Amicis*, cit., p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> E. De Amicis, *La vita militare*, s.l., s.n., n.d.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Jacomuzzi, «*Cittadini forti ... soldati intrepidi*», cit., pp. 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> De Amicis, *La vita militare*, cit., p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, inside side of the cover.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, inside side of the cover.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.



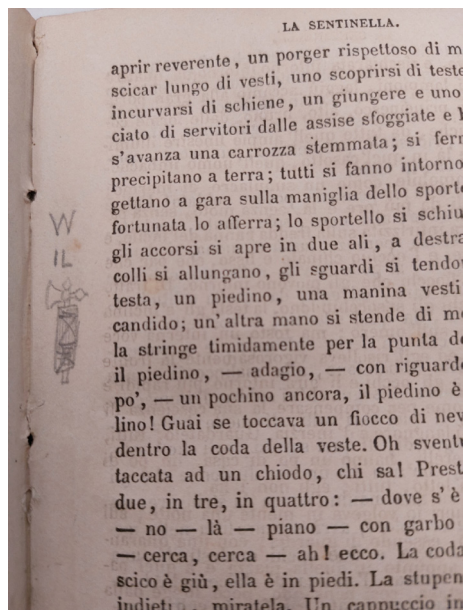


Fig. 6. Children writings praising fascism in *La vita militare* by E. De Amicis (n.d.)

mother country and to the family: «Je ne suis encore qu'un enfant mais j'aime de tout mon cher ma patrie»<sup>33</sup>.

Playful annotations were also to be expected, which go well with the young age of the readers and from which the “comradely” atmosphere that accompanies the letter of the text shines through. They range from the classic «My name is me, your name is you, who is more of a donkey, me or you?», very frequent in the annotated copies preserved in the Macerata library, to extemporaneous comments, which translate the thoughts of a moment into words, without any filter: «Read by Manuele Mercurio. Maybe it's nice but who knows, when I read it I'll tell you the result. You see what I wrote is nonsense»<sup>34</sup>. Other annotations interact directly with the text in order to elicit a smile. So, following the header of the story *Una sassata* (*Hit with a stone*) a reader adds: «in head, well done»<sup>35</sup>.

In one case a sort of question and answer is sketched out between two readers, whereby where one student writes «Beautiful», another, with a touch of irreverence typical of young boys, adds «a little bit» in front of «Beautiful» and specifies «in my opinion this story (referring to the *Carmela* tale) is very bad, especially since De Amicis's novels are copied all from my grandfather. Pignà»<sup>36</sup>. The frequent treasure hunt for a name was inevitable, («This book is beautiful, do you want to know my name? Go to page 9»), which in the case of this book seems interminable, there are so many cross-references between the pages, and in the end there is no solution, i.e. we do not get to discover the name of this bold rascal<sup>37</sup>.

We also have readers who intervene in the text trying to integrate it, as happens in the inaugural tale *Una marcia d'estate* (*A summer march*), where at the point where De Amicis states «Good! And we went, and we went...», a reader adds «there towards the distant...» and further on in the passage where the author notes «Oh you see how that tail goes! Body of...», the same hand cannot avoid adding «body of a thousand whales»<sup>38</sup>. But there are also interventions which provide indications for the readers who will follow. So, in the first page of the volume we read «*Carmela* is the most beautiful story», a judgment

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 19, 89, 29, 16, 14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

that is confirmed later on by another reader with a personal affirmation of disarming spontaneity: «The most beautiful story in this book is *Carmela*. Read it and you will be happy!!!!??? Unfortunately, it's true! I thought it was bad and instead I was amazed»<sup>39</sup>. We can imagine that the surprise of this reader to discover the beauty of the tale lies in the fact that, as can already be inferred in some way from the title, it has nothing but a tenuous link to the military life that the work promises to sketch<sup>40</sup>.

Other extra-textual interventions are symptomatic of the historical period in which they were written. Here in the heart of the text, we find a part of the anthem of the Italian popular party founded by Don Sturzo: «White flag, beautiful flag / you are the star, you are the star / white flag, star flag / you are the star of society / shield crusader will protect us»; which is followed by the unsettling comment of a reader, probably from the Fascist era, who recites: «verses by Don Sturzo that imbecile»<sup>41</sup>. The squadrist attitude typical of the Fascist period emerges preponderantly in other notes too, which follow the regime's slogan rhetoric, emphasized by the use of capital letters: «Hurra the DUCE, Hurra THE KING, Hurra ITALY», «The nerves in place, the KING cannot be touched», «Nerves in order, the Duce cannot be touched»<sup>42</sup>. In this context, the symbol par excellence of Fascism, the fasces, could not be left out, which appears three times in the volume, in one of which it is preceded by an abbreviated form of Hurra (W) (Figure 6)<sup>43</sup>. But the comments resulting from the Fascism era do not stop there and in one specific case, the full force of an ideology descended from on high in a non-critical way, permeating minds and hearts, appears. Thus, in the tale *Una sassata* (*Hit with a stone*), where De Amicis describes the moment in which a sentry is hit by a stone on the forehead by a scoundrel who has sprung up from a “shapeless crowd” of cocky villagers intent on insulting and provoking the soldiers of the guardhouse, a reader angered by the story comments solemnly:

It used to be like this, but now... now that we are in 1928 and the March on Rome has taken place, led by Mussolini... now everything has changed and even the soldier, and perhaps most of all, is considered according to his merit!<sup>44</sup>

The annotations that refer to the boarders and the reading practices adopted in the boarding school are particularly interesting. In the first pages of the work, a reader reveals that: «This book was seized and not returned to Leto Pietro»<sup>45</sup>, while further on another states: «This book is very beautiful and my brother has it. Montesi Salvatore»<sup>46</sup>. These notes, on the one hand, confirm that the books passed from hand to hand between boarders, who at times came from the same family, and on the other, reveal to us that in particular situations, these same books were confiscated by the educators, due to, we

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Jacomuzzi, «*Cittadini forti ... soldati intrepidi*», cit., p. 49.

<sup>41</sup> De Amicis, *La vita militare*, cit., p. 283.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 28, 60.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231, 234, 239.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.



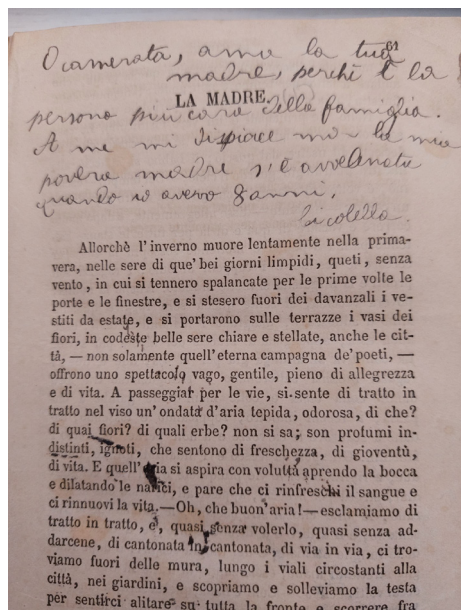


Fig. 7. Children writings in *La vita militare* by E. De Amicis (n.d.)

note, which he shares with his companions and future users of the book, delivering a profound message of care and attention towards dearest loved ones: «Oh comrade, love your mother, because she is the dearest person in the family. I'm sorry but my poor mother poisoned herself when I was 8 years old. Cicoella»<sup>48</sup> (Figure 7).

This represents one of the many surprises that can be discovered by leafing through the pages of annotated texts conserved in the “G. Leopardi” library in Macerata, from which the echoes of the voices that resounded through the classrooms, corridors and rooms of a long-lived educational institution often emerge, where generations and generations of students were welcomed, all animated by the hope of building a better future through education.

## Conclusions

The story of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library in Macerata reconstructed here constitutes an exemplary case study, which allows us to highlight the multiple possibilities of analysis offered by a “polysemic” and versatile object of study such as school libraries. We started from the typological study, regarding literary genres,

imagine, valid reasons. Another student, alongside a frequent positive judgment on the text, name and the date on which he finished reading it, also tells us one more detail: «This book is very beautiful and this is assured by Bicolella Ferdinando born in Foggia on 2 November 1914, who finished reading the *Military Life* on 23-7-1927 in Fontespina»<sup>47</sup>. The locality of Fontespina, in Civitanova Marche, appears, which is where the boarders used to spend the summer period in a villa lent to the boarding school. We often find this fact in the extra-textual notes left on specimens in the Macerata library, as proof of the fact that the warmer months included reading among the recreational activities.

However, the personal annotation that more than any other causes surprise due to the intensity of the emotions it arouses is the one that appears at the start of the tale *The Mother*. This word evidently evokes a painful memory in the reader signing the

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

then moving on to the authorial one, focusing on the most frequently found authors, reaching the analysis of typographical data, developing reflections regarding the years of edition and the publishers. We also examined donations and the indications related to class libraries inside the boarding school library. Finally, we concluded our analysis path with ideas and suggestions deriving from a completely new field of study in the historical-educational field, the extra-textual elements. We thus intended to show some of the various facets that characterize a school library, the ones that in our opinion are most significant and capable of restoring the image of a precious and unique place of memory, as it tells many stories, which we can read as part of a cultural heritage waiting to be revealed, understood and shared.

In this direction, historical analysis is assigned the essential task of stimulating processes of re-discovery and re-appropriation of that heritage, capable of promoting the perception of that school library as a cultural asset belonging to a community, not just a school one, but also civil, as it brings together different generations and helps to determine the identity of a place. And then, the school library becomes that “deposit” of school memories, where the personal experiences of those who attended that school are intertwined with the processes of transmission of cultural and educational canons, which the catalogs of that library allow to be reconstructed, thus revealing the complex web of individual and collective variables that a school institution welcomes and that a school library bring to light. As we have tried to demonstrate here, through the study of the books of a specific school library, one can make the leap that leads from the great scenarios of a national nature on school history to local realities. It is that passage that allows us to explore cross-sections of micro-history, from which it is possible to understand the ways in which educational practices have been translated into specific geographical and socio-cultural contexts, and more. As both a source and heritage, these “school books” in some cases allow the recovery of individual, collective and even public memories<sup>49</sup>. In fact, we find ourselves faced with objects that shed glimpses of light on slices of real scholastic and non-scholastic life, concerning individuals, but which – through historical research – can become part of the heritage of a community. This heritage has a tangible side, made up of concrete physical objects, but also contains intangible elements of unparalleled value, textures of memories, sensations, experiences and personal opinions, which are waiting to be rediscovered and enhanced<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> In this case, we want to refer to the concept of school memory, which – as noted by Antonio Viñao and Juri Meda – can be declined in an individual form, which pertains to one’s scholastic experience and how it is reconstructed personally by the individual, and in an individual, collective and/or public form that implies a shared school background. We intend to refer to the latter meaning. Cf. J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory. Historiographical Balance and Heuristic Perspectives*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit., pp. 1-9.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. C. Yanes Cabrera, J.M. Somoza Rodríguez, *Museos escolares: el patrimonio material e inmaterial de la educación como conciencia crítica*, in A. Mayordomo Pérez, M. del Carmen Agulló Díaz, G. García Frasquet (edd.), *El patrimoni històric-educatiu valencià. V Jornades d’Història de l’Educació Valenciana (Gandia, 30 i 31 d’octubre de 2009)*, València, Universitat de València – Departamento de Educación Comparada e Historia de la Educación – Centre de Estudis i Investigacions Comarcals Alfons el Vell, 2011, pp. 97-111.



# The Story of a School Too Good to Be a School: the *Collegio di Savoia* in Turin

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## 1. *The history of school building between architecture and pedagogy*

The history of school building has so far garnered little interest from educational historians. When they dealt with the history of a school building, they did so mainly to investigate the pedagogical and didactical theories that inspired its conception<sup>1</sup>. Architecture historians, on the other hand, are rather focused on the architectural aspects, without caring too much to connect them with their educational purposes<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the theme of the relationship between school building and urban planning, i.e. the policies aimed at choosing where a school can be built in a city, are quite neglected in the historical context. Indeed, studying the history of a school building means examining many variables belonging to very different fields of knowledge, including, for example, the ideological and political aims of the public or private body who decided to build the school, its pedagogical models, the laws that regulated the school building at the time, the teaching materials and the furnishings in use, the social and cultural needs of the population, the urban context in which the new building was to be located, etc. Research on the origin and evolution of school buildings therefore takes place at the crossroads between history, pedagogy and architecture and requires the methods and knowledge that come from all these disciplines.

The essay examines the history of the College of nobles of Turin, focusing on the architectural and urban aspects, and using it as a case study to reconstruct the beginnings of the scholastic policy of the Duchy of Savoy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It will therefore focus, on the one hand, on the educational purposes of this enterprise, and on the other hand on the material and representative functions that the grandiose school building has performed over the centuries.

<sup>1</sup> See as an example A. Viñao Frago, A.B. Escolano (edd.), *Curriculo, espaço e subjetividade. A arquitetura como programa*, Rio de Janeiro, DP&A, 1998; A.M. Chatelet, *L'architecture des écoles au XX siècle*, «Histoire de l'éducation», n. 102, 2004, pp. 7-37; P. Fossati, *L'edilizia per le scuole del popolo nell'Ottocento genovese*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 9, n. 2, 2014, pp. 445-466.

<sup>2</sup> See as an example F. Leschiutta, *Linee evolutive dell'edilizia scolastica. Vicende, norme, tipi. 1949- 1974*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1975; M. Daprà, *La fondazione dell'edilizia scolastica in Italia*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1987; S. Borri (ed.), *Spazi educativi e architetture scolastiche: linee e indirizzi internazionali*, Firenze, INDIRE, 2016.

## 2. *The beginnings of Turin as capital of the Duchy of Savoy and the first Jesuit schools*

Turin retained the structure of the Roman encampment until it became capital of the Duchy of Savoy following the Peace of Cateau-Cambresis (1559). Then began the work of building the capital, with the consequent effort to represent the grandeur and the royal power. Emanuele Filiberto triumphantly entered the city in 1563 and immediately took care of fortifying the new seat of the monarchy by having the military citadel, one of the largest in Europe, built just outside the walls, without actually affecting the size of the city.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Turin underwent two successive expansions: the first, begun in 1620, concerned the southern part of the city, with the creation of several blocks to the left and right of the Via Nuova (today Via Roma) designed by Ascanio Vittozzi in 1615 to connect the new Piazza Reale (today Piazza San Carlo) with Piazza Castello and the ducal palaces. The blocks of this extension were much larger than those of the Roman city, probably to give the opportunity to erect sumptuous palaces with courtyards, stables and gardens to the noble families. At the same time, in order to contain the ambitions and excesses of the nobles, the government imposed a uniform and symmetrical shape of the façades of the new buildings, characterized by the regularity of the blocks and the extremely ordered layout of the streets.

The second expansion, undertaken in 1673, started from the eastern part of the city and led it to expand towards the river, thanks to the opening of Via di Po, Piazza Carlina, the rear part of Piazza Castello and several blocks. In particular, piazza Carlina ended up joining the two expansions and assuming a prominent position in the city structure. The command area was made up of the buildings that, starting from the Royal Palace, ended with the *Palazzo della Zecca* (Palace of the Mint). It took on concrete and symbolic importance, since it hosted the representative and effective seats of Savoy power: the Royal Palace, the castle, the state secretariats, the archives, the Royal Academy, the theatre, the Mint, as well as the cathedral and the Church of San Lorenzo.

Since the opening of Contrada Nuova in 1615, «una nuova concezione compositiva, tendente a subordinare gli edifici singoli alla scala urbana dell'intervento» took hold<sup>3</sup>. When the great families of the Savoy elites, as well as the religious congregations, moved to the city, they were forced to adapt to the scenarios pre-established by the ruling dynasty and to build their palaces, churches, convents and shops according to government rules to make the facades uniform.

The Jesuits opened their first school in Turin immediately after the city's election as capital, in 1567, at the invitation of some aristocratic families, who had left a rich legacy of money for this purpose. The newly founded *Compagnia di San Paolo*, the one from which the bank of the same name would later be created, supported the initiative both financially and above all through its influential members. The foundation took place in a decidedly modest version, in the houses next to the church of San Benedetto, near the ancient Porta di Susa.

<sup>3</sup> V. Comoli Mandraci, *Torino*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1983, p. 27.

A few years later the schools moved to the Albosco house, who had purposely bequeathed it to the Jesuits «fra il monastero di Santa Croce e la Cittadella»<sup>4</sup>. In 1574, on the death of another founder, Aleramo Beccuti, the college was moved to his house, in the street currently called via Monte di Pietà. The premises were larger and the new location was in close proximity to the university. In 1578, the Jesuits were given the permission to erect their own church too, attached to the boarding school but with an entrance from one of the main streets of the city in Via Dora Grossa (today's Via Garibaldi), named after the Holy Martyrs.

Meanwhile, the boarding school for external students was added to that for internal students, so that the number of pupils increased considerably: in 1578, the “*Litterae Annuae*” of the college report that «il Collegio dei convittori è cresciuto a 120 scolari e se fosse più capace in breve si raddoppierebbe»<sup>5</sup>. The report then added that «le nostre scuole non sono mai state più illustri per numero di scolari e per nobiltà di convittori. Fra questi ben 48 sono fregiati dei titoli o di marchese, o di conte, o di abate»<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. *The long planning phase of the Collegio and the disputes between the Jesuits of Rome and Turin*

The proposal to build a grandiose College of nobles in the center of the city of Turin dates back to 1679, during the regency of the duchess Maria Giovanna Battista di Savoia Nemours, in a phase of relaxation of the ducal authoritarian system, which until then had directed every aspect of state life, including town planning and construction. The project of the Jesuit school is contemporary with the construction of Palazzo Carignano, which rises almost opposite the college. This is another building not typically aligned to the Turin style, designed by the great architect Guarino Guarini for Emanuele Filiberto di Savoia-Carignano with a highly innovative intention in the urban context of the city.

The architectural historian Giuseppe Dardanella pointed out that

nel progetto per il collegio dei nobili il “nuovo” prese forma per contrasto con il disegno della città “regolare”. Per distinguersi dall’immagine urbana di uniforme continuità, Carlo Maurizio Vota puntò tutto sul salto di scala: nella massa dell’edificio, nella ricchezza dell’ornamentazione, e nell’accentuato rilievo del modellato delle facciate. All’architettura si richiedeva di esprimere un atteggiamento aggressivo, di preminenza, nei confronti dello spazio circostante. La mole del collegio sarebbe emersa imponente dalla maglia ortogonale, ma la sua esterna apparenza, la sua facciata di smisurata lunghezza,

<sup>4</sup> E. Tesauro, *Istoria della Venerabile Compagnia della fede Cattolica sotto l’invocazione di S. Paolo*, Torino, Zappata, 1701, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> A. Monti, *La Compagnia di Gesù nel territorio della provincia torinese. Memorie storiche compilate in occasione del primo centenario della restaurazione di essa Compagnia*, Chieri, Gherardi, 1914-1920, vol. I: *Fondazioni antiche*, p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

si sarebbe adeguata alla partitura rettilinea del tessuto urbano, rispettandone i rigorosi allineamenti prospettici<sup>7</sup>.

As a royal building, the new college was to be distinguished from the other buildings, which had to comply with the rigid Savoy building regulations. Moreover, in his intentions, the college was to be connected, by means of tunnels and overhead bridges between the buildings, to Palazzo Madama «come un corpo Maestoso et Augusto il quale stendendo un braccio per lungo tratto, all'Academia cavalleresca, e l'altro al Colleggio de Nobili, abbraccia felicemente le parti più belle della città»<sup>8</sup>.

The Jesuits were *de facto* invested by the regency with the monopoly of the capital's educational institutions, from the lower schools to some university faculties, as demonstrated by the fact that they were rewarded with the donation of an emblematic site in the centre of the city, aimed at sealing a clear alliance between the regency and the Society of Jesus. By obtaining to build their headquarters in the blocks between Piazza Castello and Piazza Reale, the disciples of Saint Ignatius were in fact competing with those of the Theatines and the Filippini, until then the only ones located in the neuralgic areas of the residences of the Savoy court and nobility. Moreover, while waiting for the work on the new building to be completed, the duchess allowed the Jesuits to teach in the previous residence of the French ambassadors, in the adjacent Piazza Reale. Although the project is commonly attributed to Guarino Guarini, it was in fact the work of the Jesuit Carlo Maurizio Vota, who certainly felt quite strongly the influence of the great court architect.

Vota's idea was to transfer all the Order's educational activities to the new building, housing both secondary and university teaching, as well as external students and professors, in order to «dar principio all'Educazione D'alquanti Nobili che servissero di lievito alla Massa»<sup>9</sup>.

The boarding school inaugurated its teaching activities in the provisional premises granted by the Regent at the end of 1679, announcing the opening with a printed *Informazione per chi vuole essere ammesso nel Reale Collegio di Savoia della Compagnia di Gesù*:

Stando sommamente a cuore di Madama reale i vantaggi della nobiltà, che è l'ornamento e il sostegno maggiore gli Stati, e non volendo tralasciare alcuno dei mezzi più valevoli a segnalare la sua Reggenza, ha ordinato in questa metropoli di Torino la fondazione di un regio collegio, detto di Savoia, sotto la cura dei Padri della Compagnia di Gesù, [...] ove saranno i nobili educati ed ammaestrati nelle lettere e nei buoni costumi. [...] D'ordine della medesima Reale Altezza si pubblica il presente invito,

<sup>7</sup> G. Dardanello, *Il Collegio dei Nobili e la piazza del principe di Carignano (1675-1684)*, in G. Romano (ed.), *Torino 1675-1699. Strategie e conflitti del Barocco*, Torino, CRT, 1993, pp. 175-252, in particular pp. 178-179.

<sup>8</sup> Archivio di Stato di Torino, Sezione Corte (AST, Corte), *Conventi soppressi, Gesuiti di Torino*, mazzo 450, 17 novembre 1678, padre Vota, *Progetto prontamente praticabile del Colleggio de Nobili Riferito per ordine di M.R.le*, (Vota, *Progetto prontamente praticabile*), c. 4r.

<sup>9</sup> AST, Corte, Vota, *Progetto prontamente praticabile*, c. 1v.



non solamente ai cavalieri di questi Stati, ma ancora ai forestieri di qualunque nazione, che saranno indifferentemente accolti e protetti<sup>10</sup>.

The *Informazione* specified that the students would not receive lessons in riding and weapons, that they could not be taught by religious people, and that

distraggono soverchiamente dallo studio [...] riserbando ad apprendere con maggior profitto e vantaggio le accennate arti subito usciti dal collegio nella famosa Accademia ossia Cavallerizza Reale, che gloriosamente fiorisce in questa città, cogli auspicj di Madama Reale, sotto eccellenti direttori e maestri in ogni genere, col concorso dei più qualificati signori forestieri<sup>11</sup>.

In the new boarding school the curriculum provided by the *Ratio Studiorum* was activated, with the possibility for «i figliuoli più piccoli (i.e. under 9 years, Ed.) e non capaci delle scuole dei Padri» to be «ammaestrati nel medesimo collegio da un sacerdote secolare, in scuola separata dal comune degli altri, con maggior loro profitto, richiedendosi un'assistenza tutta intiera per essi soli»<sup>12</sup>.

In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the real and symbolic value of education was clear to everyone: a *Collegio dei nobili* would have attracted students and attention not only from Piedmont, but from all over Italy and Europe. The college was supposed to help bring glory to the royal family right from its name, *Reale Collegio di Savoia*. In the text that accompanied his drawings, Father Vota insisted precisely on the impact that the opening of a college like the one he was planning would have on the image of the Savoy:

Frà le magnanime imprese valevoli a segnalare le glorie della Reggenza, non meno che a eternarle nella Posterità delle Nazioni suddite e straniere, meritamente applicossi l'animo eccelso di M.R. sino dalli primi periodi del Governo, all'erezione d'un Reale Colleggio, da aprirsi alla gioventù Nobile Vassalla e forestiera<sup>13</sup>.

The example to which Father Vota explicitly referred to was that of the *Collegio dei nobili* of Parma which, thanks to the grandeur of the structures and the prestige of the teachers, had quickly entered the list of educational institutions attended by the scions of the noble families all over Europe<sup>14</sup>. Even before the building, the importance of the Jesuit boarding school was immediately suggested by the «unico» and «meraviglioso»<sup>15</sup> site where it was to be built. The *Collegio* would, in fact, be erected between the «città vecchia, Nuova e Novissima»<sup>16</sup> and very close to the nerve centre of the city, where the royal family

<sup>10</sup> AST, Corte, Materie economiche, Istruzione pubblica, Collegio delle Province e Collegio dei Nobili, mazzo 4 prima addizione, *Informazione per chi vuole essere ammesso nel Reale Collegio di Savoia della Compagnia di Gesù sotto la protezione di S.M.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> AST, Corte, Vota, *Progetto prontamente praticabile*, c. 1r.

<sup>14</sup> See G.P. Brizzi, *Educare il principe, formare le élites: i gesuiti e Ranuccio I Farnese*, in G.P. Brizzi, A. D'Alessandro, A. Del Fante (edd.), *Università, Principe, Gesuiti. La politica farnesiana dell'istruzione a Parma e Piacenza (1545-1622)*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> AST, Corte, Vota, *Progetto prontamente praticabile*, cc. 4v. e 3r.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2v.

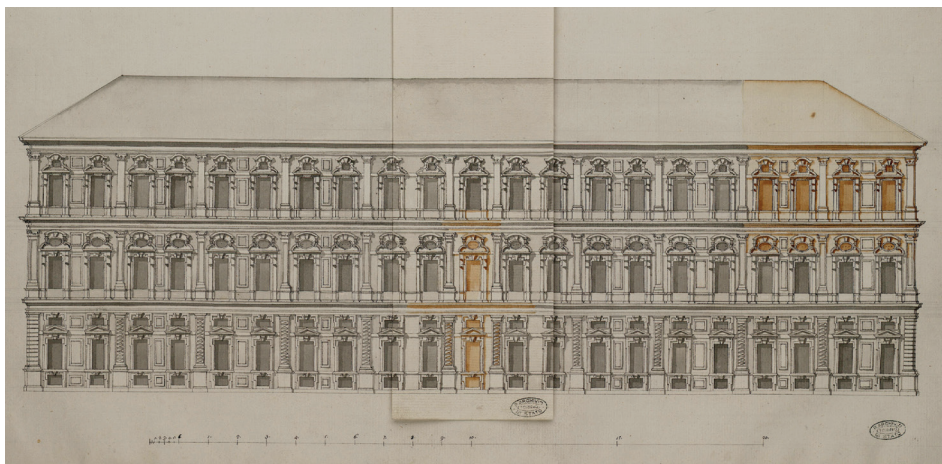


Fig. 1. Facade of the Royal College of Nobles, towards the Church of San Filippo, n.d. (State Archives of Turin, fond «Corte», series «Carte topografiche e disegni», Collegio dei Nobili, dossier 4)

resided and the government operated. After all, one of the fundamental elements of the enlargement plan commissioned by Carlo Emanuele II had been precisely to consolidate the ideological representation of power, using Piazza Castello and the ducal residences as the cornerstone of the three parts of the city. Moreover, being «equidistante dalle parti tutte della circonferenza»<sup>17</sup> of the city walls, it would have been easily accessible both to pupils outside the boarding school and to professors, who would have also continued to teach in the schools attached to the old college. It was indeed an extraordinarily central location, as it was close to both the palaces of power and to those of the nobility, who had begun to build sumptuous residences in the spaces recently opened up by the expansion of the city.

Vota's project immediately obtained the political and economic support of the Regent, who promised to allocate all the necessary resources to the grandiose enterprise. However, it met the very strong opposition of the Roman Jesuits, who had the task of approving each new building of the Company. Gilles de Gottignes, the Roman reviewer who was commissioned to give an opinion on the project, as well as a series of formal and substantial criticisms, wondered why «si faccia una fabrica per il semenario tanto ampia e magnifica, e nulla di meno in tal modo ordinata, che a pena possa servire per 50 seminaristi»<sup>18</sup>.

One of the strongest disapprovals made by De Gottignes was that the Turin college would have been far more majestic than the Roman College. The *Collegio di Savoia* seemed

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 4v.

<sup>18</sup> Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), *Provincia Mediolanensis*, vol. 90, *Collegio Taurinensis-Vercellensis*, cc. 320r-324v, in particular 321r.

disproportionate to him, not only with respect to the resources that, however munificent, would have been provided by the queen, but also with respect to the «grandezza troppo eccedente il numero de scolari che vi possono concorrere»<sup>19</sup>, given that the population of Turin was not even remotely comparable to that of Rome. The boarding school in Turin would have been «sommamente disdicevole alla modestia e povertà religiosa»<sup>20</sup>.

Therefore, a dispute arose between the Roman Jesuits, led by General Giovanni Paolo Oliva, and Father Vota, supported by the regent and the architect Michelangelo Garove, who would have later followed the construction site after the Jesuit's removal. The oppositions of the Roman general and reviewer were precisely due to the excessive majesty of the project, which was not at all in keeping with the austerity that Jesuit colleges and churches were supposed to inspire. For Vota, instead, it was a matter of making evident the royalty of the school and of its patron from the proportions of the building.

#### 4. *The brief school history of the Collegio di Savoia and its pedagogical peculiarities*

The final project on which the *Collegio di Savoia* was built was decidedly more modest than the one initially drawn up by Vota, but it did not lose either the centrality of the school in Turin's urban layout or its proximity to the palaces of power. However, by the time the Duchy was back under the secure control of Vittorio Amedeo II, the conditions that had allowed the construction of such an unusual urban space for Turin were no longer in place. The nearby Palazzo Carignano was also built according to Guarini's design but was not completed. And of the Jesuit complex, only part of the noblemen's boarding school was erected, while neither the church nor the seminary were even started.

The exhausting negotiations, more than two years long, between the Roman company and the Savoy and Vota ended in fact with the victory of the latter, but also with the Jesuit architect's removal from Turin. Work started on 14 April 1679 under the direction of Garove, but it was soon realised that the objections of the Roman Jesuits were well-founded: the costs were excessive for anyone. Therefore, already in 1687 it was decided to concentrate the work on the school. Basically, the main east wing and two side wings of the original project were completed, where the activities of the school probably started as early as 1688. Despite the strong downsizing, the Jesuit college was still taller than all the buildings around it, including the royal Palazzo Carignano.

Beyond the majestic entrance there was a gallery facing the courtyard, and at the bottom of it a grand staircase from which it was possible to control what was happening in the vast and luminous corridors that crossed the entire building. The staircase actually marked two souls of the boarding school: the representative one, set on the three very high floors facing the street, and which housed the large classrooms and the school facilities,

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 322v.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 323r.

and the residential one, built cheaply, set on six floors hidden inside the building, where the boarders' rooms were located.

From a pedagogical point of view, the boarding school designed by Father Vota had some very original characteristics: not unlike what was happening outside the borders of the duchy, the schools built in Turin by the State between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were based on the medieval typological model of the convent and all had a "cloister" structure. They were therefore conceived as a space closed off from the rest of the city, suitable, as monasteries were, for reflection and study. Since his project, however, the *Collegio di Savoia* was inspired by a different model. No cloister and open access on what would become one of the city's main streets. It was indeed, in Father Vota's intentions, a different kind of school, certainly designed with representational purposes in mind, but also responding to different pedagogical needs than those that would later inspire the schools built by the government. Differently from other Jesuit school buildings where the courtyard represented one of the central places of school life, in the *Collegio di Savoia* it seems to have rather had practical functions. This is led to believe by the small size, the lack of flowerbeds and trees, the presence of a winch to lift the laundry to the upper floors and a secondary entrance. Breaktime used to take place preferably by means of walks in the town, outside the boarding school walls.

Even the organization of the interior spaces was original: the individual rooms, located on two floors, overlooked a large rectangular hall, illuminated by large windows. All bedrooms had doors to the hall and also shared a bathroom. In such hall, it is likely that lessons and tutoring were held for the boarders who were divided according to homogenous ages and similar curricula<sup>21</sup>.

This arrangement allowed for a more rational use of space: the services were mostly located at the ends of the galleries. On the ground floor, on the left, two chapels and the sacristy; on the right, the dining hall and the kitchen. On the noble floor, on the right, the theater and the stage, above which there were large rooms used for tailoring and storage. It is however probable that the failure to complete the entire college project deprived it of some spaces, such as an adequate library, the sick bay and other staff rooms.

##### *5. The end of teaching activities and the transformation of the Collegio di Savoia into a museum centre*

As early as 1710, given the high maintenance costs of the majestic building, parts of the palace were rented out. These were the wings facing the two streets and limiting the main façade. Towards Piazza Carignano there were also several shops, including a bakery, and there was an entrance, which still exists today, giving access to the rented flats. The

<sup>21</sup> This organization of spaces has been defined "unità d'aggregazione" by L. Falco, R. Plantamura, S. Ranzato, *Le istituzioni per l'istruzione superiore in Torino dal XV al XVIII secolo: considerazioni urbanistiche e architettoniche. Il Collegio dei nobili*, «Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino», vol. 71, 1973, p. 163.

*Collegio di San Filippo* was housed on the noble floor for a few decades<sup>22</sup>, while other rooms, accessed directly from the main entrance of the palace, such as the hall where students could meet with family members and other guests, were later granted to the Stamperia Reale.

Also on the opposite side, on today's Via Maria Vittoria, there were several lodgings rented out to private individuals. It was in one of these that the Academy of Sciences was installed, a few years after the suppression of the Society of Jesus. This was the accommodation on the noble floor, which before 1784 was occupied by doctor Rejneri, the king's surgeon. In that year, having heard that the surgeon was looking for new accommodation, the founders of the Academy asked the king for permission to occupy the flat. They also asked for permission to carry out extensive renovation work on the premises, transforming what had been the theatre at the time of the boarding school into the magnificent hall where the academic meetings are still held today.

Since the Jesuits were suppressed in 1773 and had to leave the school, the building gradually but inexorably changed its function and use. The republican government set up in Turin by revolutionary France turned it into the local "Pritaneo nazionale", the ancestor of the Napoleonic "liceo", which was, however, short-lived. The closure of the Pritaneo effectively marked the end of the building's scholastic use, which from that moment onwards housed some important museum collections. Between 1802 and 1804, many rooms of the college were converted in order to house the Natural Science Museum. A few years later, the Finance archive was also moved there, but the most significant change came in 1824-5 with the placement of the holdings of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, which at that time included only the funds of Bernardino Drovetti, in the premises of the school. This was a strategic choice on the part of the government, driven by a public opinion fascinated not only by the finds from Egypt, but especially by the discoveries that internationally renowned Egyptologists, such as Champollion, were making thanks to those sources. From then on, the building definitively lost its original scholastic vocation to clearly assume a museum function. To this end, in 1825 the court architect Giuseppe Maria Talucchi built a new wing intended precisely to house the Egyptian Museum, as well as a new entrance portal, more courtly and more suited to the building's new appearance.

In 1829, again in line with the new identity of the former school, the materials of the University Museum of Antiquities were transferred there. The collections grew to such an extent that in 1854 it was necessary to build a new wing inside the courtyard by the architect Luigi Federico Menabrea. In 1863-4, the Finance archive was transferred to a new location so the museum pole was able to host the works of art from the *Pinacoteca sabauda*.

Over the decades, the exhibits of the Ancient Egypt became more and more numerous and valuable. It was, therefore, necessary to move the other collections: already in 1876 the Museum of Natural Sciences, which had first entered the premises of the former school, was transferred elsewhere. A century later, in 1980, it was the turn of the Museum

<sup>22</sup> NG.C. Craveri, *Guida de' Forestieri per la Real Città di Torino*, Torino, Rameletti, 1753, p. 87.

of Antiquities, which in the meantime had become the Archaeological Museum, and in 2014 the *Pinacoteca*, now called *Galleria Sabauda*, also left the building designed by Father Vota.

For the more than 800.000 visitors who admire its facades and cross its threshold every year, the original function of the building is absolutely not recognizable, but even the majority of Turin residents are unaware of the origins of what is now the Egyptian Museum. In a certain sense, the ruin of the *Collegio di Savoia* marked the victory of the building that had housed the boarding school, in the sense that it freed the majestic spaces from their original function and made them available for more courtly purposes and a wider use by the citizenship. Paradoxically, but also with a remarkable ability to understand the future, the Jesuits of Rome had criticized the project of the *Collegio di Savoia* precisely for its excessive majesty, which seemed inappropriate for a school, moreover in a medium-sized city. Father Vota had dreamed of a different school model, certainly designed for representation purposes, but open to citizens and not folded back to the central courtyard of medieval origin, as was the case for all the schools built by the government again in the following century: an idea probably too innovative and not always applicable for a school, but perfect for a museum.

# Restoring Memories of an Old School in Museums and Open-Air Museums in Poland\*

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## *Introduction*

The memory of an old school may be recalled in various manners and presented in numerous places. In educational institutions and cultural institutions, we can create educational projects, reread school chronicles, present photo and document galleries in the form of school, museum and archival exhibitions or organize meetings with teachers, thus commemorating their work in various periods of activities of the institution. We can also collect classroom objects through preserved artefacts, which are often in attics of private houses, as well as search for documents and school equipment at online auctions. At the same time, this memory of an old school is restored outdoors and in the open air in the form of a reconstructed classroom, teachers' room and objects, which create the common school space and are often translocated and arranged around the school building. This image is complemented by the reconstructed teacher's apartment and principal's office, located in the vicinity of the classroom and with its interior and furnishings resembling the image given to the room in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The aim of this article is to show the role of reconstructed public facilities/rooms in restoring the memory of an old school. As regards the manner of presentation, the place and number of reconstructed schools, classrooms and teachers' apartments, this article emphasises open-air museums. However, in the context of the presented problem, it is worth noting, for example, the role of museums in collection and dissemination of their collections in the reconstructed school rooms and indicate examples of their occurrence. However, they do not constitute the mainstream of deliberations. Therefore, the presented problem in the proposed formula will certainly not exhaust the topic, merely contributing to further research in this field.

\* The paper was written as based on conversations with employees of museums and open-air museums.



### 1. *Open-air museum in Poland*

The interest in folk culture, and, thus, in folk architecture in the territory of Poland, dates to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then the idea of developing regionalism was aimed at, among others, preservation and commemoration of regional traditions and culture<sup>1</sup>. These activities resulted in development of regional and ethnographic museums were created in Poland, whereas the concept of accumulating rural architecture resources in an open area was implemented at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first open-air museum was established in 1906 in Wdzydze Kiszewskie as the Museum – The Teodora and Izidor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park on the border of two areas: the Kashubian Lake District and Bory Tucholskie<sup>2</sup>. Another two oldest open-air museums, which started their activities in the interwar period include the Adam Chętnik Kurpiowski Open-Air Museum in Nowogród (established in 1927)<sup>3</sup> and the Museum of Folk Architecture – Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek (established in 1909 as the Village Museum in Królewiec, and then relocated to Olsztynek in 1938–1942). It is worth mentioning that, in terms of its area of 95 hectares<sup>4</sup>, it is the largest ethnographic museum in Poland.

As a result of war activities during the Second World War, the ethnographic collections of the open-air museums accumulated over the years were almost destroyed or could not be recovered, which resulted in irretrievable loss<sup>5</sup>. Despite such huge losses, right after the war, the above-mentioned open-air museums in Wdzydze Kiszewskie, Nowogród and Olsztynek resumed their activities. Another period marked by a revival in establishment of open-air museums was in the 1950s. In that period such museums as the Museum – Orawa Ethnographic Park in Zubrzyca Górna (1955) and the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok (1958) were established. The heyday of open-air museums was as late as in the 1970s. In that period, due to urbanization of the countryside, the process of disappearance of historical objects of folk culture began, which, in turn, resulted in the need to protect the tangible and intangible heritage. Then, the existing open-air museums were extended, and exhibitions were supplemented with functional elements, tools and exhibits of everyday life. It was also then that the largest number of such facilities were built, currently totalling to 30<sup>6</sup> in Poland. It is also worth mentioning that, apart from

<sup>1</sup> F. Midura, *Muzealnictwo skansenowskie w Polsce (stan obecny i perspektywy rozwoju)*, in F. Midura (ed.), *Muzea skansenowskie w Polsce*, Poznań, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne, 1979, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> T. Sadkowski, *Katalog tradycyjnego budownictwa w Muzeum – Kaszubskim Parku Etnograficznym we Wdzydzech*, Wdzydze Kiszewskie, Drukarnia Księży Werbistów, 2018, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> B. Kunicki, *Park etnograficzny północno-wschodniego Mazowsza im. Adama Chętnika w Nowogrodzie*, in Midura (ed.), *Muzea skansenowskie w Polsce*, cit., p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> *Początki muzeum – historia*, <https://muzeumolsztynek.pl/o-muzeum/historia/> (last access: 20.02.2023).

<sup>5</sup> A. Spiss, *Muzea etnograficzne na wolnym powietrzu w Europie*, Warszawa, Ośrodek Dokumentacji Zabytków, 1984, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37; J. Świąch, *Wprowadzenie*, in J. Sierackiewicz, J. Świąch (edd.), *Skanseny. Muzea na wolnym powietrzu w Polsce*, Olszanica, Wydawnictwo Bosz, 1999, pp. 8-9. To find out more about development of open-air museums in Poland, see J. Czajkowski, *Muzea na wolnym powietrzu w Europie*, Rzeszów–Sanok, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1984, pp. 210-220.

the above-mentioned open-air museums, there are more than thirty so-called *in situ* folk architecture complexes, which are facilities that remained where they were created in their natural surroundings and landscape<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. *The context of surrounding areas*

In order to save and consolidate the above-mentioned tradition and, in particular, the immaterial tradition, both the material, spiritual and social culture of inhabitants of a given region is presented. Open-air museums play a great role in this respect, as, through exhibitions of wooden architecture, they not only visualize everyday lives of inhabitants of nearby towns, but, above all, through the number of exhibits, they present the richness and diversity of the cultural life of a given region. In reconstructed residential buildings (e.g. cottages, mansions), residential and farm buildings (e.g. stables, sheepfolds, pigsties), a mill, sawmill, craft plants (e.g. forges, dye houses, oil mills, potters, fulling mills) public buildings are erected, including an inn, fire station, church, which, depending on their location, indicate the cultural specificity of a given region. Considering all this, we are dealing with a variety of facilities and the exhibits gathered in one place create a compact complex of buildings typical of a given period. In this rich scenery, wooden architecture is presented as an example of residential, religious, economic and public buildings dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which makes it possible to learn about the equipment and methods of producing various products. Additionally, the workshop of a home maker, host, craftsman or miller shows various types of activities of inhabitants of the region, their everyday life, customs and traditions as well as illustrates wider socio-cultural phenomena of the regional history with the use of original sources from the region.

Therefore, the above-mentioned facilities include one more public utility building that is inextricably linked with the cultural landscape, namely the school. At the same time, the method of its presentation should be distinguished from those displaying other objects of wooden architecture. Statistically, out of 30 open-air museums located in Poland<sup>8</sup>, more than half of them include a reconstructed school and/or a classroom and a teacher's apartment such as those found in Chorzów, Ciechanowiec (Winna Chroły), Wdzydze Kiszewskie, Nowy Sącz, Olsztynek, Zubrzyca Górna, Sierpc, Dziekanowice, Lublin, Kłóbka, Opole, Osiek nad Notecią, Sanok, Tokarnia, Wygiełzów, Wasilków and Maurzyce. It is worth mentioning the educational institution, which was relocated to

<sup>7</sup> Święch, *Wprowadzenie*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> The number of open-air museums in Poland was assumed as based on the literature on the subject: Sierackiewicz, Święch (edd.), *Skanseny*, cit.; *Muzea na wolnym powietrzu w Polsce*, «Biuletyn Stowarzyszenia Muzeów na Wolnym Powietrzu», n. 11, 2009, pp. 171-175; *Kalejdoskop muzealny: działalność muzeów na wolnym powietrzu w Polsce w latach 2016-2020*, «Biuletyn Stowarzyszenia Muzeów na Wolnym Powietrzu», n. 16, 2021, pp. 106-176.

the village of Winna Chroły, where school rooms were reconstructed in a wooden school building standing *in situ*<sup>9</sup>.

Selected open-air museums in Poland, in which classrooms and teachers' apartments may be found (prepared by Agnieszka Wieczorek based on the websites of open-air museums and her own observations):

- Chorzów, Muzeum “Górnośląski Park Etnograficzny w Chorzowie” (“The Ethnographic Park in Chorzów” Museum) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Ciechanowiec (Winna Chroły), Muzeum Rolnictwa im. ks. Krzysztofa Kluka w Ciechanowcu (The Priest Krzysztof Kluk Museum of Agriculture in Ciechanowiec) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Dziekanowice, Wielkopolski Park Etnograficzny w Dziekanowicach (Wielkopolska Ethnographic Park in Dziekanowice) – classroom
- Kłóbka, Kujawsko-Dobrzyński Park Etnograficzny w Kłóbce (The Ethnographic Park of the Kujawsko-Dobrzyński District in Kłóbka) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Lublin, Muzeum Wsi Lubelskiej w Lublinie (The Lublin Open Air Village Museum)<sup>10</sup>
- Maurzyce, Skansen Oddział Muzeum w Łowiczu (The Open-Air Museum, a Division of the Museum in Łowicz) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Nowy Sącz, Sądecki Park Etnograficzny w Nowym Sączu (The Sądecki Ethnographic Park) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Olsztynek, Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Park Etnograficzny w Olsztynku (Museum of Folk Architecture – Ethnographic Park) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Opole, Muzeum Wsi Opolskiej w Opolu (The Museum of Rural Life in Opole) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Osiek nad Notecią, Muzeum Kultury Ludowej w Osieku nad Notecią (The Museum of Folk Culture in Osiek nad Notecią) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Sanok, Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku (The Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Sierpc, Muzeum Wsi Mazowieckiej w Sierpcu (The Museum of Rural Life in Sierpc) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Tokarnia, Muzeum Wsi Kieleckiej – Park Etnograficzny w Tokarni (The Kielce Countryside Museum – Ethnographic Park in Tokarnia) – classroom, teacher’s apartment
- Wasilków, Podlaskie Muzeum Kultury Ludowej w Wasilkowie (The Podlaskie Folklore Museum) – classroom
- Wdzydze Kiszewskie, Muzeum – Kaszubski Park Etnograficzny im. Teodory i Izydora Gulgowskich we Wdzydzech Kiszewskich (The Museum – The Teodora and Izidor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park) – classroom, teacher’s apartment

<sup>9</sup> *Szkoła wiejska w Winnie Chroły – obiekt zamiejscowy*, <https://www.muzeumrolnictwa.pl/muzeum/wystawy-stale/szkola-wiejska-w-winnie-chroly-obiekt-zamiejscowy> (last access: 22.02.2023).

<sup>10</sup> There is only a school building in Lublin.

- Wygiełzów, Muzeum – Nadwiślański Park Etnograficzny w Wygiełzowie (The Museum – The Vistula River Ethnographic Park in Wygiełzów) – classroom, teacher's apartment
- Zubrzyca Górna, Orawski Park Etnograficzny w Zubrzycy Górnej (The Museum – Orawa Ethnographic Park in Zubrzyca Górna) – classroom, teacher's apartment

Another way to restore the memory of the old school are classrooms displayed in museums as part of permanent or temporary exhibitions. Due to the nature of the institution and exhibits presented in the museums, the museums often offer a thematic exhibition, referring to the time space of the presented exhibits and constitute a part of the main exhibition. An example of this is the Museum of World War II in Gdańsk, where one of the two elements of the exhibition entitled "Podróż w czasie" (Travel in time) is a classroom with presented conditions, in which students studied during the Second World War<sup>11</sup>. An extremely important role is played here by the historical context understood as the close surroundings of the presented place, contributing to better understanding of difficult conditions of living and studying during the occupation. Another example is the Polish Teachers' Museum in Piłszków. Due to the conspiratorial congress of teachers held in the museum in 1905, a decision was made to display, apart from the exhibition concerning the history of the Polish teachers' union, school rooms found in the building, i.e. the classroom (Photograph 1) and the teacher's apartment dating back to the 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The National Museum of Przemyśl Land in Przemyśl, cooperating with the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok organized an exhibition of the classroom entitled "Dawna klasa" (An old classroom)<sup>12</sup>. However, the exhibition is slightly different in nature. The decoration of the classroom from the times of the Partitions of Poland (1772-1918), the interwar period (1918-1939) and post-war period was enriched with offices equipped with teaching aids. The teaching aids include, among others, microscopes, reagents, anatomical gypsum models used in anatomy, botany, geography or physics classes.

As regards the above-mentioned open-air museums, reconstructions of rural schools began in the 1970s. The first school building was reconstructed in 1976-1977 in Wdzydze Kiszewskie, where the school was relocated from Więckowy, dating back from the time when it served as a rural elementary school, i.e. until 1887<sup>13</sup>. Most often, school buildings are reconstructed as based on facilities functioning as educational institutions in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1920s and 1930s. One of the oldest buildings, in terms of its origin, is a school dating back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had been relocated from Lipnica Wielka to the open-air museum in Zubrzyca Górna<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Muzeum II Wojny Światowej w Gdańsku, <https://muzeum1939.pl/wystawa-dla-dzieci-podroz-w-czasie/4354.html> (last access: 22.02.2023).

<sup>12</sup> B. Mocarska-Szwic, *Dawna klasa*, <https://mnzp.pl/dawna-klasa/> (last access: 22.02.2023).

<sup>13</sup> Sadkowski, *Katalog tradycyjnego budownictwa w Muzeum*, cit., p. 364. The school building has a classroom, school corridor, a teacher's apartment (a room, kitchen and pantry) as well as a vestibule and a hall adjacent to the residential part.

<sup>14</sup> *Muzeum Orawski Park Etnograficzny w Zubrzycy Górnej. Krótki przewodnik po skansenie*, Zubrzyca Górna, Wydawnictwo Oficyna Artystów SZTUKA Regional Art., 2008, p. 28.



Photo. 1. A classroom, the Polish Teachers' Museum in Pilaszów (the author of the photograph: Agnieszka Wieczorek)

School reconstructed recently include classrooms dating back to the 1930s and 1960s. It is also worth mentioning that in most open-air museums, they decided to relocate a school building operating in a given region, following previous demolition works. Therefore, in descriptions of objects found in an open-air museum, we often find such terms as a school (e.g. in Kłóbka)<sup>15</sup> or a school farm (e.g. in Wdzydze Kiszewskie)<sup>16</sup>. In other cases, a classroom was reconstructed in one of the rooms of a middle-class peasant's farm from 1910 (including in Sierpc: a farm from the village of Ostrów) as modelled on 2-4 class schools dating back to the interwar period<sup>17</sup>. Considering the educational context, in order to make the exhibition more attractive, they also decided to reconstruct a teacher's apartment dating back to the interwar period in the same homestead. In the Folk Culture Museum in Osiek, they arranged a one-class school and a teacher's apartment inside a cottage (a cottage from Dźwierszno Wielkie dating back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>18</sup>. It is similar with the furnishing of rooms. School items, teaching aids, class

<sup>15</sup> Kłóbka: The Ethnographic Park of the Kujawsko-Dobrzyński District in Kłóbka.

<sup>16</sup> Wdzydze Kiszewskie: The Museum – The Teodora and Izydor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park.

<sup>17</sup> Sierpc: The Museum of Rural Life in Sierpc.

<sup>18</sup> Osiek nad Notecią: The Folk Culture Museum in Osiek, [http://www.muzeum.pila.pl/wystawy.php?lang=pl&id\\_strony=76](http://www.muzeum.pila.pl/wystawy.php?lang=pl&id_strony=76) (last access: 22.02.2023).

documentation (school journals, diplomas, photographs, school reports) presented in classrooms may date back to the same period as the school facility, but often a classroom is equipped with items from a later period the school's activities, e.g. dating back to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s or from the surrounding institutions of the region and, in other cases, they were simply purchased or acquired for the purposes of the exhibition. Thus, the reconstructed school brings the memory of a teacher's, student's and principal's work on the one hand and, on the other hand, the spatial layout of the educational institution is exhibited, with functions of individual rooms divided into teaching and living.

### 3. *The spatial and historical context*

The main characters of the reconstructed schools include teachers, students and principals of the institution. And although we do not see them (although some exhibitions show their figures using the teacher's and students' mannequins), by the manner, in which the items were displayed, they undoubtedly create the atmosphere of a classroom, a teacher's apartment and a principal's office dating back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 1920s and 30s and the post-war period of the last century. In chronological terms, we are dealing with facilities/rooms, which, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were found in the area of three partitions, and during the Second World War were affected by the policy of the occupation authorities towards the education system.

The geopolitical changes had an impact on reconstruction of the above-mentioned school rooms dating back to various historical periods. Along with reconstruction of a classroom, it was possible to capture changes in the interior as regards teaching aids, textbooks, student accessories, furniture or clothes typical of a given historical period. Looking at the equipment of a classroom in various versions of a given historical period and the history of the region, we can see that the interior of rooms connected with a school has evolved. Apart from school items typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as a teacher's desk that was sometimes erected above the school floor, desks with a tilted desktop (with a characteristic recess for school supplies and a hole for an inkwell located in the middle of the upper part of the desk), sitting benches, an abacus, a pen case, ink pot, writing pens, nibs, bell, wooden satchels and black slate tablets for students, there are also kerosene lamps, maps, clocks and calligraphy boards. The central space of a classroom is occupied by a black board (the colour of which is green in reconstructions from later years) hanging on the wall or standing in the vicinity of the teachers' cathedral (Photograph 2). The classroom exposition is made even more attractive by school documents placed in glass windows. Depending on an exhibition, the documents include, among others, school certificates dating back to the 1920s, making it possible for us to learn about the assessment system in the field of behaviour, diligence and learning progress (including in Polish, geometry, natural science, drawings, handicrafts, singing), games and gymnastics, grade sheets and textbooks. The image is complemented by collections of writing materials such as inkwells and "Omnium" and





Photo. 2. A classroom, The Museum – The Teodora and Izydor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park in Wdzydze Kiszewskie (the author of the photograph: Agnieszka Wieczorek)

“Demon” pencils from Stanisław Majewski’s factory, which were popular in the interwar period. It is worth adding that “Polonia 340” technical pencils won a gold medal at the world exhibition organized in Paris in 1937<sup>19</sup>.

Widening the field of view, we will discern that reconstructions are carriers of historical and regional knowledge. On the classroom wall dating back to the interwar period and above the teacher’s cathedral, there are reproductions of portraits of Marshal Józef Piłsudski and Ignacy Mościcki, the President of the Republic of Poland, in the vicinity of the cross and the state emblem, which constituted a permanent element of classroom equipment in schools dating back to the 1930s. Due to the political role played by the marshal in the Republic of Poland, the marshal’s image was usually presented in a uniform. Also in relation to the regional context, it is worth mentioning characteristic teaching aids, which constitute unique elements of equipment for a given community. In the classroom reconstructed in Wdzydze Kiszewskie we can see the Kashubian alphabet

<sup>19</sup> *Historia fabryki ołówków St. Majewski w Pruszkowie 1889–1948*, Pruszków, Książnica Pruszkowska im. Henryka Sienkiewicza, 2016, p. 73.





Photo. 3. A teacher's apartment, the Ethnographic Park of the Kujawsko-Dobrzyński District in Kłóbka (the author of the photograph: Agnieszka Wiczorek)

(in the Kashubian language: Kaszëbscë abecadło)<sup>20</sup> placed on the wall as well as textbooks in the Kashubian language.

Apart from the didactic function, we can also distinguish between an educational and hygienic space in the classroom. Classrooms were often equipped with a leather whip often found on a teacher's desk and used for punishing for even most minor offenses. Another types of punishment for students were, among others, standing in a corner, sitting on a dunce's stool or kneeling on pea bags. Additionally, the school took care of basic hygiene. A very important aspect of the exhibition in the open-air classroom is its presentation of a hygienic corner with a bowl placed on a cupboard and a water jug or bucket (e.g. in Wdzydze Kiszewskie, Sierpc). A towel used to hung next to it.

A teacher's apartment is a coexisting factor connected directly with the classroom. There we may find both very modestly furnished rooms (equipped with a bed, table, chairs, desk, wardrobe) as well as richly arranged lounges equipped with eclectic furniture such as a desk, a glass showcase with books, a table with chairs, a clock, a wardrobe and a turntable (e.g. in Wdzydze Kiszewskie, Kłóbka) (Photograph 3). On

<sup>20</sup> The Kashubian alphabet is a traditional Kashubian song (counting) being a part of the Kashubian folklore.



Photo. 4. A school principal's office, the Ethnographic Park of the Kujawsko-Dobrzyński District in Kłóbka (the author of the photograph: Agnieszka Wieczorek)

the table, covered with a tablecloth, there is a porcelain tea set and a mirror in a wooden frame (e.g. in Wdzydze Kiszewskie) hanging on the wall. The floor is covered with a carpet. There are white curtains hanging in the windows, which became popular in the 1920s. Such an interior design undoubtedly proves a teacher's sublime taste. It is worth mentioning that in the teacher's apartment dating back to the 1960s there is a TV set and in the reconstructed staff room there is a black telephone with a handle (Winna Chroły)<sup>21</sup>.

Another coexisting factor is the kitchen, which may sometimes be found in front of the lounge. As in his case, the equipment is diversified, ranging from a modest room with a wooden bed, a chest of drawers, a hygienic corner and a stove to a more sophisticated interior, which is functionally furnished with decorative dishes hanging on the wall, a hygienic corner with a towel and soap, an iron, a kitchen, curtains in the windows and a kitchen table with chairs.

The third coexisting factor is the school principal's/administrator's office. However, this room is not often to be found in reconstructed school buildings. One of the open-air museums, which features this type of room is the museum in Kłóbka. The school principal's office is equipped with a desk, wardrobe, typewriter, clock and first aid kit (Photograph 4). On the wall in the central place there are portraits of Marshal Józef Piłsudski and Ignacy Mościcki, the President of the Republic of Poland around the state emblem.

It is also worth noting that the arrangement of school rooms is complemented by a garden and a utility room. In the case of the school in Wdzydze Kiszewskie, both these buildings were reconstructed. In the garden, which also had an educational function, the plants, vegetables and trees are modelled on those, which were grown during the school's operation (including apple trees, beans) and the utility room dating back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century served as sanitary facilities. What is interesting, the facility relocated from Kaliska (in Wdzydze Kiszewskie) used to have toilets for children in the added eastern part of the building<sup>22</sup> (Photograph 5).

<sup>21</sup> *Szkola wiejska w Winnie Chroły – obiekt zamiejscowy* <https://www.muzeumrolnictwa.pl/muzeum/wystawy-stale/szkola-wiejska-w-winnie-chroly-obiekt-zamiejscowy> (last access: 22.02.2023).

<sup>22</sup> Toilets for children in school outbuildings were constructed as ordered by the Prussian educational authorities at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Educational institutions had to apply to public administration authorities for construction of sanitary rooms and wells. The school outbuildings from Kaliska are composed of

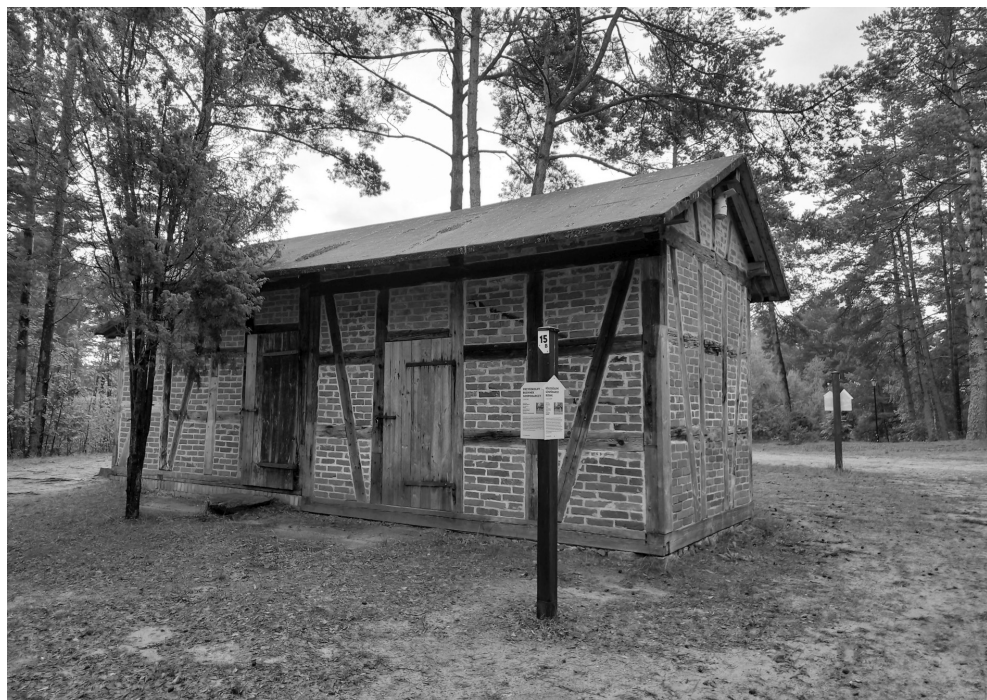


Photo. 5. The school's outbuilding from Kaliska, the Teodora and Izydor Gulgowski Kashubian Ethnographic Park in Wdzydze Kiszewskie (the author of the photograph: Agnieszka Wieczorek)

### *Conclusions*

It is undoubtable that reconstructions of school rooms carry an emotional charge. Regardless of their equipment, these places being back memories of school years in almost every visitor. The interior designs of original historical buildings make it possible to compare the remembered traces of the past with the present, placing the memory of the old school in the historical and architectural context. The arrangement of the school interior not only reflects the times, in which the school operated, thus giving it the atmosphere and spirit of the era, but it also contributes to the knowledge of the regional history, everyday lives of inhabitants and elements typical of construction of educational institutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

two parts, namely the western part built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for animals and the eastern part added at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to one of the gable ends, in which toilets for children could be found. In 1995, the school outbuildings were handed over to the Kashubian Ethnographic Park and then demolished. In 1996, the outbuildings were rebuilt in the premises of the Museum in Wdzydze Kiszewskie. More reading on this subject in: Sadkowski, *Katalog tradycyjnego budownictwa w Muzeum*, cit., pp. 369-371.



# Corporate History in the Education Business\*

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## *Introduction*

Corporate history, the key focus of this study, have traditionally been analysed in the fields of economic and business history. Most authors coincide in defining a corporate history as a historical account of a private company, cultivated and spread by the latter<sup>1</sup>. Some studies have shown that the components of this account and the mechanisms used to spread it tend to follow a repeated pattern, leading to claims that this is a genre all of its own<sup>2</sup>. Some examples of the main components used by companies to weave a corporate history are: recognition of the company's founders; the establishment of important landmarks, ordered sequentially; and the acknowledgement of external collaborators who played a decisive role in the company's success<sup>3</sup>.

Corporate history might be inferred to have no association with the field of education, with the concept solely being limited to the business world. However, one type of school – religious schools – has tended to operate as a business, despite its educational function<sup>4</sup>. According to Antonio Viñao, numerous religious schools have designed and disseminated an institutional historical account of similar characteristics to that of a corporate history<sup>5</sup>. Despite this, compared with studies of non-educational organizations, few research studies in the field of educational history have explored this issue. Among the few examples that can be found, two particularly noteworthy ones are the study by Marjo Nieminen of anniversary books published for a Finnish school and the study by Alice Fucs of the means used to spread the corporate history of a private school in Rio de Janeiro<sup>6</sup>.

\* This research was carried out within the framework of project (PID2020-113677GB-I00, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033).

<sup>1</sup> A. Sivula, *Corporate history culture and useful industrial past: A case study on history management in Finnish cotton company Porin Puuvilla Oy*, «Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore» vol. 57, 2014, pp. 29-54.

<sup>2</sup> A. Blombäck, O. Brunninge, *Corporate identity manifested through historical references*, «Corporate Communications: An International Journal», vol. 14, n. 4, 2009, pp. 404-419; A. Delahaye et alii, *The genre of corporate history*, «Journal of Organizational Change Management», vol. 22, 2009, pp. 27-48.

<sup>3</sup> C. Booth et alii, *La memoria social en las organizaciones. Los métodos que las organizaciones usan para recordar el pasado*, «Revista Empresa y Humanismo», vol. 8, n. 2, 2005, pp. 95-131.

<sup>4</sup> Doctoral thesis by S. Moll Bagur, *L'educació masculina en els col·legis religiosos de la Postguerra (1939-1945)*, Universitat de les Illes Balears (Supervisors: F. Comas Rubí, B. Sureda García), a.y. 2021-2022.

<sup>5</sup> A. Viñao, *Las autobiografías, memorias y diarios como fuente histórico-educativa: tipología y usos*, «Revista Teías», vol. 1, n. 1, 2000, pp. 1-26.

<sup>6</sup> M. Nieminen, *From elite traditions to middle-class cultures: images of secondary education in the anniversary books of a Finnish girls' school, 1882-2007*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 52, n. 3, 2016, pp. 236-251; Master



The research study presented in this paper aspired to analyse the components of the corporate history disseminated by religious schools and the mechanisms used for this purpose. To do so, a decision was taken to use Sant Francesc de Sales School (Ciutadella, Minorca, the Balearic Islands) as a case study. This centre, run by the Salesians, illustrates some of the procedures used in strategies by religious schools to create and spread an account of their history. As for the chronological framework of the study, it focuses on the Spanish post-war period (1939-1945), a point in history characterized by a new totalitarian regime in Spain and a radical breakaway from the educational and religious policies of former democratic governments, which had impeded the activities of these schools<sup>7</sup>.

### 1. *Methodology*

The study in question, identified in accordance with the latest historiographical trends, takes a cross-cutting historical approach, since the aid of other branches of historical science and other social sciences were needed to achieve the intended goals. This can be noted in different methodological aspects of the research study, such as the selection and review of different sources. For instance, if the main goal of a study is to explore a social strategy directed at the systematic recollection of a certain history by a social group, then sociological aspects are necessarily involved; specifically, social studies of memory. According to leading authors in this field, to tackle this phenomenon, one key concept must be taken into account: realms of memory. Pierre Nora defines them as informative artefacts vested with a series of material, functional and symbolic meanings, aimed at transmitting a past to a group of people<sup>8</sup>. Majken Shultz and Tor Hernes focus on private organizations, classifying these “memory spaces” according to their format and highlighting the following types: text based (books, magazines, leaflets etc.), material (flags, paintings, objects etc.) and oral (myths, speeches, conversations etc.)<sup>9</sup>.

If these concepts are applied to Sant Francesc de Sales School, a series of organizational realms of memory can be identified that serve to glorify foundational myths, to establish the order of historical events, to pay tribute to benefactors, and to extoll the school’s most celebrated ex-students. These diverse realms of memory, with their numerous individual peculiarities, can be summarized into publications, public acts and rituals, a hidden curriculum, and institutional symbols.

To understand the role that they each played in the systematic dissemination of a corporate history, different historical sources must be consulted and analysed. A wide

Thesis by A. Fucs, *O papel da memória na (re)construção de identidade organizacional: o caso da escola Edem*, Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (Supervisor: A. de Sá Mello da Costa), a.y. 2018-2019.

<sup>7</sup> E. Moradiellos García, *La España de Franco, 1939-1975: Política y Sociedad*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> P. Nora, *Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire*, «Representations», vol. 28, 1989, pp. 7-24.

<sup>9</sup> M. Schultz, T. Hernes, *A temporal perspective on organizational identity*, «Organization Science», vol. 24, n. 1, 2013, pp. 1-21.

variety of sources was used, including documentary ones, oral accounts and symbolic items, leading to the disclosure of different mnemonic mechanisms that had initially not been identified as such.

## *2. Informative artefacts for building a corporate history in the field of education*

In this section, a study will be made of the nature, peculiarities and specific contributions of each of these artefacts in building and spreading the corporate history of Sant Francesc de Sales School. To facilitate this task, a classificatory analysis is made, where each of the realms of memory, organized under different headings, is treated as a unit of analysis.

### *2.1 Publications*

In this study, publications are construed to mean the publicity or written means of communication that were designed and developed by religious congregations in the places where they settled. On many occasions, a religious order's different bodies, associations and institutions each had their own means of communication to publicize the work they carried out<sup>10</sup>. In this case study, a series of commemorative books, school magazines and parish magazines were identified as having been used to carry out these tasks. During the post-war, the chronological framework of this research study, one of the school's best-known corporate publications was distributed: the magazine «Nuestro Auxilio». This was a monthly institutional Salesian magazine, used to publicize any event directly or indirectly related to the Salesian school and it often featured articles and sections with details of the school's history.

For instance, the school's foundation and its development were one of the most recurrent themes. Several accounts of its creation were given to firmly establish the fact that the arrival of the first Salesian teachers to the island, in 1899, marked the first stone in the congregation's work in Ciutadella<sup>11</sup>. It must also be noted that the Spanish Civil War heralded an important turning point. For the Salesians, the closure of the school and their persecution were traumatic events and, at certain moments, the war seemed to mark the end of the school and, possibly, the loss of their lives<sup>12</sup>. The magazine therefore explains that, chronologically, the school's history can be divided into two stages: a first

<sup>10</sup> S. Moll Bagur, B. Sureda Garcia, *The Generation of Social Capital and the Conformation of Identities in the Schools of the Spanish Postwar Period (1939-1945): Study of the Montesión School Magazine*, «Social and History Education», vol. 10, n. 3, 2021, pp. 238-261.

<sup>11</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 52, July-August 1943.

<sup>12</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 7, October 1939.



phase, lasting from the foundation of the school through to the Spanish Civil War, and a second stage that began at the end of the war. As for the evolution of the school, the magazine tried to impress upon readers the meteoric growth that the congregation and the school had undergone since the centre's foundation, illustrating it with photos and statistical tables<sup>13</sup>.

Myths associated with the school's foundation are another very common feature of the magazine. The school's intrinsic characteristics are systematically explained to be attributable to the combined influence of certain Salesian figureheads, in a metaphorical family-based hierarchy, with Mary Help of Christians (the mother), Saint John Bosco (the father), Dominic Savio (the son), Saint Francis de Sales (the protector) and Federico Pareja (the founder). Their life stories, specific episodes from their lives, and famous phrases are used as behavioural models for the whole educational community. One example is Dominic Savio, the child martyr and ex-Salesian student. He is upheld as a model for the students to follow, emphasizing virtues like his deep Catholic devotion, the way he put Christian ethics into practice, and his efforts to accomplish the tasks he was given<sup>14</sup>. The attribution of miraculous powers to different Salesian figureheads is another function of the magazine. In most issues, miracles associated with the foundational myths are described, normally recovery from serious illnesses, with the person in question making his or her gratitude public by giving a financial donation<sup>15</sup>. Another miracle attributed to a Salesian figurehead was the victory of the pro-Franco faction in the Spanish Civil War. According to the historical narrative established in different articles, Mary Help of Christians interceded by playing a decisive role in saving lives during the bombings and she contributed to the success of the insurrectionists, which the magazine attempts to demonstrate by giving various different specific examples<sup>16</sup>. Hence, according to the version given in the publication, Salesian devotion to the Virgin Mary was solely responsible for the victory, with the military leaders who were involved just playing a secondary role.

It is also interesting to analyse the role played by former students in the corporate history. The mental image largely built up as a result of the publication «Nuestro Auxilio» was that the school's ex-students were successful in different aspects of their lives. First, there was academic success, justified and demonstrated by the monthly publication of the progress made by ex-students in their respective university, military and ecclesiastical careers (admittance, passing exams, graduation, distinctions etc.)<sup>17</sup>. Second, there was financial prosperity, as different articles describe the headway they made at an employment and business level, citing examples of promotion and public selection exams, or the inauguration of commercial establishments<sup>18</sup>. Third, there was social and family success, with announcements of weddings and births, participation in associations, involvement

<sup>13</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 30, September 1941.

<sup>14</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 70, February 1945.

<sup>15</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 71, March 1945.

<sup>16</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 66, August 1944.

<sup>17</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 51, June 1943.

<sup>18</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 65, July 1944.

in public acts etc.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, there was moral success, with repeated descriptions of their good works, regular attendance of religious acts, and altruistic Salesian educational activities<sup>20</sup>.

Finally, mention must be made of the use of Salesian patrons in the historical narrative built up about the centre. These individuals – with their own status and personality within the school – were some of the most venerated figures by the school's management team, since they were the benefactors who had helped to found the school and to collaborate in the first extensions that were made. Normally, they were cited and upheld as models when their death was announced, although particular emphasis was also placed on their contributions when fund-raising campaigns were held for structural alterations to be made to the school facilities<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.2 *Public acts*

As with most religious schools, Sant Francesc de Sales School was «more than just a school»<sup>22</sup>. As a driving force in the town's cultural and social life, the Salesians were responsible for promoting a series of ceremonies, festivities and public acts there, which served, among other functions, to disseminate the school's corporate history. Due to the organizational complexity of these activities, altruistic voluntary work by many members of the Salesian educational community was involved, coordinated and organized through different “satellite” associations and bodies, including the ex-students' association (*Unión d'Antigues Alumnes de Don Bosco*) and the students' association (*Agrupación Domingo Savio*)<sup>23</sup>.

According to their regularity, these celebrations can be classified into yearly festivities, monthly commemorations, and acts of an extraordinary nature. In the first case, they were dedicated to celebrating the foundational myths associated with Mary Help of Christians, Saint John Bosco and Dominic Savio. The chosen dates of the celebrations were related to the lives of the worshipped figures, taking as a reference events like their birth or death, the miracles they had performed, apparitions etc. The festivities were used to hold numerous public acts such as processions, conferences, theatre plays, sports championships, literary competitions, hymn singing etc. The procession in honour of Mary Help of Christians was the most highly attended act, since many people from the town helped to organize and take part in it. The conferences held during the festivities to

<sup>19</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 77, September 1945.

<sup>20</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 64, June 1944.

<sup>21</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 65, September 1944.

<sup>22</sup> S. Moll Bagur, B. Sureda Garcia, *Private Religious Schools for Boys in the Spanish Post Civil War Period: An Analysis through Triangulating Historical Sources*, «History of Education and Children's Literature», vol. 15, n. 2, 2020, pp. 29–48.

<sup>23</sup> G. Julià Seguí, *Pels seus fruits els coneixereu, un segle de la Unió d'Antics Alumnes Salesians de Ciutadella*, Ciutadella de Menorca, Ex Salesian Students' Association, 2012.

celebrate Saint John Bosco are also worthy of note. These talks, which were inaugurated by singing the hymn dedicated to the Italian saint, were given by important Salesian figures (ex-students, patrons, heads of the school etc.), typically on subjects related to the congregation and their vision of religion and society. The floral offering by the students to Dominic Savio's statue in the courtyard must also be mentioned. This solemn act was held at the start of a festive day involving literary competitions and different football matches<sup>24</sup>.

Unlike the yearly festivities, the monthly commemorations were more restricted acts, with stronger religious and spiritual undertones. These rituals were held at the shrine adjoining the school, dedicated to the "mother" (Mary Help of Christians) and "father" (Saint John Bosco). Once a month, an ordinary mass was capitalized on to preach a sermon on the virtues of these important Salesian figureheads and the example they offered. In Saint John Bosco's case, his relics were exhibited for people to kiss before the ceremony ended<sup>25</sup>.

During the post-war period, various extraordinary public acts were held to celebrate institutional anniversaries, alterations to the original building, and visits by important Salesians. On occasions, all three were merged in one single festivity. This is the case of the 1943 Golden Wedding, used to commemorate the first visit by a Salesian delegation to Ciutadella (1893) and to inaugurate extensions to the shrine. The programme of events also included the famous funeral procession of Federico Pareja – the school's founder, who died 10 years prior to the visit, at the age of 79 –, filing from the municipal cemetery to the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians with his coffin. Most of the said acts were attended by members of the school's educational community and numerous civil, ecclesiastical and Salesian authorities. Hence, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was used to recall the origins of the school, to honour its founder and, through the inauguration of new facilities and inaugural speeches, to highlight the prosperous, fructiferous future that awaited the school<sup>26</sup>.

### 2.3 Institutional symbols

Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, symbols and allegories have played a fundamental role in the development and dissemination of the narrative on which it is based<sup>27</sup>. The Salesian school in Ciutadella took advantage of similar strategies and

<sup>24</sup> R. Cortés Casasnovas, *Menorca, María Auxiliadora y la obra salesiana: 1899-1939*, Ciutadella de Menorca, Unió d'Antics Alumnes Salesians, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> The information has been taken from the programmes of festivities found in the family archives of Joan Bagur Franco and Alfredo Moll Tur.

<sup>26</sup> See the example in «Nuestro Auxilio», n. 53, September 1943.

<sup>27</sup> L. Réau, *Iconografía del Arte Cristiano. Iconografía de la Biblia–Antiguo Testamento*, Barcelona, Ediciones del Serbal, 2000.

mechanisms, successfully capitalizing on institutional symbols to disseminate its own narrative.

Numerous symbols were positioned throughout the school, transforming it into a veritable corporate museum. The ex-students who were interviewed have precise recollections of the different paintings, busts, sculptures, medallions and flags representative of the school's foundational myths that could be found in its classrooms, corridors and other rooms. Likewise, at the shrine, different references to Salesian figureheads could be seen on its altars and stained-glass windows and in its chapels and reliquaries<sup>28</sup>. Not only were these visual messages present throughout the school. They also extended to the personal lives of members of the educational community, thanks to the design and distribution of what might be described as a collection of Salesian merchandising products, all with a distinctive identifying hallmark. One example is the small gold medal of Mary Help of Christians, Saint John Bosco or Dominic Savio, which most Salesian sympathizers wore around their necks. In their pockets, they also carried holy cards and small yearly calendars with images associated with the foundational myths. One of the most famous holy cards had a piece of Saint John Bosco's cassock inserted in it, which was thought to have mystical and curative powers according to the interviewed ex-students. Salesian images could also be found in private homes, with postcards of the school, monthly calendars dedicated to the order's leaders, and little statues of Mary Help of Christians being habitual. These statues of the Virgin Mary were either taken from house to house in portable shrines or, following the tradition of ex-students, given as a wedding present to preside the bed of the newlyweds<sup>29</sup>.

Salesian names were another way of infusing everyday life at the school and in the town of Ciutadella with historical symbols associated with the education centre. From 1931, the school's big courtyard was named after its founder, Federico Pareja (*Patio Padre Pareja*), while the little one was dedicated to the child martyr Dominic Savio (*Patio Venerable Domingo Savio*). The ex-students' centre (*Don Bosco Centre*) and the church adjoining the school (*Mary Help of Christians Shrine*) were each named after "the father and mother" of the Salesians. The foundational myths spread beyond the school's walls, with these iconic figures lending their names to numerous streets and squares in the town. Examples include the streets next to the school (Mary Help of Christians Street and Don Bosco Street) and Federico Pareja Square, 200 metres from the school entrance. This demonstrates the connivance between the public authorities and management team of the school, who both firmly promoted the Salesian cause<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Alfredo Moll Tur (ex-student), in conversation with the author, June 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Bagur Franco (ex-student), in conversation with the author, May 2021.

<sup>30</sup> *Cincuenta años de labor salesiana en Ciutadella de Menorca (1899-1949)*, Ciutadella de Menorca, Impremta Al·lès, 1949.

## 2.4 *Hidden curriculum*

A hidden curriculum is construed to mean knowledge that is worked on implicitly in schools, and sometimes spread involuntarily, without it forming a specific part of the regulated curriculum<sup>31</sup>. According to the school's ex-students, the classroom was also used for the subliminal dissemination of the school's corporate history under the pretext of learning other input or skills.

One example is the compulsory reading matter for encouraging good reading habits. Biographies like those of Saint John Bosco or Dominic Savio were read by most of the students who passed through the Salesian school's classrooms, supposedly to improve their reading comprehension. The same also applied to drawing skills, which were often practised by drawing portraits of figures from the foundational myths<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, the students were introduced to drama and theatre by performing plays based on salient episodes from Saint John Bosco's life, with special emphasis on his dreams and his childhood<sup>33</sup>.

It is also important to highlight the informal complementary explanations that, according to accounts, were common in class during most subjects, particularly when the teacher was a member of the religious order. The subjects that were being taught were often used to talk about the origins of the school, the growth that it had undergone, and the work that had been achieved there. It was also common for teachers from other regions to talk about the educational and social headway that had been made in their place of origin, contrasting the achieved goals with the situation prior to the congregation's arrival. Ex-students from the school were also used in such practices. The teachers continually upheld ex-students who had forged a noteworthy professional, military or ecclesiastical career as a role model and means of motivating students, with special emphasis on the first figures to forge a prominent career in each of these fields<sup>34</sup>.

Lastly, mention must also be made of *Buenas noches* (Good Night), a kind of daily farewell by the school headmaster. When the day's classes were over, the students met in the school hall where the headmaster gave a speech with a moral message for them to reflect on. He talked about the lessons that could be drawn from the day, in addition to including some input on the school's corporate history<sup>35</sup>. For instance, as encouragement for the school's young students, anecdotes relating to the school's foundational myths were told or some of its most celebrated ex-students and former patrons were recalled<sup>36</sup>. This practice, invented by Saint John Bosco, created a link between the founder and the history of a congregation that continues to use this solemn evening ritual.

<sup>31</sup> J. Torres Santomé, *El curriculum oculto*, Madrid, Ediciones Morata, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> Joan Bagur Franco (ex-student), in conversation with the author, May 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Julià Seguí (ex-student), in conversation with the author, July 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Alfredo Moll Tur (ex-student), in conversation with the author, June 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Gabriel Julià Seguí (ex-student), in conversation with the author, July 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Bagur Franco (ex-student), in conversation with the author, May 2021.

### *Conclusions*

From an analysis of the results of this research study, it can be concluded that corporate history is also related to the field of education; specifically, to private religious schools. Clear commercial rewards can be derived from this kind of corporate history, illustrated through numerous examples.

Firstly, foundational myths served to forge a collective identity and to encourage a sense of belonging to a school, uniting students, fostering a sense of loyalty and boosting the centre's clientele. Secondly, "triumphant" ex-students demonstrated the functional benefits and success of the educational services offered by the school, infusing it with added value and setting it apart from the rest. The different mechanisms used to disseminate the school's corporate history also helped to foster a positive corporate reputation, maximizing the growth achieved by the centre since its foundation. In our case study, the message that was conveyed was one of a booming enterprise (the Salesian congregation) and a thriving franchise (the school), with the constant expansion of its infrastructure and facilities. Lastly, by upholding ex-patrons and benefactors as role models, this helped to encourage donations and, by extension, additional finance when major alterations had to be made to the school buildings.

To sum up, from a study of the different mechanisms used by private religious schools to disseminate their message, aside from their obvious educational activities, these schools also engaged in important social and commercial activities which helped them to survive and to compete in the post-war educational market. By analysing the corporate history of religious schools, an insight can be gained into how their reputation as educational leaders was forged during the Franco regime, reinforced by a series of corporate strategies that have been examined in this paper.





# Studying to Survive: the Representation of the Waldensian School through the Beckwith Museums

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At a distance of a few kilometers from each other in the three Piedmonts valleys called Val Pellice, Val Chisone and Val Germanasca there are five school museums (in Malzat, Pramollo, Angrogna, Rodoretto and Didiero). To add to these, one classroom has also been reconstructed and is located inside the Torre Pellice Museum. It is natural to ask why this concentration is so important. The answer is closely linked to the fact that, these Valleys about 50 km from Turin represent the territory in which people of Waldensian religion, after the persecution for having joined the Calvinist Reformation, with the peace of Cavour obtained from the Savoy in 1561 the right to live in the valleys and to profess their worship, albeit with restrictions<sup>1</sup>. Almost three hundred years later, in 1848, with the letters patent signed by King Charles Albert of Savoy the Waldensian population living in these valleys obtained full rights, finally being able to leave the ghetto territory. It is evident – given this concentration of school museums – how the concept of school is perceived by the Waldensian together with a personal identity: in other words, education and the ability to read and write form an integral and fundamental part of the “Waldensian existence”.

To understand the motivation of such a close bond it is sufficient to refer to the very roots of the Waldensian religion and the history of the population: on the one hand one of the fundamental requirements of the religion's principles is the free reading and free analysis of the Sacred Scriptures and, consequently, only knowing how to read was possible to access the biblical text without the intervention of other people<sup>2</sup>. On the

<sup>1</sup> About Waldensian's history: E. Comba e L. Santini, *Storia dei valdesi*, Torino, Claudiana, 1973; A. Armand-Hugon, *Storia dei Valesi 2. Dal Sinodo di Chanforan all'Emancipazione*, Torino, Claudiana, 1974; A. Molnar, *Storia dei Valdesi. Dalle origini all'adesione alla Riforma (1176-1532)*, Torino Claudiana Editrice, 1974; G. Tourn, *I Valdesi*, Torino, Claudiana, 1981; G. Tourn, *I valdesi: la singolare vicenda di un popolo-chiesa: 1170-1999*, Torino, Claudiana, 1999; M. Gilibert, A. Magaddino (edd.), *I Valdesi: cinque secoli di storia del popolo e delle valli*, Torino, Gilibert, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> For this reason the travelling preachers (known as *barba*, the Waldensian word for uncle) were trained from the Middle Ages in a *Schola* located in what is now the Pellice valley. As early as the sixteenth century, every church was obliged to have a sufficient number of schools in which to teach the basis of religion. The plague of 1630 caused the death of many Pastors and Teachers, so it was necessary to bring in French-speaking Swiss teachers and Swiss pastors, and the French language soon replaced Italian in official teaching. Despite peace



Fig. 1. Angrogna schoolmuseum (Historical Archive of the Waldensian Table in Torre Pellice)



Fig. 2. Beckwith classroom in Rodoretto's Museum (Historical Archive of the Waldensian Table in Torre Pellice)

other hand, the ability to communicate in writing through exchanges of letters was a necessity, a tool that allowed the people of these Piedmonts valleys to keep in touch with the various committees that had arisen abroad (Holland, England...) to also support economically the Waldensian population of this territory<sup>3</sup>. Given the fundamental importance of education in this cultural and religious context, it is significant to question what representation of the school is offered through these Waldensian School Museums. From the study of these museums, it is clear how the Waldensians chose to represent specifically their school of the nineteenth century. In fact, a unique phenomenon is seen and an out of the ordinary growth. These are the schools created by Charles Beckwith, a colonel sent by the Foreign Committees to support the Waldensians of the Piedmonts valleys who arrived in Torre Pellice in 1828 and immediately set to work to improve the school system (remember, however, that until the Letters Patent of 1848 the Waldensians could not attend the schools of the Kingdom of Savoy)<sup>4</sup>. There was in fact since 1700 a Waldensian school system in the valleys but they were lessons in dilapidated premises,

agreements, the persecutions suffered by the Waldensians in Piedmont during the seventeenth century did not interrupt the efforts made in the field of education, which the 1692 Synod reiterated as a primary necessity. This is reflected in the organization of the educational system into *Grandes écoles* in the main towns and *Petites écoles*, small neighborhood schools, scattered throughout the mountain villages. Cf.: G. Ballesio, G. Ceriana Mayneri, S. Pasquet, «*Universités des chèvres*»: l'istruzione primaria tra i Valdesi delle Valli Pellice, Chisone e Germanasca, in M. Piseri (a cura di), *L'alfabeto in montagna. Scuola e alfabetismo nell'area alpina tra età moderna e XIX secolo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012, pp. 194-202; A. Armand-Hugon, G. Peyrot, *Origine e sviluppo degli Istituti Valdesi di Istruzione nelle valli del Pinerolese*, «Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi», n. 117, June 1965, pp. 9-17; M. Battistoni, *Il sistema scolastico valdese e la rinascita della Scuola Latina nel secolo XVIII*, «Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi», n. 191, 2002, pp. 27-63.

<sup>3</sup> Interview given by Pastor Marchetti to the author on August 2019.

<sup>4</sup> For a Beckwith biography: J.P. Meille, *Le Général Beckwith. Sa vie et ses travaux parmi les Vaudois du Piémont*, Lausanne, Bridel, 1872; D. Jahier, *Per una nuova biografia del Generale Carlo Beckwith*, «Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Vaudoise» n. 38, 1917; J. Jalla, *Le Général Beckwith*, Torre Pellice, Società di Studi Valdesi, 1927; G. Ashdown, *The General with a Wooden Leg*, London, The Protestant Alliance, 1980; G. Giampiccoli, *J. Charles Beckwith. Il generale dei valdesi (1789-1862)*, Torino, Claudiana, 2012.

mostly stables, in which the pupils were given the basics of reading, sacred hymns and a small amount of mathematics. The operation promoted by Beckwith is all-rounded and widespread, starting from the belief that the school must be present in every small village, to allow everyone to attend without having to travel great distances. He then developed a specific school architecture, very simple, consisting of a single classroom (sometimes with the accommodation for the teacher above the premises) that replicates in every small village. The number of these schools grows at an impressive rate: in 1840 we have in the three valleys 89 new schools built and 13 restored; in 1846 the school buildings rise to 120 (and these neighborhood schools, as they were then called begin to be somehow identified with Colonel Beckwith himself, calling them *écoles du Colonel* (Colonel's schools); in the school year 1848-49 there are 169 schools with their own building; in 1898 Beckwith schools in the three valleys become 182<sup>5</sup>. These numbers appear even more significant when compared to the rest of the territory: for example, Piedmont – which already had a high literacy rate and had had before the Unification of Italy, with the Boncompagni Law gave great importance to education – there was 54.2% illiteracy<sup>6</sup>. On the contrary, in the small mountainous territory populated by the Waldensians, a scholastic statistic of the year 1848-1849 (year of the emancipation of the Waldensians) shows how out of a population of about 20,000 inhabitants, 4,779 went to school<sup>7</sup>. This is a quarter of the total population.

Returning to the consideration of the current Waldensian School Museums, it is of great interest to investigate whether and how they manage to represent, and consequently to convey to the public, this significant uniqueness of the local school. Visiting such museums shows how attention has been paid to showing some central points of the experience such as the diffusion of the school in every small village, the construction of a building designed specifically to accommodate the school, the classroom furniture that was regarded as essential by Beckwith and that saw him personally involved in the renovation (such as the stove, the blackboards but also the first teaching aids such as the globe or the abacus) the expositive fulcrum represented by the Bible in French<sup>8</sup>.



Fig. 3. Salsil's Museum in Didiero (Historical Archive of the Waldensian Table in Torre Pellice)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Coisson, *Monographie sur le developpement intellectuel dans nos Vallées pendant les dernières 50 années. Instruction primaire*, Torre Pellice, Typographie Besson, 1898.

<sup>6</sup> C.G. Laicata, *Istruzione e sviluppo industriale in Italia 1859-1914*, Firenze, Giunti, 1973, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Coisson, *Monographie sur le developpement intellectuel dans nos Vallées pendant les dernières 50 années*, cit., p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> On the materials present in the school representations made within the Beckwith Museums see F.D. Pizzigoni, *The Beckwith school-museums as a place of memory*, «History of Education and Children's Literature»,

In reality, however, if we turn to other sources of study, such as the documentary funds of the Waldensian Archive of the Table and memories shared orally by former teachers or ex pupils of the Waldensian schools, we easily see that the history of the Waldensian school and its uniqueness are also constituted by many other aspects of great interest, both for the study of the local school and for considerations related to the relationship with the national school history. We will mention here only the main macro-themes, due to the lack of space, without going into the depth of which they deserve. Among the themes that emerge from the study of other sources and that do not seem to find full representation in the Beckwith Museums, are:

1. The specific subdivision of the Waldensian school system and the focus on all levels of education, both male and female.
2. The aspects of school life that characterised the “making of school” in this reality: multi-class, teaching methods, programs and schedules.
3. Teacher training.
4. The relationship between the rules and programmers of Waldensian and Ministerial schools at national level.
5. The history of Beckwith schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The schools opened by Beckwith, also called as we have seen *Colonel's school* or *neighborhood school*, coincided with *les petites écoles* (small schools) and corresponded indicatively to the first years of elementary school and were mixed, for boys and girls. To complete the elementary cycle, there were *les grandes écoles* (great schools), also called “parochial schools” that were based in the larger towns and not in the individual villages<sup>9</sup>. They were intended for pupils between the ages of ten and sixteen and there were 13 schools<sup>10</sup>. To allow the girls to continue their education, between the ages of 10 and 16 there were also the *écoles des filles* (girls' schools), in which they taught reading, arithmetic, grammar, sewing and other women's jobs. The offer of higher studies in the area was articulated and allowed the choice between the Latin School which was opened in the 1830s with courses in Latin and French, the College built in Torre Pellice from 1835 and the high school that opened in 1888, as well as courses to become teachers to which we will refer to later<sup>11</sup>.

With regards to the subjects taught within the Beckwith elementary schools, the documents of the Archive show us how the Synod of 1848 had introduced the Italian language at school, along with that of French<sup>12</sup>. In the neighborhood schools religion,

vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 91-107.

<sup>9</sup> This subdivision into *Petites écoles* and *Grandes écoles* had already been regulated by the chapter *De l'instruction publique* of Ecclesiastical Discipline adopted at the Synod of 1833: cf. G. Ballesio, G. Ceriana Mayneri, S. Pasquet, «*Universités des chèvres*»: *l'istruzione primaria tra i Valdesi delle Valli Pellice, Chisone e Germanasca*, in M. Piseri (ed.), *L'alfabeto in montagna. Scuola e alfabetismo nell'area alpina tra età moderna e XIX secolo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2012, p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> G. Ballesio, S. Rivoira, *Leggere, scrivere e cucire. L'istruzione femminile nelle Valli valdesi nell'Ottocento*, Torre Pellice, Claudiana, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> L. Micol, *Le scuole dei valdesi ieri e oggi*, Torre Pellice, Società degli Studi Valdesi, 1965.

<sup>12</sup> T.J. Pons (ed.), *Actes des synodes des Églises Vaudoises*, Torre Pellice, Società di Studi Valdesi, 1948, p. 229.



French, Italian, writing, singing and arithmetic were taught<sup>13</sup>. With the unification of Italy and the first national laws on education, the situation in the Waldensian Valleys seemed not to have changed substantially. In fact the local Municipalities were charged by the Casati Law to personally take care of the management of the schools willingly ceded this task to a reality already structured as the Waldensian: «Compromise solutions were therefore found and the Waldensian elementary schools were considered local council schools to avoid the break between the City and the Waldensian Church, with the risk that there were local and municipal teachers with very few pupils [...] on the contrary, the Catholic ones became private»<sup>14</sup>. The study programs were those of the state, but the French lessons and Waldensian religion remained as complementary courses. The issue of the division between male and female classes foreseen by the national law, which clashed with the mixed class organization of the Waldensian reality, created difficulties in adapting to national school legislation, in line with the foreign Protestant model. In 1875 a letter from Past the Minister of Education Ruggiero Bonghi was perfectly in line with the needs of the p of mixed schools, requested by the Prefecture a population of the evangelical Christian rel principles which had to be taken into account being attached to the system of mixed school there would have had to be certain branches more development than in schools of Catholic

Another unique aspect of the Waldensian reality was the training of teachers: initially the management of the Waldensian schools was entrusted to each community Council that had to provide for the appointment of the titular teacher (called *régent*). The

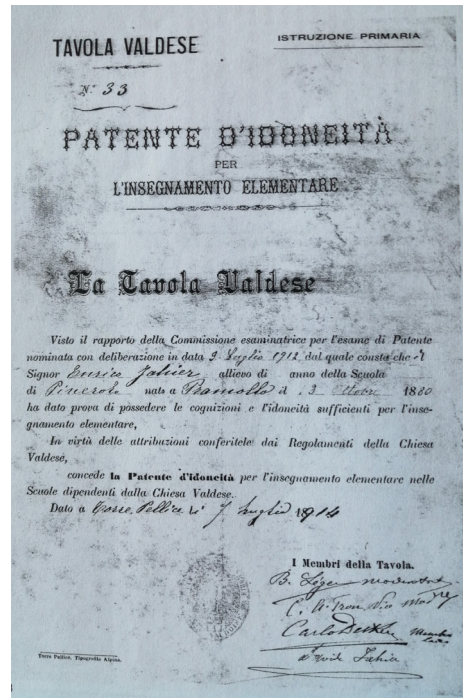


Fig. 4. Certificate of eligibility for teaching in primary school issued by the *Tavola Valdese*, 1914 (Historical Archive of the Waldensian Table in Torre Pellice)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Archivio del Concistoro di Torre Pellice* (Torre Pellice Consistory Archives), series «Instruction Primaire», 1873, Register 16.

<sup>14</sup> Ballesio, Ceriana Mayneri, Pasquet, «*Universités des chèvres*»: l'istruzione primaria tra i Valdesi delle Valli Pellice, Chisone e Germanasca, cit., p. 186.

<sup>15</sup> *Archivio comunale di Torre Pellice* (Torre Pellice Municipal Archives), category IX, folder 893.



Fig. 5. Martel's school in Angrogna (Waldensian Photographic Archive in Torre Pellice, fond «David Peyrot»)

Certificate of Eligibility was awarded directly by the Waldensian Table still in the late nineteenth century.

This aspect was in contrast with what was established at the national level, which referred to the Royal Decree of 24 June 1860 and in particular to an examination specifically regulated in Chapter XVIII to obtain the qualifications recognized for teaching. In fact, even the teachers appointed by the Table had their own specific training but provided by local institutions represented first by what was called the “General School for teacher training” created in 1827 in the hamlet of Pomaretto, and then from 1852 to 1883 from a course of study at the Waldensian College of Torre Pellice<sup>16</sup>.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the problem of the training of Waldensian teachers emerged with greater force in the face of the risk of seeing them replaced by non Waldensian teachers. To resolve the situation in 1913 Beckwith opened a Normal School to ensure that the Waldensian teachers could achieve the correct degree achieved by national laws<sup>17</sup>. Another aspect not treated as a specific theme within the Museums of the Beckwith school, but of great interest is the history of these *écoles du colonel* during the twentieth century. Excluding the events linked to the progressive depopulation of the mountainous areas of the Valleys, which leads to a progressive closure of the “Beckwith school”, the history of *petites écoles* in the twentieth century sees the school building remaining the property of the Waldensian Church but teachers being paid by the State and sometimes by the City, becoming subsidised schools.

To study this situation we are helped by the archives of the Waldensian Table, through donations of notebooks and materials from the families of teachers, and the memorabilia

<sup>16</sup> A. Mannucci, *Educazione e scuole protestante: dall'Unità all'età giolittiana*, Pian di San Bartolo, Luciano Manzuoli editore, 1898, pp. 64-65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

of former teachers who still until the 1970s taught in the Beckwith schools. With respect to the first typology of twentieth century sources, we note in particular the collections of unpublished diaries by Eithen Bonnet and Enrico Gay referring to the 1950s, 60s and 70s (which were also used for the cards of the database of Diaries unpublished within the project “School Memory”<sup>18</sup>). These have the ability to vividly and comprehensively portray the life of this school organized in multi-classes, bringing out excellent planning, returning the annual income as well as the great organisational and teaching capacity of the teachers. Among the didactic choices, for example, diaries highlight the work in classes that are also grouped among different multi-classes, the use of lessons based on conversations that, starting from the same centre of interest, develop according to the age of the students. Compared to the training of teachers in recent years, the diaries report on the topics and modalities of the monthly updates that were held in Pinerolo through pedagogical conferences to which each teacher was called to actively participate by presenting theme-based reports. The school hours in the second half of the twentieth century were from 9 am to 12 am and from 2 pm to 4 pm, including Wednesday classes of Catholic religion and Saturday Waldensian religion. As of the setup of the classroom, it is from the inspectors comments in these diaries that help us understand that it was actually not very different from how it looked in the nineteenth century: «poor classroom, blackened walls [...] two unreadable maps due to being overused»<sup>19</sup>, «the furniture consists of benches of antiquated workmanship, in a very poor state of conservation»<sup>20</sup>. Teachers brought personal materials from home to decorate the classroom and equip it with teaching aids, while parents contributed to the purchase of the indispensable new heater for the school<sup>21</sup>. There are also other sources, those drawn from the oral memories of former teachers of the Beckwith school<sup>22</sup>, that allow the full reconstruction of what the Beckwith school was really like in the twentieth century. As an example, the memoirs of Raimondo Genre, who began his activity as a teacher in 1951 at the age of 21, he gives us an idea of the reality of a Beckwith school with all the classes together, from the first year to the sixth. At the end of the afternoon lessons, the students stayed for the optional French course: the lessons were in Italian, but the local council gave the teachers a supplementary sum for the French lessons taught outside of their schedule. Since Beckwith schools were now attended by Waldensian and Catholic students, religious lessons were also held outside school hours. The memoirs of the teacher Genre continue retracing the reality of subsidised schools: «It was a school recognized by the State, it was

<sup>18</sup> The Memoria Scolastica website was born as a design result of the PRIN “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)” project and offers different databases related to the collective, individual and public memory linked to the school: [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it) (last access: 08.02.2023).

<sup>19</sup> Diary of Ethel Anna Bonnet, s.y. 1951-1952, in *Archivio storico della Tavola Valdese* (Historical Archives of the Waldensian Table) in Torre Pellice, fond «Bonnet».

<sup>20</sup> Diary of Ethel Anna Bonnet, s.y. 1956-1957, in *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Interviewed by the writer in relation to the project “*Memorie magistrali*” (Teachers’ memories) of INDIRE: P. Giorgi, F.D. Pizzigoni, *Memorie di scuola: percorsi dell’Archivio storico INDIRE*, Firenze, INDIRE, 2022.



head of a teaching direction of a larger school, but our opening period was shorter and at the end of the year there was the examination at the capital. As a salary I remember that I received a part from the State through the City (all year 75,000 lire) and the families had contributed collecting another 5,000 lire. The families also helped by bringing wood for the class stove and inviting us home whenever there was a family party». The memories of master Genre confirm the appearance of the Beckwith school remained unchanged over the years: «we had wooden benches and a single bench for each row. The chair was of the high ones, on a predella. There was the slate board and an abacus that in reality we did not use anymore».

### *Conclusions*

Analysing the representation of the school promoted through the Waldensian school museums, it is possible to capture very clearly some specific aspects that the promoters of these museums intend to highlight. First of all, one can clearly comprehend the desire to emphasise the importance of education for the Waldensian community and the importance it has had in the history of this population. Unquestionably, the school is considered a symbol of an entire culture, that of the Waldensian community itself and recognized as one of the foundational values. Another aspect that the Waldensian museums succeed in highlighting well is the distinctive feature of the school in this specific area of the valleys, with its widespread distribution of school buildings and a high rate of attending citizens. Lastly, the figure of Beckwith is emphasised, whose fields of action with respect to the local school are well explained: the dedicated school building, the presence in all the villages and decent furniture more appropriate to the needs of the school. In the same way, however, it emerges that the representation of the school that the Waldensian Museums intend to convey coincides with that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That is, with the unique and particular phase stimulated by Beckwith. Many other aspects such as the themes we mentioned in the previous paragraph are not addressed or at least not in an evident way in these museums. We can certainly say that the Waldensian school museums offer a “representation” of the Waldensian school and not the real and complete history of the Waldensian school. This is a deliberate and considered choice on the part of the community, which clearly recognises in Beckwith its own school history. It is therefore to all intents and purposes a symbolic representation, a kind of synecdoche. It allows us to say that the Beckwith school museums can be regarded as part of that phenomenon recognised as “reconstruction of memory”<sup>23</sup>. The school has come to assume a collective

<sup>23</sup> We refer here to the reflections developed from the International Conference “School Memories. New trends in Historical Research into Education: Heuristic Perspectives and Methodological Issues” (Seville, 22-23 September 2015) and from C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao Frago (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, without neglecting the previous work: A. Viñao Frago, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

value and, beyond how it really was, has taken on an important identity for the entire community of Waldensian religion of the Piedmonts Valleys<sup>24</sup>.

It is therefore in all respects a significant ideal representation and for this reason, by force of things, partial. This is not, however, a pedagogical reconstruction. The exhibition proposed by the Waldensian museums is intended to convey an idea of school, its ideal value and a part of its history that has now taken on a value that goes beyond the merely instructive and didactic. But it is not intended to offer elements of in-depth knowledge of educational history or educational history. You have to be aware of this when visiting a museum of the Beckwith school, however on the other hand are perfectly aware of the very promoters of these representations: «Opening and showing a Beckwith school is a way to maintain our roots, our culture, our religion»<sup>25</sup>, the chairman of the Waldensian Historical Places Committee stresses. If on the one hand, therefore, the study of the museums of the Beckwith school, in the light of other sources dedicated to the history of the local school, makes us confirm that it is necessary to remember that the museums of the school do not necessarily coincide with pedagogical museums<sup>26</sup>, on the other hand they underline how the value of memory is capable of “building” (creating representations, selecting a part of history, identifying an ideal, etc.) and at the same time allows individuals or groups of individuals to “recognize” and to feel that we are part of a community, a phenomenon and its history. In other words, with the study of the museums of the Waldensian school we can say that memory, in this case especially school memory contributes to reconstruct history but it is not history.

<sup>24</sup> J. Meda, *The «Sites of School Memory» in Italy between Memory and Oblivion: a First Approach*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 25-47. Cf. also: S. Ramos Zamora, *Debates on Memory and the History of Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, «HSE Social and Education History», vol. X, n. 1, 2021, pp. 22-46.

<sup>25</sup> Statements to the author given on 8 August 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Cf.: J.R. Berrio, *Pasado, presente i porvenir de los museos de educación*, in A. Escolano Benito, J.M. Hernández Díaz (edd.), *La memoria y el deseo. Cultura de la escuela y educación deseada*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2002, pp. 43-65; J. Meda, *Musei della scuola e dell'educazione. Ipotesi progettuali per una sistematizzazione delle iniziative di raccolta, conservazione e valorizzazione dei beni culturali delle scuole*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. V, n. 2, 2010, pp. 489-501; M. Brunelli, *Alle origini del museo scolastico. Storia di un dispositivo didattico al servizio della scuola primaria e popolare tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata, eum, 2020.



# The Fame of the First Girls' High School in Paris: the Birth of a Co-Constructed Collective Memory

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## *Introduction*

State secondary education for women appeared in France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until then the preserve of the congregations<sup>1</sup>, the care of young bourgeois girls – future mothers and educators of the nation's elite – was the object of all the attention of public policy, although not without reluctance.

Indeed, as Jules Ferry, then Minister of Public Education and Fine Arts, said, «he who holds the woman, holds everything, firstly because he holds the child, then because he holds the husband»<sup>2</sup>. Educating young girls from the ruling classes by providing them with a paid education, then, means ensuring «the reconstituted unity in the family»<sup>3</sup> through equality of education. Moreover, it was also a question of guaranteeing these girls a republican education, in an anti-clerical logic of secularization of education, without revolutionizing its conceptions<sup>4</sup>. Thus, it took three years of debate in the Chamber of Deputies before the Camille Sée Law was passed on 21 December 1880. It would take another three years to see the birth of the first girls' *lycée* in the capital – the *Lycée Fénélon* – on 22 October 1883.

This dual creation raised a number of issues. Indeed, the State was involved in the dual logic of using the Parisian example to prove the validity of this progressive law to the City Council and the press, but also to attract the capital's bourgeois families. The question then arises as to how the legislative framework and the actors participate in

<sup>1</sup> R. Rogers, *Les bourgeoises au pensionnat: l'éducation féminine au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007, p. 264: «The results of the survey of secondary education that he launched in 1864 – analyzed in the previous chapter – helped to confirm his impression that nuns dominated the education of girls».

<sup>2</sup> F. Mayeur, *L'enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles sous la Troisième République*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> F. Mayeur, *Garçons et filles du XIX<sup>ème</sup> au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle: une éducation différente*, «Enfance», vol. 34, n. 1-2, 1981, p. 50: «If the State wants to succeed in its educational enterprise, it must reassure the public. The best way to do this is to offer a substitute as exact as possible for the world in which it is used to seeing girls evolve».

the construction of the identity of this school while taking into account the social and cultural environment during the mandate of the first director.

I propose here to observe first of all how the public authorities structurally built and organised the image of Fénelon even before it opened; and how, thanks to the central power but also thanks to the interaction of local actors, the reputation of the *Lycée Fénelon* made this establishment the figurehead of female secondary education.

## 1. *Building a reputation: a structural and organizational issue*

Faced with the immobility of the municipality, the State alone undertook the creation of the first Parisian girls' high school. We must not lose sight of the importance of what was at stake. The capital had a duty not only to innovate but also to serve as a model: «Paris could not remain behind fifty communes in France», wrote the newspaper «La République Française». If the statement is exaggerated, the fact remains that twelve *lycées* and colleges were opened between 1881 and 1902.

### 1.1 *A legislative framework for girls' education*

In order to administer these establishments, the Camille Sée law imposed a framework for future female secondary schools that was adapted to the social and moral aims of the time, thus distinguishing them from male secondary education. The legislative framework built up during these three years of legislation dealt with various aspects of girls' schooling.

Concerning the schooling regime, «at the idea of being the guardian of the innocence of future pupils, and of having to watch over the modesty of these young vestals, the Minister took fright»<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, apart from the financial aspect, it was agreed that the girl should remain, as far as possible, within her family. The harshness and promiscuity of the boarding school, already highly criticized for boys, are hardly compatible with the «fragile nature» of young girls. On the other hand, beyond the existence of boarding schools in girls' *lycées*, morality has also been the subject of many disputes. It was not so much the fact of teaching morals in school that posed a problem, but rather the content of the teaching.

<sup>5</sup> F.W. Foerster, *L'école et le caractère: les problèmes moraux de la vie scolaire*, Paris, Fabert, 2003, p. 9.

Indeed, aware of the weight of the Church on the generations of young girls<sup>6</sup>, the State – through the creation of a secular and specific secondary education<sup>7</sup> – sought to break with this heritage marked by an obsolete monarchic system. However, it was necessary «not to offend morals and to give the newcomer education its letters of nobility by showing its roots in a distant past, which was at once philosophical, political and pedagogical»<sup>8</sup>. By placing republican morality as the first teaching in its curricula, the Camille Sée law imposed a teaching system stripped of all religious references but which nevertheless allowed young girls to take optional courses. It was therefore necessary to construct this morality resolutely different from that inculcated in boys.

The main reason for the paradigm shift was the fact that at that time, public education included a good number of Protestant personalities. The instigator of the law on secondary education for girls was Jewish, the Protestant masters of secular pedagogy such as Buisson and Pécaut, then Inspector General in 1880, presided over the *École normale de Sèvres*<sup>9</sup>. Other illustrious Protestant personalities held strategic positions in the *Société* «for the study of secondary education issues» within the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Instruction publique* (Higher Council for Public Instruction), founded shortly before the birth of the Camille Sée law, and particularly in charge of its implementation. Thus, the *Société* lays the foundation for an independent morality: «the new school must propose, as its primary and supreme goal, the formation of character»<sup>10</sup>. This training also involved the establishment of a disciplinary straitjacket, similar to the male secondary schools of the time.

However, the notion of adolescence as we understand it today and its consequences<sup>11</sup> did not exist in those days. For the contemporaries, it was a passage from childhood to adulthood, from family life to public life, a notion that was then used exclusively for boys from the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois girls, on the other hand, were not included in these considerations because their education took place essentially in the family sphere, and therefore in private<sup>12</sup>. Brought up by their mothers who played 'fully, in most cases,

<sup>6</sup> Speech by J. Ferry, 10 April 1870: «He who holds the woman, holds everything, firstly because he holds the child, then because he holds the husband [...] the woman must belong to science or she must belong to the Church».

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, morality in boys' *lycées* has existed since their creation, but it has taken on a completely different nature. Gréard, in the report annexed to the décret of 5 July 1890 (p. 594), speaks of it in these terms: «We have had many opportunities to observe this and we wish to proclaim it once and for all: the natural basis, the first guarantee of a moral education, is, in our eyes, a healthy and virile physical education [...] Good discipline and good morals are, for us, in close collaboration with good humor, hygiene and male exercises». Moral education is therefore essentially a matter of physical exercise.

<sup>8</sup> Rogers, *Les bourgeoises au pensionnat*, cit., p. 269: «the most exceptional aspect of the program is the decision to replace the religious institution with moral instruction, although parents may request that girls attend religious classes».

<sup>9</sup> P. Cabanel, *Histoire des protestants en France (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, Fayard, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> J. Ancelet-Hustache, *Lycéenne en 1905*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1981, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> A. Thiercé, *Histoire de l'adolescence: 1850-1914*, Paris, Belin, 1999. The concept of an «adolescent crisis» did not exist and as a result there was no specific framework: only repression could «constrain minds and govern hearts».

<sup>12</sup> G. Houbre, *Histoire des mères et filles*, Paris, de La Martinière, 2006, p. 77. The education of young girls from the bourgeoisie was carried out by their mothers, although they «most often went to a Catholic

the game of the social and cultural construction of the sexes<sup>13</sup>, they were taught to be «devoted, vigorous, fit to become excellent reproducers, mothers capable of fulfilling their destiny»<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, «one cannot, on the other hand, compare the discipline of boys and girls who are infinitely more sensitive than their brothers to purely moral sanctions»<sup>15</sup>. The «internal discipline»<sup>16</sup> of girls' schools does not mention punishments considered repressive and abusive<sup>17</sup> present in boys' schools, such as picketing, *pensums*, deprivation of recreation, restraint on walks and being put on the agenda. Moreover, the State did not initially envisage the creation of a post associated with discipline within the schools. Nevertheless, a strict school framework is imposed on the girls thanks to the internal regulations, a timetable regulated to the millimeter regulates their time and a staff that has just been qualified and hand-picked manages, trains and punishes. At their head, the headmistress who, unlike her male counterpart, is statutorily kept<sup>18</sup> informed of everything, whether it be the pupils' absences (article 30), or «penalties and sanctions imposed by the teacher or by the repeating mistresses» (article 32). She acts in concert with the latter in drawing up the rules of procedure (article 49) and the roll of honour (article 33), facilitated by the fact that she is aware of the marks obtained because she comments on them each week in class (article 34). It is also in collaboration (hierarchical) that she participates in the passing examinations. The principal is officially involved in the life of the school, at the confluence of the missions of education and instruction.

This statutory overview has enabled us to analyze the way in which the initial structure of secondary education helps to guarantee a well thought-out, structuring and reassuring framework in order to silence its detractors and attract families. Let us then look at its implementation in the capital.

## 1.2 *An attractive local setting: the creation of the Lycée Fénelon*

The reputation of an establishment is built initially on the basis of the means implemented to contribute to the success of the objectives set by the law. Many choices were made regarding the birth of the first girls' high school in the capital.

congregation or lay boarding school».

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> «Bulletins de l'amicale générale des Proviseurs et Directrices des lycées français», Cahors, Coueslant, 1932, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Arrêté du 28 juillet 1884.

<sup>17</sup> «Bulletin administratif du Ministère de l'Instruction Publique», vol. 48, 1890, p. 424: «This discipline is bad, it is clumsy and narrow-minded. It sacrifices the whole future to the security of the present moment; it is satisfied with the apparent order it obtains and does not know or does not want to see the profound disorder it tolerates, still less that which it creates».

<sup>18</sup> Arrêté du 28 juillet 1884.



Located in the «Sinaï of university education», the building – a former Villayer mansion – offered an exceptional location in this district of the sixth arrondissement of Paris where «the experience of the male high schools had enlightened him». Thus, it was obvious that the first girls' high school in Paris would be built in this highly renowned district. However, alongside the moral vitality part of the district was renowned for its places of depravity in the image of the Saint-Michel district. The choice of the «sad rue de l'Éperon»<sup>19</sup> could not have been more strategic. As for the interior, it was austere, but in good taste. The architect of the large Parisian boys' high schools, Charles le Cœur, had made the necessary architectural modifications to make the premises functional while preserving the «attractive appearance of the classrooms and corridors»<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, on 15 October 1883, the *lycée* welcomed 121 pupils from a certain bourgeois class. Indeed, in order to forge the image of the renowned establishment and to guarantee its quality, the first *lycée* in the capital had to adopt strategies locally in order to ensure a choice recruitment. Firstly, the training offer for girls was accessible from a very young age<sup>21</sup> despite the status of a secondary school in order to compete with the congregations. In addition, the fees required for schooling were much higher than those of other girls' schools. For example, to be a simple day pupil at the *Lycée de Mâcon* cost sixty francs for primary classes compared to one hundred and fifty at Fénelon and ninety francs for secondary classes in Mâcon compared to two hundred francs for schooling in Paris, i.e. more than double.

In addition to the financial selection process, the school imposes a standard of excellence on young fénelonians. In addition to the financial selection process, the school imposed a high standard of excellence on the girls, with entrance examinations in both primary and secondary classes. In addition, a sixth year was created so that some girls could prepare for entry to the *École Normale de Sèvres* with, initially, a science-oriented class and then a literary section the following year. During the first ten years of its existence, Fénelon kept the preparation at Sèvres, having as its only competition the private college Sévigné. Finally, although the law did not provide for it, a boarding school was created outside of Paris in order to satisfy the wealthy families of the provinces<sup>22</sup>. Fénelon therefore welcomed young girls from bourgeois families in the Seine and the provinces, selected the best and perpetuated this requirement by preparing them for the teaching exam. Indeed, the *École Normale de Sèvres* – a women's teacher training college – opened its doors a few months after the Camille Sée Law and Fénelon became both a breeding ground and an

<sup>19</sup> G. Laguerre, *Le Lycée Fénelon*, Paris, Lesot, 1960, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> G. Dupont-Ferrier, *Du collège de Clermont au lycée Louis-Le-Grand: 1563-1920*, Paris, E. de Boccard, 1921, p. 226.

<sup>21</sup> AdP, 1491W 163. Prospectus des «Violettes» p. 18: The three years of primary education «are directed towards preparing pupils for secondary school».

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1: «The aim of the *Lycée Fénelon* educational centre is to enable parents to send their daughters to one of the best schools in Paris, and at the same time to provide them with the healthy and invigorating life of the countryside [...] we therefore wish to give the girls entrusted to us a physical and moral education in keeping with the high intellectual education they receive at the *Lycée Fénelon* [...] to surround the pupils with the healthy atmosphere of family life, while accustoming them to a thoughtful and moral discipline».

employer from the outset, in a process of perpetuating a certain form of education, of excellence, which was to play a major role in building its reputation.

In order to manage this establishment, Miss Cécile Provost was chosen by the vice-rector of the Paris academy, Octave Gréard<sup>23</sup>, as the first director of Fénelon. As one of the first female agrégées and with a wealth of teaching experience, she ran the school for over thirty years. In spite of all the missions mentioned above, she was perceived by the students as a «distinguished and reserved person, who ensured the organization of the school by a few general directives and obtained the good behavior of all by the simple example of her strict behavior»<sup>24</sup>. The female teachers, who were single in the early years, also had a duty to set an example, especially as many of them lived on the premises. The school was then a place of strict, hermetic, even monastic life.

In addition to this moralizing exemplarity, moral lessons were given in secondary education. Thus, in the fourth year, the girls tackle notions such as the idea of duty, the role of feeling in morality, responsibility or virtue, with the addition of commented philosophical readings such as Aristotle on friendship and education or Nicole and his Treatise on the means of keeping peace with men. This notion was taken up again and extended the following year, on the «means of not hurting their fellow men by contradicting their opinions»<sup>25</sup>, on the benefits of social life, solidarity between men, charity, benevolence and with the subject of the composition being a connection between theory and practice on the notion of goodness<sup>26</sup>. Linking theory to practice demonstrates the scientific and utilitarian character of republican morality. Having acquired a certain form of maturity, the fifth-grade students are not mere spectators of a lecture, but actors in understanding the internal logic of the morality course. The readings are complemented by questions that guide the debate while giving the high school girls keys to understanding, thus enabling them to reuse – with their children or future students – a reflexive path specific to a proven and tested morality. Indeed, «there is no morality without sanction»<sup>27</sup>. This organizational construction carried out by the agents made it possible to build an institutionalized school culture conducive to self-recruitment<sup>28</sup>.

Many resources have been deployed to make the Fénelon High School a quality school. In addition to the austere framework provided by the school building, elite staff

<sup>23</sup> E. Levasseur, *Octave Gréard*, Versailles, Imprimeries Cerf, n.d. p. 28. In this work, the author discusses the way in which Octave Gréard invested himself in female secondary education, describing it as «one of Gréard's most lively and dearest concerns». Indeed, he chose its name, its location «close to the Sorbonne» and its director in order to accompany him in the administration of the first *lycée* in the capital for twenty years.

<sup>24</sup> Association des anciennes élèves du lycée Fénelon, *Livre d'or du centenaire de l'association des anciennes et anciens élèves du lycée Fénelon*, Niort, Dumas, 1996, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> AdP, 704/73/1/54, Cahier de textes de 1906-1907.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, «After characterising goodness and briefly indicating its effects, you will draw a portrait of a truly good person».

<sup>27</sup> F. Mayeur, *L'éducation des filles: le modèle laïque*, in M. Perrot and G. Fraisse (edd.), *Histoire des femmes en Occident. Vol. IV: Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Plon, 1991, p. 300.

<sup>28</sup> Association des anciennes et des anciens élèves du lycée Fénelon, *Centenaire du lycée Fénelon*, Niort, Dumas, 1983, p. 15: «We have seen in this period of almost 24 years the children of the same family succeed one another without interruption at the *Lycée*. This is an unquestionable testimony to a discreet but sure success».

implemented the legislative framework by relying on human and financial resources in order to make this school the figurehead of girls' high schools in France. Once this reputation was created, what were the means to maintain it?

## 2. *Cultivating the reputation of the first girls' high school in Paris: the example of the Fénelon high school alumni association*

Although alumni associations are local initiatives, the public authorities have indicated their willingness<sup>29</sup> to see the development of an alumni network:

«I would like to take this opportunity to ask you to draw the attention of the Headmasters and Headmistresses of the secondary schools in your area to the usefulness of the former pupils' associations. These societies can lend us very valuable assistance, not only through the foundation of scholarships and prizes, but also through the patronage they exercise over pupils who are on the eve of leaving the *lycée*; they can, as one of their honorable predecessors observed, «intervene in the most useful way by giving these young people wise directions, by smoothing out for them the difficulties they encounter when entering the world, by facilitating their access to a career, in keeping with their vocation, their ability and their family position». My administration could therefore only strongly encourage the efforts which would be attempted by the local authorities to found alumni associations where none exist, or to extend the benefits and develop the means of action of those which are already functioning».

Mindful of the ministerial injunctions and conscious of the weight of this type of structure in the running of schools<sup>30</sup>, the headmistress Cécile Provost decided to found the association of former pupils of the *lycée* thirteen years after the birth of Fénelon. The newsletters produced are an invaluable source of information on the way in which the school's operating and communication methods were thought out at the time.

### 2.1 *The Alumni Association*

«In 1896, a group of teachers elected by their colleagues and joined by a few former pupils formed, together with your Founder, the first Committee of our Association»<sup>31</sup>. At that time, this group was not simply an after-school activity, but an independent organization with its own mode of operation. The latter was composed of members,

<sup>29</sup> Circular letter of 21 April 1894: *Alumni Association*.

<sup>30</sup> S. Lembre, *La participation des anciens élèves aux politiques d'enseignement technique. Le cas du Nord de la France sous la Troisième République*, «Participations», n. 1, 2015, p. 196.

<sup>31</sup> Association des anciennes élèves du lycée Fénelon, 25<sup>ème</sup> anniversaire de l'association amicale des anciennes élèves du lycée Fénelon, Cahors, Coueslant, 1921, p. 3.

classified according to their donations and their status in the organization (from founder, to benefactor, to honorary member). Members could also be students, again for a fee. In addition, in order to legitimize the seriousness of the enterprise in the eyes of the authorities and users, Octave Gréard was appointed honorary president. It should be noted that this same male figure enabled the association to obtain recognition as an Association of Public Utility<sup>32</sup>.

As far as the aims of the association are concerned, they are similar to the statutes of the boys' high schools, but they do not include the sphere of professional mutual aid:

Article 1<sup>er</sup> – The purpose of the Association, known as the “Association of former students of the Lycée Fénelon”, founded in 1896, is to establish a common center of friendly relations between the former students of the *Lycée Fénelon*, and to provide material and moral assistance to those of its members who, without having any demerit, would be in need.

Here we find the same logic of selection that the *Lycée* operates. Indeed, in order to be a student at Fénelon, it is necessary to pay a certain sum. In order to become a member of the Association as well. Similarly, success and merit are valued at Fénelon. The Association also values the most deserving through prizes, scholarships or the emergency fund for members in need.

The activities offered by the association to the alumni are of different kinds and have evolved over time. Nevertheless, they are in line with the aims of the school. As early as 1902, conferences were organized by the association's steering committee so that former pupils would periodically receive «a charming and instructive talk», usually by the *lycée's* teachers. In order to disseminate the event as widely as possible, a monthly report is published in the association's bulletin. In this same bulletin, all information concerning the future of the former pupils is reported: births, deaths, marriages. Once a year, the moral situation of the association, the list of members and the statutes of the association are published; not forgetting the announcement of the *Lycée* festival and the Association festival, sources of funding. Thus, from its creation, the association had 160 members, mainly teachers. Indeed, «the students who have left the *Lycée* are not sufficiently eager to join the Association: our income is therefore affected»<sup>33</sup>. As a result, an entire recruitment policy was put in place to win over former *Lycée* girls. A «propaganda committee» was set up to solicit as many female students as possible. The pupils of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade (the youngest eligible members) were invited to the conferences. In addition, the Alumnae Association helps with the organization of parties and the ball, and helps the girls to find a place in a foreign family.

Over the years, the number of members has increased and the activities have multiplied. Indeed, many activities animate the life of the school and contribute to perpetuate its influence. For example, there were certain works that «seemed worthy of

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4: «You were also greatly helped by the Honorary President, then at the head of the Association, Mr. Rector Gréard, who, struck by the achievements of the Association, which had been so recently created, and also by your organisation, asked that the dossier be submitted for careful examination».

<sup>33</sup> «Bulletin de l'association amicale des anciennes élèves du lycée Fénelon», May 1902, p. 2.

particular interest», such as the work of preserving tuberculosis, sewing workshops to make clothes for poor children, and collaboration with the «Oeuvre of the blind of war». These members are confronted with moral questions. In fact, by provoking reflection and action in order to enlighten and strengthen feelings, the (former) girls put into practice the sense of moral and virtuous life they learned during their studies.

Thus, a network woven by the association contributes to the prestige of the Fénelon high school. Former students and teachers enroll their daughters in the school. They tend to remain very attached to the school and to their headmistress, Cécile Provost, who helped to give a soul to the Fénelon school and to bring together in the same family all the *Féneloniennes*, students and teachers.

## 2.2 *The central role of Fénelon's first headmistress in the newsletters of the alumni association*

Formerly assistant teacher at the *École Normale Supérieure de Sèvres* and just agrégée (27 years, 9 years and 8 months of service), Cécile Provost was chosen by Octave Gréard to be head of Fénelon. She worked under his strong recommendations until the death of the vice rector in 1904. From the very first inspection reports, Provost's inspection reports are laudatory:

Intelligent, well-informed, distinguished principal. Loves her school and gives herself to it without counting the cost [...] and gives all her colleagues an example of activity and zeal [...] Judges her staff with insight and benevolence [...] pleases the families [...] seems to me to have all the qualities needed to ensure and develop the good reputation and prosperity of the school she has been invited to run<sup>34</sup>.

In parallel to her work as head of Fénelon, she decided to create the association with a handful of teachers. Thus, she reigned for thirty years at the head of the school and worked within the Association until her death as founding president. Her attachment to the school was great. Fénelon was undoubtedly like a second family for her. This is reflected in her last speech in the newsletter of the Fénelon High School Alumnae Association. Indeed, the lexical field used is marked by maternal tenderness. The one that encompasses («my dear girls [...] my friends [...] my dear alumnae»), the one that guides («walking towards the future [...] growing success»), the one that brings together («a closer union of all») both in memory and for the future («when you come back [...] to bring your grandchildren [...] a thought of affection for the past»). This is how the future *Féneloniennes* were mainly recruited for years.

Thus, the Association's Bulletin became the forum of the school principal. Published quarterly, then monthly, almost every issue includes the first speech by the honorary president before that of the president or the treasurer, thus marking her pre-eminence. In this context, she comments on the life of the school and of the association, its events and

<sup>34</sup> AN, F/17/22241, General Inspection for the year 1894-1895.

its alumni, particularly in the event of death. She is also constantly congratulating the moral health of the school, highlighting the actions carried out and constantly soliciting new recruits. Her speech is that of a teacher who directed «this great House» that is Fénelon during the first thirty years of her life, in the evocation of a past that may have been toned down and certainly regretted:

In the strong bourgeoisie of our old France, our ancestors frequently kept a book, called the “book of reason”, in which were noted the events that interested the family group. They were accompanied by judgments and reflections, and from these books the soul of the family really emerged. With what tender respect the descendants had to reread these Annals of the past, we can easily imagine! What would be ours when we leaf through them in our turn... And we regret that life, so different today from what it was in the past, has only too rarely allowed traditions that are both so strong and so touching to survive.

But if the habit is almost completely lost in families, Societies like yours give us each year, in a series of reports, an enumeration of the decisions taken and the events that occurred, which together form a sort of “book of reason” for the Association. And this is one of the reasons why you should come in large numbers to the General Assemblies. On the contrary – and I deeply regret that your ranks are so thin at this meeting where we review the work and results of the year! At least read and reread these beautiful reports written with such a loyal pen, let your absent companions read them and, as we do ourselves, let yourselves be penetrated by the Soul of the Association<sup>35</sup>.

This collective memory, represented by the newsletters, is to be crossed with the individual memories gathered in the visitors’ book published during the centenary of the Fénelon school. Here, the testimonies of former students, together with the class photos, constitute an additional marker of the school’s history. Provost is described here by a pupil who attended the school between 1907 and 1919 as a headmistress who «appeared rather majestic, rather distant; and [who] knew very little about us». Another pupil who went to school in 1912 «remembers her very precisely as a distinguished and reserved person, who ensured the organization of the school by a few general directives, and obtained good behavior from everyone simply by the example of her strict behavior». As Michelle Perrot said about her mother, «The *Lycée Fénelon* played an important role in my mother’s life [...] She took great pleasure in meeting up with her friends and forging new links with much younger “old-timers”. The Association was for her an irreplaceable place of meeting and friendship which she held dear».

### *Conclusion*

The reputation of the *Lycée Fénelon* was built up at the same time as its memory, as the first high school for young girls in Paris. This success was the fruit of many efforts: that of the State, but also, and above all, of women and men who knew how to exploit

<sup>35</sup> «Bulletin de l’association des anciennes élèves du lycée Fénelon», May 1926, p. 6.

their room for manoeuvre to carry out their project: to make Fénelon the figurehead of female secondary education in France and internationally for many years.

It is primarily thanks to the will and determination of Octave Gréard<sup>36</sup> and Cécile Provost – a man and woman of power – that the prestige of the school was built. Gréard played a major role in providing the school with selection criteria favorable to good opinions, such as the name of the school, the choice of its location and the appointment of the headmistress, whom he accompanied in many of her undertakings.

It is also certainly in large part thanks to the first headmistress and founder of the alumnae association that a certain atmosphere, prompted by moral discipline and family duty, was spread for more than fifty years in and around Fénelon. Finally, it is certainly thanks to the teachers and staff who have accompanied all these generations of students.

It is also thanks to all these young girls who brought the school to life in various ways that the school «remained for a long time a place of excellence in women's secondary education»<sup>37</sup>, as Françoise Mayeur recalled.

Today, a true living memory of the school, the alumni association still holds a meeting on Tuesday afternoons in the school, despite a certain decline. I had the pleasure of hearing them on a few Tuesdays reminiscing (and sometimes bickering) about the good and not so good moments of their schooling in their House.

<sup>36</sup> J.F. Condette, *Gréard Octave Valléry Clément*, in *Les recteurs d'académie en France de 1808 à 1940*, Paris, Institut national de recherche pédagogique, 2006, vol. II, pp. 204-206. After devoting a large part of his professional life to primary education, Octave Gréard turned down a position as Senator in order to continue his duties as Vice-Rector of the Paris academy.

<sup>37</sup> Association des anciennes et des anciens élèves du lycée Fénelon, *Centenaire du lycée Fénelon*, Dumas, Niort, 1983, p. 13.





# Building the Local History Curriculum in Rural Portugal: between Local Developments and Global Understandings

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## 1. “School memories, reconstructed identities”: brief notes on a project

Primary sources mentioned in this paper result from a research project in the fields of History of Education and Policies for Education and Training: “Rescued memories, (Re) constructed Identities: Schooling experiences, heritage and local education dynamics” – MRIR (October 2019-September 2022, University of Lisbon). Based on qualitative research methodologies in the field of Historical Studies in Education<sup>1</sup>, Project MRIR gathered and collected oral and written testimonies and other visual sources related to the history and memory of education in the region of PIS (sub-regions of Beira Baixa and Médio Tejo). Oral and visual sources are still being systematized for publication in the project’s Website<sup>2</sup>, to support the design of a Local History Curriculum (LHC) and developed through a CTET Program<sup>3</sup>. Involved in the design and implementation of this experimental CTET Program are the CFAE Centro Educatís (sub-regions of Lezíria and Médio Tejo) and the CFAE Alto Tejo (sub-regions of Médio Tejo and Beira Baixa)<sup>4</sup>.

MRIR team sought to build a memory of education at the local level, identifying the material and immaterial heritage associated with education and teaching (buildings, iconography, biographies of pedagogues and teachers, ephemerides, school museums, local and regional press, school statistics, archeological sites). The project was also directed towards the production of a local history curriculum through the organization of a teacher training program involving local actors (citizens, specialists in local history, teachers, and researchers), institutional partners (universities, polytechnics, local development associations) and Centers for Teacher Education and Training (hereafter CFAES), within the geographic area of PIS.

When the pandemic hit Portugal, project MRIR’s team was conducting fieldwork in PIS, and planning the CTET Program to be certified by the national Continuing

<sup>1</sup> T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education: Debates, Tensions and Directions*, Singapore, Springer, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <http://memorias.resgatadas.ie.ulisboa.pt/> (last access: 20.03.2023).

<sup>3</sup> CTET stands for Continuous Teacher Education and Training program.

<sup>4</sup> CFAE stands for *Centros de Formação da Associação de Escolas*.

Education Scientific-Pedagogical Council (CCPFC). The trial phase of the program pilot was already in place at Centro Educatís, associated with one of our project members. However, in between two nationwide lockdowns (March-May 2020 and January-March 2021), with the order of priorities continuously shifting, planning and implementation activities had to be constantly postponed, rethought, and rebuilt. Furthermore, since then, the CFAE and their Associated Schools have been overwhelmed with urgent priorities which left them with little room to attend Project MRIR's proposals. From September to December 2021, a series of informal conversations and formal negotiations between Project MRIR's team members and two CFAE's Directors led to the launching of an experimental version of the CTET Program at the CFAE of Alto Tejo, in collaboration with the School of Education of Castelo Branco.

MRIR project, which was the result of research carried out *with* the local community and *for* the local community, through historical and ethnographic research dynamics, aimed at producing historical content in the field of local educational heritage that may be used by stakeholders for instructional and civic purposes (municipalities, civic associations, schools, teachers, and families). Ultimately these materials, and the way in which they were organized as historical knowledge, sought to contribute to the rethinking of the Local Educational Project (hereafter PEL) impacting at the Educational School Project level (hereafter PES) and at the Curricular Class Plans level (hereafter PCT). The project's preliminary results have been made available on a web platform<sup>5</sup> that disclosed an archive of Public Memory seeking to deepen the public's awareness of their local education history and heritage. The platform is organized according to the three axes of the project: Memory, Heritage, and Education.

Memory axis relates to the building of historical sources founded on the gathering, collection, systematization, and production of knowledge about schooling experiences, mainly through oral history methodologies<sup>6</sup>. Heritage axis deals with the identification of the historical educational heritage at the local cultural level, mainly through historical research and ethnographic fieldwork<sup>7</sup>. Education axis refers to the production of tangible materials (programs, curriculum, and thematic modules) associated with teaching and teacher' training in the field of local history. This project strand rest on community-

<sup>5</sup> <http://memorias.resgatadas.ie.ulisboa.pt/> (last access: 20.03.2023).

<sup>6</sup> K. Llewellyn, N. Ng-A-Fook (edd.), *Oral History and Education: Theories, Dilemmas and Practices*, London-Cham, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> M. Lawn, I. Grosvenor (edd.), *Materialities of Schooling: design, technology, objects, routines*, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2005; M. Lawn (ed.), *Modelling the future: Exhibitions and the Materiality of Education*, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2009; C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

based teacher participatory research methodologies<sup>8</sup>, the organization of “communities of practice”<sup>9</sup> and “place-based curriculum strategies”<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. *The context*

The PIS region is classified as a “low-density territory”, a multi-criteria concept that considers population density, demography, settlement, physical characteristics of the territory, socio-economic characteristics and accessibility as the main indicators<sup>11</sup>. The five municipalities that integrate the region of PIS (Oleiros, Proença-a-Nova, Sertã, Vila de Rei e Mação) all display low demographic density (including low level of interaction both between people and institutions), low institutional density (public institutions with little territorial dynamics), difficulty in using human resources (limited job offers), the limitations of local markets (not very competitive), difficulties in accessibility, low qualification levels of the active population and high school dropout rates<sup>12</sup>.

In the last two decades, the contraction of the school population with the consequent reduction in the number of pupils has led to the reorganization of the school network, dictating the closure of schools, the migration of teachers and unemployment of auxiliary staff and the concentration of teaching in medium-sized establishments.

The closure of schools, particularly 1<sup>st</sup> cycle schools, which were more widespread in the rural landscape, led to further depopulation and often to the abandonment of villages. This phenomenon aggravated the educational disparities within the region (namely regarding the socio-economic profile of the pupils’ families, pupils with social support, educational level of the mothers, retention and drop-out).

Against all odds, PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS results of the five municipalities<sup>13</sup> challenge the idea that poor school performance and learning inequalities can be explained by factors external to the school, such as the social and economic characteristics of the territories, and the socioeconomic profile of the families. Portugal’s participation in the

<sup>8</sup> G.J. Pine, *Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies*, Los Angeles, Sage, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> E. Wenger, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998; E.C. Wenger, W. Snyder, *Communities of practice: the organizational frontier*, «Harvard Business Review», vol. 78, n. 1, 2000, pp. 139-144; E. Wenger, R. McDermott, W. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> D. Sobel, *Place-based education: connecting classrooms and communities*, Barrington, Orion Society, 2004; D. Shulsky, E. Hendrix, *Rooting the Literacies of Citizenship: Ideas that integrate social studies and language arts in the cultivation of a new global mindset*, in A. Crowe, A. Cuenca (edd.), *Rethinking Social Studies Teacher Education in the Twenty-First Century*, Cham, Springer, 2016, pp. 101-119.

<sup>11</sup> Interministerial Coordination Committee for Portugal 2020, Resolution n. 55/2015, pp. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> J. Álvaro, *Educação em Territórios de Baixa Densidade: Ensino Profissional e Desenvolvimento, O Caso da Beira Interior Norte*, Tese de Mestrado em Ordenamento do Território e Desenvolvimento, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra, 2013, pp. 51-53; B.M. Mota, *A Problemática dos Territórios de Baixa Densidade*, Tese de Mestrado em Administração Pública, ISCTE, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, 2019, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> In education statistics, Oleiros and Proença-a-Nova are part of the sub-region Beira Baixa; Sertã, Vila de Rei and Mação are part of the sub-region Médio Tejo.

2018 edition of PISA seems to confirm the favourable position of Beira Baixa and Médio Tejo in the programme results in Literacy, Mathematics and Science. At the national level, Portugal came 24<sup>th</sup> in scientific literacy, 24<sup>th</sup> in reading and 22<sup>nd</sup> in mathematics, with 492 points in each domain, ranking above the OECD average in any of them. In the PIS region, the results obtained in reading performance by Beira Baixa (495 points) and Médio Tejo (501 points), place either of these regions above the national average. In scientific literacy, the Médio Tejo and Beira Baixa stood out again, in a positive way, reaching respectively 509 and 500 points, significantly above the national average (492). In mathematics, the performance of these two regions was 505 points (Médio Tejo) and 498 points (Beira Baixa), again scoring above the national average. Considering the context variables, these results challenge the most deterministic visions about the existence of predestined pathways<sup>14</sup>. Thus, it is clear that school performance can make a difference and those external factors can be downsized, or even compensated, by school networking, and cooperation between schools and municipal councils within the educational communities. Community solidarity, and the role of the municipalities during lockdown times (and after), give us an entry point to understand the advantages of proximity against the background of distanced, aging, and isolated territories.

### 3. *The Local History curriculum as a response to the flexible curricula management policy*

Education policy in Portugal in the last forty years developed around four main oxymorons: the ideal of decentralization (1980s), the concept of autonomy (1990s), the territorialization process (first decade 21<sup>st</sup> century), and the discourse on flexibility (second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century)<sup>15</sup>. These ideas have shaped the juridical discourse with cumulative and often contradictory guidelines about the educational system organization<sup>16</sup>. The Educational Act functioned as an instituting narrative of the decentralization of the education system (LBSE Act, 1986); the narrative of autonomy worked as a discourse aimed at strengthening the powers of the school (Decree-Law n° 43/89); the notion of territorialization legitimized the transfer of responsibilities from central to municipal levels (Decree-Law n° 30/2015); and the discourse on curricular flexibility transferred to the Principals, the School Board and to the teachers the

<sup>14</sup> J. Cravinho, *As desigualdades de resultados entre regiões e escolas e o direito constitucional à igualdade de oportunidades*, in *Estado da Educação 2019*, Lisboa, Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2020, p. 540.

<sup>15</sup> The 1986 Educational Act is, to this day, the backbone of Portuguese education policies. As a product of a particular set of political circumstances, in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution that overthrow 40 years of dictatorship, the document sought «to grant schools autonomy and to enfranchise the people's participation in the educational process», core principles aligned with the newly approved Portuguese Constitution (LBSE, Law n. 46 of 14 October 1986, Art. 3).

<sup>16</sup> J. Barroso, *A emergência do local e os novos modos de regulação das políticas educativas*, «Educação, Temas e Problemas», n. 12-13, 2013, pp. 13-25; L. Lima, *Máquinas de administrar a educação: dominação digital e burocracia aumentada*, «Educação & Sociedade: Revista de Ciências de Educação», n. 42, 2021, <https://www.scielo.br/j/es/a/PyfCP4xcqHvTKm6M3TPsB4h/> (last access: 20.03.2023).

responsibility of managing the curriculum (Decree-Law nº 55/2018)<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, in recent decades, the management of education policies at local level has become the confused stage for public policies subject to “complex a multi-regulation” game. To understand it one must take in consideration a number of simultaneous complex processes: the reinforcement of transnational regulations (such as PISA, PIRLS, TIMMS, etc.), the hybridism of national regulation (the four oxymorons), the widening of intermediate regulation (granting municipalities new responsibilities in educational local governance), and the diversity of logics in the internal regulation of schools (the regulatory power of digital platforms and “flexible curriculum management” issues)<sup>18</sup>.

Despite these deconcentrating attempts, the Portuguese Education System remains until today highly centralized. A recent international report confirmed that Portugal has the highest portion of education responsibilities controlled by the central government, when compared to the OECD. As such, Portugal’s index of autonomy (measured by a combination of factors under PISA testing) rests below the OECD average by about 10% percentage points<sup>19</sup>.

We do not intend here to discuss levels of autonomy and school outcomes, which in any case are bound to a discussion<sup>20</sup>. Rather we want to focus on the possibilities offered by the “decreeted” and the “hyper-regulated” autonomy margins and how municipalities, school clusters and communities may explore them to build innovative pedagogical local, school, and curricular educational projects. The concept of *curricular flexibility* is one of these possibilities, by circumventing this disciplinary rigidity, within and between areas of knowledge, betting on a transformation of the curriculum from within the educational institutions<sup>21</sup>. This is the case with the discipline of History “which in some cases has shifted from a sequentially organized set of contents to a problem-based approach that integrates reflections and procedures from Geography, Economics, Sociology, and Cultural Studies. While the chronological sequence is rarely abandoned, its themes tend to mobilize microhistories and global histories, gender perspectives, material cultures, and there is an increased presence of historiographic reflections on sources, archives, and narrative forms<sup>22</sup>. The other “possibility” that received an impetus during pandemic times has been the growing awareness of the importance of local educational projects defining

<sup>17</sup> The amount of legislation subsidiary to each of these Decree-Laws cannot be summarized here amounting to thousands of pages of statutory regulations, most of them heavily criticized by their hybrid, contradictory or even misleading character.

<sup>18</sup> Barroso, *A emergência do local e os novos modos de regulação das políticas educativas*, cit., p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> S. Martins, L. Capucha, J. Sebastião, *School autonomy, organization, and performance in Europe: a comparative analysis for the period from 2000 to 2015*, Lisboa, CIES/ISCTE, 2019, pp. 126-127.

<sup>20</sup> E. Hanushek, S. Link, L. Woessmann, *Does school autonomy make sense everywhere? Panel estimates from PISA*, «Journal of Development Economics», n. 104, 2013, pp. 212-232.

<sup>21</sup> Curricular Flexibility Decree – DR, 1<sup>st</sup> series, n. 129,6 July 2018, p. 2928.

<sup>22</sup> I. Dussel, *The Shifting Boundaries of School Subjects in Contemporary Curriculum Reforms: Towards a post-disciplinary curriculum?*, «Zeitschrift für Pädagogik», n. 5, 2020, p. 683; I. Dussel, *La clase em pantuflas*, in I. Dussel, P. Ferrante, D. Pulfer (edd.), *Pensar la educación en tiempos de pandemia: entre la emergencia, el compromiso y la espera*, Buenos Aires, UNIPE – Editorial Universitaria, 2020, pp. 337-348.

a vision for education and a roadmap to improve long-term outcomes and equality for the community<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4. *Building a common education public space*

In Portugal, several authors have drawn attention to the need to find new forms of institutional regulation that are compatible with socio-community logics<sup>24</sup>. António Nóvoa goes further, proposing the construction of a “common education public space”<sup>25</sup> based on the creation of new school environments and the composition of a pedagogy of encounter. The proposal involves a new contract between school and society, which inevitably implies new links between family, social and working times<sup>26</sup>. This very same idea runs through *Reimagining our Futures Together* (ICFE/UNESCO, 2021) according to which «n a new social contract for education, curricula should grow out of the wealth of common knowledge and embrace ecological, intercultural and interdisciplinary learning that helps students access and produce knowledge while building their capacity to critique and apply it»<sup>27</sup>. Teachers constitute a key player in the construction of this “education common space”:

1. through the building of educational moments inside and outside school premises, in cities and in family and local contexts, leading to the valorization of non-formal times and spaces;
2. by organizing instruction in a diversity of spaces, for work and study, individually or in groups;
3. by organizing diversified forms of grouping students, also according to the tasks to be carried out, giving rise to individualization processes that allow for the construction of differentiated school paths;
4. by replacing the “frontal pedagogy” by a pedagogy of work;
5. by organizing the curriculum in great themes and problems, valuing the convergence of the disciplines and the dynamics of investigation.

<sup>23</sup> International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Education in a Post-Covid world: nine ideas for public action*, Paris, UNESCO, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> J. Barroso, *Regulação e desregulação nas políticas educativas: tendências emergentes em estudos de educação comparada*, in J. Barroso (ed.), *A Escola Pública: Regulação, Desregulação, Privatização*, Porto, Asa, 2003, pp. 19-48; Id., *A transversalidade das regulações em educação. Modelo de análise para o estudo das políticas educativas em Portugal*, «Educação & Sociedade», vol. 39, n. 145, 2018, pp. 1075-1097.

<sup>25</sup> A. Nóvoa, *Debate Nacional sobre Educação*, Assembleia da República, 22 May 2006, <https://dne.cnedu.pt/dmdocuments/Confer%C3%Aancia%20de%20abertura-Ant%C3%B3nio%20N%C3%B3voa-AR%2022%20Maio.pdf> (last access: 20.03.2023); Id., *A escola e a cidadania: apontamentos incómodos*, in R. D’Espiney (ed.), *Espaços e sujeitos de cidadania*, Setúbal, Instituto das Comunidades Educativas, 2006; Id., *Educação 2021: Para uma história do futuro*, «Educação, Sociedade & Culturas», n. 41, 2014, pp. 171-185.

<sup>26</sup> A. Nóvoa, Y. Alvim, *Os professores depois da pandemia*, «Educação & Sociedade», vol. 42, 2021, pp. 1-16.

<sup>27</sup> International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*, Paris, UNESCO, 2021, p. 64.



Accordingly, the “education common public space” is space in which the school has its place, but which is not a hegemonic, unique place in the education of children and young people<sup>28</sup>. Within MRIR project, the Education axis aimed at building networks with local educational partners toward the construction of a local history curriculum for primary and secondary schools in the region of PIS. Our research project was developed within the specific site of teacher education programs, curriculums and professional learning models provided by Centros de Formação de Associação de Escolas (CFAE). CFAE’s are one of the most important entities regulating the continuing teacher development in Portugal. These entities, which intermediate between the central administration and the local level, integrate school clusters (groupings of schools) of the public, private and cooperative network belonging to a same geographical area. Through the organization of a teacher training course, we sought to interlink teachers belonging to different school clusters and isolated schools in these territories. Our aim was, firstly, to disclose the open web platform of the MRIR project; secondly, to encourage the development of collaborative practices and the building of *communities of practice* among the PIS schools; and thirdly, to encourage the building of a local history curriculum (PEL), that could impact both the educational school project level (PES) and at the curricular class plans level (PCT). This approach was intended for connecting core subjects with their historical local expression, thus linking a global citizenship to situated, place-based knowledge.

### 5. *Curricula Beyond the Classroom*

We know too well that the processes of learning history do not result only from the teaching opportunities offered in the classroom, but also from dispersed contexts of learning. The development of historiographical practices within the scope of *Public History* makes it possible to build a set of opportunities for communities, activating collective memory, rescuing historical heritage, and giving visibility to local culture<sup>29</sup>. This process hinges on the fundamental notion of «educational public space»<sup>30</sup>. Epistemologically, the process rests on the assumption that «responsibility for Education stems from shared deliberative processes among the several entities: universities, local government, associations, citizens»<sup>31</sup>. Thus, we sought to build a local history curriculum

<sup>28</sup> A. Nóvoa, *A metamorfose da escola*, «Revista Militar», vol. 72, n. 1, 2020, pp. 33-42.

<sup>29</sup> T. Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, in J.B. Gardner, P. Hamilton (edd.), *Oxford Handbook of Public History*, New York/London, Routledge, 2017; Id., *The Rise of Public History: An International Perspective*, «História Crítica», n. 68, 2018, pp. 3-26; M. Houdek, K.R. Phillips, *Public Memory*, «Oxford Research Encyclopaedia», 25 January 2017, <https://oxfordre.com/communication/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-181?rskey=3291Or&result=6> (last access: 20.03.2023).

<sup>30</sup> A. Nóvoa, *O espaço público da educação: imagens, narrativas, dilemas*, in *Espaços de educação, tempos de formação*, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2002, pp. 237-263.

<sup>31</sup> A. Nóvoa, *Professores: Imagens do futuro presente*, Lisboa, Educa, 2009.

through the enactment of “communities of practice”<sup>32</sup>. This approach was based on the establishment of a network of institutions and professionals that share a cultural identity, common learning environments and similar educational requirements<sup>33</sup>. As such we have departed from the MRIR website project platform, both as Public History repository and as a pedagogical too<sup>34</sup>. By setting up a teacher training programme, the diverse partners who cosigned the project proposal, namely the training center *Centro de Formação de Associação de Escolas Alto Tejo*, the *Terra e Memória* Institute, the *Escola Superior de Educação de Castelo Branco*, were able to establish collaborative practices methodologies among the PIS schools and teachers, aimed at the creation of a local history curriculum that could work in post-pandemic hybrid-learning environment<sup>35</sup>. The curricular offer comprises a set of themes related to the issues of memory and school patrimony, amplified with the theme of local archeological heritage. The production of pedagogical materials (syllabus and support modules for teacher training) was targeted at deepening local/global historical relations, and stress that curriculum and pedagogy are locally culture developments within global understandings<sup>36</sup>.

In the middle of the pandemic emergency the organisation of a set of short-term training courses (AFCD) in the form of webinars was the possible overcoming strategy, trying to disseminate the work done so far by the MRIR project team in the Intermunicipal Communities of Beira Baixa and Médio Tejo, aimed at teachers integrated in the CFAE – Training Centres of local School Association. The Short Duration Courses organised by the Alto Tejo Schools Association Training Centre (CFAE), were entitled, respectively, “Citizenship, Education and Memory” and “Citizenship, Education and Local History”. The sessions focused on the development of curriculum proposals aimed at strengthening the links between history, heritage and education, with an emphasis on local heritage and the resources produced within the MRIR Project. This strategy also encouraged the involvement of communities and families in an intergenerational dialogue on the issues of education, teaching and schooling in rural areas. The methodology followed in the online sessions attempted:

- to contextualize the different experiences in each territory, the methodologies used, the different phases of project MRIR implementation and evaluation;

<sup>32</sup> E. C. Wenger, W. Snyder, *Communities of practice: the organizational frontier*, «Harvard Business Review», vol. 78, n. 1, 2000, pp. 139-144.

<sup>33</sup> E. Wenger, R. McDermott, W. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> L. Stoll et alii, *Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature*, «Journal of Educational Change», vol. 7, n. 4, 2006, pp. 221-258; R. Opertti, *Ten clues for rethinking the curriculum*, Genève, UNESCO / IBE, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> OECD, *Curriculum (Re)design. A series of thematic reports from the OECD Education 2030 Project*. Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020; International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Education in a Post-Covid world*, cit.

- to mobilize the teachers and headmasters for the relevance (and potential) of integrating heritage and local history into teacher training curricula, strongly based on the territory, schools and collective reflection on pedagogical work;
- to acknowledge the inspiring and transformative potential of initiatives of this nature (involving schools, CFAEs, academia, municipal museums, and the local community) for changing the processes of initial and continuous teacher training and curriculum management, diversifying the learning times and spaces of teachers and students.

The responses to the final evaluation questionnaire launched by the Alto Tejo CFAE showed the receptivity of the participants to the initiative and gave the project team an account of the projects that were being designed in the different local spaces, in view to the recreation and the production of knowledge. Several participants wrote:

The sharing of experiences is what make us improve practices and this training course served this purpose... The expectations I had when I signed up for the course have been entirely fulfilled [...] The sharing was excellent, clarifying and motivating, as they gave me encouragement to realize a project that has been dormant for a while [...] The training course was very important and aroused my curiosity to get me to know better our local heritage [...]<sup>37</sup>.

## Conclusions

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a social contract of education was established based on an agreement that created the conditions for the emergence and consolidation of educational systems and schools. In post-pandemic times, education systems and schools are forced to rethink their organization and relationship with society, in a new cycle that, in the history of school and education, requires a new “social contract”<sup>38</sup>.

Thinking about education as “common good” links us to the arguments developed by historian António Nóvoa around the concept of “public space of education”<sup>39</sup>. This notion expands the space of school learning, involving society in a co-responsibility for a set of missions (education for citizenship, education for heritage, environmental education, media education, education for consumption, etc.), until now exclusively centered in the hands of the school institution and its teachers. Commitment to transform the present (and future) reality demands new questions, based on an understanding of the regime of

<sup>37</sup> C. Cruz, *Dimensões Locais do Espaço Público da Educação: (Re)pensar o currículo e a formação de professores*, in A. Madeira, H. Cabeleira, J. Magalhães (edd.), *Memórias Resgatadas, Identidades (Re)construídas: Experiências de Escolarização, Património e Dinâmicas Educativas Locais*, Lisboa, Colibri/IEUL, 2022, pp. 413-432.

<sup>38</sup> International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Reimagining our futures together*, cit.

<sup>39</sup> A. Nóvoa, *Tres tesis para una tercera visión: Repensando la formación docente*, «Profesorado: Revista de curriculum y formación del profesorado», vol. 23, n. 3, 2019, pp. 211-222; A. Nóvoa, Y. Alvim, *Nothing is new, but everything has changed: A viewpoint on the future school*, «Prospects», vol. 49, 2020, pp. 35-41; Nóvoa, Alvim, *Os professores depois da pandemia*, cit.

historicity in which we are immersed<sup>40</sup>. It is from a history of problems – e.g., from how a particular reality historically became a problem – that we can build an alternative history, by approaching what Hayden White called the “practical past”, capable of organizing the reading of that past according to new intelligibility, overcoming nihilist presentism and connecting the daily experiences of subjects to an horizon of expectations<sup>41</sup>.

This is what the project “Rescued Memories, (Re)constructed Identities” has sought to achieve over the last four years, setting up a unique research experience by bringing together a network of actors, integrating higher education establishments, museums, schools, school association training centers, teachers, local researchers, municipalities and senior universities. We aimed at contributing to the construction of the “public space of education” through the public sharing of historical knowledge (Public history) and the intergenerational participation of the community (schools, teachers, municipalities, associations, and citizens) in the construction of a new meaning for educational practices, inside and outside the school. At the same time, the establishment of “communities of practice”, collaborative dynamics between teachers and schools, and the active participation of local communities in the construction of local educational projects became an essential step to allow “place-based projects” and the overflowing of curricula into new educational spaces.

Our brief contribution sought to clarify the conceptual assumptions and the development of the project in its theoretical and methodological underpinnings, and its choreography (Memory – Heritage – Education). We also wanted to make clear the contribution of the research, through the products generated and shared with the community, to the changing practices inside and outside educational organizations. MRIR project was developed in an interior region of Portugal involving five municipalities classified as low-density territories. In these territories, where all indicators seem to precipitate a negative representation of community existence, signs of a paradigm change in the functioning of schools at the local level emerge in counter-cycle. We have shown that ideas can translate into meaningful actions, transforming “predestined” outcomes and the sense of inevitability of global pressures upon small rural populations and school clusters.

<sup>40</sup> M. Sahlins, *Des îles dans l'Histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1989; F. Hartog, *Regimes de historicidade: presentismo e experiências do tempo*, Belo Horizonte, Autêntica Editora, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> H. White, *The practical past*, «Historien», n. 10, 2010, pp. 10-19; M. Certeau, L. Giard, P. Mayol, *A invenção do cotidiano: Morar, cozinhar*, Petrópolis-Rio de Janeiro, Vozes, 1997; R. Koselleck, *Futuro passado: Contribuição à semântica dos tempos históricos*, Rio de Janeiro, Contraponto, 2006.

# Colegio Mayor Universitario “Casa do Brasil” (1962): a Place between Stories and Memories

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## *Introduction*

The present study concentrates its attention on the history of the international movement of higher education students and professors, with an emphasis on non-formal education models, which are organized in student residences, and more specifically on the case of *Casa do Brasil*, located in Madrid/Spain. We understand these spaces in their educational dimensions as a phenomenon inherent in higher education, a *locus* for formation (education in its broadest sense), socialization, political and cultural organization<sup>1</sup>. On the one hand, from our theoretical perspective, we consider institutional histories within a framework, which encompasses the internationalization of models, taking advantage of the convergence of tendencies in a celebratory fashion, and of their global quality as well. On the other hand, we question the overarching narratives of single causes, be they functional or symbolic, for their establishment and development<sup>2</sup>.

On Casa do Brasil's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1962-2022), we approach the discussions brought up by Pierre Nora on the need to consecrate the *places of memory*, in an artificial way, that is, with some external effort. Places of memory «are born and live in the feeling that there is no spontaneous memory, that it is necessary to create archives, keep track of birthdays and anniversaries, recite dirges, notarizing minutes, because these are not natural operations»<sup>3</sup>. Also, Paul Ricoeur problematizes forgetting as the hermeneutics of the historical condition of human beings, playing its role, besides history and memory, in the representation of the past<sup>4</sup>.

This research also approaches the broadening notion of material and immaterial heritage, which triggers reflections in other fields, as the educational one<sup>5</sup>. This movement,

<sup>1</sup> T. Ermel, M. Hilterholz, *A história da residência estudantil em questão: espaços de assistência, formação e circulação sociocultural*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. 10, n. 1, 2023, pp. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> E.V. Roldán, E. Fuchs, *Introduction: The Transnational in the History of Education*, in E.V. Roldán, E. Fuchs (edd.), *The Transnational in the History of Education. Concepts and Perspectives*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 1-47.

<sup>3</sup> P. Nora, *Entre memória e história. O problema dos lugares*, «Projeto História», n. 10, 1993, p. 13 (our translation).

<sup>4</sup> P. Ricoeur, *A memória, a história, o esquecimento*, Campinas, Editora da Universidade de Campinas, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> In 2013, an important number of student residences which are part of the University of Coimbra Alta and Sofia was considered by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) as

fundamental for the new perspectives on the history of education, recovers and values the memory of education in different times and spaces. As a transnational movement, it expresses the globalized forms of schooling and their common materiality. Therefore, «it expresses simultaneously specific, converging modalities to preserve the educational heritage and school culture, finding its counterparts in different countries»<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, they also attentively analyze the singularities of national education systems, assessing their global and regional tendencies.

From this standpoint, we analyze the projection and inauguration of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid, with a focus on ceremonies and celebratory works. This research, in its historical-documentary quality, concentrates on the book by its Brazilian architect, published in the year of its opening (1962), on the book *Ato de Inauguração (1962-2001)*, on annual reports, and on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration book (2012), among other documents from the General Archive of the Complutense University of Madrid and from its institutional archive. We also highlight the potential of CAPES/Brazil's central archive for research on this topic.

### 1. *A brief history of Colegios Mayores in Spain*

University student residences in Spain have a century-old history, marked by the creation of the first European university and by both students' and professors' need for displacement/accommodation. It is known that the first Spanish *Colegio Mayor* was organized in the city of Bologne (Italy), to welcome students who pursued their studies at its University. Named *Colegio Mayor San Clemente*, it was founded by Cardinal Gil de Albornoz in 1367 and is still open to this day, now as *Real Colegio de España*. In Spanish territory, the foundation of the *Colegio Mayor San Bartolomé*, in 1401, in the city of Salamanca, has been the model for several *colegios* and, in particular, the so-called *Colegios Mayores*, which are known for their excellence, with their own constitutions and bylaws<sup>7</sup>.

One of the reform projects developed by the *Junta de Ampliación de Estudios* (JAE) was the creation of the *Residencia de Estudiantes de Madrid*, in 1910, as an attempt to renew the Spanish educational system, with a distinctive cultural, intellectual and scientific space<sup>8</sup>. In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and the extinction of

a World Heritage of Humanity.

<sup>6</sup> M.J. Morgarro, A. Namora, *Educação e Patrimônio cultural: escolas, objetos e práticas, perspectivas multidisciplinares sobre a cultura material*, in M.J. Morgarro (ed.), *Educação e Patrimônio Cultural: escolas, objetos e práticas*, Edições Colibri, Instituto de Educação de Lisboa, 2015, p. 27 (our translation).

<sup>7</sup> M.N. Rupérez, *El Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé o de Anaya*, Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> PhD thesis Á. Ribagorda, *La Residencia de Estudiante. Pedagogía, cultura y proyecto social (1910-1939)*, Complutense University of Madrid – Department of Contemporary History (Supervisor: J.P. Fusi Aizpurua), 2010.

activities at this residence, there was an attempt to continue the project with the creation of the *Colegio Mayor Ximenez de Cisneros*, in the University City of Madrid in 1943.

As far as internationalization and higher education exchange are concerned, the political impetus directed at the increase in the number of university residences can also be seen in the creation of institutions for the welcoming of foreign students<sup>9</sup>. The first *colegios* in Spain to be organized to accommodate Hispanoamerican students were: *Colegio Mayor Casa de Santa María del Buen Aire*, founded in 1943 in Seville; *Colegio Mayor Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, founded in 1947 in Madrid; and *Colegio Mayor Hernán Cortez*, founded in 1950, in Salamanca<sup>10</sup>. According to the model of the *Colegio Mayor Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, there was the foundation, in the upcoming decades, of the following institutions: *Colegio Mayor Universitario Casa de Brasil* (1962), *Colegio Mayor Argentino Nuestra Señora de Luján* (1971) and *Colegio Mayor Universitario Colombiano Miguel Antonio Caro* (1971). The management of these three institutions was linked to their respective countries, represented in Spanish territory by the Embassies and respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, as well as by the regulations and bylaws of the Complutense University of Madrid<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. *Colegio Mayor Universitario “Casa do Brasil”*

Located at the University City of Madrid, which belongs to the University of Madrid<sup>12</sup>, on the University Campus of Moncloa, the *Colegio Mayor Universitario Casa de Brasil* was built on a parcel of land donated by the Spanish government<sup>13</sup>. In the report of the first academic year (1962-1963), headmaster Joaquim da Costa Pinto Netto<sup>14</sup> stresses

<sup>9</sup> In 1935, the Colegio de España was founded in the Cité Universitaire de Paris.

<sup>10</sup> The Instituto de Cultura Hispánica was founded in 1945, as an advisory agency to the Spanish *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores* and as a tool to strengthen the relations with Iberoamerican countries. C. Lascaris, *Colegios Mayores*, Madrid, Ediciones de Cultura Hispánica, 1952.

<sup>11</sup> Ermel, Hilterholz, *A história da residência estudantil em questão*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> The current *Universidad Complutense de Madrid* adopted different names on different occasions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1943 and 1970, it was named *Universidad de Madrid*. In 1970, it received its current name: *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*.

<sup>13</sup> The official donation was made in Madrid on 21 November 1959 and put in place by decree n. 42.295A on 27 November 1959. An agreement was struck so that the construction of the building would be paid in exceeding coffee sacks by the Brazilian Coffee Institute. Cf. L. A. D’Escragnolle Filho, *Casa do Brasil. Madrid: Colegio Mayor Universitario Brasileño*, 1962 (Archives of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid).

<sup>14</sup> Joaquim José da Costa Pinto Netto (Salvador, BA, 1913-1996) was the first director of *Casa do Brasil* and worked in this position until 1973. He had a Social Sciences degree from the Faculty of Philosophy of Bahia (1943). He had been a teacher at *Ginásio da Bahia* (a junior school) and the *Instituto Normal da Bahia* (a teachers’ school). He moved to Rio de Janeiro, where he worked as a teacher, but also in commerce A. Wildberger, *Biografia e descendência do Marechal de Campo Francisco Pereira de Aguiar: 1820-1903*. Salvador, s.n., 1957, p. 43. He was sent to Europe, along with Ambassador Manoel Emilio Pereira Guilhon, thanks to his connections with Anísio Teixeira and Péricles Madureira de Pinho, to help in the foundation of *Casa do Brasil*. Cf. R. Araújo, *Os tempos de uma casa. 50 anos da Casa do Brasil em Madrid*, Brasília, Distrito Federal, LabPam, 2012.



the incipient character of this institution, as the first foreign *colegio mayor* in Spanish territory<sup>15</sup>. Officially inaugurated on June 4, 1962, *Casa do Brasil* was linked to Brazil's return to democracy, a time when the national development project and higher education in Brazil and abroad were seen with optimism<sup>16</sup>. Before that, we must also highlight the creation of CAPES (Brazilian Federal Foundation for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education), the Brazilian agency for the advancement of higher education, in 1951, whose main goal was to invest in the training of higher education professors by means of scholarship grants in Brazil and abroad, while importantly working on the implementation of post-graduation courses<sup>17</sup>.

The building was designed by Brazilian architect Alfonso d'Escragnolle, and the construction was led by Spanish architect Fernando Moreno Barberá. According to Miguel Ángel Gil, when he analyzed the history of the design of Spanish university residences, *Casa do Brasil* «stands as a timeless block, congregation, save for the gardened terrace, the features of Le Corbusier's architecture, turning into a symbol of the Modern Spanish Architecture of our time»<sup>18</sup>. Speaking of his own project, Luís Afonso D'Escragnolle Filho praises its «external plasticity» and the fact that the building was aligned with the architectural ideas of its time thanks to its «simplicity, functional efficacy, extreme comfort and beauty». According to him, «the space has been shaped to meet the demands of the man who will spend a good deal of his life in it; making it more pleasant to his walks, more comfortable and quiet to his time of rest and his daily toil»<sup>19</sup>. The building and its premises were the central topic in the beginning of the activities, with an emphasis on a series of imperfections and deficiencies which were under the care of *Torregrosa Empresa Constructora* and, also, the changes in the display of originally projected spaces, such as the director's room and the reception, which were turned into a music room and a TV room, as well as the displacement of the space initially reserved for the library, which was then moved to the ground floor of Block B, and also the space in the central hall, where student meetings took place<sup>20</sup>.

The opening ceremony was held at the Conference Hall and attended by Brazilian and Spanish diplomatic and official personnel, with a piano recital by Lia Salgado, wife to the former minister Clóvis Salgado. In the last months of 1962, there was an inaugural *missa capellán* and the chapel was blessed by Friar Antônio do Carmo, followed by a lunch attended by Brazilian, Spanish and Portuguese authorities, besides residents of the Casa and other guests. The first statute of the *Casa do Brasil*, issued in 1963, reinforces the

<sup>15</sup> Archives of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid, Report on the Academic Term, 1963, p. 41.

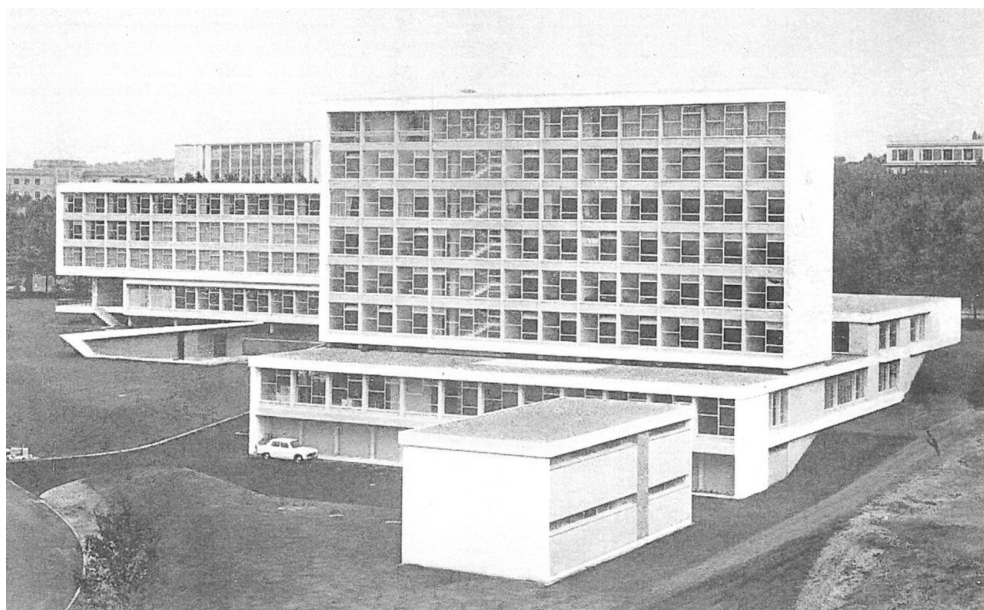
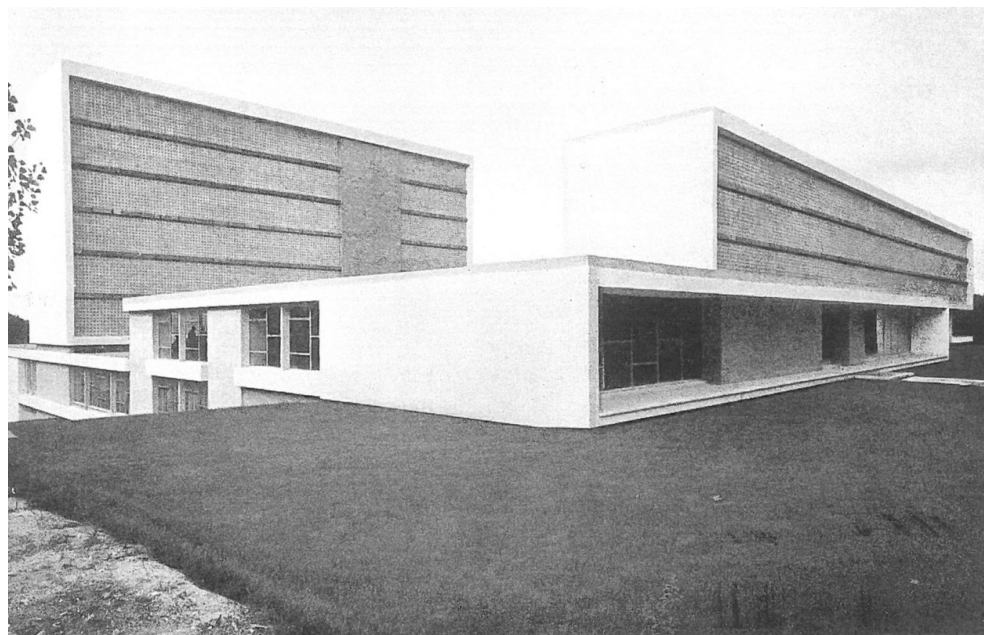
<sup>16</sup> T. Ermel, J. Igelmo, *Os Colegios Mayores como espaços de modernização do Ensino Superior espanhol na década de 1960: o caso do Colegio Mayor Universitario Casa Do Brasil*, «Revista Brasileira de Educação», vol. 27, 2022, pp. 1-26.

<sup>17</sup> C. Teive, *História da Educação*, São Paulo, Ática, 2007, p. 305.

<sup>18</sup> PhD thesis M.Á. Gil, *Residencias universitarias: historia, arquitectura y ciudad*, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia – Departament of Architectural Composition (Supervisor: C. Jodá Such and M.T. Palomares Figueres), 2015, p. 512 (our translation).

<sup>19</sup> D'Escragnolle Filho, *Casa do Brasil*, cit., p. 13 (our translation).

<sup>20</sup> Archives of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid, Report on the Academic Year, 1963.



Figs. 1-2. Photographs of the building, n.d. (D'Escragnolle Filho. *Casa do Brasil. Colegio Mayor Universitario Brasileño*, cit., pp. 7 and 12)

idea of disseminating Brazil in Spain as well as that of a cultural – and spiritual – closeness between both countries.

In the book that records the happenings of the opening ceremony and the impressions of the attendees, one of the first messages states that the residence should go beyond being the lodgings for university students of all nationalities, but also be a place for disseminating Brazil in Spain, and also for «bringing the cultures of both countries ever closer together»<sup>21</sup>. Throughout its pages, the records made between 1962 and 2001 consist mostly of dozens of signatures and messages written by visitors – most of them illegible –, and some of the written by Brazilian, Spanish and Portuguese authorities. Moreover, there are some records of addresses for the start and end of academic years, especially from the 1980s and 1990s. One of the first addresses was written by the President of the University of Lisbon, Paulo Cunha, on 6 February 1963. Not only does he praise the foundation of *Casa do Brasil*, but he also points out to the need for building a Brazilian university residence in Lisbon:

It was my great pleasure to visit Brazil's *Colegio Maior* at the University of Madrid: a great pleasure mixed with some *invidia bona*. It is absolutely necessary that the noble Brazilian Nation build in Lisbon a house as beautiful and useful as this one!

I declare my best wishes for such a work, which deserves every title, to fully achieve its purpose of educating people and disseminating Lusiad culture, thus fulfilling its fair aspirations<sup>22</sup>.

In the following decades, there were messages signed by the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture, such as those by Luís Victor d'Assis Silva, representative of the project *Universidade Aberta*, from April 1975; by the Head of the Center for Biological Sciences (CCBI), of the Federal University of Alagoas (1976); by the President of the Autonomous University of Madrid and the Vice-President of the Complutense University of Madrid, in June 1980. As for messages that imply proximity to the Catholic Church, there are those signed by the Archbishops of São Paulo (1967), Curitiba (1975) and Maceió (undated) and by the Parish Priest of Brasília (undated). The same document contains records of group visits to attend a typical Brazilian lunch party, the *feijoada*, as the ones offered to the International Commission of Delegates for the conservation of Atlantic tuna, in 1974, with members from the United States, Portugal, Venezuela, Japan, Canada, Korea and Senegal and the one offered in the following year to VARIG employees. In the early 1980s, the records show the signatures of those who attended the Portuguese Language and Brazilian Literature Teachers' Conference, which took place from 18 to 20 September 1981.

Throughout its six-decade history, we can observe that some features have remained the same and some have changed, which may be noticed both in its managerial structure and in the profile of its residents. The second article of the 1963 statute regulates the

<sup>21</sup> Archives of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid, Book of records. *Ato de inauguração*, 4 July 1962, p. 1 (our translation).

<sup>22</sup> Archives of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid, Book of records, *Ato de inauguração*, 1963, unpagged (our translation).

Management Board and makes it clear that it is incumbent on the Ministry of Education and Culture of Brazil to appoint its director to the National Education Ministry of Spain. This practice has gone unchanged to this day, so that the directors are still Brazilian, appointed by Brazil. It has been possible to identify directors with different backgrounds, namely: a sociologist, two engineers, an Economics and Business Administration major, and a Law and History major<sup>23</sup>. According to the book *Ato de Inauguração (1962-2001)*, on 31 October 1994, there was the nomination ceremony, «pro tempore», of the current director, Cassio Roberto de Almeida Romano, who succeeded Otaciano da Costa Nogueira Filho.

Annual reports were sent to CAPES/Brazil, with financial data, such as: expenses related to food, maintenance, workers' wages and monthly payments. They were written in different formats, some of them extensive and thorough, and others short and concise. Mostly, other data made up these memories, such as the residents' personal information (mainly nationality and gender) and those on cultural activities and courses held over that period. In 1990, according to Otaciano, *Casa do Brasil* stopped receiving financial resources from the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs, relying entirely on the monthly payments made by the residents<sup>24</sup>.

The connection with Brazil is explicit from the very first Bylaw, from 1963, in which it is stated that Brazilian residence solicitors should require their access via CAPES, and would be allowed to reside there for one year only, which could be extended to two or three years, depending on academic performance and other justifications. Thus, it is important to consider that a relevant part of the documents on Brazilian residents is in CAPES's central archives, in Brasília. These archives, which are still being put together, have recently found the files of Bendito José Barreto Fonseca, born in Campinas in 1934, a college professor and public prosecutor, who studied Law at Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, in 1957. He was one of the first Brazilian residents, and in 1964 he required a CAPES grant to pursue further studies in Constitutional Law and Philosophy of Law in Madrid. CAPES's central archives certainly contain significant documents on scholarship recipients who studied in Madrid and were lodged at *Casa do Brasil*.

Another key element in the history of *Casa do Brasil* is the organization of the archives of the *Padre Anchieta* Library, started in the first academic year. With constant efforts regarding the donation and purchase of works (journals or not), we can notice that in the first decade of the archives' existence, in 1965 it already contained 1.168 colored projection sheets, 689 of which on Brazilian culture topics – organized by residents especially with photographs taken of the Brazilian magazines *Manchete* and *O Cruzeiro* – and 479 on Spanish culture. They were forever asking Portuguese and Brazilian institutions for donations, and they also asked for the support of the Brazilian embassy in Madrid, its

<sup>23</sup> Araújo, *Os tempos de uma casa*, cit., pp. 86-87.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

biggest donor. Moreover, in 1970 a record library was created, with 35 records, 10 tape rolls and two thousand slides<sup>25</sup>.

In 1969, two murals were painted in the hall of the building, by visual artist Dirso José de Oliveira. One of them represents the evolution of humankind, made on wood and acrylic, and the other one, drawn on wood with light-colored crayons, show folkloric aspects of the Brazilian Northeast. Also, *Casa do Brasil*, is home to several artworks donated by artists who resided or exhibited their work there, and a studio for artists (formerly a section of the TV room) functioned there in the academic year of 1965-1966<sup>26</sup>.

The publishing of Ricardo Araújo's work *Os tempos de uma casa. 50 anos da Casa do Brasil em Madrid*, was a pioneering initiative regarding the history and memory of the residence. The book is a study that commemorates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Casa do Brasil*, and a part of it is dedicated to the Brazilian and Spanish historical contexts between 1962 and 2012<sup>27</sup>. In the section on the residence itself, the author displays the research he made in different archives, documentation centers, libraries and newspaper libraries, besides the institution's own files and records. Furthermore, he contacted former employees and residents, and systematized five decades of the history of the residence. More recently, Ermel and Igeldo have analyzed the context of modernization of Spanish higher education, highlighting the first decade of *Casa do Brasil's* activities and its role as an interlocutor in the Iberoamerican scenario<sup>28</sup>. Thus, due to the lack of studies on the topic, carrying out systematic research on the residence is a demand that must be urgently met<sup>29</sup>.

### Conclusions

Reflecting on the history of the international transit movement of students and higher education professors, we consider *colegios mayores* to be a space of religious and political formation, but also one of socialization and university culture. With its century-old history, it is possible to observe that in the foundation period of *Casa do Brasil* in Madrid it was aligned with Franco's regime, but also with the influences of university internationalization and modernization. Furthermore, its design is a landmark in modern Brazilian architecture, and still stands as a reference in Madrid, even though it is little known by most Brazilians.

<sup>25</sup> General Archive of the Complutense University of Madrid, Report on the Academic Periods, 1970, pp. 16-17 and p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Araújo, *Os tempos de uma casa*, cit.

<sup>28</sup> Ermel, Igeldo, *Os Colegios Mayores como espaços de modernização do Ensino Superior espanhol na década de 1960*, cit.

<sup>29</sup> We must make it clear that the research has been limited to looking up «Casa do Brasil» on the following databases: CAPES's theses and dissertations database/Brazil; PhD Theses – Teseo/Spain; Scielo; Dialnet; Google Scholar.



*Casa do Brasil* was founded to promote Brazilian culture and the Portuguese language in Spain and Europe, and still reserves a part of its vacancies for Brazilian students, teachers, researchers and artists. The closeness to Portuguese culture must also be regarded as a key part in the initial organization of this space, bearing in mind the unfulfilled expectations concerning the construction of a *Casa do Brasil* in Lisbon<sup>30</sup>.

Starting with some external effort, we believe that one of the main features of this study was bringing up the potential of the history and memories of *Casa do Brasil*, in view of its institutional archive, aiming at promoting historical research at the institution, which should be regarded as a transnational historical-educational heritage. The annual reports and records are, indubitably, a major part of this archive, available at the General Archive of the Complutense University of Madrid. However, other documents, which may broaden the official discourse, which is often merely technical or informative, need to be organized and made available with a view to expanding the historical importance and visibility of the residence. Another point, which might be key in this movement consists of intergenerational experiences shared by the residents and creating memory archive in the residence.

As a non-formal university educational space, for decades *Casa do Brasil* has promoted countless activities that contribute to the formation, socialization and culture of the *colegios mayores* in Spain, as a landmark for the convergence of several countries, especially Iberoamerican ones. This space was, to a great extent, a place for welcoming Latin American residents in its first decade of history. That being said, *Casa do Brasil* has not only played a role in the history and memory of the early and further university formation of many students, educators, researchers and artists from Brazil, Spain and many other countries, but also a distinguished part the transnational history of higher education, and perhaps in the future it will also be a part of the historical-educational university heritage of both countries.

<sup>30</sup> *Casa do Brasil de Lisboa* (CBL), created in the early 1990s, is not a student residence, but an association that provides assistance to Brazilian migrants. For further information, check: C. Brum, *A Casa do Brasil de Lisboa: uma associação de acolhida*, «Interseções», vol. 23 n. 1, 2021, pp. 7-38.









# **The School and Its Many Pasts**

## **III: Collective Memories of School**

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani







SECTION *The Representation of School between Press, Literature and  
Collective Imaginary*





# Iconographical Sources and History of Italian Schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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## 1. *History of education's pictorial turn*

After decades of debate dating back at least to Philippe Ariès's revolutionary and much debated *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960)<sup>1</sup>, it can be said that historical research today, especially that into social history, fully categorises images as autonomous sources, on a par with traditional written sources<sup>2</sup>. Ariès, further expanding on the already wide ranging research perspectives brought in by the *Annales* School in his later work, *Essai sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours*<sup>3</sup>, lucidly identifies the quality of historical sources produced by human creativity in its aesthetic orientation, like art and literature, seeing them with the most far reaching nonchalance in their fullest heterogeneity. In the 1975 *Preface* to this work, Ariès argues that:

this method is considered suspect today because it also uses noble materials and it is thought that this aesthetic quality, attributed to an elite, does not convey common feelings. A theological thought, an artistic or literary theme, namely everything that seems to rely on individualistic inspiration, can only take shape and style if it is simultaneously very close to an era's general feelings and a little different from it. If they were less close, it would not even be conceivable by its creators and understood by either the elite or the masses. On the contrary, in the absence of the difference, they would pass unobserved and would not cross the artistic threshold. Proximity gives us the vernacular, the era's common denominator. Diversity encompasses ambitions to "tomorrowness" or, by contrast, a prophetic trumpeting of future change. Historians must be able to distinguish between such proximities and diversities. On this certainly risky condition, historians are entitled to take good where they find it, from wide ranging and heterogeneous material, to compare documents of various kinds<sup>4</sup>.

\* Lorenzo Cantatore wrote sections 1 and 4; Luca Silvestri sections 2 and 3.

<sup>1</sup> P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Seuil, 1960; *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, English translation by R. Baldick, London, Pimlico, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> C. Pavone, *Prima lezione di storia contemporanea*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007, p. 107; P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001, p. 9. One of the theoretical-methodological objectives of Aby Warburg's work, too, as Burke stressed, was to «create a cultural history based equally on images and texts» (*ibid.*, p. 14).

<sup>3</sup> P. Ariès, *Essai sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris, Seuil, 1975; *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, English translation by P.M. Ranum, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> The *Preface* of 1975 is absent from the English edition of the work. The quoted translation refers to the French edition: Id., *Essai sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, cit., pp. 11-12.

Shored up by a great deal of subsequent wide ranging international enquiry<sup>5</sup>, Ariès's approach undoubtedly allows us to talk of a pictorial turn in historical studies, too<sup>6</sup>. This was a full-blown watershed in both the way historical documents (testimony) are to be understood and historians' perceptive and critical elaboration attitudes. At the same time, it also involves radically casting doubt on the text-based perspective, which gave written documents (mainly institutional and official in nature) absolute pre-eminence over other sources. In fact even when these latter were taken into consideration (from the starting point of visual sources) their validity always needed to be confirmed by written words. Horst Bredekamp's consideration on *image acts* can be considered to be valid for historians too<sup>7</sup>. According to him, in parallel with linguistic acts, the difficulty behind image acts consists in identifying the power which enables images to make the leap from a state of latency to exterior efficacy in the perception, thought and behaviour fields via visual or tactile fruition. Bredekamp claims that, in this sense, the efficacy of the iconic act is to be understood on the perceptive, thought and behaviour planes as triggered by the power of the image itself as well as the interactive relationship of those looking, at, touching and listening to it<sup>8</sup>.

This realisation has led to a process of fundamentally important renewal and relaunching of interdisciplinary relations and the very language of historiography in addition, naturally, to scholarly interpreting, critiquing and writing creativity (now necessarily prompted to measure up to the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of the new type of sources too), as well as the packaging of the products of research increasingly encompassing iconographic frameworks to progressively greater efficacy<sup>9</sup>.

One of the problems on which the concrete effect of this pictorial turn in historical enquiry can be measured relates to what is known as the «apparent realism»<sup>10</sup> of the iconic sources and the consequent need to hone interpretative tools. Historians using testimony of this type have to be aware that they are dealing with «texts» which have, in turn, interpreted the contexts and circumstances in which they were produced. Naturally, rather than limiting the value of their testimony, this amplifies it, as long as the person using such sources is able to interpret the historical value of their iconographical, stylistic and technical meaning and the non-secondary role of the original target. However much it distorts reality, a work of art is still a product of it, documenting it also by turning it on its head or rejecting it. As Burke has aptly explained:

<sup>5</sup> See R.J. Rotberg, T.K. Rabb (edd.), *Art and History. Images and Their Meaning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., p. 12; cf. W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Pictorial Turn*, «Artforum», n. 30, 1992, pp. 89-94.

<sup>7</sup> H. Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2010; *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, English translation by E. Clegg, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 33-35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> In this respect I like to cite a recent attractive work by R. Sani, *La leggenda del santo educatore. Filippo Neri tra agiografia e rivitalizzazione della tradizione pedagogica nel passaggio dalla società di antico regime all'età borghese (secoli XVII-XX)*, Macerata, eum, 2021, in which an analysis of attitudes to the saint figure in subsequent centuries is based on a detailed analysis of iconographical documents and of both erudite and popular language.

<sup>10</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., p. 115.

representational art is often less realistic than it seems and distorts social reality rather than reflecting it, so that historians who do not take account of the variety of the intentions of painters or photographers (not to mention their patrons and clients) can be seriously misled. However [...] the process of distortion is itself evidence of phenomena that many historians want to study: mentalities, ideologies and identities. The material or literal image is good evidence of the mental or metaphorical “image” of the self or of others<sup>11</sup>.

For this reason, too, historians wanting to try their hands at using visual sources need to be capable, either alone or with art scholars, of understanding how the language of art functions (in the same way as should happen with literary sources), taking account of the meaning of the technical-formal and social aspects of the artefact, aspects which are sometimes more decisive, in historical testimony terms, than the subjects portrayed in them. «The very way in which artists represent men and the world», suggest Rotberg and Rabb, «can be as meaningful as the objects they choose to represent. It is relatively easy to describe the stylistic differences in landscape paintings by Claude Gallée and Claude Monet, but to attribute these differences merely to technique, or to regard them as of secondary importance, is to minimize the value of art in understanding the past»<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. *The history of school in Mario Alighiero Manacorda's Storia illustrata dell'educazione: three possible methodologies*

Within the panorama of Italian studies on the relationship between history and images, Mario Alighiero Manacorda's 1992 *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*<sup>13</sup> constitutes the first example of an iconographical history of education<sup>14</sup>. Analysing the theme of the history of schooling from Italian Unification to the Fascist period from the starting point of this pioneering historiographical case study, which devoted two of its eleven chapters, the ninth and the tenth, to the “Kingdom of Italy” and “The Early Twentieth Century” respectively, was thus held to be of a certain interest<sup>15</sup>. However, prior to getting down to this by means of two specific case studies (dealt with in section 4), we must first place these within the work's more general methodological framework set out in its Premise.

Beginning by defining illustrated history, and in line with the most cutting-edge historic research on the subject<sup>16</sup>, Manacorda wrote:

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>12</sup> Rotberg, Rabb, *Introduction*, in Rotberg, Rabb (edd.), *Art and History. Images and their Meaning*, cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> M.A. Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione. Dall'antico Egitto ai giorni nostri*, Firenze, Giunti, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> I examined this theme on the occasion of the XVII Congresso Nazionale del CIRSE (Messina, 26-28 maggio 2022) with a paper entitled *La storia dell'educazione attraverso le immagini: Mario Alighiero Manacorda e l'uso delle fonti iconografiche come frontiera della ricerca storico-educativa in Italia*, which will be published in the conference proceedings by the journal «RSE» in 2023.

<sup>15</sup> These are, respectively, Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., pp. 186-207 and 208-229.

<sup>16</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., p. 10.

For an illustrated story to be described as such it must not only have many illustrations, alongside its narrative (and its documents) but these must act as testimony of equal worth. [...] All this [iconographical] material, used to-date only for illustrative purposes, in a secondary role as compared to traditional history, can, we might say, also serve as primary narrative if it speaks primarily of what it represents and what is narrated elsewhere<sup>17</sup>.

For Manacorda this definition constituted an ideal that could be put into practice in three different ways in methodological terms. These are set out analytically here, both to understand the cultural backdrop Manacorda was measuring up to in choosing his historical iconographical method and with a view to examining recent work around the nexus between iconographical historiography and the history of Italian schooling more critically.

The first methodological option is described by Manacorda as a work of «pure documentation [...], namely a collection of documents which leaves all interpretation to readers»<sup>18</sup>. This option can be called iconographical research's bottom line, preferring «the objectivity of images» in juxtaposition to «inevitably subjective historical interpretation»<sup>19</sup>. It might reasonably be supposed that this theoretical possibility conceals a previous historian who is, by no means randomly, cited in the work's final bibliography<sup>20</sup>: *Album of Greek Education* by F.A.G. Beck<sup>21</sup>. This same author calls his own work a «source book»<sup>22</sup> because it is made up exclusively of 425 images accompanied by limited technical captions free of interpretative references. Whilst considering this a viable option, Manacorda declares his desire to produce a work in which images are also accompanied by interpretation in such a way as to give readers the twofold chance to take advantage of reading keys unknown to them and to look at images alone and autonomously to interpret them personally<sup>23</sup>.

The second methodological option consists of «starting precisely from these material and figurative documents and then commenting them in such a way as to clarify their contents, both in their details (frequently difficult to read) and as a whole and in their historical context»<sup>24</sup>. In this case, too, it can be assumed that Manacorda is referring to two real cases that he cites in his bibliography and which are now kept at his library at *Università degli Studi Roma Tre's* MuSEd: Robert Alt's *Bilderatlas zur Schul — und Erziehungsgeschichte*<sup>25</sup> and the fourth volume of the *Man Through His Art* series devoted to education<sup>26</sup>. In both these works, the image's objective data is summarised with subjective

<sup>17</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> F.A.G. Beck, *Album of Greek Education. The Greeks at Schools and at Play*, Sydney, Cheiron press, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> R. Alt, *Bilderatlas zur Schul — und Erziehungsgeschichte*, 2 Bände, Berlin, Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1960-1964.

<sup>26</sup> A. De Silva, O. Von Simson, P. Troutman (edd.), *Man Through His Art*, Vol. 4: *Education*, London, Educational Productions Limited, 1966.

interpretation which, above all, in contrast to traditional historiographical custom, uses images as primary sources and as on a par with the others in historical reconstruction worth terms. Whilst Manacorda states that «my primary intention was precisely this, I admit»<sup>27</sup>, he nonetheless discards this option, having identified its limitation as generating a history characterised by «an inevitably fragmentary nature»<sup>28</sup>.

From the starting point of the considerations Manacorda makes on his first two methodological options, it is interesting to focus on two of the most innovative projects on the relationship between the history of Italian school and iconography to have been produced in Italy in recent years: *FotoEdu – Archivi fotografici per la storia della scuola e dell'educazione* of INDIRE<sup>29</sup> and the *Illustrazioni e opere d'arte* database on the *Memoria Scolastica* platform produced by PRIN “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”<sup>30</sup>. Whilst presenting themselves as iconographical databases, both projects differentiate themselves from the first methodological option examined by equipping the individual images with identification info encompassing not only technical data (subject, storage location, production date) but also an interpretative synopsis. On the other hand, however, they avert the risk of fragmentation inherent to the second methodological option by their claims to supplying not a historical narrative but a scientifically structured collection of sources to be used for future and more general reconstructions.

Lastly, the third methodological option, the one preferred by Manacorda, is described thus: «The figurative material can also be used [...] alongside the full-blown historical discourse (which performs a reconstruction of the matter of its own) in such a way as to corroborate it and make it concretely visible»<sup>31</sup>. Via an incisive metaphor it is argued that whilst the second methodological option gives us simply fragments, photograms, of educational history, by associating words and images as autonomous and reciprocally clarifying sources, the third option ensures that «the individual fragments move and take shape (like a film reel) in a sort of living painting»<sup>32</sup>. Although she makes no explicit reference to Manacorda's work in her 2002 *Scuola*, Ester De Fort reconstructs the Italian school parable precisely by associating words and images symmetrically, with the latter taken, in her case, from the Alinari Foundation's photographic collection<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> <https://fotoedu.indire.it/> (last access: 06.12.2022).

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/> (last access: 06.12.2022).

<sup>31</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> E. De Fort, *Scuola*, in M. Firpo, P.G. Zunino (edd.), *La storia e le sue immagini. L'Italia dall'Unità a oggi*, vol. II, Milano, Garzanti, 2002, pp. 225-264.

### 3. *Two Italian school case studies in Mario Alighiero Manacorda's Storia illustrata dell'educazione*

It would be impossible to analyse all 91 images making up the Italian iconographical narrative from Unification to Fascism in *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*. We will thus focus on two specific case studies which are emblematic of the way in which Manacorda's work on the iconographical sources took concrete shape.

Manacorda's history of education in Italy begins with the Casati Law's frontispiece<sup>34</sup>, followed by certain images showing school as this law conceived of it<sup>35</sup>. In particular, an illustration drawn from a book, on which Manacorda supplies no further specific bibliographical data<sup>36</sup>, portrays school divided up into two classes by gender as required by the law (Legge Casati, art. 319). Furthermore, male teachers taught boys and female teachers taught girls, in this case too, as required by the law (Legge Casati, art. 324). Lastly, the pupils are shown sitting neatly at their desks and absorbed in their school work in a perfectly ordered classroom.

Whilst he conceived the illustrations as a powerful tool in finding out more about the real state of affairs, Manacorda cannot be called an image «positivist», as defined by Burke as those who ingenuously «consider that images» *sic et simpliciter* «transmit reliable information on the outside world»<sup>37</sup>. In fact, in this case, Manacorda does not see the image described as constituting proof that the Casati Law came to fruition but writes, in his caption: «this is how the *ideal* school was presented»<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, he disagreed with the image «sceptics», Stephen Bann style<sup>39</sup>, demonstrating that it is via other images (and not via other types of sources) that testimony on a school other than ideal was to be had: the «boring school» of inattentive, forlorn children with their textbooks<sup>40</sup>; the dunce's corner<sup>41</sup> and the rod tradition<sup>42</sup>, which survived as a result of the absence of constraints on corporal punishment or humiliations by the Casati Law (articles 143-147, 229). We might conclude by saying that, for Manacorda, the pros and cons of images, like documentary sources, were that they are in themselves neither true nor false, but the expression of a historical period both in their ideal aspirations and their contradictory and multifaceted real implementation.

The second case examined is a photograph of the best twenty-four Rome pupils of the year 1924, which Manacorda uses as an insight into the selective and class-prejudiced nature of the school envisaged by the Gentile Reform<sup>43</sup>. This interpretation can be confirmed by the fact that the photograph's 'commendable' children are dressed in their

<sup>34</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., fig. 1, p. 188.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, figg. 1, 3, 4, pp. 194-195.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 3, p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit. p. 184.

<sup>38</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 195 (italics not present in the original).

<sup>39</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit. pp. 183-184.

<sup>40</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., fig. 1-2, p. 196.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 6, p. 197.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 2, p. 204.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 2, p. 218.



fashionable Sunday best, something which implies that they came from the wealthy classes the Gentile Reform targeted and contrasting, as Manacorda wrote, with the «cultural elevation of the masses»<sup>44</sup>. A more careful examination, however, shows that one child, fourth right on the front row, is wearing a long and severe black cloak, in contrast with the other pupils. Might this have been a high achieving pupil not from a wealthy family? The photo's caption gives no information on the subject, but an autobiographical account by Manacorda elsewhere is of considerable interest:

In 1924, at the end of my primary school education, I suffered one of the greatest humiliations of my life. I was recognised as one of the best twenty-four pupils in Rome. It was a small mark of Fascism's elitist, still Gentile-style, schooling policy. We were photographed in the courtyard of *Liceo Visconti* [...] right in front of the man himself [...]. The other twenty-three best pupils were dressed in their Sunday best: [...] I alone wore the pathetic uniform of my boarding school, which was a profound humiliation for me. There I am, stiff, disconsolate and haggard with my legs crossed, right over left, in an unnatural pose, symptomatic of my deep embarrassment<sup>45</sup>.

The identical date makes it likely that this child was none other than Manacorda himself. Two considerations can be drawn from this. From the point of view of the class-based nature of the Gentile Reform, Manacorda's presence in the photograph does not contradict this. Whilst it is true that, after the premature death of his father, Giuseppe Manacorda, the family experienced hardship and the children went into orphanages<sup>46</sup>, the Manacorda remained middle class and Giovanni Gentile himself kept the memory of the family alive<sup>47</sup>. In methodological terms, this is certainly an unusual use of an autobiographical type illustrated source for the purposes of general history reconstruction. It is an idea worthy of future study: systematically including images in the primarily documentary autobiographical sources used for education and schooling history, images that have the potential to link up micro and macro histories, private with public, on a par with the others, just as Manacorda envisaged:

[...] I have deliberately alternated macro and micro history data. *In minimis videtur deus*: it is little things which are most revealing of reality. It is up to the reader to judge whether this illustrated history is simply "little things" or whether these little things, which normally remain hidden, can help us to understand "big things" (or those generally considered such), of what should be, but isn't, the biggest of things, people's education<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Id., *Momenti di storia della pedagogia*, Torino, Loescher, 1977, p. 167.

<sup>45</sup> Id., *La mia scuola sotto il fascismo*, in G. Genovesi (ed.), *C'ero anch'io!: a scuola nel Ventennio, ricordi e riflessioni*, Napoli, Liguori, 2010, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *L'intervista*, edited by A. Semeraro, in A. Semeraro (ed.), *L'educazione dell'uomo completo. Scritti in onore di Mario Alighiero Manacorda*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, pp. 296-297.

<sup>47</sup> The unorganised part of Fondo Manacorda dealing with correspondence contains a number of letters from Gentile to the Manacorda family.

<sup>48</sup> Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione*, cit., p. 9.

#### 4. *The images and history of Italian school. Two reading exercises*

In the field of the historical study of childhood, education, school and the educational institutions, the pictorial turn undoubtedly has great potential. Italian historiography has already shown wide-ranging awareness of the hermeneutic stimulus potential of the arts and iconic testimony, including that of folk origin, on the occasion of the great Venetian exhibition of 1999<sup>49</sup>. In particular, in reference to the chronological time frame examined here, a great range of documents is available in both the painting and sculpture and printed illustration fields with their specific but, at the same time, growing audiences, as in the case of children's literature. It is precisely from the starting point of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, that «art production for a general and not wealthy audience spread like wildfire into the general public, including the lower and middle bourgeoisie», reflecting «an evolving society turning inwards to examine itself and its historical context and showing an interest in subjects and issues to-date little considered»<sup>50</sup>. Childhood, education and school were among these.

For the purposes of performing a reading of iconographical sources as testimony to specific cultural, ideological and material aspects of the history of Italian schooling in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we would like here to shine a spotlight on two extremely different artists of equal significance as regards the social impact of school institutions and the way they were perceived by the artists themselves and the audiences their work was designed for: Demetrio Cosola (1851-1895) and Leo Lionni (1910-1999).

Cosola, a Piedmontese painter, was a characteristic exponent of post-Romantic realism strongly influenced, in his choice of subject, by the values of a changing society and by themes such as the presence of children among adults, public health prevention and state education. There are three versions of the work *Il dettato*, an oil painting on canvas dating to 1890 (cm. 144 x 94), a pastel painting dating to 1891 (cm. 185 x 95, figure 1) and an undated and lost oil painting on canvas *L'asilo* (cm. 90 x 54)<sup>51</sup>. These were especially intense and significant years in terms of the political, cultural and social tensions the national identity building process was replete with. Many artists took part in this collective effort, on a par with the institutions. In this work Cosola, reflecting various aspects of the Casati Law (1859) and what Edmondo De Amicis had done a few years earlier with the novel *Cuore* (1886), decided to immortalise the great school “theatre” and within it, one of the symbol scenes of basic education: the dictation. We know neither who the work was painted for nor the circumstances it was painted in. What we do know, in light of its three versions, is that the subject must have been central to the artist's interest at length. Whilst the angle of the painting remained the same – from

<sup>49</sup> N.M. Filippini, T. Plebani (edd.), *La scoperta dell'infanzia: cura, educazione e rappresentazione. Venezia 1750-1930*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> R. Bossaglia, *L'immagine del bambino nell'arte italiana dall'Ottocento agli anni Venti*, in *Infanzie. Il bambino nell'arte tra '800 e '900*, Torino, Regione Piemonte, 2001, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Demetrio Cosola* [exhibition catalogue (Chivasso 27 October-25 November 2001)], Milano, Electa, 2001, pp. 34, 35, 148, 149; V. Valecchi, *Il dettato*, in *Banca dati delle opere d'arte sulla scuola*, DOI: 10.53220/1243, published on: 31.01.2022 (last access: 12.12.2022).

above, vertical, narrow, modelled on the elongated form of the desk which, precisely as a result of the angle, is tangibly centre-stage and central to the whole painting, material and symbolic starting point of the very notion of education – the three versions differ in the presence of the teacher, who was absent in the 1890 oil painting, young stylish and distinguished in the 1891 pastel painting and dressed as a nun in the lost oil painting. Two great themes interweave throughout these alternative scenes, the secular nature of school (evident in the shift from the nun to the female teacher, a novel figure in many social contexts both urban and rural, but also a new artistic and literary subject<sup>52</sup>) and the gender issue. Women's education – female teachers, female pupils – the feminising of the teaching profession, pupil separation by gender. And the backdrop to all this is the geographical map of the Kingdom of Italy, the starting point and, at the same time, the ideological finishing post of that specific historic juncture, further material testimony – in addition to the desk – of the rhetorical framework revolving around the scene as a whole, emphatically oriented towards fostering the importance of school, its methods and its goals.

Seventy years later, in 1959, we come across the most «aggressively modern»<sup>53</sup> illustrated picture book of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Piccolo blu e piccolo giallo*, by the Italian-American Leo Lionni. A historic and cultural context (McCarthy-era USA and informal art, authoritarian policies, social issues, artistic research and experimentation) that was a world away from Cosola's and, above all, a new artistic subject in the language (simultaneously visual and verbal), technique (collage) and style (abstract) used and its target audience (primarily children), production ambit (children's book publishing) and, consequently, the product's degree of socialisation. This illustrated children's book published on the cusp of a decade, the 1960s, which was to see the authoritarianism of traditional schooling and its methods questioned across the West. The eighth picture focuses precisely on this subject (figure 2). It is only on this page that Lionni uses the cutting rather than tearing technique, at the cost of a «certain vitality»<sup>54</sup> which torn coloured paper gave him. And once again, this includes the entire book's only geometric figure, a rectangle with a black background to symbolise the school classroom, a rigid and bleak image. Geometry, in this case, is a limit which, Foucault style, conjures up a place, an idea, a constrictive and oppressive educational practice, a geometric mortification of children's vitality. Portrayed as torn coloured paper discs, in this image alone children are aligned symmetrically in three rows «still and composed»<sup>55</sup>. A situation exacerbated by the verb «must» below. The teacher's desk and the teacher are never visible but the area set aside for them is there and the observer can imagine them, which means that they are entirely absorbed by the black background, sign of a total uniformity between the authoritarianism of the school institution and that of the people and methods governing

<sup>52</sup> C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996; A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Macerata, eum, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> L. Lionni, *Tra i miei mondi. Un'autobiografia*, edited by M. Negri, F. Cappa, Roma, Donzelli, 2014, p. 252.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*, *Piccolo Blu e Piccolo Giallo*, Milano, Babalibri, 2010.

them. Their exclusion-inclusion underlines their negative importance<sup>56</sup>. It should not be overlooked that the next picture, the ninth, conflicts tangibly with the eighth, depicting children outside school, against a white background, happily “messy” in the open space, free and self-directed.

Whilst it is true that «historian needs to read between the lines, noting the small but significant details – including significant absences – and using them as clues to information which the image-makers did not know they knew, or to assumptions they were not aware of holding»<sup>57</sup>, we must conclude that the two images analysed, however different the moments in the history of art they derive from, are both packed with details documenting practice, ideals, perhaps experience, aspirations, condemnation and stereotypes and also, lastly, a way of artists taking a stance as regards school “rules”, experienced by Cosola as an aspiration and by Lionni as a prison.

<sup>56</sup> Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, cit., pp. 173-174.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

# Between History and Memory: the School Souvenir Portrait in Spain

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## *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

As Antonio Rodríguez de las Heras stated, photography is a fragment of time and space, the result of a composition, of a look<sup>2</sup>. This enables the photograph to act, at the level of historical research, as a certificate of presence. It can be said that what appears in the photo – above all when old photographs are used (much more so than with current, digital ones, which may have been manipulated more easily) – is something that existed at the time the photograph was taken.

Hence, the photograph acts as a certificate of presence or of pre-existence of objects, spaces, persons, ecc. But this certificatory function is not what interests us, or at least is not our only interest; because although the photograph can verify the pre-existence of objects, spaces, or persons, it cannot verify what actually happened. Influenced by the need to believe only what “we see with our own eyes”, we tend to confer on the photograph properties it does not have. It does not show us the past, as the past does not exist; the photograph is always a representation of something through elements and choreographies. The photograph is not a historical testimony of what was, but rather of what was considered to be or what was made out to be.

In the words of Joan Fontcuberta,

Every photograph is a fiction with pretensions to truth. Despite everything that we have been inculcated, all that we believe, photography always lies; it lies instinctively, lies because its nature does not allow it to do anything else. But what is important is not that inevitable lie. What is important is how the photographer uses it, what interests it serves. What is important, in short, is the control exercised by the photographer to impose an ethical direction on their lie. The good photographer is the one who lies «the truth well»<sup>3</sup>.

Photography is, then, a way of seeing reality, a glance at what has happened, constructed by a historical subject with an imaginary, a culture, a sensitivity, and mental frameworks

<sup>1</sup> Work carried out in the framework of the project *PID2020-113677GB-I00*, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rodríguez de las Heras, *L'ús pedagògic de la fotografia històrica*. «Educació i Història: revista d'Història de l'Educació», n. 15, 2010, pp. 41-54.

<sup>3</sup> J. Fontcuberta, *El beso de Judas. Fotografía y verdad*, Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 1997, p. 15.

that lead to reality being interpreted in a certain way. Like every image, the photograph is no neutral element, it always has a certain intention. As Peter Burke stated, «Anyone attempting to use the testimony of an image would be well advised to start by studying its author's intended purpose»<sup>4</sup>. Yet this mediated, subjective cut-out of reality is also found in written documents on which, occasionally with such confidence, historians base their conclusions. Through photography, historians may also reach, as they do with many texts, oral sources, or objects, an approximation – oftentimes complex and difficult – that can improve our knowledge as to how symbolic universes, imaginary referents, and collective mentalities were constructed.

Photography related to the world of school and education, interpreted critically and in parallel with other historical sources, can bring us closer to the idea of the ideal model of education and school that exists at each historical moment. School and educational photography in general has a lot to do with scenography at the service of the dissemination and spreading of a particular educational and school model, whether it is to capture the order and authority, to show what is innovative, or to justify a certain model of school or education. Moreover, when we observe an old school photograph, we do not see the past, but rather we make present again something that no longer exists; the image represents, makes what is absent, what is dead, imaginarily present, and even alive. Hence the evocative power of photography, and its momentous importance in the construction of school memory.

### 1. *The school souvenir portrait*

This type of photograph is easily recognisable to anyone, and even more so in the Spanish context, where most families have one of these portraits in their family album. These are the portraits of boys or girls who, albeit alone or accompanied by a sibling, appear in the photograph surrounded by one or more elements and symbols that are normally identified with school, although not necessarily always and not necessarily all of them. These are photographs taken by a professional, who either offered to do so or was commissioned by the school, with a commercial objective that is none other than the sale of the “print” to the families.

With great impact in Spain from the 1940s onwards, albeit not exclusively, as the practice of using this type of portrait as a school souvenir was also common in other countries, these photographs have formed an indisputable part of the collective imaginary, which is why we immediately identify them with the school. School souvenir portraits can end up being very different from each other, perhaps depending on the aesthetic guidelines of each period, the traditions of each place, the possibilities of each photographer. On some occasions a more classical style of portraiture is used, with few accessories and with simple backgrounds that are not necessarily associated with the

<sup>4</sup> P. Burke, *Visto y no visto*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001, p. 22.



Fig. 1. School portrait of Andreu Comas, school year 1942/43. Author: Foto Martín. Owner: F. Comas



Fig. 2. School portrait of two sisters, 1942-43. Author: unknown. Owner: Agrupació Fotogràfica d'Algaida

school, but they are mounted on a piece of cardboard stating that it is a school souvenir. In others, use is made of numerous elements that are recognised socially and at specific times as typical of the school, creating symbolic scenarios (with maps, globes, books, fountain pens, teachers' desks, geometric shapes, ecc.) that end up being so stereotyped – and ideologized – that not only do they enable us to easily identify this portrait as a school photograph from the Franco regime, but they have even come to represent, in the collective imagination, the “official” image of the school at the historical level. Perhaps this is why many exhibitions on the history of the school in the 20<sup>th</sup> century contain this type of images, and even use them to head the exhibition or its advertising.

This type of photograph has been classified by some authors as a sub-genre within so-called school photographs, while they are also considered family photographs – as mentioned, they are part of the family album, not of the school archive – and it could be said that, due to their biographical ties, they are like those of weddings, communions, or military service<sup>5</sup>.

Each of the school souvenir portraits makes up part of the memory of the individual portrayed, but by being integrated in family albums, over the years, these pictures end up being depersonalised and turning into elements of the family memory. Meanwhile, the presence of the same photographs in most family albums shapes a social memory linked to common elements and collective identities. For this reason, in the collective imagination, school souvenir portraits form an unmistakable part of school memory. Society automatically identifies this type of photograph with the school, to the point of considering them to be the most representative of the collective imagination linked to the school institution, as demonstrated by the fact that they are resorted to in most of

<sup>5</sup> H. Velasco Maíllo, *Fotografías escolares, imágenes institucionales. Miradas retrospectivas a la fotografía en la escuela (1900-1970)*, in A. Bautista García-Vera, H. M. Velasco Maíllo, *Antropología audiovisual: medios e investigación en educación*, Madrid, Editorial Trotta, 2011.



the graphic representations of school memory (exhibitions, school museums, websites on school memory, ecc.).

Occasionally, this memory constructed with images determines what we think school was really like in the past. In fact, knowing the influence exerted by this school imaginary on school memory, and specifically the stereotypes it has generated, should make us rethink some questions as to how we conceive and interpret the past. It will be essential, in order to make history, to take into account the power of image in the construction of memory, and the power of memory in the creation of stereotypes that historical interpretation must overcome. Memory and history, therefore, should not be confused.

## *2. The school souvenir portrait: history, memory, and public uses*

For the history of education, the school souvenir portrait can be of great value, providing we are capable of analysing it properly; as we cannot expect the objective representation of school, of its materials, or of its dynamics from this type of photographs.

The fact that it is so socially accepted that the image represented in them, through its symbology, is that of the school leads us to the initial conviction that a simple observation of the elements and symbols it contains will turn out to be very useful for the historical knowledge of the school at a given time. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. This type of portrait was not usually made on the school's initiative, but rather on the professional photographers' who, seeing a business opportunity therein, went from school to school offering to take portraits which they then sold to the families. In many cases, they did not even use materials from the school itself to create the scene for the portrait, but rather those that the photographer considered would best fit the idea of school at each time. The children sat in front of enormous desks with large chairs that they never used in class. It was usually the teacher's desk. They were also surrounded by books they had not read, by stationery they did not use in their daily lives, or by artefacts, symbols, or materials that were alien to them. Even the way the children photographed were dressed might not have corresponded to reality. Parents dressed their children in their best clothes for the portrait. It is true that occasionally some of these portraits include identifying elements specific to a particular school (a religious image, the school's own smocks, ecc.), but many others create totally artificial scenes. In fact, as can be seen through the photographs, some of these portraits do not even use elements of the school imaginary. Consequently, the reading we can make of them as historical sources will have to be different from what might have been supposed at first sight, although this does not mean that they do not have their usefulness in historical-educational research.

If we consider these photographs a sub-genre of the portrait, and we focus on what Finol, Djukich & Finol call portrait discourse<sup>6</sup>, two main features can be discussed at

<sup>6</sup> D.E. Finol, D. De Nery, J.E. Finol. *Fotografía e identidad social: retrato, foto carné y tarjeta de visita*, «Quórum académico», vol. 9, n. 1, 2012, pp. 30-51.

the semiotic level that the school souvenir portrait shares with the other prime examples of portraiture: on the one hand, the identity trait: the portrait is intended to reflect facial features that are compatible to a specific person. On the other hand, the social recognition of specific moments or occasions related to the biography of the person portrayed (anniversaries, communions, weddings, ecc.) or which represent forms of dedication or social prestige of said person, and by extension of their family. The school souvenir photograph presents this discourse, on the one hand it seeks the identification of the individual, whereas on the other it is used as an instrument of social recognition. Depending on the period, school souvenir portraits are related to the culmination of levels of education such as graduations, end of studies, ecc.; in fact, nowadays the custom of children having school souvenir portraits taken throughout the schooling process continues and is widespread. Every year, schools hire professional photographers, or it is the photographers themselves who offer to photograph the schoolchildren, so that families have portraits of their children for each school year. Historically, however, the school souvenir portrait is more associated with the idea of dedication and prestige of the child as a schoolchild, with all the social implications of being at school during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is why, and also possibly for economic reasons, the school souvenir photograph used to be unique to each stage of schooling. It did not, as such, represent a specific moment in relation to the child's school life, but rather the child's status as a schoolchild, providing a record of their schooling.

These photographs could be said to be a visual witness of belonging to a society that shares certain values (sometimes civic, other times ideological) and that considers the school as one of the main mechanisms of socialisation. From this perspective, school souvenir portraits can be a useful source for the history of the school, interested in the processes of schooling and in the social dimension that this institution acquires in contemporary times, but also in the history of family, of society, and even of mindsets. The presence of the same photographs in all family albums will shape a social memory tied to common elements which, at the same time, construct collective identities that other disciplines, beyond the history of education, are interested in studying.

Meanwhile, the school souvenir portrait – which is present, as mentioned, in almost all family albums, and which continues to be taken today – is, and will be in the future, one of the elements that will be most associated with school memory. Even without reflecting what really happened, or apparently showing any real, objective element of past school context, the evocative nature of these photographs, which all Spaniards remember seeing at home, makes them a recurrent element of identification with the school, possibly one of the elements that most clearly represent it at the social level. It is for this reason that their presence in spaces for memory recovery is very abundant, as well as in public history of education products, where we can best see how this type of portrait forms part of school memory whilst in turn conditioning it.

### 3. *The presence of the school souvenir portrait in photography collections created from citizen participation (crowdsourcing)*

In recent decades, the Internet and social networks have facilitated the formation of numerous collections of old photographs with specific sections on the school setting. These are projects that are generally based on so-called crowdsourcing or collective collaboration, such that most of the photographs collected by these projects come from private archives and family albums, not from the school institutions themselves. This fact, as explained above as to how and where school souvenir portraits have been kept, has made it easier for this genre of portraiture to have an important presence in these collections.

By way of example, and without intending to be exhaustive, we will take a look at some of these collections created in Spain. Many of these are the result of public initiatives, such as the *Legados de la Tierra* [Legacies from the Land] programme<sup>7</sup>. Promoted by the Regional Government of Castile-La Mancha, this programme was developed between 1998 and 2010, with the aim of promoting the recovery of the unknown Photographic Heritage of this community through the organisation of exhibitions and in some cases the publication of catalogues. The programme fomented the dissemination of regional photographic heritage from both local corporations and from the inhabitants of the municipalities. A selection of the photographs exhibited was also reproduced (first in analogue format and then digitally). Finally, close to 9.000 images – digitised and recovered through the programme – ended up forming the current Castile-La Mancha Image Archive.

Within the framework of this programme, grants were awarded to town councils, groupings of municipalities, and Sub-Municipality Organisations (*EATIM* from the initials in Spanish) in Castile-La Mancha, and with these around 1.000 exhibitions have been held. One of these exhibitions – entitled Education through Time and organised to mark the celebration of Education Day in Castile-La Mancha – selected a total of 52 photographs tracing the historical evolution of Education in this autonomous community from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1970s. It is remarkable that out of these 52 photographs, 10 are school souvenir portraits. In the presentation of the exhibition, the aim of the exhibition is claimed to pay «tribute to the work and effort made by our teachers over so many years to educate and train the different generations of Castile-La Mancha citizens»<sup>8</sup>; however, 20% of the images do not show this work, but rather the stereotypical image of school memory that many families keep in their family albums.

Another example of a photographic archive created with citizen help and collaboration is the *Madrileños* [People from Madrid] collection in the Regional Archive of the Community of Madrid, which houses more than 25.000 photographs<sup>9</sup>. Among

<sup>7</sup> <https://cultura.castillalamancha.es/archivos/exposiciones-virtuales/los-legados-de-la-tierra-20-anos> (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>8</sup> <https://cultura.castillalamancha.es/archivos/exposiciones-virtuales/la-educacion-traves-del-tiempo#> (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>9</sup> [https://gestion.comunidad.madrid/archivos\\_atom/index.php/madrilenos-archivo-fotografico-de-la-](https://gestion.comunidad.madrid/archivos_atom/index.php/madrilenos-archivo-fotografico-de-la-)

these, there is an interesting collection of school souvenir portraits. Also the result of a crowdsourcing initiative, there is The *Cortes en el Recuerdo* [Cuts in Memory] collection, which can be visited on the website of the municipality of Cortes (Navarre) and which includes a sample of school images provided by residents in this municipality, amongst which there is a predominance of school souvenir portraits. This presence should be no surprise, since, as indicated above, these photographs belong to the family rather than to the school or institutional sphere<sup>10</sup>.

It is not only public institutions that resort to citizen collaboration to create interesting archives or image collections; we also find private initiatives, launched by newspapers, associations, and/or amateur groups that use social networks to collect thousands of photographs that could never be found in classical archives. One example would be *FAM* (*Fotos Antiguas de Mallorca*) [Old Photos of Majorca], which used Facebook not only to collect thousands of historical images thanks to citizen collaboration, but also to obtain information about them through the comments provided by both historians and first-hand accounts of people and/or episodes from the past recognised in the photograph<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4. *The school souvenir photograph as an inspiring iconic and advertising resource*

The power of the school souvenir image in the construction of the collective memory of the Spanish school is so important that not only is it the type of portrait most commonly associated with the history of the school by society, but it is also the one most used as an iconic and even advertising resource.

On the Internet we can find personal blogs with entries devoted to this type of photographs, and even recent initiatives in which the choreography of these portraits is used to reproduce this type of images with current pupils. In the *Blog de Ocurris* of Manuel Cabello and Esperanza Izquierdo, for instance, mention is made of a particular initiative:

Over the last few weeks some of the parents of sixth form students at *Victor de la Serna School* have been very busy. With the inspiration of the Old School Souvenir Photographs, it was thought it would be a good idea to help finance part of the sixth form excursion by resuming the traditional custom of taking photographs of schoolchildren surrounded by books, maps and, now that it is fashionable,

comunidad-de-madrid (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cortesenred.es/enelrecuerdo/la-escuela/> (last access: 22.03.2023).

<sup>11</sup> *FAM* (*Fotos Antiguas de Mallorca*) has an active blog (<https://fotosantiguasdemallorca.blogspot.com/>; last access: 25.03.2023) and Facebook account (<https://www.facebook.com/fotosantiguasdemallorca>; last access: 25.03.2023). Further, based on part of the photographic heritage collected, they have published an annotated book of images of Mallorca in the past: Ll. Miró, S. Bauzá, P. Llodrá, J.M. Martí Corbella, *Mallorca, otro tiempo...*, Palma, Dolmen Editorial, 2022.



Fig. 3. Pedagogy students at the UIB, 2018-2019 academic year. Exhibition *L'Escola, descobrir, fer i conviure* [The School, discovering, making and living together], Mallorca, November 2018

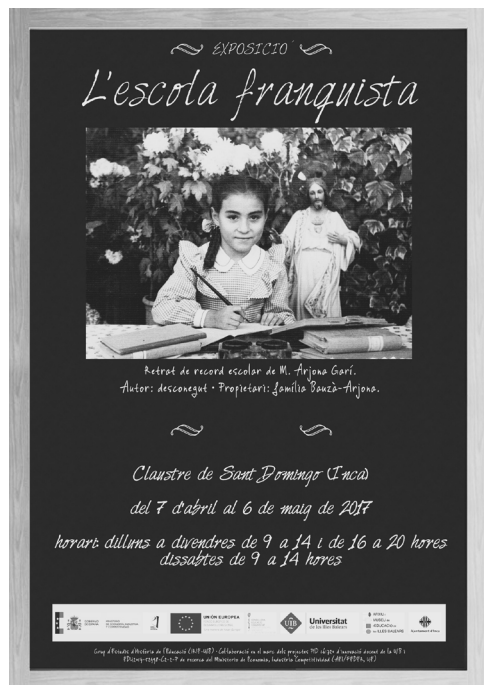


Fig. 4. Poster of the exhibition *L'Escola franquista* [The Francoist School], 2017

the minicomputer that has invaded the lives of kids. This very day, Benja thought that perhaps the photographs could also have been inspired by the old ones, those taken in the sixties and seventies with Gibraltar in the background, by way of claiming it back, and that is the result, although, definitely, this year's photos will be the modern ones, with the computer and in full colour<sup>12</sup>.

The use of the most stereotypical choreography of school souvenir portraits from the Franco era to set up these so-called photocalls is now very common in educational or school museums and in exhibitions regarding the school past. One only has to visit a few museums or access their social networks to see numerous photographs of visitors seated at the teacher's desk, with the map behind them, and the globe, some books, fountain pens, ecc. on the table<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://manuelcabelloyesperanzaizquierdo.blogspot.com/> (last access: 23.3.2023).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, we find this type of images in museums such as the *Museo Pedagógico de la Universidad de Sevilla* (<https://museosycolecciondelaus.wordpress.com/90-2/>; last access: 25.03.2023), or in the Facebook account of the *Museo de Historia de la Educación Manuel Bartolomé Cossío de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid* (<https://www.facebook.com/museo.historia.educacion.mbc>; last access: 25.03.2023).

Finally, the social identification of the school souvenir portrait with the social image of school history confirms the fact that such photographs are very often used to advertise exhibitions, plays, or films on school subjects, or as covers of books on subjects related to school history.

### *Conclusions*

It can be said that the school souvenir portrait is a special photographic genre found between school and family photography.

While as a historical source it offers limited information, its relationship to school memory, on the other hand, is much more complex: the school souvenir portrait has been key in the construction of the collective memory of the school in Spain; it is for this reason that greater public use is made of them than is the case with other photographs; as a result of the above, at times their importance within the sphere of memory is confused with their usefulness within the field of history. But here we must bear in mind the fact that history and memory are not synonymous, and that they operate in different registers.

As a consequence of all this, it is necessary to warn that school history, and above all the public history of education (made collaboratively with society, and sharing academic authority), is in danger of overusing this kind of photographs, and of ending up reproducing and feeding stereotypes that history ought to avoid.





# Female Teachers in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The Teacher Training Schools in Literary Narratives and Archive Papers: Destiny or Emancipation?

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## *Introduction*

Marianna! I'm going to whisper a great big sin in your ear! [...] If I were to have a pretty coffee coloured dress made? [...]. Without a crinoline, well maybe not! But a dress that isn't black, that I could run around and jump over walls in, that doesn't constantly remind me, as this habit does, that down there in Catania, when the cholera has passed, what awaits me is the convent<sup>1</sup>.

Giovanni Verga imbues this pretty coffee-coloured dress symbolically with the desire for freedom felt by the main character of his epistolary novel *Storia di una capinera*, Maria. The book was published in 1871. Maria is a convent girl destined to enter a convent. An outbreak of cholera in Catania leads to a visit to her father's country home where she falls suddenly in love with Nino, a local boy, an event that upsets her life. However Maria does not succeed in rebelling against a fate which she sees alternately as a choice and a punishment. The result of this inner conflict and self-sacrifice is first madness and then death. In 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, especially that written by men, the choice-destiny alternative seemed to sum up the existential journeys of young women almost always obliged to give in to the inevitability of the confines set by the dominant social imperatives of the day.

Such references to literary realism will, in this paper, highlight the multi-faceted ambivalence surrounding the advent of female primary school teachers in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century post-Italian unification history, focusing in particular on the institutional role and identity of the *scuole normali* set up to train a new teaching profession in an educational process that soon became almost exclusively female, and always hovering between destiny and emancipation.

This is confirmed in the restlessness that seems to cut through the life of Luigi Pirandello's school teacher Boccarmé, in his 1902 book of the same name. Victim of sexual and emotional abuse at a very young age and seeking to get away from the

<sup>1</sup> G. Verga, *Storia di una capinera*, Milano, Mondadori, 2017, p. 28.

place the violence took place, Boccarmé succeeds in winning a degree of personal and financial independence in her new life as a teacher, but fails to free herself of a state of social marginality and loneliness. Pirandello, too, uses clothing as the *fil rouge* of a truly polysemic tale of inexorable destiny.

Perennially dressed in black, gentle, patient and affectionate with the school's children, not simply because of her own memories of suffering at the hands of certain harsh teachers but also because, as girls, she considers them destined more for suffering than pleasure, living shuttered away in a part of the school far from everyone, in secret she makes up for all the afflictions and humiliations her shyness has foisted on her with imagination and reading<sup>2</sup>.

An examination of the literary sources is thus a way of giving voice to the underswell of emotions and identities implicit in concrete everyday school life, which would otherwise have been lost and forgotten. Over recent decades, historical research has made ample recourse to literature as a source, whilst not giving sufficient thought to the methodological and interpretational issues that arise from this, except as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's documentary revolution – now consigned, over a century on, to historiography – which has accorded all testimony of the past, «reluctant sources» as Marc Bloch aptly called them, great heuristic value even its lies and distortions. The purpose of literary source analysis is thus not solely to describe its textual contents but also, at the same time, to examine the way memory and recollections are constructed with a view to assessing the extent to which these express the class and social origin conflicts ever present in the history of Italian schooling or whether they were, by contrast, written with the intention of legitimising official educational methods and the educational aims implicit in them. It is, thus, a matter of undertaking a «reading» of the literary documents capable of making sense of the clues to, and signs of, the historical events featured in them<sup>3</sup>.

It is important to highlight that the austere clothing theme featured in both literature and real life.

In the case of the *scuola normale* students undertaking teacher training in post-unification Italy until the Gentile Reform of 1923, the girls put up in halls of residence because the small towns or rural areas they came from were without these, this dress code was regulated by specific norms set out in the statutes of the institutions themselves and consisted of black uniforms and extreme simplicity and modesty. It was the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This strictness, and frequent references to black and uniformity, are revealing of a type of clothing serving a model of conduct based on the modesty and discipline considered absolutely indispensable to future «virtuous women teachers».

De Amicis' description of two very different teachers in *Cuore* (1886), a melancholic nun-like figure and a «cheery teacher with a red feather» is inspired precisely by clothing highlighting very different behaviours, but both based on simplicity all the same. The nun-like teacher

<sup>2</sup> L. Pirandello, *La maestrina Boccarmé*, in Id., *Novelle per un anno*, Roma, Newton Compton, 2004, p. 650.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento. Tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019.

[...] is always dressed in dark colours and wears a black apron. Her face is small and white, her hair always smooth, her eyes pale, pale and her thin voice seems always to be murmuring prayers [...]. But there's another one I like, too: the teacher of the first class of the lower school, class 3, that young woman with a pink face and two pretty dimples in her cheeks, wearing a great red feather in her hat and a yellow glass cross around her neck<sup>4</sup>.

Outside the world of literary fiction many autobiographical accounts testify to the gap between young teachers' aspirations and the harsh reality they faced. An account told by Marcello Dei, for example, reads:

It was 1<sup>st</sup> February 1924, I was twenty years old and setting off enthusiastically for my long awaited school, after the challenges of qualifications and exams, like a conquering warrior. I wore a pair of high heeled patent leather shoes, a pretty dress and broad brimmed velvet hat, as teachers wore them at the time [...]. My first great disappointment came when I saw an old mountain man waiting for me with two donkeys pointing the "way" to me, namely the riverbed, quite full of snow melt water. I wept then and didn't want to get onto the donkey but I had to do as I was told [...] and unsteadily and fearfully I flailed around crying out and calling for my mother<sup>5</sup>.

This stress on teachers' vocation for motherhood, a constant theme in the pedagogical literature of the day and in the ministerial instructions and primary and *normale* school *curricula* and parliamentary debates, returned to the clothing theme as one of the most symbolic elements in teachers' adherence to the day's ideals of modesty and decorum seen as even more essential to women who were the first to venture out of the confines of the home. Austere clothing was to protect them from the various forms of prejudice, hostility and gossip that awaited them.

In a pamphlet called *Considerazioni intorno al riordinamento delle scuole normali regie*, published in 1875, educationalist Domenico Failla argued: «In the teacher training schools of towns and cities we must take care to keep students away from the fashionable dress codes the newspapers are full of to protect women teachers from the whirlwind of frivolity which women so enjoy surrounding themselves with»<sup>6</sup>. Minister Coppino, in turn, expressed considerable worry regarding the risk that rural teachers training in the cities might lose their natural simplicity and gain from their companions the habit of scorning the places they come from and «take with them thoughts and customs out of step with those of the villages and which would make them less acceptable to villagers even than foreigners»<sup>7</sup>. During an inspection carried out on the teachers during the preparatory course at the *scuola normale* in Bari (1855), Antonio Labriola observed as follows:

<sup>4</sup> E. De Amicis, *Cuore*, Milano, Treves, 1934, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> M. Dei, *Colletto bianco, grembiule nero. Gli insegnanti elementari italiani tra l'inizio del secolo e il secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1984, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> D. Failla, *Considerazioni intorno al riordinamento delle scuole normali regie*, Napoli, Tip. De Pascale, 1875, now in C. Covato, A.M. Sorge (edd.), *L'istruzione normale dalla legge Casati all'età giolittiana*, Roma, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali – Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1994, p. 261.

<sup>7</sup> See in G. Bini, *La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà*, in S. Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, p. 344.

The first is more effective and attentive, more authoritative. The second, while capable and cultured, is a bit careless and less teacherly in the real sense of the word. Colacicco has the personality of a lower class woman and all her teaching has something of the homespun about it but there is method there. The other one, Magrini, is more genteel, more affected. [And he added] The minister's idea of moving a young, rather fashionable teacher, a bit like this Magrini, from Girgenti to Bari, is a good idea<sup>8</sup>.

Even the differences between city and countryside that clothing symbolised thus configured as a way of consolidating a specific social order which was to remain unchanged.

Within the context of the rapid feminisation of primary education, even the teachers' fragile identity was a novelty for girls from the lower and middle bourgeoisie for whom it had, until then, been impossible to get past primary schooling, and which thus opened up novel opportunities for a career and financial independence. But this same fragile identity also thrust teachers into a new "gender" ghetto that took the form of deliberately simplified cultural training as compared to that taught at the lyceums, the impossibility of university study, wage discrimination, control over teachers' moral conduct and spirit of self-sacrifice for their vocation, understood as a social extension of the maternal role to a school designed to «train sufficiently and educate as much as possible». Neither an analysis of the pedagogical theories of the day, a history of school law nor a non-contextualised "gender" history are capable alone of fully contextualising the relationship between a set of apparently distinct phenomena such as educational destinies and the class and gender inequalities within them in the absence of contextualisation and without taking account of a series of interpretational cross currents. Identifying the meeting points is thus the most topical historical reading quandary. I will thus attempt here to establish where the sources interweave, a process which is indispensable to according fresh knowledge value to the historiographical narrative in order to bring out what lay beneath the contradictions of a school life in which everyday concrete educational practice was permeated by existential expectations, emotional states and de facto inequalities that were not to find a voice in reconstructions focusing exclusively on analysing the pedagogical, institutional and legal debates of those years.

It is an approach that also enables us to take stock of certain literary figures, such as the «teacher with the red pen» which, removed from its literary context, have breathed life into a collective imagination frequently unaware of the original textual genesis.

In this context it is, in my opinion, crucial to reflect, in a way which has only rarely happened, on the relationship between containment of the emancipatory urge implicit in the very figure of the teachers, their professional and cultural trajectory and the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century revival of a patriarchal symbolic order that was present in both the literary context and outside it, and frequently codified by a specific normative apparatus generally considered an antidote to the risk of social upheaval implicit in the earliest feminist claims, as one of the first female voices capable of self-portraying in Sibilla Aleramo's

<sup>8</sup> A. Labriola, *Relazione sull'ispezione compiuta nella scuola normale femminile di Bari* (1885), now in Covato, Sorge (edd.), *L'istruzione normale*, cit., p. 166.

novel *Una donna*<sup>9</sup>, in a narrative register which finally succeeded in getting away from male projections.

Starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian society was torn apart by two conflicting drives represented, on one hand, by an ineluctable although contradictory advance in modernisation processes and, on the other, by a recurrent evocation of the immutability of a specific hierarchical social class and gender order in the collective imagination. The struggles of the early emancipation movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were ultimately seen as extremely dangerous by the majority and prompted considerable alarmism. With a view to averting the much feared collapse of a patriarchal family revived in these same years in both Catholic and secular worlds as a bulwark against change, a new virility cult came to the fore together with a myth that might be called an “invented tradition” lasting centuries, to use an apt categorisation developed by Hobsbawm and Ranger<sup>10</sup>.

It was, in actual fact, the intangibility of the patriarchal order that was believed to be at risk from the first struggles for women's rights, the vote and education, motherhood and the new women's labour gains<sup>11</sup>. Feminism and a new emancipated woman model thus became dangers to be fought against and resisted. This unease is visible in many of the era's cultural manifestations, from the complex and unsettling work of Luigi Pirandello, one of the most significant examples in novels and drama, to the prescriptive character of religious and pedagogical treatises, and to the endless Lombroso style anthropological debates on gender differences in relation to sexual issues. «The idea that “nature” had forged the male gender for leadership and excellence» – observed Sandro Bellassai in *L'invenzione della virilità* – «was certainly not new but it was reasserted forcefully at a specific historical juncture and presented as an eternal and indisputable truth precisely when it was being seriously disputed and threatened»<sup>12</sup>.

As testimony to the unease pervading the society of the day, the prestigious journal «Nuova Antologia's» decision to publish an *Inchiesta sul femminismo* (*Enquiry into Feminism*) sponsored by a provincial women's circle Circolo di Mesagne (Brindisi) in 1911 was certainly neither random nor insignificant. It was an enquiry founded on two questions put to many eminent exponents of the culture of the day and an extraordinary source of information on the fears of the day<sup>13</sup> including profoundly hostile contributions by Salvatore Di Giacomo, Vilfredo Pareto and Benedetto Croce who argued: «Feminism is a movement which I feel is condemned by its own name. A female idea in the bad sense of the word. Men have their own specific problems, too, but they have not yet invented maschilism»<sup>14</sup>. Other voices were cautiously positive, including Teresa Labriola

<sup>9</sup> S. Aleramo, *Una donna*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1906.

<sup>10</sup> E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (edd.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Salvatici (ed.), *Storia delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea*, Roma, Carocci, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> S. Bellassai, *L'invenzione della virilità. Politica e immaginario maschile nell'Italia contemporanea*, Roma, Carocci, 2021, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> The enquiry was published in «La Nuova Antologia di Lettere, Scienze ed Arti», vol. CLIV, July-August 1911, pp. 121-128.

<sup>14</sup> B. Croce, in *ibid.*, p. 123 (the author's italics).

and Achille Loira. Fear of a threatening women's activism also explains women's failure to win certain fundamental rights such as the right to vote, for example, even prior to the shift towards authoritarianism.

### 1. *Women going into teaching*

The survival, even in the face of certain changes, of women's social and cultural subordination speaks volumes of the illusory and manipulative character of the extremely pervasive rhetoric revolving around the exaltation of the virtues of motherhood not only as regards motherhood itself but also what was viewed as the intrinsically altruistic identity of female teachers whose numbers were continuing to grow but were the victim of wage discrimination until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and various forms of social and cultural prejudice.

In this sense, the issues raised by the development of the educational institutions was an interesting vantage point for the conflict between the advent, for an increasingly large number of people, of the new life, education and work choices typical of a modern society and a tendency to hem these into a rigidly hierarchical social relationship structure. An extremely significant case in point which we have already noted, embodying a twofold social class and gender theme, is the event characterising the development of the *scuola normale* teacher training colleges and their rapid feminisation<sup>15</sup>. But how did they work on an institutional structure level?

Founded, as we have seen, by the Casati Law of 13 December 1859 and promulgated in Piedmont before being extended after unification to the whole country, the *scuola normale* were to train male and female teachers, i.e. a teaching class that had, until then, been almost non-existent but was felt to be necessary to the effective functioning of primary schools and thus of the uphill task constituted by the struggle against post-unification Italy's high levels of lower class illiteracy. Until the Gentile Reform of 1923, despite various attempts at reform, the *scuola normale* had remained essentially unchanged in institutional structure and intrinsic educational objective terms, with the exception of certain partial reorganisation measures including a new regulation issued by Minister De Sanctis in a Royal Decree of 30 September 1880. The Casati Law set up 18 such teacher training colleges, nine for men and nine for women. Other *scuole normali* and *scuole magistrali* were then set up by town councils and provinces. School organisation was modelled on that of primary schools and was formally covered by the law under the same *Titolo V* heading as that dealing with primary schooling and the education of the

<sup>15</sup> The literature around the history of women's education is now ample, thanks to contributions by historians in recent years. For the Italian case see, amongst others, Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne*, cit. See also S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Le bambine nella storia dell'educazione*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1990; C. Covato, *Idoli di bontà. Il genere come norma nella storia dell'educazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2014. On the use of the female teachers' story in literary sources, see Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù*, cit.; see also, *Banca dati delle opere letterarie e dei diari editi sulla scuola*, in <https://www.memoriascolastica.it> (last access: 20.04.2023).

lower classes. This type of school was, in fact, never viewed as on a par with other forms of secondary schooling, like the gymnasiums, lyceums or technical schools. Courses lasted three years but were carried out in such a way that students could sit exams qualifying them to teach in lower primary school after just two years and upper school exams after three. Admission to such schools was open to boys of 16 and over and girls of 15 and over. In addition to an entrance exam students were also required to submit good character certificates and documents attesting to their good health<sup>16</sup>.

Whilst the desire of certain middle-class and *petit bourgeois* girls to continue their studies past primary school had met with stiff resistance in institutions such as gymnasiums, lyceums and universities that trained for professions held to be the reserve of men, enrolment at the teacher training schools (at which, as we have seen, classes were divided up by gender) were tolerated and encouraged. It fit into a cultural training framework centred on professional training, for primary school teachers, considered, at least in the abstract, as not inconsistent with women's nature and identity. It was, however, precisely the potential for a change in status, the objective need for financial independence, linked to the effects of the modernisation and urbanisation then under way and, lastly, a desire to change their destiny that were behind the drive to study and work for girls whose experience of life had, until then, been tightly circumscribed by the family sphere<sup>17</sup>.

An especially interesting source for an understanding of the nexus between individual destinies and institutional changes is, as we have seen, a literary genre that came to the fore at the end of the century, stories and novels with female teachers or *scuola normale* students as their central characters and whose lives were described with stark realism. These are even more significant if told by women (think of Matilde Serao, Ada Negri or Elvira Mancuso) who were, to some extent, recounting their own stories, hopes and fears<sup>18</sup>.

The aspiration for new destinies and new freedoms, often with unhappy endings, was, in this type of literature, entrusted to women's chances going into teaching<sup>19</sup>. In general, however, their desire for independence and intellectual and professional challenge was destined to be harshly punished with gossip, illness and loneliness. As we have seen, the literary sources were not too wide of the real life mark. As Elvira Mancuso wrote in her

<sup>16</sup> Sorge, *L'evoluzione dell'istruzione normale e la documentazione conservata nell'Archivio centrale dello Stato*, in Covato, Sorge (edd.), *L'istruzione normale*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> See, amongst others, on this subject, S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, in Soldani, G. Turi (edd.), *Fare gli italiani*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, pp. 67-130; C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> On late 19<sup>th</sup> century women's literature, see A. Briganti, *Protagoniste e vittime, le donne e la scrittura*, Milano, ESA, 1990; G. Morandini, *La voce che è in lei. Antologia della narrativa femminile italiana tra '800 e '900*, Milano, Bompiani, 1980; E. Rasy, *Le donne e la letteratura*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1984; A. Ascenzi, *Il Plutarco delle donne. Repertorio della pubblicistica educativa e scolastica e della letteratura amena destinate alle donne nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Macerata, eum, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> The most significant examples of female writers taking on the teacher theme in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century include Matilde Serao, Ada Negri, Elvira Mancuso, Anna Fusetti and Ida Baccini.



1906 novel *Annuzza la maestrina*, published later by the Sellerio publishing house under the title *Vecchia storia... inverosimile*<sup>20</sup>.

The great hope that gave mother and daughter courage was that Annuzza could become a teacher and, they believed, earn well without having to be subservient, like a servant, or do manual labour, like a factory worker [...] But neither of them could be certain that the dream would come true because the only school in the town was a primary school and obtaining a free place at the halls of residence in the provincial town meant knowing the right people and having money<sup>21</sup>.

The two characters lived in a small town in Caltanissetta province. The writer of the novel took her upper primary school exams, and achieved excellent marks, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and graduated in Literature at the *Regia Università di Palermo*. She ranked sixth out of the eighty candidates for Italian teaching posts in the royal technical schools. Subsequently she began training teachers at her own home. Elvira Mancuso was born in Caltanissetta in 1867. Her family were upper middle class and her father was «an eminent criminal lawyer, a genuine patriot and a skilled orator»<sup>22</sup>. The novel's author and her main character are paradigmatic of different existential journeys but there are a great many analogies: the trajectories taken, from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, by a group of women belonging, in the first case (the teachers) to a middle class struggling economically but with intellectual aspirations and, in the second, to the working or lower middle classes. This is the almost exclusive subject of the frequently realist style literary narratives whose chilling portrayal of the female teachers' living conditions was almost never combined with any parallel ability on their part to assert their independence.

This is the case of Matilde Serao, a writer whose attitude to feminism was very wary and who was opposed to women's suffrage and women's equality. The teachers' living conditions she described in *Scuola normale femminile* (1885) are especially drastic, but the harshness of her condemnation of the situation seems implicitly to desire a future for women in the family with husbands and children to look after. In describing the destiny of *scuola normale* students, the situations Serao describes are almost unfailingly desperate, as one example will suffice to demonstrate:

Cleofe Santaniello applies for the school and is one of the last in line to get in. She teaches the first class at the Montecalvario primary lower school. She is lacking in moral strength, entirely free of energy. She struggles with her girls and they almost always humiliate her in exams. She is always sickly and frequently absent in winter. One day she faints in the classroom. The school headmistress and her superiors are not happy with her. They have to give her a helper for a month at her own expense. They put up with her because of her gentleness and the desperate straits she finds herself in<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> E. Mancuso, *Annuzza la maestrina*, Caltanissetta, Tip. Dell'Omnibus – Fratelli Amone, 1906, now in Ead., *Vecchia storia... inverosimile*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> S. Nigro, *Prefazione. Una volpicina tra i villani*, in *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>23</sup> M. Serao, *Scuola normale femminile*, in Ead., *Il romanzo della fanciulla*, Milano, Treves, 1893, p. 180.

## 2. *Emancipated or excluded?*

As Anna Ascenzi has aptly noted in her references to those she calls the De Amicis-esque teachers featuring in *Il romanzo di un maestro*, *Cuore* and *Amore e ginnastica*<sup>24</sup>, the women concerned seem to have no ambition or choice. «The hard lives, sacrifices and accumulated burden of sad experiences of these De Amicis-esque teachers make them seem resigned to, or rather passively accepting of, the immobile culture and society they live in, a world they seem to have no chance for independent action in, or real chance of freedom»<sup>25</sup>.

In Luigi Pirandello's *L'esclusa* (1902)<sup>26</sup>, too, attendance at *scuola normale* and access to the teaching profession by the character Marta Ayala (and a secondary figure, Anna Veronica, a widowed and now alone former teacher) condemns her to marginalisation and misfortune, triggered by an unfounded suspicion of betrayal by Marta and inexorably condemnation by her family and local community. She is paradoxically forgiven only when the suspected adultery does actually take place: «Alone in her room she is amazed how calm she is, as if she had not forced herself to be so, amazed at her ability to pretend so well, and this amazement verged on satisfaction. She was cheerful that day, as her mother and sister had not seen her for some time»<sup>27</sup>.

This realist portrayal, then, did not encourage women's new individual and social consciousness.

Whilst financial motives no more than scratched the surface of a more complex problem also encompassing the relationship between destiny and freedom, the desire for change and the survival of asymmetrical social frameworks, it should also be remembered that, as we have seen, the salaries of female teachers were, for some time, a third less than those of their male colleagues and even lower when they taught in rural schools, which were mainly the preserve of female teachers. Their behaviour was hemmed in by rigid moral codes of behaviour, and if they failed to abide by these they risked losing the certificate of good conduct issued by the mayor required for teaching. Their ability to teach male children, above all at higher primary school, was the subject of lengthy debates cut through with male employment concerns and arguments implying women's unsuitability to pass on manly virtues like patriotism and the importance of hard work. These constraints notwithstanding, however, the figure of the female teacher was socially tolerated, while women's ambitions to what were seen as the higher professions were harshly stigmatised. In the years in which the terrible suicide of teacher Italia Donati (1886), unjustly accused of having an affair with the mayor of the town she taught in, Lamporecchio, triggered shock and compassion in the public, the Court of Cassation sentence (1884) that took away from Lydia Pöet, the first woman in Italy to graduate with a law degree, the right previously granted her to register as a lawyer, precisely on

<sup>24</sup> E. De Amicis, *Il romanzo di un maestro*, edited by A. Ascenzi and R. Sani, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2021; Id., *Cuore. Libro per ragazzi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001; Id., *Amore e ginnastica*, Torino, Einaudi, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù*, cit., p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> L. Pirandello, *L'esclusa*, Milano, Mondadori, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

the grounds of her gender and its fragility, was received favourably as averting what were considered to be excessive female claims.

It should, in fact, not be forgotten, that prior to what is known as the Morelli Law of 1877, women were not allowed to give testimony in public acts regulated by the Civil Code, on the grounds that any oath by them was considered meaningless and thus unreliable. The path by which women gained a voice, both private and public, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was truly fraught with trials and tribulations. The rhetorical emphasis which surrounded the female figure conflicted with the real conditions women, and thus female teachers, lived in, within a context in which the feminising of the teaching profession was soon becoming clear. The 1990-1901 school year saw a considerable leap forward in the already greater number of women than men in the profession, almost doubling female numbers to 21,178 men and 44,560 women).

The subject matter examined here highlights the fact that the expansion of schooling and the schooling processes managed by the nation state – both effect and driving force behind modernisation – took place within the context of a contradictory process involving a great many new features, but also the re-emergence of mindsets typical of rural and patriarchal societies.

This is confirmed by the frequent recourse, in the common sense of the day, to the notion of destiny, which acted as a bulwark as regards the uncontrolled expansion of women's and lower class education, with attempts being made to contain these within strictly circumscribed boundaries. In this sense, the development of the school institutions were a privileged vantage point in the conflict between modernisation and modernity, on one hand, and the survival, on the other, of cultural choices tending to revive the material and symbolic structures of a pre-industrial world still characterised by patriarchal traditions and specific class and gender hierarchies.

# The “Excellent Head Teacher” in Professional Manuals

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## *Introduction*

This paper intends to review the main stages in the construction of the role of the primary school head teacher and the main depictions there have been in professional manuals, from the moment the role was legally recognised (between the 1880s and 1890s) until the 1960s, that is, up to the threshold of its transformation initiated by the Decrees of 1973-1974. Over a period of about 70 years, this figure played an important role in school life for several reasons. First of all because it originated “from the bottom up”, i.e., as a response to a need widely felt by those who ran primary schools and those who worked within them: from municipal administrators, to state authorities, teachers, parents and service staff. The head teacher was called upon to play a central role in the life of the primary school: the action of the teachers, their relationship with the pupils and, in general, with the social, political and cultural context, were influenced to varying degrees by the head teacher’s presence and their guiding, supervisory and evaluative activities.

The professional role and duties of the head teacher were obviously embodied in legislation, which was a genuine expression of educational policy of the time and the attempt to make public education and its organisation more efficient. The growing importance of this role and the increasing number of teachers who faced competitive examinations to take up the managerial role also gave rise to an interesting body of publications that, in an attempt to prepare candidates, outlined the “ideal profile” of the head teacher, as a man and as a professional. Indeed, the various publications listed the intellectual, moral and psychophysical qualities of the “excellent” head teacher, as well as desirable cultural and professional skills. The authors were often head teachers (or former head teachers) with many years of work experience, sometimes even academics who were interested in real school life. The different profiles developed in these works reflect not only the experiences of the author, but also the cultural (or political-cultural) climate of the time. They are representations that were destined to change through the different seasons experienced by the Italian school system and are intended to highlight the different traits that characterised this protagonist of school life.

In this contribution, we intend to illustrate only a few portrayals of the figure of the head teacher, taken from the works of well-known education specialists and school professionals. These portrayals stem from an attempt to bring together theory (i.e., a

certain educational approach) and practice (the author's personal experiences or those of others collected by the author); individual memory (self-representations of oneself and one's professional experience) and collective memory (expressed in various testimonies intended to present the social image of the head teacher, or rather the most desirable image). The works and their portrayals were thus not only intended to meet the training needs of aspiring head teachers, but they also addressed a broader public in an attempt to construct a certain vision of the school and its organisation.

### 1. *An unknown role*

In 1893, a major publishing house in Florence published a volume of almost five hundred pages that offered an almost complete panorama of the trades and professions that existed in Italy at that time<sup>1</sup>. The editor, Giuseppe Marcotti (1850-1921), a journalist and writer of Friulian origin, had collected and presented about a thousand professions, both old and new. In order to produce the work, he had availed himself of the collaboration of numerous experts from the business world, the liberal professions, services and, of course, schools. Indeed, the reviewers included ministerial officials, inspectors, teachers and experts from the various levels of public and private education. In this sector, the panorama of professions presented could be said to be complete, as it ranged from university lecturers, to teachers, to gym instructors. In this wide-ranging and informative panorama, the primary school head teacher did not appear. This absence is not surprising because, at the date of publication, this role had not yet received any official recognition in legislation, even though by then many municipalities had begun to appoint head teachers in their schools. To explain this situation, it is necessary to take a step back and return to the Casati Law of 1859, which represents the birth of the Italian school system as it was gradually extended from the Kingdom of Sardinia to all the territories of the unified state.

Article 318 of the Casati Law stipulated that municipalities could manage and control primary schools by appointing «special supervisors or inspection commissions» (sometimes called supervisory committees). This provision was progressively modified not by subsequent legislative provisions (which would predictably have found strong opposition), but through a slow change in the actual organisation of schools, favoured above all by a series of administrative regulations. The regulations (R.D. 15.09.1860, no. 4336), issued to implement the Casati Law, did not explicitly envisage the role of the head teacher, but they did open up this possibility. After reaffirming that it was up to the municipalities to appoint superintendents or inspection commissions by mid-October of each school year, the regulation left it up to the municipalities to «entrust the direction of the teaching part to persons judged suitable for that office» (art. 19). The appointment

<sup>1</sup> G. Marcotti, *Mentore. Guida pratica per la scelta d'una professione*, compiled and edited by Prof. G. M., with the participation of special auditors for each subject, Firenze, Barbera, 1893.

of superintendents (and that of female inspectors for «women's work») did not therefore exclude the appointment of other roles to coordinate the teachers' activities. Gradually, especially in the big cities, a new role was created: the head teacher. Since it was not envisaged as being a compulsory post, it still held a very uncertain legal position. The head teacher's authority and prestige depended more on the skills he or she was able to demonstrate "in the field" rather than on precise legal authority. From an economic point of view, the salary did not differ much from that of the other teachers. Moreover, since he or she owed the position (a yearly contract, although renewable<sup>2</sup>) to the municipal administrators, he or she was often subjected to the same pressures and arbitrariness as teachers.

## 2. *First legal recognition*

The increasing use of the head teacher was greatly favoured by the Ministerial Regulations on Primary Education that replaced the 1860 regulation. Without entering into open conflict with the Casati Law (now in force throughout the country), they took note of the emergence of this new role and then, in an increasingly clear way, even went so far as to encourage its institution. At the central level, this solution was looked upon more and more favourably in order to address the difficulties caused by the poor (or non-existent) educational coordination of teachers. The creation of these posts seemed very useful, yet not easy, as it meant a significant increase in expenses for the municipalities.

Indeed, the new regulation (R.D. 16.02.1888, no. 5292) had prudently reaffirmed the current legislation and confirmed that the municipal schools were to be run in the usual twofold manner: for the general, organisational and supervisory part, through superintendents and inspection commissioners (compulsory), and for the more specifically educational part by appointing those who had demonstrated good teaching experience or recognised skills in school administration (the appointment remained purely optional). At that time, no qualification was prescribed for this appointment. In 1894, however, there was an important novelty: the decree that established the modalities of the examinations of suitability for the office of school inspector (R.D. 15.02.1894, no. 118) stipulated that the certificate of suitability for this office was also a qualification for the appointment as head teacher (art. 9). A subsequent ordinance (Ministerial Decree 15.01.1895), specifying the examination programmes, reiterated that those who aspired to obtain the qualification certificate solely in order to compete for the office of head teacher would also be admitted to the selection procedure. In this way, the tests for the

<sup>2</sup> A ministerial note, dated 26 June 1884, recalled that «appointments of head teachers are optional and as such can always be terminated. Ordinarily they are understood to be made per year and are confirmed by tacit consent».

school inspector's certificate and those for the head teacher's certificate became one and the same<sup>3</sup>.

These provisions were developed and incorporated in a new Regulation on Primary Education (R.D. 8.10.1895, no. 623). With it, the institution of the educational direction now appeared to be completely reformulated and regulated by precise rules. In the events we are reconstructing, this regulation represents a step of considerable importance because, by tacitly abolishing the figure of the municipal superintendent, it transferred part of their duties to the head teacher, whose professional profile it outlined. Among the head teacher's numerous duties, the regulations listed the following: to supervise the maintenance of discipline and observance of the school timetable; to give the teachers the necessary instructions on the development of the syllabus, the method of teaching and the keeping of records; to review the school work corrected by the teachers; to decide on the temporary suspension of pupils from school; to accompany the inspector on visits and to ensure that the instructions given to the teachers are carried out punctually. Head teachers could keep teaching or be exempted from it: this choice was always up to the municipalities.

The post of head teacher was to be assigned to school personnel with a higher grade licence, who had commendably taught in public primary schools for at least eight years, and preferably to those who possessed the certificate of suitability for the office of inspector or head teacher. One of the main problems (apart from the economic one) faced by municipalities wishing to appoint head teachers was the fact that very few teachers possessed the certificate of qualification or suitability required by the regulations. An attempt was made to remedy this immediately with a number of ordinances aimed at relaxing the requirements for access to the competitions and thus expanding the number of candidates<sup>4</sup>. Within a few years, the contingent of male and female head teachers, with or without a teaching role, gradually increased. In the school year 1895-1896, for example, 744 headmasters and 78 headmistresses (a total of 822) were in service, while in the following school year the number rose to 1445.

<sup>3</sup> Candidates had to be no older than 35 years of age and had to hold a higher grade licence issued by the Scuola normale. In addition, they had to certify that they had «always and in all respects maintained irreproachable conduct»; that they had taught in public schools for eight years, of which at least four in the higher grades; and that they possessed qualifications proving expertise in teaching, particularly in the pedagogical disciplines. The examination covered the following subjects: Italian literature; pedagogy and history of pedagogy; rudiments of mathematical, physical and natural sciences; natural history; legislation for primary schools. For literature and pedagogy the test was written and oral, while for the other subjects only oral.

<sup>4</sup> A first examination (30.10.1895), only for qualifications, awarded the qualification to as many as 1.130 candidates. A further examination (27.12.1897) turned out to be even more favourable because it abolished the minimum number of years of service (stipulated in the previous ordinance), due to which many precarious directors had not been able to graduate and were therefore in danger of losing their jobs. As a result of this competition, a further 835 candidates were qualified. New notices were published in the following years, in some cases with a return to more restrictive criteria for access.



### 3. *Pietro Pasquali: the "missionary" head teacher*

The launch in 1894 of public examinations for the qualification of head teacher did not go unnoticed, especially among insiders. Perhaps the first to grasp this novelty and attempt to provide an immediate response to the training needs of those who aspired to this position was Pietro Pasquali. A teacher, who was then head teacher in Monza with five years' experience, he was finally appointed Director General of the Primary and Infant Schools of the Municipality of Brescia in 1888. In this city he began his long association with the Agazzi sisters. His solid experience, the many posts he held, also at ministerial level, and his intense collaboration with the main school journals of the time favoured the dissemination of his manuals, which were intended for teachers and nursery school assistants. In 1894, in the journal series «Il Risveglio Educativo» (The Educational Reawakening) – to which he was an assiduous contributor – he published the *Guida del direttore didattico* (Guide of the head teacher). In the *Preface* he stated that the content of the work was drawn from his 30 years' experience with colleagues, «friends and acquaintances, worthy representatives of the head teachers of Italy». The aim was «that such a treasure trove of practice be collected in a volume and made the property of all, especially young people»<sup>5</sup>. Personal experiences and memories and those of colleagues were combined with the author's ideas and his educational eclecticism. He presented his position in very pragmatic terms: although the main theories of the time, i.e. spiritualism and positivism, were different and opposed, in his opinion they converged at the teaching level, particularly in the natural or intuitive method. He believed that: «the identity of practical application resulting from different theories is a fact that also frequently occurs in hygiene, agriculture, industry and trade». This idea was bound to have direct repercussions for those running a primary school. He therefore suggested that: «the director will bring it to his attention, and he will judge the teachers in terms of their teaching, regardless of their abstract opinions; because these may be diametrically opposed, and they have the same value»<sup>6</sup>.

Before outlining the qualities, both personal and professional, of the "model head teacher", Pasquali warned that this professional «bears a disturbing responsibility: he is in charge of cures that can disrupt sleep, appetite and digestion». In his vision, being a head teacher means responding to a *vocation*, being aware of having a mission to fulfil in short, «one is born a director, as one is born a poet». By vocation he was referring to that set of «special talents», innate and developed through study and experience, which «make the head teacher» more than the legal title<sup>7</sup>.

According to Pasquali, the foremost attribute of the "exemplary" head teacher must be honesty, in public as well as in private life. In carrying out his work, he must prove himself to be precise, punctual, proper, sincere, loyal, impartial and courageous, even in «retreat», i.e. in recognising his mistakes. Honesty also comes before personal culture,

<sup>5</sup> P. Pasquali, *Guida del direttore didattico*, Milano, Risveglio Educativo, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20 and 21.

because «science is useful, but virtue is necessary». The second fundamental attribute is good health, because «physical weakness is almost always the cause of moral weakness»<sup>8</sup>. In addition to being a gallant man, a good director must also be a gentleman: he must always display «gentle manners and courteous acts», which do not imply relinquishing seriousness and firmness. The “model” head teacher is therefore suited to a «calm and serene temperament» and behaviour inspired by prudence, moderation, respect and tolerance towards the positions of others. At the professional level, his main quality must be a love for the «educational disciplines», to be cultivated through the study of theories and critical reflection on his own and others’ educational experiences. He must also show love for his profession, his office and his country. Finally, he must beware of personal vanity: if his possible involvement in public life is legitimate, this must not lead him to do as so many «individuals aspiring to medals, crosses, conspicuous honours and other titles that gratify vanity». Concluding his ideal portrait, Pasquali asserted that «only those who enjoy the esteem of a head teacher and the esteem of a man can attain the highest degree of leadership authority»<sup>9</sup>.

In this portrayal of the “ideal head teacher” there are certainly many concessions to the rhetoric of mission and vocation that was widespread in those years. However, one cannot fail to recognise Pasquali’s sincerity and his profound knowledge of actual school life. His references to moral and relational qualities were perhaps intended to indicate the indispensable requisites for dealing with the many situations of abuse and injustice that affected teachers (and above all female head teachers) of the time and that often involved, in various capacities, male head teachers and school inspectors. Honest behaviour and a polite manner on the part of the head teacher might have represented a bulwark against the arrogance of the local authorities and a safeguard for the rights and dignity of many teachers.

#### 4. *Domenico Luigi Pardini: the head teacher as a “gallant man”*

In 1903, a new but relatively established publishing house in Abruzzo published the *Manuale del direttore didattico* (Manual of the head teacher). The author, Domenico Luigi Pardini, wrote that the work was the result of personal experience and that of many colleagues. The aim was very concrete, namely, to collect and order «what might be required, almost on a daily basis, by those who run primary schools»<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, the book illustrated all of the head teacher’s duties during the school year, commented on the current legal regulations and concluded with a series of forms to be used for administrative acts. The new publication was justified – also and above all – because a few weeks earlier, an important change had taken place. Law No. 45 of 19 February 1903 (known as the

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> D.L. Pardini, *Manuale del direttore didattico*, Lanciano, Carabba, 1903, p. 3.

Nasi Law, after the name of the Minister who proposed it) stipulated the compulsory nature of the educational directorship in municipalities with a population of over 10,000 inhabitants, and the option – in the remaining municipalities – of establishing their own educational directorship, including by forming consortia with others. Forty-four years after the Casati Law, the measure marked a turning point: the role of the head teacher was legally recognised as an active external organ of the school administration, with functions of guidance and supervision over primary education and the work of the teachers.

In his work, Pardini draws an ideal portrait of the head teacher that in several respects recalls (even explicitly) that of Pasquali. The emphasis, however, no longer falls on vocation or innate talents, but on *mission* and ethical, social and educational aspects. In this perspective, the main concern of the head teacher must be the moral education of the pupils before formal education. Again, according to the author, favouring head over heart in teaching has left children as they were before, that is, full of vices and defects. The good head teacher, on the other hand, must exercise continuous, patient and strict vigilance «so that the employees always have the good word on their lips, which teaches respect and love for divinity, superiors, laws, opinions, neighbours and work»<sup>11</sup>.

Faithfully applying national laws and programmes, he must ensure that honest citizens and good workers are formed in his Institute. This is why the director must be and appear to the teachers to be an authentic human and professional model, endowed with solid culture, willing to make sacrifices and devoid of any selfish interests. His main qualities must be prudence, seriousness and modesty. As Pardini concludes, «without being a saint, he must deserve the name of a gallant man and a gentleman, in the highest sense of the word, in order to increase esteem and goodwill around him»<sup>12</sup>. Once the call to vocation is set aside, this ideal portrait considerably reinforces the ethical aspects of the leadership figure, even if it does not avoid the usual lapses into rhetoric. It is not difficult to discern in these statements the echo of the teaching programmes for primary schools issued in 1894. When presenting them, Minister Baccelli summarised the guiding principle as follows: «Instruct the people as much as is sufficient, educate them as much as you can». In this restorative and conservative political action, the head teacher – at least according to Pardini's *Manual* – was to play a significant role.

### 5. *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice: the head teacher as “teacher”*

In Italy, the representation of the head teacher as “a teacher of teachers” was the most widespread and also the most enduring. Formulated by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, a pupil of Giovanni Gentile, an orthodox neo-idealist but with great sensitivity to the concrete aspects of education, it was revived and relaunched several times up to the years after the Second World War. The portrait of the “ideal head teacher” emerges above all in

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

his masterpiece, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale* (Educational lessons and memories from teaching experience), intended for the training of teachers and which was to have numerous re-editions<sup>13</sup>. The double title fully reflects the author's educational vision, which always aimed to combine theory and practice, education and teaching, in an operational symbiosis. Indeed, the work was divided into *Lessons* (i.e., a systematic treatment) and *Memories* of experiences, directly encountered by Lombardo Radice and presented by him through concrete examples. In his opinion, they were "excellent" experiences of teaching life, encountered above all in the rural schools of the time such as in Montesca and Muzzano. The protagonists were extraordinary teachers and head teachers, such as Francesco Bettini, Angelo Colombo, Giancesare Pico and Angelo Patri, an Italian-American who ran a public school in the United States.

To develop a representation of the "ideal head teacher", Lombardo Radice therefore drew on two sources: a theoretical one, namely Gentile's neo-idealism, and a practical one, namely the concrete experiences of which he had personal memory. Following Gentile's reasoning, he considers the school as a «living spiritual unit», and the head teacher as the «organ of the educating Spirit», i.e., the embodiment of the universal Spirit. For his teachers, the director represents authority, but not so much for hierarchical reasons as for educational reasons: he has, in fact, reached a stage of greater understanding of that law of the Spirit that governs school education. Lombardo Radice does not mention supposed vocations or innate gifts, but more concretely states that the good head teacher should have an authentic mission, to which he dedicates all his time and all his energies of intelligence and will. Once again following in the footsteps of Gentile, he believes that the relationship between head teacher and teachers is analogous to the relationship between teacher and pupils, that is, between authority and freedom. The head teacher is an educator, a "teacher of teachers", and exercises an educational magisterium. The head teacher represents an exemplary figure, as a man and as an educator, and his authority is legitimised by the superior cultural awareness and self-fulfilment that he has developed.

According to Lombardo Radice, a good head teacher must possess the attitude of a *father* who looks after his children with love and confidence: a benevolent but serious authority, affectionate but impartial; gentle and severe, firm and authoritative, "inspiring and moderating". Father but even more *teacher* ("teacher of teachers"), the head teacher must know the teachers of his institute, stimulate and support their teaching action, encourage their spirit of cooperation. He must therefore be a coach, capable of promoting the unification of the educational forces in his institute, stimulating the teachers' harmony and cooperation.

This representation of the figure of the head teacher certainly appears dated and in any case it is linked to a philosophical-pedagogical approach of the past. The "charismatic" model that Lombardo Radice upholds, based on cultural training, mission, on the apostolate, on exemplarity, on total dedication to the school, has long since entered a crisis, just as the thesis of the training of "being a man" in order to become a teacher

<sup>13</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, Palermo, Sandron, 1913-1936<sup>16</sup>, in part. pp. 45-46.

and head teacher appears outdated: a magisterial preparation, that is, that excludes all non-humanistic disciplines, that neglects the sciences of education and that denies methodological-operational skills. Beyond the rhetoric typical of the period, Lombardo Radice's call to reflect on the role of the head teacher, on his functions and on the need for him to be able to nurture that spirit of collaboration that is still, today as yesterday, the “secret” of a good school.

#### 6. *Giovacchino Petracchi and Ferdinando Montuschi: the head teacher as “coach”*

In this concise review, the last portrayal chosen appeared at the end of the 1960s and was devised by Giovacchino Petracchi, Central Inspector of the Ministry of Education, and Ferdinando Montuschi, then a young scholar specialised in psychology who later became a university lecturer in pedagogy. Before presenting this depiction, it seems opportune to recall that from a juridical-administrative point of view the role of the head teacher was reconfirmed and strengthened by the Gentile Reform and above all by the subsequent 1928 regulation that remained in force substantially until the issuing of the *Decreti Delegati* of 1973-1974. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the gradual transition of primary schools from municipal to state management, completed in 1934, had also brought the head teacher into the direct employment of the state, thus becoming a civil servant. From the post-war period onwards, discussions on this school figure multiplied: at the centre of the various analyses was the head teacher-teacher relationship and the interpretation of managerial authority as a competence to be placed at the service of teachers and pupils and not as a power to be exercised in varying degrees. In the debates, the image coined by Lombardo Radice had been revived and relaunched above all through the interpretation given by the pedagogical culture of a Catholic matrix, but with the passing of time the idea of the head teacher as a “teacher of teachers” appeared increasingly ambiguous and inadequate.

It was in this same Catholic cultural and publishing environment that Montuschi and Petracchi's volume was produced, presenting itself to readers not as «a manual or vademecum but as a study». Indeed, the authors specified that their intention was to adopt a new perspective of enquiry: the image of the head teacher could not be derived, as in the past, by deduction, that is, based on a pedagogical theory (or on the current legislation) in order to then deduce the “ideal profile”, that is, the “essentials” of the good head teacher. They attempted to replace this “static” profile with a “dynamic” profile, constructed inductively, i.e., starting from an analysis – conducted with scientific instruments – of the managerial role, considered in the context of concrete professional action, to identify then the personality traits that turned out to be most effective and productive. In other words, the focus of the study is on the relationship between the head teacher's personality and his or her professional duties, i.e. between the personality traits examined in the performance of his or her duties and the skills, qualities and attitudes that have proved most effective according to research conducted using scientific methods.

Drawing on Italian and, above all, foreign studies on the subject, the authors write that the volume gathers «ideas and proposals considered beneficial to the fairest interpretation of the personality and role of the head teacher; and, on the other hand, professional experiences have been used in order to broaden the perspectives of the activity of the head teacher, whose task it is to inspire the work of the school in close communion with the teachers»<sup>14</sup>. The aim of the authors was therefore not to offer yet another “ideal profile”, but to study the professional behaviour of the head teacher in order to identify, on the one hand, the specificity of his action and, on the other, the characteristics of the «basic personality» that are most involved in the exercise of the profession. The profession is thus understood as an attribute of the personality that, in its concrete exercise, involves the entire human dimension of the head teacher.

The first part of the work, dedicated to the personality of the director in actual work situations, draws on a US experimental study that, in many respects, had analogies with the Italian situation. So, the head teacher's «basic personality» traits are examined, i.e., the qualities, skills, behaviours and attitudes that have proven to be most effective in dealing with teachers. In the second part, the focus is brought to the specific tasks of the head teacher – from leadership, to coaching, to monitoring, to evaluation – and the working methods deemed to be most effective. From the study it emerged that «the personality of the head teacher, even more than his or her knowledge, appears to be of great importance for the performance and effectiveness of his or her professional activity»<sup>15</sup>.

Again according to the authors, experimental research has confirmed that a good head teacher knows how to act above all as a *coach* in his or her institute: the main commitment is not so much to dictate solutions to teachers as to coach or encourage them to seek solutions to teaching problems themselves. Adopting this attitude appears to be the most productive approach because it discourages any oppositional will on the part of the teacher, stimulates personal growth and establishes a positive relationship with the head teacher. The head teacher's coaching action becomes effective with regard to all the components of the school community: from the teachers, because it reduces the possibility of authoritarian attitudes and isolation on the part of the head teacher himself; to the families, because it awakens the need for cooperation and involvement in the initiatives promoted by the school; and to the pupils, because it allows them to identify in collegial forms the most appropriate ways to support their daily commitment. In keeping with this perspective, the head teacher-coach must avoid any authoritarian and paternalistic attitude and exercise his powers in the form of advice, encouragement and help. To become a coach, the good head teacher must also plan a personal itinerary: «an itinerary that is then a method that moves from the basis of mutual esteem and trust between head teacher and teacher to arrive at consistent relationships of collaboration and understanding. Hence, assistance to the teachers in solving their personal and professional problems; but assistance that has roots below the superficial bureaucratic

<sup>14</sup> F. Montuschi, G. Petracchi, *Il direttore didattico: personalità di base e prospettive operative*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1968, pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

relationship. Because the head teacher must also, and above all, motivate the process of professional awakening»<sup>16</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The portrayal of the head teacher as a coach can be said to mark a turning point: not only because of the year in which he appears, 1968, a year that launched a period of profound change in the Italian school system, but also because it marks the definitive abandonment of a tradition. Those who in the past had attempted to delineate the image of the head teacher had faced the ambivalence of his or her functions (controller-coach; superior-collaborator; judge-friend; guide-counsellor...) trying to reconcile them in an "ideal profile" (i.e., in human and cultural attributes) based on ethical and pedagogical values. At the end of the 1960s, the cultural climate appears to have changed: the roots of the ideal representation are derived from psycho-social analyses and prelude to new professional profiles (leader, manager, etc.). In essence, any charismatic image is abandoned and there is an increasing shift towards a functional vision: the management role is interpreted as that set of expert behaviours, carried out by a professionally trained figure, that enable the school community to achieve its goals. The winds of change in the school system did not spare the old head teacher, considered an expression of bureaucratic authoritarianism and a figure that was at odds with the principles of democracy and participation. With the Delegated Decrees, the image of the head teacher changed to that of the coordinator and promoter of the life of the school community. The attributes were reorganised and partly entrusted to the collegial bodies. Pedagogical, teaching and administrative skills were required to be integrated in a new and broader professionalism, centred on organisation as the intelligent use of all available resources to achieve the best results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.





# Portrayals of the Head Teacher in Forty Years of the Journal “Scuola Italiana Moderna” (1946-1985)

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## *Introduction*

This paper is the result of research carried out on the portrayals of head teachers and, specifically, of female head teachers found in the journal «Scuola Italiana Moderna», one of Italy's most important and most popular teaching journals in the period from the end of the Second World War to the early 1980s.

«Scuola Italiana Moderna» is a journal with Catholic influences, which was clearly broadly representative and widespread among teachers, the expression of a precise pedagogical area and political wing in Italy where, at least in the first twenty years considered, the Christian Democrats were the majority party. The Communist Party was the second largest party in those Cold War years, and secular educational specialists wrote in other important journals, so in future research, it should be expanded by reviewing some of these journals with different leanings, such as, for example, «I Diritti della Scuola», comparing the results with those obtained in this research.

The two decades between the Second World War and the mid-1960s were a period of profound social and educational change. Starting in the 1970s and the *anni di piombo* (years of lead) which were marked by terrorism, the Italian political situation became more varied: the Christian Democratic Party was still a party of broad consensus, but, after the assassination of Aldo Moro in 1978, the conflict with the Communist Party faded and the Christian Democratic party was joined by other parties that contributed to the country's democratic debate. The school system also underwent reform: for example, in 1963 the middle school was established and in 1979 its New Programmes were issued; in 1968 the state nursery school was created; in 1985 the new primary school programmes were issued. In 1974 the *Decreti Delegati* came into force, marking a turning point for the Italian school: from being a state institution, it became an educating community integrated into the local community and all of its components took part in its governance. The role of the head teacher also changed to meet the new cultural, political and pedagogical-educational requirements.

Thus, we get to what was to be a new turning point for schools, namely the *Bassanini Law* no. 57 of 1997, followed by Presidential Decree no. 275 of 8 March 1999 “Regulation

on the organisational and didactic autonomy of educational institutions”, which would impose a new character on teachers and head teachers, in the context of a school system that had radically changed its structure, while still maintaining ministerial management on certain issues.

The quantitative aspect of the research can be traced back to the gathering of articles dedicated to the head teacher and the management role: these articles were very scarce until the 1950s (about one or two a year), although they became more frequent from the beginning of the 1960s. In 1971, in addition to articles written by well-known and prestigious figures, three *Dossiers* on the role and duties of the head teacher and the inspector appeared, foreshadowing the change that would happen in 1974. In the 1980s, the articles became less frequent. With a view to a new heuristic and a different hermeneutics, the obituaries, contained in the *Resurgent* column, where a portrait of the person and the professional is often drawn, were also examined. Obituaries were present in considerable quantity, approximately twenty or so each year until the 1960s, then they started to diminish, moreover the content and tone changed over time and in the late 1970s they began to be shorter and more standardised.

As far as the qualitative aspect is concerned, the articles were analysed to understand both what the real role of the head teacher was and, above all, the representation that was intended to be conveyed of that role. Particular attention was paid to the portrayal of the head teacher that the journal proposes to a predominantly female class: they contributed to developing a particular feeling of school authority in the teachers. In addition, by skimming the most interesting obituaries from a historiographical point of view, an attempt was made to determine the presence and nature of any gender differences in professionalism between male and female head teachers; the latter were certainly far fewer in number than their male colleagues. The research explored the collective memory of these women in relation to their colleagues, and the portrayal that was intended to be conveyed to all the head teachers reading the journal.

### 1. *A model that persists: the 1940s and 1950s*

In the first twenty years, the journal sketched a profile of the head teacher that is in continuity with the past, even if there were attempts in those decades to convey a representation that went from being a man who exercises a special “mission” as a guide, because he is the “teacher of teachers”, to being a head teacher who, as the Catholic area of Italian pedagogy in part hoped, would have a greater cultural and educational preparation. The problem being debated was what should be the preparation of those who wanted to become head teachers: the aspirants to this role were simple teachers, or teachers who had already exercised the leadership role as “appointees”, but what they had in common seems to be a lack of training.

The journal revealed the problem that lies at the heart of the competition process: was the fact of having been a teacher and knowing the school really the most important

qualification for a head teacher? The model still proposed in this period was Lombardo Radice's neo-idealistic one, although in reality there was a realisation that something different was needed as compared with the past: the head teacher's role remained purely educational and hierarchical, so much so that he or she undertook annual evaluations of the teachers and these affected the evaluation of titles in selection procedures.

The school, however, within a society that was a young democracy, was going in another direction, towards a managerial role that was destined to be more "technical" and administrative, but the journal did not immediately grasp this need. Thus, at the beginning of the 1950s, for example, Tersilio Valenti, a head teacher from Reggio Calabria, wrote about keeping the idea of the head teacher as a teaching guide and called for an increase in positions: in the real school there was a dissatisfaction to which the journal gave voice. There was a desire to keep the teaching role of the head teacher even while grasping an organisational "crisis" of the time: too many classes did not allow the traditional role of teachers as guides to be fulfilled:

How can a head teacher with jurisdiction over 150-200 and even more classes serenely and profitably fulfil his role of coordinating and then propelling the educational system? He can act as a bureaucrat and issue circulars that God knows how they will be applied, because he can only visit classes once a year and has no opportunity to follow the teachers in their difficult work, who are so much in need of guidance and enlightened help<sup>1</sup>.

In the following pages of the article *La funzione direttiva oggi* [The management role today], Pico<sup>2</sup> also held that it is not so much preparation as experience that is important. In accordance with Lombardo Radice's theories, he re-proposed the old model, although he eventually tried to integrate it by favouring collaboration with teachers and social forces close to the school:

we speak not of supervisory control in our sphere, but of guidance, stimulation and initiative. Teachers of teachers are to be considered the head teacher and the inspector; superior is truly the teacher colleague who takes the irresolute novice under his wings to help him solve the small and large problems that arise in this arduous job. [...] It must be remembered that the post of head teacher was given to teachers who did not have a diploma, but merits [...] why does the state not proceed with the same criterion? All schools would truly become sources of original and avant-garde work<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, Gian Carlo Sottili<sup>4</sup>, prestigious contributor to the journal, sought a solution to the problem of poorly trained head teachers participating in selection procedures by demanding better qualifications. In the articles dedicated to head teachers or inspectors, who were almost always teachers and professors, the journal nevertheless emphasised the nobility of spirit and tireless work on behalf of the school. The most sought-after public recognition, beyond medals, knighthoods and honours, remained –

<sup>1</sup> T. Valenti, *Sulla crisi della direzione didattica*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XXII, n. 3, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> L. Lombardi, *Pico Gian Cesare*, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2014, vol. II, pp. 336-227.

<sup>3</sup> G.C. Pico, *La funzione direttiva, oggi*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XXII, n. 3, 1952, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. G.C. Sottili, *Sui concorsi direttivi*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XXIII, n. 19, 1953, p. 56.

as we read in a short paragraph by Giovanni Modugno on Dante Lugo's retirement – «the gratitude of the countless pupils, the many teachers and head teachers, colleagues and admirers, who for half a century have received from him light, encouragement and an example of fervent and hard-working loyalty to the cause of education»<sup>5</sup>. The resulting portrayal of the head teacher was that of a man who devotes himself to the school with moral integrity and generosity: nobility of spirit and experience seem to be sufficient to carry out the management role.

The obituaries in the *Resurgent* column, which provide us with an insight into the collective memory, confirm this model of leadership that placed importance on hard work, goodness, duty performed in an exemplary manner, character, the work of building the state school and sometimes even a fighting spirit. This conveys a memory and representation of leadership that emphasised human qualities above professional ones, often summarised only in the concept of “dedication”.

In the obituary of head teacher Cornelio Borghiero, we read: «he had truly remarkable qualities of character, industriousness and devotion to duty. He was always the first to give an example of absolute dedication to the school»<sup>6</sup>, just as another obituary reads: «In Bucchianico (Chieti), his native town, Paolo Sinolli, former head teacher in Rome, died. He was a well-known figure in the capital's teaching environment, where he was deservedly esteemed and enjoyed the widest sympathy for his work as an educator, in which he had lavished the treasures of his intelligence, goodness and unparalleled rectitude»<sup>7</sup>. Again in 1967, head teacher Italo Raggi of Milan was remembered:

In Milan Dr. Italo Raggi was the head teacher in the municipality's primary schools, where he lavished his noble activity also on cultural and extracurricular works, to which he devoted paternal care until the very end. He was a fervent and brilliant friend to his teachers, who will never forget the cordial handshake he used to give them on leaving school. In this affectionate sign they felt his participation in their daily toil and drew encouragement and comfort from it. [...] We see him again at the distribution of the prizes as his emotion is communicated to all those present. The young teachers who had received awards had him as a diligent guide on their journeys, happy to be in the midst of their new colleagues, to whom he gave the gift of all that he had gained from his experience and wisdom<sup>8</sup>.

Female head teachers were very few in number, they did not have a specific place in articles dedicated to leadership but only appeared in obituaries. They too were part of this rather stereotypical memory that struggled to detach itself from the educational ideals that characterised the previous historical period.

In Alba, head teacher Maria Baudina was remembered as follows: «Her singular qualities, her constantly praiseworthy activity, her ever-ready spirit of initiative, her understanding of the value of the school in the preparation of a brighter tomorrow for

<sup>5</sup> G. Modugno, *Il cinquantenario educativo di Dante Lugo*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XVII, n. 8, 1948, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XVI, n. 2, 1947, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. XVII, n. 8, 1948, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXVI, n. 9, 1967, p. 98.

our country»<sup>9</sup>. Given the orientation of the journal, faith was also often mentioned as an additional value to human qualities.

The obituaries and articles dedicated to managers confirm, in the collective memory, the great importance given to educational work, conceived as a "mission" on a par with that of the teacher in the same historical period. In this early period, the model for head teachers remained that established by Lombardo Radice, who «Scuola Italiana Moderna» remembered and supported: the educated and religious man or woman, of good morals and proven faith, hierarchically superior, but capable of becoming "teachers of teachers".

From the mid-1950s onwards, the journal began to publish articles, which would become more and more frequent in the 1960s, which argued that the management role was in need of greater cultural and professional preparation. This sentiment also appeared in the pages that advertise management competitions and offer tools and bibliographical references to prepare for the selection procedures.

## 2. *The 1960s: change begins*

At the beginning of the 1960s the school hierarchy began to be questioned in the pages of the journal: it was necessary to demand greater competence from the head teacher in making judgements concerning the teachers. The role, however, was changing: in 1964 the need for a real management office with a separate teacher for bureaucratic-accounting roles and the need for a democratic collegiate body of self-government of the school alongside the head teacher were raised in the pages of «Scuola Italiana Moderna». However, this also entailed economic and legal claims on the part of the managerial class, which explains the participation of some managers in the trade union.

The new proposal, however, at least in the Catholic sphere, did not do away with tradition, but sought to integrate it and modify it in accordance with the new social, political, economic and cultural conditions. In 1965, «Scuola Italiana Moderna» reported on a conference on management studies, noting that almost all the participants were oriented towards a solution that met three requirements: the presence of teachers in school governance; the study of permanent forms of contact between the school, the family and the social and cultural environment; and the role of teams of medical experts, psychologists, social workers in supporting the teaching staff<sup>10</sup>. In order to respond to these needs, there was a call for the establishment of a Teachers' Board in each teaching district that could elect a Management Board chaired by the head teacher: these would be advisory and recommendatory bodies of the management that provide organisational and teaching guidelines to be implemented in the district.

Gradually the role, but also the public portrayal to the school staff, began to change and, albeit amidst divisions and different stances, the head teacher became a civil servant,

<sup>9</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXVII, n. 7, 1968, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> *Convegno di studio sul Consiglio di direzione*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXIV, n. 15, 1965, p. 91.

not only with culture, but also with organisational skills. The article did not contrast with the previous vision, indeed the *Foreword* states that the head teacher must focus on collaboration with the teachers to promote their preparation, choice, continuous “spiritual replenishment” and professional qualification.

In 1968, Angelo Liotta wrote *Il Rapporto maestro-direttore. In ordine alla libertà didattica* [The teacher-head teacher relationship. On educational freedom] in which the guiding role of the head teacher was reaffirmed, while respecting the teachers’ freedom to teach<sup>11</sup>. In issue 13 of the same year, Giovacchino Petracchi provided news of the new management selection procedure and in doing so drew up the boundaries of the head teacher’s operational capacity, once again in the traditional context:

it is expressed as an aptitude for establishing human relations with those who gravitate towards the school’s activities; then as the ability to animate the school and community environment; then, to be able to promote collaboration with and between teachers; again, to be able to exercise a supervisory role without demeaning, without pushing conformity, without compelling teachers’ initiatives; finally, to be able to evaluate fairly<sup>12</sup>.

From the mid-1960s, it became a priority to establish the roles of management: issue 18 of 1966 contained a supplement for school inspectors and head teachers in which an attempt was made to better define their role and duties.

Gino Bellagamba, head teacher in Opparo (near Ferrara), hoped that «head teachers and school inspectors will be increasingly urged and helped to intensify and improve their work of stimulating and animating teaching experimentation and the cultural and professional training of teachers»<sup>13</sup>.

The obituaries of the 1960s reflected the change that took place: they refer to the professional qualities of the head teachers rather than their human ones, they mention honours and merits due to the valuable work performed within the educational institution, and the talents highlighted are cultural, organisational and related to the many activities carried out.

In this sense, while nothing specific appeared in the articles about female head teachers who were treated in the same way as male colleagues in the exercise of school governance, there were a few obituaries of women whose multiple activities were emphasised. This is the case of the head teacher Giuseppina Tarditi Isaia in Dogliani (near Cuneo), remembered for her industriousness:

A moving collection of writings was published in her memory, testifying to her singular virtues, professional value, and the sympathy and affection she was surrounded by. We reproduce some parting words pronounced by Luigi Taricco, mayor of Dogliani, during the solemn and moving funeral honours

<sup>11</sup> A. Liotta, *Il Rapporto maestro-Direttore. In ordine alla libertà didattica*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVIII, n. 9, 1968, pp. 98-102.

<sup>12</sup> G. Petracchi, *Direttori didattici e concorsi direttivi*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVII, n. 13, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> G. Bellagamba, *Una proposta da inquadrare in una più ampia prospettiva*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVI, n. 1, 1966, p. 9.



[...] «Dogliani is once more entirely here for her last farewell, she who spent her entire life, right up to her last industrious days, for the primary schools of this area, which she led with perfect dedication, solicitous care and effective work anxiously aimed at the education of children to prepare them for life as good men and good citizens for a better society in a better world»<sup>14</sup>.

The head teacher, Lidia Monteverde, on the other hand, was remembered for her dynamism: «in Rome, Dr Lidia Monteverde, head teacher of the schools “Principessa Jolanda” and “A. Beccarini”. The school system in Rome, which for so many years counted her among its most respected and dynamic head teachers, remembers her with unanimous fondness»<sup>15</sup>; while head teacher Maria Chiesa was remembered for her faith and for having received a medal:

The sudden death from a brain haemorrhage of Dr Maria Chiesa, school inspector of the Mortara district, Gold medal winner for public education, Knight of Merit of the Republic, has aroused widespread mourning. [...] For many years she was President of the city's School Board, where she also held numerous positions in welfare organisations. Gifted with singular qualities of mind and heart, Inspector Chiesa was able to put to good use in her tireless work the natural reliability, affability and gentleness of manner that distinguished her in the always cordial way she related to others. In the school environment she also earned esteem and affection for her gentleness of spirit, which meant she never overreached her authority. [...] With a profoundly Christian spirit, she was able to bear witness to her faith, which she used to light up her path<sup>16</sup>.

Matilde Meda, another head teacher, was remembered for her talents and merits: «After twenty years of primary teaching, appointed head teacher of the Musocco school in Milan, she was appreciated by all for her high qualities of mind and heart. [...] For her merits, she was awarded the Gold medal of the municipality of Milan, that of the Ministry of Education and the honorary title of school inspector»<sup>17</sup>.

Male and female head teachers appeared in the pages of «Scuola Italiana Moderna» as people who did not abandon their roles of educational guidance and support for the teachers but set out to be cultural organisers and civil servants who wove broader relationships with all the school components and entities that existed in the area in which the school was located, while also drawing on the cooperation of the best teachers.

### 3. *The 1970s and 1980s: the renewal of the head teacher model*

In the 1970s, the management model began to change and the journal prepared the head teachers for what would be a change in role and duties with three dossiers published in 1971 in issues 7, 16 and 19. In all the articles, the change outlined a new role of the

<sup>14</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXIII, n. 2, 1963, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXV, n. 15, 1965, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXV, n. 11, 1966, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXVI, n. 11, 1967, p. 98.

head teacher, which had been challenged by the democratic conception of the school, but to which little support and few solutions were offered.

Petracchi acknowledged that «the increase in the number of inspectors and head teachers has led to a decisive reduction in the area of responsibility and, therefore, has contributed to a less burdensome and more effective operating condition»<sup>18</sup>. However, he wrote, a host of problems were looming: «Today the school must become a school of learning, that is, a school that does not aim to give the minimum of education to the nation's children, but that creates for each and every one the opportunities for the full development of young talents». If the school model was to change, then the leadership model would also have to change. However, inspectors and head teachers were in serious difficulty because they were overburdened by administrative and bureaucratic workloads that had not been matched by a progressive adjustment of administrative services.

Luigi Agazzi reiterated that the teaching aspect of the head teacher's work had taken a back seat, even though, since the 1928 Regulation, the head teacher had always been «not only didactic, but also didactic» because he had the task of visiting the schools and directing the work of the teachers, but he also had to attend to many other tasks with a prevalent or exclusive administrative content. And he added that in reality it was a single role with two aspects that were coexistent and inseparable. He ends the article with a new definition of the head teacher that accommodated new tasks which had not been contemplated in 1928 and which saw the appearance (unfortunately ill-conceived) of a secretary in every office: «One could therefore, for the sake of argument, say that – today – the head teacher is a technician whom the state hires to administer the school, or if you like, the head teacher is an administrator whom the state hires for his technical expertise»<sup>19</sup>.

The technical competence extended horizontally because the head teacher had to deal with primary schools, nursery schools, adult education, welfare activities, after-school activities, etc., and vertically because «they are required to promote and animate teaching-educational activities, to set up concrete initiatives suitable for a commitment to updating teachers and to create conditions conducive to the progressive and continuous methodological renewal of the schools entrusted to their competence»<sup>20</sup>. It was therefore time to address the issue of the head teacher's competence, which required «conditions of specific qualification»: it is the result of «a process of study and in-depth examination of issues that, in the context of direct experience, cannot have gone beyond mere intuition»<sup>21</sup>.

Even Bellagamba, while reiterating that the head teacher had to collaborate with the teachers, recognised the need for a courageous mentality of renewal.

It is interesting that in *Dossier no. 19* Petracchi gave an account of a comparative study on management and inspection roles in Europe and in some non-European countries: he

<sup>18</sup> G. Petracchi, *Ristrutturare gli organi direttivi per una scuola rinnovata*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», Supplement to n. 7, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> L. Agazzi, *Funzione didattica e amministrativa del direttore didattico*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», Supplement to n. 7, 1971, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

first dwelt on the validity of comparative studies and then analysed Argentina, Austria, Belgium, France, West Germany, England, Spain, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. The study, which is thorough and precise, merits a detailed account: suffice to say that the interpretations of the role are varied, but the duties noted were still the teaching and organisational-administrative ones, albeit with a very varied weight. However, no particular indications for the role of management in Italy seemed to emerge from the comparison.

From 1975 onwards, articles explaining and interpreting the new school reform law are encountered for a few years<sup>22</sup>, because the reality of school is quite different from the one outlined in the legislation. This is how the crisis in the school was described following the approval of the Delegated Decrees and the head teacher posts in particular:

after a year since the new legislation came into force, the unease of the head teachers has become more evident: the protests, even if composed, manifest the dissatisfaction of a category that finds itself having to bear the full weight of the innovation without having the tools and means. [...] The figure of the head teacher in a democratic school is miserably sinking in the great sea of organisational and structural deficiencies in primary schools. The head teacher [...] should become [...] the animator of the school's educational and teaching activity, the promoter of community participation through the collegiate bodies, the coordinator of the various initiatives to give the school necessary unity<sup>23</sup>.

In the face of all this, the head teacher was unable to perform his duties because he was often entrusted with the supervision of unfilled districts, had an excessive number of classes and teachers, had the burden of state nursery schools, no longer had the support of the District School Inspectorates that had been closed down, had to take charge of the establishment and operation of School Boards, and had a shortage of staff in the management offices and many other roles. Trade union activity was weak and the Ministry acted inconsistently: this caused insecurity and resignation in an already difficult historical moment. Thus, there was a twofold danger: «first, the head teacher is reduced to a mere executor of the resolutions of the school boards and of the provisions that come down from the higher offices; second, the head teacher is transformed into an organiser of school life and into a coordinator of the school boards, without being able to have a direct influence to make a specific contribution to various processes of renewal»<sup>24</sup>. In 1978, Luigi Silvestri revisited the need to eliminate temporary posts<sup>25</sup>, and the following year Remo Bernacchia emphasised the need to reform school boards that did not seem to function well<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> "Legge Delega" n. 477 of 30 July 1973 and "Decreti Delegati" of the President of the Italian Republic nos. 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 31 May 1974.

<sup>23</sup> P. Pasotti, *Sempre più grave lo stato di crisi delle direzioni didattiche*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXXV, n. 6, 1975, pp. 102-103.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> L. Silvestri, *Tra "reggenza" e "incarico direttivo"*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXXVIII, n. 5, 1978, pp. 115-117.

<sup>26</sup> R. Bernacchia, *Saranno modificati gli organi collegiali*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXXVIII, n. 6, 1979, pp. 12-13.

Pietro Pasotti reflected, in 1985, on the role of the deputy head teacher, created in 1974 by the Delegated Decrees to start the process of democratisation of the school, requesting more training for both head teacher and deputy head.

There was also the possibility of employing staff for collegiate direction, but the preparation, recruitment and relationships had to be well defined in order to achieve a true sharing of power and responsibility. Collegiality struggled to take off and undermined the role of the manager without offering appropriate solutions.

Female head teachers, apart from a few sporadic cases such as the well-known Pierina Boranga<sup>27</sup>, did not get any specific space in the journal. Even in obituaries, the celebration of public remembrance remained firmly tied to previous models that emphasised human rather than professional qualities. Thus, in the 1970s we read:

In Brescia, at the age of 80, head teacher Caterina Mottinelli (widow of Gagliardo). She had begun her career at a very young age in the Edolo circle, where she remained for about twenty years in charge of around 200 teachers, then moved to Bagnolo Mella and to Brescia (city) where she remained until her retirement. Colleagues and teachers remember her as intelligent and cultured, serene and smiling, but above all profoundly, motherly good. Highly esteemed and loved, she leaves a great sense of sorrow<sup>28</sup>.

In Giarre (Catania), the retired school inspector, Dr Michela Cali Marano. Colleagues, school managers and teachers remember her as intelligent and cultured, serene and smiling, but above all profoundly and motherly good<sup>29</sup>.

It was once again the maternal role, as for teachers, that was placed at the forefront. From the mid-1970s, obituaries became rarer and more neutral: «In Pisa, at the venerable age of 85, head teacher Dina Questa, widow of Clicci, former head teacher of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circle»<sup>30</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The analysis of the texts revealed that there were no specific professional traits attributed to the professional role of female head teachers, other than those referring to typically female human qualities such as care and gentleness in relationships. The picture that emerges is closer to that of fellow male head teachers rather than to that of female teachers, insofar as it evolved along the same lines as the image of men and long maintains characteristics that were no different from those required of male colleagues.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. Targhetta, *Pierina Boranga*, in Chiosso, Sani (edd.), *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione (1800-2000)*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2014, vol. I, pp. 195-196. A few interviews were devoted to Boranga, but always within a very traditional vision that presented her as the pupil from Pizzigoni who loved childhood and does her best for it.

<sup>28</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXX, n. 13, 1976, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXX, n. 7, 1976, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> *Resurgent*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», vol. LXXX, n. 17, 1976, p. 48.

Gender diversity in the profession did not appear, nor did it characterise female head teachers.

The work of the female head teacher was not conceived and proposed as a “mission”, like that of the teacher, and as for her male colleagues, the characteristic traits of the role changed over time, becoming increasingly similar to the semi-professional work that characterised the path of male head teachers without particular evolutions. Furthermore, given the orientation of the journal, the religious dimension remained as a component of managerial professionalism, but this also applied to male head teachers.

It can be said that the path towards a truly professional conception of the male and female head teacher was portrayed by the journal as being fraught with obstacles and particularly “lonely”, as this state official seems to have been left alone, with few prescriptions and few tools, to face the often radical changes in the school system.

It was only at the beginning of the 1990s that the head teacher became the manager that the law on autonomy outlined, but once again without providing sufficient operational tools. This was the third step in the evolution of a professionalism that has struggled to find its theoretical-practical dimension within the Italian school system and has lost, over time, the teaching name and role of its origins.



# A Memoir of How Italian Secondary Schools Changed in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Birth and Development of a Concept of Innovation and Experimentation in the Private Papers of the Principal Tranquillo Bertamini

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## 1. *The formative years*

Born on 28 October 1921 in Vignole, a small district of Arco in the province of Trento, Tranquillo Bertamini was the first of five children, and the only male. After primary school, he joined a religious congregation – the *Istituto della Carità*, better known as the *Rosminiani* – that enabled him to pursue a private high school education at the officially-recognized “Mellerio Rosmini” College in Domodossola<sup>1</sup>. In the summer of 1941, he sat his final exams as an external candidate at the “Alfieri” classical high school in Turin, then enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Catholic University in Milan, where he remained for two years<sup>2</sup>.

Soon after starting to attend university, he was entrusted with «all the literary teaching» for students in their second year at the “Rosmini” lower secondary school associated with the ENIMS in Stresa Borromeo<sup>3</sup>. A year later, for the 1942-1943 academic year, he

<sup>1</sup> On the origins of this institution, see *Atti del Consiglio Provinciale di Novara anno 1892*, Novara, Tipografia Novarese con Litografia, 1892, pp. 197-199.

<sup>2</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, autograph Curriculum vitae for career reconstruction.

<sup>3</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, certificate of services rendered in the academic year 1941-1942, signed by the priest Prof. Mario Zambrini, principal at the “Rosmini” lower secondary school in Stresa Borromeo, and dated 12 October 1946. Italy’s National Board for Middle School Teaching (ENIM) was established by Royal Decree n. 928 of 3 June 1938. With various amendments, it was converted into law n. 15 of 5 January 1939, and renamed ENIMS to cover lower and upper secondary school teaching. It monitored private schools and courses that led to qualifications at lower and upper secondary, teacher-training, technical and girls’ schools. It was suppressed by law (D. Lgs. Lgt. 24 May 1945, n. 412) and its responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of Education.



returned to the “Mellerio Rosmini” College in Domodossola where he was appointed to teach letters to the first-year students<sup>4</sup>.

Having completed his supply teaching appointment, Bertamini returned to his native Arco, enrolling at Padua University to complete his further education<sup>5</sup>. He did not escape the war unscathed. Rounded up by the German troops of occupation in September 1944, he was forcibly moved to a work camp in Navene on Lake Garda, and from there to another camp in Re di Cola di Monte Baldo. «Eluding the surveillance of the Nazi police», he managed to escape in April 1945, and succeeded in «making himself scarce until the end of the war»<sup>6</sup>. As we can see from a CV dated 10 September 1953<sup>7</sup>, he nonetheless managed to complete his studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Padua, where Luigi Stefanini and Umberto Antonio Padovani were teaching at the time. Bertamini found Padua University a stimulating cultural environment, which remained rightfully remote from the dominant directives of the period, and closer to his personal interests<sup>8</sup>. He was proclaimed doctor in philosophy on 13 November 1945<sup>9</sup>, by which time he had already come into contact with the sphere of Monsignor Filippin «as a supply teacher of literary subjects at the Filippin Certified Middle School private lower secondary school in Paderno del Grappa (Treviso)»<sup>10</sup>. He was appointed to teach history and philosophy at the Filippin Institute's private scientific high school, and remained in service there until 30 September 1957<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, Certificate of services rendered in the academic year 1942-43, signed by prof. Francesco Airandi, acting principal at the “Mellerio – Rosmini” high school in Domodossola, dated 23 October 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, autograph Curriculum vitae for career reconstruction, cit.

<sup>6</sup> In relation to these events, the Commissariat of the Trento Provincial Government, in the person of A. Bianco, acknowledged his status as a «civilian veteran of deportation» on 4 September 1975. Later on, in accordance with the law of 16 March 1983, n. 75, based on a proposal advanced by the then Minister of Defense, Giovanni Spadolini, the President of the Republic, Sandro Pertini, awarded him the *Diploma d'onore al combattente per la Libertà d'Italia 1943-1945* on 25 April 1984. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, respectively minutes of the Commissariat of the Trento Provincial Government and letter accompanying the diploma, (unnumbered papers).

<sup>7</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, typewritten Curriculum vitae for competition use, on letter-headed paper of the «Scuola Libera: rassegna trimestrale a cura del Centro Studi Problemi Scolastici», 10 September 1953 (unnumbered papers).

<sup>8</sup> Cf., F. Tassarolo, *A scuola di libertà. Figure di riferimento ed esperienze didattiche di Tranquillo Bertamini, preside coraggioso*, Bassano del Grappa, Attiliofraccaroeditore, 2019, pp. 38-39.

<sup>9</sup> With a sizable body of reflections entitled *Gnoseogenesi studio critico su Aristotele, S. Agostino, S. Tommaso s. Bonaventura e Rosmini*, that earned him a distinction. Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, Certificate of the University of Padua, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (unnumbered papers).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, typewritten Curriculum vitae of 10 September 1953, cit.

<sup>11</sup> Judging from the available documentation, he was assigned the teaching post about a month before the proclamation, on 16 October 1945. Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A (various unnumbered papers).

## 2. *The years at the Filippin Institute*

Tranquillo Bertamini found the environment in Paderno familiar, much like those he had experienced in Domodossola and Stresa, and for more than a decade he benefited from being close to two great personalities. One was Monsignor Erminio Filippin<sup>12</sup>, founder of the Institute – «great forerunner, great organizer, great educator»<sup>13</sup> – who wanted to reshape Catholic schooling, acknowledging freedom and persuasion as the cornerstones of a new educational action at a time when authoritarianism was rife. The core elements behind Filippin's thinking, wholeheartedly shared by Bertamini, were an attention to giving a person an all-round education, the need to use persuasive methods, the importance of mutual respect and cooperation between educators and students to ensure a rational and disciplined use of personal freedom – seen as the founding principle of a liberal education<sup>14</sup>. Alongside his convinced alignment with the educational principles behind Filippin's pedagogical model, it is also worth recalling Bertamini's lifelong friendship and cultural exchanges with Giovanni Gozzer<sup>15</sup>. Filippin had met Gozzer a few years earlier, at the time of an examination board in Rovereto, and had invited him to Paderno. He subsequently appointed him principal at the lower secondary school in Asolo, which was established in 1942.

As soon as Bertamini arrived in Paderno, he began to work with Gozzer, who did not restrict himself to simply directing the lower secondary school. On the strength of experience gained at the «valley school centers»<sup>16</sup>, and always stimulated and supported

<sup>12</sup> On this topic, see E. Filippin, *Controcorrente 1924-1934*, Bassano del Grappa, Vicenzi, 1934; M. Quadrio, *La scuola libera di mons. Filippin*, Bassano del Grappa, Tip. Minchio, 1971; T. Andreatta, T. Bertamini, G. Gozzer, G.P. Marotta (edd.), *Mons. Erminio Filippin. La vita, il pensiero e l'opera di un educatore. Per il centenario della nascita: 1899-1999*, [s.l.], Associazione ex allievi mons. Filippin, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> As Gozzer wrote to Bertamini on 31 December 1998, Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B (unnumbered correspondence).

<sup>14</sup> Much later, in 1985, Filippin wrote: «My very dear Dr. Prof. Tranquillo Bertamini, [...] I remember you with your children and wife in my recollections of an indelible past». Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B (unnumbered correspondence).

<sup>15</sup> On Giovanni Gozzer, see Q. Antonelli, R. G. Arcaini (edd.), *Giovanni Gozzer a 100 anni dalla nascita*, Trento, Provincia autonoma di Trento – Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali – Ufficio Beni archivistici, librari, 2016; A. Gaudio, *Comparative education discourse in Italy after WWII: the case of Giovanni Gozzer*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 5, n. 2, 2018, pp. 17-28; Id., *Giovanni Gozzer and the reform of secondary schools in Italy during the Seventies*, «Rivista di Storia dell'Educazione», vol. 8, n. 1, 2021, pp. 61-69.

<sup>16</sup> These centers «brought together students from different types of school (vocational, lower secondary schools, classical and scientific high schools, teacher-training and technical colleges). In a way, they were basically an early version of the unified system. Since every type of institute had some subjects in common (though the course content was not always identical), students from different classes came together for lessons on the subjects they shared, and had separate lessons on the subjects specific to each type of institute. This demanded a degree of adaptability, but also enabled innovations that later took years and years to be adopted by the Italian school system. It is not unity and uniformity that guarantee a good schooling. [...] An exceptional teaching experience [...], a great innovation, promptly set aside as soon as the Italian administration was restored». The innovation concerned both upper and lower secondary schools. In fact, «together with the two — and three-year courses at vocational colleges [...], these [centers] of the former also offered Latin as an option, and those of the latter could generally teach commercial subjects» (P. Tessadri, *Un professore scomodo. Intervista a Giovanni Gozzer*, «Didascalie. Rivista della scuola trentina», VI, n. 2, December 1997, pp. 2-51, in part. pp. 2-3 and 13).

by Monsignor Filippin, Gozzer embarked on a first teaching experiment at the lower secondary school, seeking to adopt the recommendations of Carleton W. Washburne.

Bertamini himself was to say on this topic,

the “Bridging” lower secondary school in Asolo was [...] supervised in all its phases with the utmost care, always proceeding with caution in its conception, design, implementation, testing and improvement. The obvious need to develop a lower secondary school connected to the primary school in the difficult period when the young need to be guided to make the most congenial choices, and helped to gradually orient themselves according to their aptitudes and real abilities, was possibly sometimes suggested to prof. Gozzer not only by the need to correct the backward Italian situation in this delicate sector of a person’s education, but also by his encounter with Carleton W. Washburne, creator of the “Winnetka Plan”, who spent a brief period of time in Trento with the Allied troops at the end of the war. The basic format of the experimentation conducted in Asolo was certainly not exotic or American. It was closely linked to profound local needs, although the Winnetka Plan could suggest many things as regards freedom of organization within the school, and especially as concerns psychological and environmental security, or in other words the consolidation of that “ground under your feet” that affords young people sincere and free expression<sup>17</sup>.

In 1946 Gozzer also became director of the new journal, «Scuola Libera»<sup>18</sup>, which included Giuseppe Pimazzoni, Tranquillo Bertamini and Ferruccio Ceselin on its editorial committee. «Scuola Libera»<sup>19</sup> was officially meant to replace the Filippin Institute’s earlier journal, «L’Aquila», which had stopped being published in 1941. In actual fact, it was closely related to the Filippin research center (Centro Studi Problemi Scolastici) in Asolo and, rather than documenting life within the Institute, it became a means for

<sup>17</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer, typed draft with notes in the margin of a contribution to the text commemorating Monsignor Filippin (handwritten page numbering, p. 22).

<sup>18</sup> Gozzer remained director of the journal, published in 36 issues from 1946 to 1955, even after he moved to Rome to work at the Ministry.

<sup>19</sup> More than 50 years later, in 1999, Gozzer wrote to Ferdinando Adornato, director of the «Liberal» weekly (official journal of the Foundation of the same name that organized a conference entitled *Scuola Libera*, to which Gozzer was not invited): «I had the idea of dealing with the topic of a Free School right from the time of the Resistance, and I kept it together with the idea of autonomy (it would be presumptuous of me to say of federalism too, as the time was not right) as president of the CLN [National Liberation Committee] in Trento in 1944-45, and then as head of the education offices under the city’s Allied administration. I was “thrown out” immediately when our administration returned, and “retrieved” a few years later by Gonnella’s DC [Christian Democrats]. With some merit, and what I might call obstinacy, we conducted the first national enquiry on the school system, using the newborn Doxa to conduct opinion polls for the first time in 1948, though this met with derision from the left-wing parties. Incidentally, I would appreciate it if you could unearth it again, now that the culture dominant at the time is in crisis. Once again in 1988, my pamphlet – which has been totally ignored to this day (only the current chairman of the State Attorney’s Office, Plinio Sacchetto was so kind as to ask me for it when it seemed that the issue of “parity” was becoming a hot topic) – on the history of statism in schools (*Senza oneri per lo stato – La vittoria sbagliata*, Roma, Anicia, 1986) was the last, fruitless attempt to draw attention to the topic that nobody wanted to think about. Now I see that you have all changed your tune and, if I’m not over-happy about it, that’s fine». Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer, copy of the fax sent to the director of «Liberal», dott. Adornato, by Giovanni Gozzer 1<sup>st</sup> July 1999 (unnumbered correspondence).

disseminating the free analysis of school-related problems, involving families, promoting research and investigations, organizing “referendums”; in a word, for creating an atmosphere in which school problems could be freely discussed: so that the school and its organization could stem from and really satisfy the needs of families and educators<sup>20</sup>.

As Bertamini himself claimed, the first issue did more than just outline the programmatic lines of the journal itself, and of the related research center. It also identified proposals for school reforms in the spheres of organization and teaching, «suggestions that anticipate by half a century problems that are highly topical today»<sup>21</sup>. The journal (on the theoretical plane, and as regards the open exchange of ideas in the field of education), and the research center (on the practical plane of delivering lessons and continually assessing the results) made a fundamental contribution to the first experimentation in post-war Italy: this concerned the so-called “bridging school”, followed by the arrival in 1956 of the modern language polytechnic high school<sup>22</sup>.

Drawing on the approaches of Monsignor Filippin and Giovanni Gozzer, Bertamini highlighted the importance of «free experimental schools» for the study and application of the various education systems correlated with the knowledge afforded by medical, biological and scientific advances regarding character development and psychology, as a necessary support for the teacher’s work. In particular, the “bridging school” was seen as a sort of “laboratory-workshop”. Moving away from any superficial experimentalism, the “bridging school” would enable a genuine interdependence of selection and orientation, with elements characterizing a school that would occupy a place in between the world of children and the world of adults. Hence Bertamini’s interest in the studies and research that sought psychological foundations and scientific education theories with a view to identifying the most suitable means for a school «made for school-goers», designed to suit the young people attending it, respecting their developmental age, and adapting to the various stages of their development and human life, in general and as single individuals in relation to that «strictly *personal* something»<sup>23</sup> characteristic of each individual<sup>24</sup>. A lower secondary school designed for students who «have yet to show any particular inclinations or sense of responsibility towards their future» should be distinctive in its focus on the essential, not on the accessory. It should «take care of the inner structure,

<sup>20</sup> A program revolving around seven points concerning freedom of organization, programs, school arrangements, initiative, and the creation of free experimental schools with the fundamental acknowledgement of their equal standing. E. Filippin, *Sette punti di libertà nella scuola*, «Scuola Libera», I, n. 1, October 1946, pp. 1-8.

<sup>21</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer, handwritten notes (unnumbered papers).

<sup>22</sup> On this issue, in addition to various articles in «Scuola Libera», see also G. Gozzer, *La scuola ponte. Osservazioni, esperienze, problemi della scuola media*, Trento, Saturnia, 1948.

<sup>23</sup> T. Bertamini, *Argomenti di psicologia in favore di una Scuola Media unica*, «Scuola Libera», IV, n. 3, 1949-1950, pp. 10-14 (in part. p. 10).

<sup>24</sup> So, although he retains a «strictly orthodox and Catholic» stance, Bertamini reveals «a rare equilibrium in his assessment when suggesting that Christian education principles are not disrupted [...] by psychoanalytical theories, but can instead be sustained and confirmed thereby». T. Bertamini, *I turbamenti psichici della pubertà*, «Scuola Libera», I, n. 3, 1946-1947, pp. 22-32 (in part. p. 22).

not [...] of premature professional differentiations»<sup>25</sup>. As the outcome of «a conscious personal self-determination slowly reached by young people», professional orientation is not the goal of lower secondary schools, which should instead be concerned with young people's personal solidity as an indispensable basis for their healthy development and valid organization of their own aptitudes<sup>26</sup>.

According to Bertamini, the school is rooted in the «psychological practical», and the method consequently derives its rules only from what has been tried and tested<sup>27</sup>. In this context, the educator can be seen as an

*instigator* of education, inasmuch as it is the students themselves who should take action *directly* in that sense. Hence the need for the master to be prepared scientifically to understand and guide the students' free initiative; and hence also the need to connect the teachers' preparation with scientific research institutes attuned to serious principles.

Education theory is a complex discipline that has two fundamental points of view: the first concerns how to look at the general principles that should inspire the relationship between master and pupil, and aspects of general education theory; the second focuses on the applied research into the most appropriate ways to put pupils' energies to good use, and this leads us to the method and didactics of teaching and education<sup>28</sup>.

The goal of the research center was to renew the Italian schooling and education systems. The center was conceived as «the most up-to-date source of information in the world on the problems of education and the organization of schools»<sup>29</sup>. It brought together teachers at the Filippin Institute and anyone else interested in the urgent and topical problems pertaining to education and schools. Tranquillo Bertamini served as the research center's secretary for more than a decade, acquiring an educational experience that was fundamental in shaping his future as a principal.

In 1955, the experience of the Institute's journal came to an end and, not long afterwards, its founder Monsignor Filippin was induced to leave the Institute, which had gradually passed entirely into the hands of the *Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*, and all the courses had consequently become aligned with the directives and pedagogical models of the state school system. At the same time, there were great changes underway for Bertamini too. He passed a selection process and qualified as a teacher of history and philosophy at high schools and teacher-training colleges. He was first appointed by a teacher-training college in Manfredonia (Foggia)<sup>30</sup>, then requested and obtained (1 October 1957) a transfer to the "C. Renier" Institute in Belluno «thanks to the

<sup>25</sup> Bertamini, *Argomenti di psicologia in favore di una Scuola Media unica*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> T. Bertamini, *Il metodo socratico e i suoi limiti*, «Scuola Libera», IV, n. 2, 1949-1950, pp. 3-6 (in part. p. 6).

<sup>28</sup> T. Bertamini, *La metodica e i suoi motivi fondamentali*, «Scuola Libera», IV, n. 1, 1949-1950, pp. 3-10 (in part. p. 3).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Inside back cover of each issue of the journal «Scuola libera».

<sup>30</sup> Where he never actually takes up his post because he applies for and obtains unpaid leave for family reasons from 27 October 1956 to 30 September 1957. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, signed certificate of marital status of principal Bertamini (unnumbered).

direct involvement of the Centro Didattico Nazionale di Studi e Documentazione in Florence, that wishes to exploit the above-mentioned teacher's experience in the study of pedagogical problems at the "Gabelli" experimental school in Belluno»<sup>31</sup>. Two years later, Bertamini was full professor at the "Galilei" scientific high school in the same city.

The experience he had gained during his years of teaching and cooperation in Paderno were nonetheless to have a fundamental influence on Bertamini in his new role as principal at the high school, and on his efforts to promote the renewal of secondary schools. Much later, on 16 January 1998, Bertamini wrote to Gozzer:

I have always retained incisive and grateful memories of you because it was by working alongside you that I learned the ropes, albeit in cooperation "with that brave and loyal group of teachers that (at that time!) gave life and soul to the institutes in Paderno". And I can tell you that, along with your teachings, I have also carried with me in the state schools a clear and precise idea concerning the EXPERIMENTATION OF NEW WAYS (structural and, above all, methodological/didactic) better suited to the current education needs of our society. And the outcome has been (and continues to be) positive<sup>32</sup>.

### 3. *Representation of an innovative principal*

After an experience as principal at the "Castaldi" high school in Feltre in the academic years from 1960-61 to 1966-67, Bertamini was appointed principal at the "Brocchi" high school in Bassano del Grappa, where he was to remain until 31 August 1988.

When I arrived at the high school (in Bassano in 1967) it took my breath away. The atmosphere was suffocating, typical of an old-fashioned, highly-selective school. The experimentation aimed instead to keep the different subjects as balanced as possible during the two-year course in order to offer students the opportunity to "taste" various subject areas and thereby discover their own aptitudes before choosing their final course of studies<sup>33</sup>.

Bertamini thus set to work to obtain a different type of school, more attentive to the changing times and to the demands of its students. It was a time when the youth were in ferment, and Bertamini needed to find ways to deal with the student revolts.

As soon as he arrived in Bassano, he made high-school classrooms available for courses run by a school for working students (the Scuola Lavoratori-Studenti) established in 1965 thanks to the efforts of several university students who had made themselves available to help workers obtain a lower secondary school diploma. This scheme had begun on the quiet, but the organizers very soon found themselves having to cope with considerable numbers of workers wanting to complete their formal education. Bertamini's

<sup>31</sup> Giovanni Gozzer, then director of the Office for Teaching Centers at the Ministry of Education, also supported Bertamini's application to the *Istituto Nazionale per le Case degli Impiegati dello Stato* (INCIS) for a home so that he could settle in Belluno with his family. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A, letter from Giovanni Gozzer dated 6 March 1958, to the I.N.C.I.S. management (unnumbered).

<sup>32</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone B, Filippin Gozzer (unnumbered correspondence).

<sup>33</sup> E. Castellan, *La scelta del liceo rischia di diventare una trappola*, «Giornale di Vicenza», 3 March 2006, p. 28.



inclusion of these courses at the historical site of the classical high school was seen by some as “scandalous”, but he was on familiar ground. He could rely on the depth of his knowledge of pedagogical and didactic principles gained during his years in Paderno. To give an example, he referred to a program defined along general lines and subsequently implemented on the basis of the topics that emerged as interesting and useful from an assembly, as the principal organ of a possible democratic self-management<sup>34</sup>.

It is hard to summarize within the limits of the present contribution all the studies, personal reflections and notes to be found among Bertamini's private papers, which reveal a picture of an exemplary case of school directorship at a time when great changes were underway.

Bertamini was convinced that renewing the school system demanded not only new programs but also a profound reform of the teaching methods. It needed to rely on new teachers capable of expressing a cultural approach that was not shuttered and notionist, but problematic, based on research and experimentation. These ideas emerge already from notes in the margin of a round table entitled “New techniques and novel teaching methods (with particular attention to the final school-leaving exams)” held at the Centro Didattico Nazionale for high schools in Padua on 4 and 5 October 1969, that Bertamini attended because he was president of an examination board<sup>35</sup>. The core idea of «renewing the school to renew the culture», clearly apparent on that occasion, was brought to the attention of the “Brocchi” high-school teachers:

Today more than ever, the school is trying to shrug off a lengthy LETHARGY that kept it rooted in a defunct STABILITY. We can no longer give our lessons the appearance of an absurd cultural IDYLL, where tranquility coincides with a spiritual passivity in our young people. But, while the school wishes to renew itself, it also fears the constant danger of a DISQUALIFICATION of CULTURE, with a dispersive sloppiness, a decline of logical discipline, of serious documentation, of a panoramic coordination of school subjects. [...] Culture is presented more and more as a crucial dialogue; as such, even in class, it should be acquired by means of inner conflicts and problems that are clearly motivated and discussed<sup>36</sup>.

In thinking about a new school for a new society, Bertamini's gaze always turns to the young people dealing with a society dominated by situations that are extremely variable and, as such, they call for an effort on everyone's part to employ intellectual processes shaped as a function of an adequate adaptation of school to reality. Bertamini emphasizes the need to promote:

on the plane of didactics too, an interdependence of group work (instead of traditional individual competition) and a consolidation of community systems that achieve a widespread participation (instead of the usual small, closed measures), so that the “temporary” and “provisional” always prevail

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone X (unnumbered papers).

<sup>35</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone C, Notes and conclusions of the round table at the *Centro Didattico Nazionale per i Licei* (unnumbered papers). On this occasion, the principal focused particularly on the new final school-leaving exams that came into effect with legislation (D.L. n. 9 of 15 February 1969, and L. n. 910 of 11 December 1969) on the deregulation of access to university faculties.

<sup>36</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone C, Handwritten speech for the meeting on Tuesday 23.12.1969 (unnumbered papers).



over any duties, roles, models, and fixed arrangements. A rapid adaptation to transient and constantly varying criteria will help to: release our school system from its current vertical hierarchy, based on ranks, grades and roles; replace it with a lively dialectic, constructive contributions from all the various components (students, teachers, society) that, taking action from both inside and outside, are part of the school world; and nurture the development of every student's personal capabilities and social adaptability. Wherever it comes from, dissent will always be accepted at school as a basis for prompting an ongoing personal self-criticism and a shared progress. Having thus gained the impetus to overcome the current archaic institutional and ritualistic structures (lessons, marks, tests, exams, ecc.), we hope to create a type of school that always proceeds on the strength of homogeneous groups with processes that develop young people's capability levels, with mobile social interferences, inventive teaching methods and the so-called leisure-time schooling, the maturation of a critical spirit, the scientific approach to group research and, ultimately, the variety of opportunities to meet those socio-economic demands that correspond to young people's vocational choices<sup>37</sup>.

Bertamini was unable to take part in the general drive for renewal of the school system that first took concrete shape in the "Progetto 80"<sup>38</sup>, and in the proposals for reform outlined at the end of the conference in Frascati in 1970 on the new approaches to secondary-school education, held at the head office of the *Centro Europeo per l'Educazione (CEDE)*, of which Giovanni Gozzer was president.

When subsequent Italian legislation (DPR n. 419 of 31 May 1974) made experimentation possible, Bertamini succeeded in involving his team of teachers in a lengthy preparatory effort to embark on an ambitious experimental project that began in the academic year 1974-75:

[...] anticipating the results of the expected REFORM of upper secondary schools that, within a few years, will be enshrined in law and will modify the school system, a ministerial decree has already been put into effect at the "G.B. BROCCHI" state high school, where an EXPERIMENTAL UNIFIED TWO-YEAR PROGRAM ensures that students who enroll can complete their cycle of studies up to the threshold of their profession, or – at the end of the subsequent THREE-YEAR PROGRAM – up until the final school-leaving exams that enable access to the university<sup>39</sup>.

A core element of the new school organization was the module that could be defined as interdisciplinary (or, more realistically, cross-disciplinary) research activities, undertaken directly by students organized into groups, and monitored by their teachers. This was not to be confused with a normal group work activity. The goal was to enable students to acquire a more complex view of society, going beyond the traditional fragmentation of knowledge by taking an interdisciplinary approach as a habitual and necessary way to achieve personal growth.

<sup>37</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone H, handwritten notes (pages numbered 1-3).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ministero del Bilancio e della Programmazione Economica, *Progetto 80. Rapporto preliminare al programma economico nazionale 1971-75*, Roma, 1969.

<sup>39</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone D, pamphlet «Liceo Ginnasio Statale "G.B. Brocchi" con annessi Biennio + Triennio Sperimentali che prevedono "uscite laterali" dopo il Biennio e gli indirizzi: Linguistico Moderno Scientifico Socio-Psico-Pedagogico Classico (a condizione di almeno 15 aderenti) Via Verci n. 9 – Bassano Del Grappa (VI)» (unnumbered papers). See also the manuscript for a meeting of the Comitato di Coordinamento Sperimentazione 3 April 1978.

Bertamini put a great deal of effort into the project to reshape the new school and, even in 1989, starting from an examination of the statistical data in the recent CENSIS report, he produced an acute analysis of the situation as it stood, and of the possible solutions. The results obtained by projects supported by the Ministry of Education, and by experimental models based on art. 3, «virtually imposed from on high, taking a reductive, sectorial and antiquated view», and with a rigid definition of programs drawing on a now obsolete and corporative, discipline-oriented approach, had been translated into «reforms that are out-of-date, apparent rather than substantial, innovations managed in such a way that things change only to remain the same». Faced with this situation, and in the name of the founding principle that the focus should be on a school system genuinely capable of «giving to every student according to their needs», Bertamini called for:

the introduction, by law, of UNIFIED OPTIONAL TWO-YEAR SCHOOL COURSES that aim to “form” and “guide” – operating in close connection and interdependently for the purpose of facilitating internal and external “switches between options” by means of locally-based integration courses to be delivered especially during and at the end of the first year of the two-year program. These courses can be combined together and organized according to the size of the catchment area coming under the fulcrum-city of a single school district, or several districts in partnership<sup>40</sup>.

In a detailed example of a project for a unified two-year program with seven optional orientation areas<sup>41</sup>, the importance of a collegial programming activity and refresher courses for teachers becomes abundantly clear, as does the central role of methodological and didactic innovations. Bertamini’s working manifesto focused on the need to combine flexible timetables with efficient laboratories and working instruments, collegial exchanges to arrange teaching modules that help students to develop their own personal study and problem-solving methods, as well as providing for adequate assessments<sup>42</sup>. The greater freedom and operating autonomy combined with a willingness to take risks – especially on the methodological-didactic plane – that Bertamini had enjoyed in Paderno resurfaces clearly in this last of his plans for renewing the school system, bringing it into line with the times, and focused on forming citizens for a society in rapid transformation.

What emerges from Bertamini’s private papers is the figure of a man, school professor and principal who made renewing the school his mission. The changes he made were initially perceived as subversive, but soon gained the approval of the local community, and his works are still alive in public memory. Already a knight and official of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic<sup>43</sup>, Bertamini was also awarded a silver medal for his work for the school system and the arts in 1989. In 2012, five years before his death, he was also acknowledged by the city of Bassano for his contribution to the town’s education system.

<sup>40</sup> Fondo Bertamini, Faldone F, *Biennio opzionale come scuola orientante*, 15 February 1989, handwritten notes (pages numbered 1-10, in part. 5).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone X, *Programmazione e sperimentazione* (unnumbered papers).

<sup>43</sup> In 1972 and 1975, cf. Fondo Bertamini, Faldone A (unnumbered papers).

# Portraits of Headmasters and Headmistresses. How is School Authority Depicted in Children's Literature?

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## 1. *About the origin of school stories and the representation of school authority*

Stories with major school settings or backdrops to the lives of characters are deeply intertwined with the history of children's literature and constitute a significant legacy. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an interesting repertoire of boys' and girls' school stories began to emerge and received growing interest from the publishing market. For instance, in the 1800s and 1900s, thousands of British school stories were published<sup>1</sup>. These stories have «long suffered from critical dismissal and public derision and it is only recently that their influence and merits have begun to be re-evaluated»<sup>2</sup>. Even though many of these narratives were undoubtedly repetitive in plot structure, and had stereotyped characters and inauthentic adult-driving values, they also offered stimulating insights into the world of school, and played a significant role in the children's book literary, social, cultural, and political tradition<sup>3</sup>. The reason may be bound up with the fact that

[a] school story offers a setting in which young people are thrown together and in which relationships between older and younger children, between members of the peer group and between children and adults can be explored. Events and relationships can be imbued with an air of excitement and the possibilities for humour are never far away. Through reading an entertaining story, children can 'test the water', learn how people may react in specific situations and see what lies ahead<sup>4</sup>.

Remarkable traditional examples of these stories are Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749), Charles and Mary Lamb's *Mrs Leicester's School* (1808), Harriet Martineau's *The*

<sup>1</sup> Historical, theoretical and thematic analysis of this genre is to be found in works: R.J. Kirkpatrick, *The Encyclopedia of Boys' School Stories*, Burlington (VT), Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000; S. Sims, H. Clare (edd.), *The Encyclopedia of Girls' School Stories*, Burlington (VT), Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000; U. Pesold, *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children's Literature*, Leiden, Brill Rodopi, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> R. Auchmuty, *Preface*, in Sims, Clare, *The Encyclopedia of Girls' School Stories*, cit., p. VII.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ray, *School Stories*, in P. Hunt (ed.), *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, vol. I, pp. 467-480; M. Reimer, *Traditions of the school story*, in M.O. Grenby, A. Immel (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Ray, *School Stories*, cit., p. 467.

*Crofton Boys* (1841) and Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), a novel that «helped to mark the transition from what has been called the Age of Didacticism to the Golden Age of children's literature in English»<sup>5</sup>. The impact of Tom Brown and his boys' boarding school on the children's school story tradition was enormous. The novel is about Tom, a student at Rugby School, who is mistreated by school bully Flashman before finally succeeding in overcoming his troubles and difficulties. In the novel, a crucial role is played by the headmaster of Rugby School, Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), a real educator whose tenure (1828-1842) saw Rugby become a top public school and profoundly influenced public school education in England. In the novel Hughes paid homage to Arnold by progressively pushing his protagonist, Tom, to adopt his headmaster's ideas and moral values. The novel is a milestone in the school story literary microcosm and influenced hundreds of successive children's books, both past and present, like J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, for instance. Interestingly, a number of scholars<sup>6</sup> have been attracted by the intriguing parallels between the school adventures of Tom Brown and those of Harry Potter, such as ideological and organizational structure (students' empowerment, older students as "prefects", intellectual skills linked to moral awareness, sport, ecc.) and on the role played by school relationships (friends and bullies). School authority has also been examined. A comparative analysis of the headmasters in the two school stories – Doctor Arnold at Rugby and Albus Dumbledore at Hogwarts – shows that the two headmasters have many characteristics in common:

Both Hughes and Rowling also stress the important ties between the hero and the headmaster, an adult mentor who helps the hero develop into a functioning, useful young man of good character. [...] both the Doctor and Albus Dumbledore are adults our heroes come to trust and value, and who in turn support, protect, and guide the boys. They are portrayed as moral, fair, kind, and unusual men who at times face criticism from within and without but always have the best interests of their school at heart. [...] These two boarding school novels do not simply dismiss all adults or see them as impediments, but emphasize the necessity of strong, wise adult mentoring to the development of the students<sup>7</sup>.

Similarities to the 19<sup>th</sup> English language school stories' portrayal of school authority is also to be found in some classic Italian children's novels, such as characters in *Cuore*, [The Heart of a Boy] (1886), by Edmondo de Amicis, a fictional school diary of a young boy attending a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Turin school which describes the achievements, setbacks, pleasures and pains of a year at school and its social and cultural community life, or in *Romanzo di un Maestro* [Novel by a Teacher], published in 1890 by the same author, which offers a representation of the miserable conditions in which Italian teachers lived

<sup>5</sup> B.L. Clark, *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tatling Tomboys*, New York-London, Routledge, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> P. Pinsent, *The education of a Wizard: Harry Potter and His Predecessors*, in L.A. Whited (ed.), *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives in a Literary Phenomenon*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2002, pp. 27-50; D.K. Steege, *Harry Potter, Tom Brown and the British School Story. Lost in Transit?*, in L.A. Whited (ed.) *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives in a Literary Phenomenon*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2002, pp. 140-156.

<sup>7</sup> Steege, *Harry Potter, Tom Brown and the British School Story. Lost in Transit?*, cit., pp. 150-151.

at the time. These novels offer specific insights into the literary framework writers used to depict school authority and portrayed headmasters as strong, wise adult mentors, capable of understating, supporting, and fostering students' intellectual and moral development.

Representations of fictional school communities (peers, teachers, families) and the impact of these stories on the Italian historical, social and cultural contexts have been also enquired into. Research focusing on the representation of school in children's literature has paid considerable attention to portraits of teachers, the teaching process and its social, cultural and political implications, the role of schools settings, educational tools and the moral values and social norms of schooling<sup>8</sup>. However, little attention has been paid to the representation of school authority and to the figures embodying it, both male (headteachers and headmasters) and female (principals and headmistresses) characters.

My study aims to fill this gap. In this research<sup>9</sup>, I will analyse classic children's stories published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Italy and abroad. Then, I will compare extracts of these books, pinpointing some recurring representational characteristics – in terms of literary depictions – of headmasters and headmistresses. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks on the different, gender-biased representation of the concept of authority embodied by headmasters and headmistresses while exercising their role at school.

## 2. Headteachers and headmasters: children's literature and the history of school

In Italy, the head teacher role began to take shape in Italian children's literature in around the 1880s, namely when school management began to evolve, however confusedly. It would thus seem to be appropriate to start by looking at the children's books of those years. Whilst Carlo Collodi, the creator of Pinocchio, was more interested in town squares, hostelrys and home interiors than in the school classroom in his educational stories, the opposite can be said of a contemporary writer, Edmondo De Amicis, who accorded school a hugely important role, making it responsible for educating children and bringing them into the social fold as responsible citizens, just like in Tom Brown. The lessons emerging from De Amicis' work are highly specific social and political messages.

<sup>8</sup> A. Antoniazzi, *La scuola tra le righe*, Pisa, ETS, 2014; Ead., *Da "Cuore" a "L'ultima possibilità". La scuola vista dai suoi protagonisti*, in M. Corsi (ed.), *La ricerca pedagogica in Italia. Tra innovazione e internazionalizzazione*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa MultiMedia, 2014, pp. 365-372; S. Barsotti, *La scuola nella letteratura per l'infanzia di ieri e di oggi: l'immagine narrata di un luogo di educazione*, «Pedagogia Oggi», vol. 17, n. 1, 2019, pp. 143-158; P. Boero, G. Genovesi, *Cuore. De Amicis tra critica e utopia*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2009; F. Borruso, *La scuola nella letteratura per l'infanzia del secondo novecento. Spazio materiale e simbolico di una pedagogia eversiva*, «Pedagogia Oggi», vol. 17, n. 1, 2019, pp. 159-170; E. Catarsi, *I maestri e il «cuore». La figura del maestro elementare nella letteratura per l'infanzia tra Otto e Novecento*, Pisa, Del Cerro, 1996; I. Filograsso, *Bambini in trappola. Pedagogia nera e letteratura per l'infanzia*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2012; V. Spinazzola, *Pinocchio & c.*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> This is part of the research work I carried out at the University of Padova for the PRIN research project "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)".

Speaking of school and life in the classroom, he dealt with important social and political elements such as the need to bring the social equality principle not only into the school community but also into the Italian nation: children were to be as equal at school as adults were to be in society in general. If schools were to be up to the task of such progressive changes, competent, well trained people were needed, people of high intellectual, moral and cultural calibre. This was true not only of teachers themselves but also of those tasked with training, shaping and managing teachers.

In Italy the Casati Law (1859) focused on just a few of the elements considered to be crucial to training school principals. In secondary schools such head teachers were, at the very least, to possess high moral stature and consolidated experience in “managing youth”. In primary schools, on the other hand, principals were as yet undefined figures and the situation was an extremely confused one. The characteristics and skills required of those responsible for managing or coordinating schools were not clear and in the midst of this chaos many of these were shown to be unsuited to the task.

De Amicis breathed literary life into many of these figures. I believe it to be useful, at the outset, to examine certain pages of the well-known novel *Romanzo d'un maestro*<sup>10</sup> (1890) in which a school headmaster is depicted. De Amicis depicts the latter as a cultured, educated, severe man, passionate about pedagogy studies, to the extent even of a belief in its omnipotence (i.e. of contents over methods), characterised by an austere, exacting but tolerant kindness and an extremely elevated notion of the teacher's role. He inspires spontaneous obedience, respect, gratitude and emulation, as an exemplary man. Megari, as he is called, is a head teacher (and also an excellent, cultured and well trained teacher) passionate about shaping a “new generation” of children and citizens of the world. The head teacher depicted by De Amicis is an educator who urges his students to take the cultural activism path (holding literary circles in his living room) with enormous pedagogical responsibility. He is an edifying model of the type of man best suited and equipped to manage a school<sup>11</sup>. It is a model of enlightened, progressive, exemplary school authority conjuring up the headmaster model depicted in Hughes's novel.

This depiction of male school authority is present not solely in novels set inside boarding schools but also in novels whose main setting is primary schools. Take Edmondo De Amicis' novel *Cuore* published in 1886, for example. The novel's structure is well known. It is a diary of a school year (1882) narrated by a third year primary school pupil, Enrico Bottini. This novel «more than any other reflects the longing for education and cultural and civil growth which was such a feature of Italy in the immediate post-unification period»<sup>12</sup>.

Against this literary backdrop, how did De Amicis depict the director? Whilst his description of his character is decidedly cursory, De Amicis' focus is the exemplary nature of the principal's behaviour by means of his actions and conversations with pupils and

<sup>10</sup> E. De Amicis, *Il romanzo d'un maestro*, edited by A. Ascenzi, P. Boero, R. Sani, Genova, De Ferrari, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> A. Gramiglia, “*Il romanzo di un maestro*” di Edmondo De Amicis, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Storia e antologia della letteratura per l'infanzia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento. Volume II*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2018, p. 171 (my translation).



family members. The novel's excessive moralism and sentimentalism notwithstanding the principal is portrayed in extremely positive terms. The novel tells of a melancholy but loving, sober, measured man with a generosity of spirit concerning children and education and a direct approach to school relationships, with both pupils and parents. His is a focus on dialogue and care [see, for example, his conversation with Enrico Bottini's father]. It depicts a principal who is occasionally verbose and melodramatic but also exceedingly modern and relevant: a principal who is open to dialogue, dedicated to education, willing to challenge himself fully, and attentive to the diverse needs of his students.

The same habitus, attitude and dedication accorded by De Amicis to Megari in *Romanzo d'un maestro* is present here too. Thus, the idea of a positive model to follow in both physical and psychological terms, in educational work with pupils and the general context is shown in the primary school, too.

Children's literature, both Italian and otherwise, also features another approach to the portrayal of school principals, however, a model hinging on a more negative characterisation of head teachers often depicted ironically as distant figures uninterested in pupils' needs whose priority is simply ensuring obedience to the rules with punitive methods and abuse of their power to personal ends.

An example is the principal in Vamba's (alias Luigi Bertelli) *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*. The story came out in 55 instalments in *Il Giornalino della Domenica* in 1907-1908, and was published as a complete book in 1912. In this case, too, the story is in diary form and told by a boy, Giannino, recounting his irresistible adventures at home and school. It is, however, a diary which turns the traditional school diary form on its head. Its author Vamba uses it to poke fun, with biting wit, at the facile conventions put forward by the adults inhabiting Giannino's world. The novel features both a headmaster and a headmistress, the latter of whom we will look at later on. It should be clarified right away that in *Gian Burrasca*, in contrast to *Cuore*, the headmaster's role is limited to a certain period of time, namely a period spent in a private boarding school to which Giannino has been taken by his father with the specific objective of correcting what the latter sees as his rebellious spirit. For Giannino the school is comparable with a prison and he stays there just one month before being expelled.

How does Vamba represent school authority? Mockingly. It is visible right away, in his physically caricatured headmaster, Signor Stanislao, who he describes as wearing a wig, «very very thin, very very tall, with a great greyish moustache which trembles all over when he gets angry»<sup>13</sup>. The principal is presented as ridiculous in numerous episodes. He is frequently subjected to insults and abuse by his wife who calls him «cretin» and «idiot»<sup>14</sup>. He is treated mercilessly by Vamba who uses Gian Burrasca's pranks to highlight the mean spiritedness of a man who abuses his authority for personal gain. Anything but a model, the headteacher is presented as pathetically bursting with vices and habits. Under the veneer of an apparently authoritative figure (an army type who speaks forcefully of

<sup>13</sup> Vamba, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, Milano, Bur ragazzi, 2012, p. 256 (my translation).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.



commands and glares at his pupils), underneath it all he is inept, abject and incapable of truly acting as an authoritative and credible guide and mentor.

This necessarily summary analysis brings out two male embodiments of school authority in children's literature. On one hand we have a model headmaster, a figure with great moral and intellectual stature, total dedication to his school and pupils, a pedagogical model to be admired and aspired to, present in both the novels of the past, from the school stories of Hughes and De Amicis to Rudyard Kipling's anti-school stories, such as *Stalky & Co.* (1897) and modern novels, of which Harry Potter is emblematic.

In the other, by contrast, this model is turned entirely on its head. It takes aim not only at the very idea of a "serious" school and boarding school but first and foremost at its headteachers, making use of parody to underline the latter's ambiguity and pettiness. This model is also present, in various forms, in a range of children's literature genres, including outside Italy. Examples are Anthony Horowitz's horror fantasy school stories, *Groosham Grange* (1988) and *Return to Groosham Grange*, first published as *The Unholy Grail* (1999), whose principal is portrayed as a two-headed being in a single body with a vampire deputy principal resembling Frankenstein to some extent.

### 3. *Principals and headmistresses in the exercise of authority: a problematic turning point*

As Nancy G. Rosoff and Stephanie Spencer highlighted in their study<sup>15</sup> of British and American school stories from 1910 to 1960, the depiction of female school authority in school stories is a multi-faceted and extremely complex subject. There is nothing random about the fact that whilst they highlight various cases in which a positive model of female leadership in the school context takes shape they also argue that «whereas sociability, responsibility, and domesticity might be easily recognised as markers of femininity, that of authority is more problematic»<sup>16</sup>. The traditional literary representation of the principal is an unmarried woman – and thus without a private life – all of whose attention is devoted to her pupils. Whilst in some ways this may have constituted an alternative lifestyle model for the women of the day – most of whom were expected to marry and have children – choosing to be a school principal offered «an example of a professional authority figure in contrast to the girls' mothers, none of whom engage in paid employment»<sup>17</sup>, it is equally true that such a choice implied a quasi-religious professional choice in which all energies went into the public dimension with no reference to any chance whatsoever for a satisfying private life.

The social and cultural terrain in which British girls' schools flourished was an extremely fertile one, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. There are a great many cases of

<sup>15</sup> N.G. Rosoff, S. Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910-1960: Fiction, Femininity, and Friendship*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

extraordinary school principals who left an important mark on the British school system, such as Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale<sup>18</sup>. In fact an association was set up in Britain in 1874 whose purpose was to promote female school headships, the Association of Headmistresses (AHM)<sup>19</sup>. Its purpose was precisely to form coalitions, to encourage female principals to make common cause and increase their authority in the school world. This was to exert a certain influence in channelling the popular image of female school authority in school stories to the extent that the citations by female pupils used by Price and Glenday in *Reluctant Revolutionaries: A century of Headmistresses 1874-1974* would seem to have come precisely from girl pupils

who had attended some of the schools whose heads belonged to the AHM [Association of Headmistresses] in the later twentieth century reflected the characters of the headmistresses portrayed in both the American and British novels<sup>20</sup>.

What portrait of female principals emerges from these studies of British women's school stories? What emerges is a principal who is seldom angry, who is both patient and reasonable, who speaks with a soft voice and is caring about her pupils, highlighting that «authority was not exercised through raised voices, or harsh punishment, but through effective use of acceptable feminine skills of patience and collegial styles of leadership that maintained the accepted hierarchy of institutions established over a number of years»<sup>21</sup>. This principal profile seems to converge on a psychological characterisation and predisposition for the care dimension and the building of friendly relationships. In many cases the women's vulnerability and fragility in certain situations comes across, to the extent that in some of these school stories there is an emphasis on their «fallibility [...] the headmistress is seen as fallible»<sup>22</sup>. References to professional training, disciplinary and organisational skills and professional know-how as regards the management and headship of the school institution itself, the desire to innovate school life, are much less frequent. Even in the most effective and positive literary models, such principals are depicted in ways which do not sufficiently focus on their intellectual stature, authority and managerial skills. Take Angela Brazil's novel *A Harum-Scarum Schoolgirl* (1919), for example, a novel which contributed positively to developing contemporary female literary figures as regards agency, independence, determination and assertiveness in school stories<sup>23</sup>. However, her principal, whilst actively engaged in renewing her school, is extremely vaguely depicted.

<sup>18</sup> J. Kamm, *How Different From Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale*, London, The Bodley Head, 1958.

<sup>19</sup> M. Price, N. Glenday, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: A century of Headmistresses 1874-1974*, London, Pitman, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Rosoff, Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910-1960*, cit., p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>22</sup> Rosoff, Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910-1960*, cit., p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> B. Lyon Clark, L. Dhingra Shankar, *When Women Tell Tales about School*, «Studies in Popular Culture», vol. 17, n. 1, 1994, pp. 17-28.

When it comes to the admiration of the Head, we can detect a novelty, however. Although the new reign is eventually acknowledged to be much more interesting than the old one, we have no complete admiration of the headmistress. Unlike the pictures of the godlike headmaster Arnold or the “downy Bird” Bates, the description of Miss Todd is, as noted, ambiguous<sup>24</sup>.

Beyond this model, as in the boys’ school story tradition, an alternative, caricature depiction of female school authority exists in girls’ stories too. There are a great many examples of this. It may, in this case too, be worth comparing novels published in Italy and Britain.

Let us begin by comparing two Italian novels published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first of these is the headmistress depicted in De Amicis’s *Un dramma nella scuola*<sup>25</sup>, a story set in a girls’ school in Turin. The second is headmistress Geltrude, Signor Stanislao’s wife in the Vamba novel mentioned above. The extracts to be compared are shown below:

The headmistress, a large, approximately 45-year-old spinster, a sort of police inspector, a sort of bloated Juno clothed in a certain austere elegance, enclosed in a corset which held her up as stiffly as a suit of steel armour [...] She was much feared by her pupils, who she lined up by striking them with her umbrella, and whom she was never seen making the slightest kind gesture to and she was especially harsh with young, attractive mothers. [...] As regards her cultural stature, this was impossible for anyone to fathom as she concealed herself behind a veil of prudence and majesty. But the teachers said that she never read books because she was so full of herself that there was no space left for any new ideas or notions<sup>26</sup>.

This headmistress understands nothing [...] She is very very small and very very fat, with a very red nose and makes grandiose declarations all the time, making a great deal of insignificant matters and never stops talking, running around and talking to everyone about everything and everyone, finding something to criticise in everyone<sup>27</sup>.

These extracts shows that both authors focus in particular on the women’s physical and postural oddities as well as their relationships with others. Whether they are married women (very rare) or “old spinsters”, a term used disparagingly, the two principals are sour and repulsive physically and equally repugnant morally and educationally, embodying a model of headmistress which is ugly and brutish.

All this is also true of children’s novels published in Britain. Let us look at two cases. The first of these is Roald Dahl’s *Matilde*, published in Britain in 1988, which tells the story of a talented girl, a voracious reader, who does not identify with the habits, meanness and triviality of her family. A significant part of the novel is set at a school whose principal is Miss Trunchbull. Dahl describes her thus:

Now most head teachers are chosen because they possess a number of fine qualities. [...] Miss Trunchbull possessed none of these qualities and how she ever got her present job was a mystery. She was above all

<sup>24</sup> Pesold, *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children’s Literature*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> E. De Amicis, *Fra scuola e casa*, Milano, Treves, 1892.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24 (my translation).

<sup>27</sup> Vamba, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, cit., p. 257 (my translation).

a most formidable female. She had once been a famous athlete, and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. You could see them in the bull neck, in the big shoulders, in the thick arms, in the sinewy wrists and in the powerful legs. Looking at her, you got the feeling that this was someone who could bend iron bars and tear telephone directories in half. Her face, I'm afraid, was neither a thing of beauty nor a joy for ever. She had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes. And as for her clothes...they were, to say the least, extremely odd.

She always had on a brown cotton smock which was pinched in around the waist with a wide leather belt. This belt was fastened in front with an enormous silver buckle. The massive thighs which emerged from out of the smock were encased in a pair of extraordinary breeches, bottle green in colour and made of coarse twill. These breeches reached to just below the knees and from there on down she sported green stockings with turn up tops, which displayed her calf muscles to perfection. On her feet she wore flat heeled brown brogues with leather flaps. She looked, in short, more like a rather eccentric and bloodthirsty follower of the staghounds than the headmistress of a nice school for children<sup>28</sup>.

The second is Harry Potter, the story of the famous magician with the scar on his forehead. The school's headmistress makes her appearance in the fifth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) with full power over the school. Her name is Dolores Umbridge, former teacher and supreme inquisitor, later principal of Hogwarts School. Rowling introduces her thus:

He thought she looked just like a large, pale toad. She was rather squat with a broad flabby face, as little neck as Uncle Vernon and a very wide, slack mouth. Her eyes were large, round and slightly bulging. Even the little black velvet bow perched on top of her short curly hair put him in mind of a large fly she was about to catch on a long sticky tongue<sup>29</sup>.

These descriptions show an image which has remained virtually unchanged over hundred years. Of the various elements in common, what stands out most is the headmistresses' physical oddities: Miss Trunchbull is a masculine-soldier-like aggressive woman (bull neck, stubborn chin, cruel mouth, powerful thighs); Dolores Umbridge is compared to a toad, an animal which, in the Western literary tradition, is both poisonous and symbolically emblematic of ugliness, awkwardness and impurity.

Of the four headmistress depictions, then, what emerges is an image of an aggressive, animalesque woman incapable of empathy, brutally cutthroat, unjust and garrulous, uninterested in culture and the educational value of teaching, unsuited to the principal's role. It is, overall, a model which may be even more derogatory and demeaning than the grotesque male model described above.

<sup>28</sup> R. Dahl, *Matilda*, New York, Penguin Random House, 2007, pp. 76-77.

<sup>29</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, London, Bloomsbury, 2003, p. 146.

### Conclusions

Traditionally, «the headteacher in the traditional school story, no matter how authoritarian or how kind and empathetic, embodies the rule of law and society at large. Power/knowledge resides in his/her person and leadership/management»<sup>30</sup>. This study has analysed the representation of power embodied in the power of the headteacher for the purposes of enquiring into the various ways in which school authority is depicted in children's literature historically. Two distinct models – present in portrayals of both headmasters and headmistresses have been identified: on one hand a model which highlights exemplary headteachers and, on the other, a model which mocks them and casts them as grotesquely inadequate.

A comparison of these literary models via the various novels analysed has highlighted the way in which these portrayal formulas have crystallised over time and tend to re-emerge in diverse school stories published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as in British and Italian literary traditions, for example. Over one hundred years, these depictions have not substantially changed.

It is worth underlining that descriptions of headmistresses differ from headmaster models in one specific element: a greater focus on the women's physical oddities, and a lesser emphasis on intellectual stature, on the cultural, social and political know-how of the headmistresses.

I would argue that this latter element is more problematical than the former as it constitutes a female power relationship model marked by considerable gender bias. Beyond a significantly lesser presence of headmistresses in children's literature<sup>31</sup>, what stands out most is the choice of identity shaping elements by which such headmistresses are portrayed as exemplary figures. In fact, whilst the "exemplary" model depicts enlightened and erudite headmasters of great intellectual and moral stature, a model which hinges in particular on their extraordinary knowledge and leadership abilities and makes them an «almost godlike figure»<sup>32</sup>, there is no corresponding headmistress model. There are certainly headmistresses worthy of admiration but their stature hinges primarily on their caring natures, their ability to listen, be empathic, show compassion, on their moral stature. References to scientific and pedagogical know-how, cultural and intellectual resources, capacity to effectively and farsightedly manage their school authority are, by contrast with headmaster portrayals, very rare. In school stories, what is most absent would appear to be precisely a model of headmistresses who are intellectually and culturally talented, competent, innovative, capable of strong and authoritative leadership and of going beyond the literary kindness and care stereotype to take on the challenges of institutional roles professionally.

<sup>30</sup> P. Thomson, *The uses and abuses of power: teaching school leadership through children's literature*, «Journal of Educational Administration and History», vol. 46, n. 4, 2014, pp. 367-386.

<sup>31</sup> A. Trousedale, *Teacher as gatekeeper. Schoolteachers in picture books for young children*, in P.B. Joseph, G. Burnaford (edd.), *Images of Schoolteachers in Twentieth-Century America*, New York, St. Martins Press, 1994, pp. 195-214.

<sup>32</sup> Pesold, *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children's Literature*, cit., p. 39.

# Illustrations and Cartoonists in the Collodi Conflict Context. Childhood at School and School-Less Childhood

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In the brief considerations in this paper, I have prioritised an interpretative analysis of visual sources, especially certain figures and illustrations revolving around evocations and depictions of school and the various forms of schoollessness in children's literature and school readings which have been published in a broad time frame ranging from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is, thus, a matter of observing the symptoms of cultural, social and educational turmoil shown in images depicting the childhoods of an era and designed for child readers.

School at school, the school children run away from for adventure, the school which disappears in the denial of a right to education that marginalised children cannot capitalise on.

The literary and artistic framework I am referring to focuses in particular on two Florentine cartoonists, Enrico Mazzanti and Carlo Chiostri, and one atypical intellectual writer, Carlo Collodi.

This specific thematic and perspective was, in fact, initially prompted by the ambivalence around the school of the day that emerges from *The Adventures of Pinocchio. Story of a Puppet*, published in volumes as a first edition by Florence Paggi publishing house in 1883 and illustrated by Enrico Mazzanti<sup>1</sup>.

In Carlo Collodi's great classic, school is the backdrop to the enigmatic landscape in which Pinocchio's adventures are played out, resembling a ghostly mirror image of the ordinary life the puppet escapes from in his repeatedly risky but attractive journey deviations.

Pinocchio, as literary figure, imagery icon, wooden hero of children's literature, as archaic as he is eternal, ideally embodies the role of the "school-less" from the point of view of those who cannot stand even the sight of school or the very word itself.

A metaphor for the inexhaustible desire for a free wandering childhood, the puppet is, however, put to the test by his own desire to belong to the social system his own surreal relationships and identity expectations conform to. Thus, conflict.

<sup>1</sup> Enrico Mazzanti (Florence, 5 April 1850-Florence, 3 September 1910).

The author repeatedly emphasises the role of school, sometimes in severe pedagogical, sometimes mildly pedantic tones, emphasising its educational value. But in so doing he hovers repeatedly between a desire to send the puppet to school and the opposite and ambiguous desire to offer him the chance to escape that claustrophobic classroom.

To the extent that skipping school, children's jaunts and quarrels, overshadow even the measured tones in which the novel makes its way into the state school Pinocchio attends, diligently, in the unusual and undefined literary time frame of a couple of chapters.

The next day Pinocchio went to the local school. Just imagine the reaction of those little rascals when they saw a puppet come to their school! The laughter was unstoppable. A joke here, a joke there, one lad pulled his cap from his hand, another pulled his jacket down at the back, another tried to ink a large moustache under his nose, another even tried to tie string around his hands and feet to make him dance<sup>2</sup>.

Enrico Mazzanti illustrated the first edition of the book, effectively conveying the combination of irony, mockery and tragedy in the puppet's dealings with his classmates. Rascals, hooligans, even a pack, as Collodi later referred to them in his favourite way of comparing children with animals.

The tragedy is clearly Pinocchio's experience, even if it is just for a few minutes. Flabbergasted and hurt by the cruel mockery inflicted on him by his classmates, the puppet defends himself with a good schoolboy air.

— Look lads. I haven't come here to be your buffoon. I respect others and expect respect back<sup>3</sup>.

School is an educational experience that can win our happy-go-lucky hero acceptance by respectable society. When did Pinocchio the puppet express himself with austerity on the subject of the moral right to respect, even prompting the author to floor readers with that "buffoon" expression, which both demotes to and, at the same time, elevates the puppet's identity from, compromise with those who lose their dignity? A puppet and/or marionette destined for a lesser, theatrical existence, of a town square entertainer, very different from all other childhoods, Pinocchio seems to have discovered his wound, in which the awareness of his ambiguity that defines him hurts. Goofy, a buffoon, a wooden toy in other people's hands, depicted by Mazzanti as straight-backed and severe, visibly contrasting with the flowery suit a real school bag is falling on.

Mazzanti shows him serious, compact and stiff, telling us of his belief in this new Pinocchio at school and in that part of him that suffers this different, marginalised identity.

In the meantime, the cartoonist does not set aside his satirical and inventive vein as an artist whose roots were in the otherness of popular visual culture, expressing the cruel and scornful side of the children surrounding Pinocchio, who are enjoying and subverting

<sup>2</sup> C. Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Torino, Einaudi, 1968, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, cit., p. 99.



that call to order which school imposes on children and which Pinocchio also, incredibly, seems to claim to.

A plate in which Mazzanti illustrates an unusual role reversal: the adventurous puppet whose world is untidy, expects order and the children metaphorically summed up and embodied in his character overtake him in mischief-making and conceit. Until Pinocchio gets angry and breaks out into kicks under the desks, wisdom is set aside and the wood he is made of shows all its physical strength as he emerges as the winner.

A new power relationship shores him up at school.

This space-time dimension in which the classroom is the context of choice for a pungent and action-packed measuring up to good manners – the blackboard with its numbers and letters, the desks, the ragamuffins sitting obediently at their desks, in lively mocking poses, dressed in clothes messed up by play – lasts just a few sentences and a single illustration.

The puppet wins his good schoolboy image and keeps his “school buddies” (as the Fairy calls them, in expectation of trouble<sup>4</sup>) at bay until the challenge in which he, too, will be forced to show his hatred of school. Collodi shows extraordinary finesse in reawakening the temporarily and effortfully suspended appeal of adventure and transgression.

It is a suspension that takes place in Chapters 26 and 27, when Pinocchio experiences a fragment of ordinary life at school, an interval owning the extraordinary features of an elsewhere, a sort of break that the roguish puppet is granted as required by the adventure story tradition, in which he is judicious, polite, studious. An interval, a break, in which there are very few illustrations by either Mazzanti or Chiostri.

It is in this incarnation as a disciplined puppet that Pinocchio is immortalised by Carlo Chiostri<sup>5</sup>, the second great cartoonist to illustrate Collodi's novel in the 1901 Bemporad edition. The figure is exemplary both for its interpretative concision and for the sophisticated mark of an artist who captured the deeper meaning of the image. The chronotope of the classroom time-space is once again used, and it is to the teacher that the puppet seems to be turning his attention with sacral awe. Attentive and, you would think silent pupils, to the extent that not even a whisper or breath is exuded by an illustration so expressive as to seem alive. An illustration which communicates composure and silence, although Pinocchio is portrayed standing up, with his unmistakable profile, as he gets ready to read, but the only hint of his voice is the expectation that he will begin. The other four school children are seen from the back, bent over their work, intent on studying under the watchful eye of the teacher.

By contrast, in the initial sequence to Chapter 26 cited above, Enrico Mazzanti depicts a ruckus, the sound of laughter, mockery and taunts. It is a different view of the alternating relations and dynamics historically characteristic of school.

Thus, Chiostri's is a respectable classroom, one which perhaps reflects Pinocchio's dream of becoming a respectable boy, although he is caught up in a climate in which it is the wise irreverence of boisterous childhood which reigns supreme.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Collodi (Florence, 5 May 1863–Florence, 9 July 1939).

The images and styles of the two cartoonists, their respective artistic traditions — amongst other things very close to the lower class districts their visual and narrative styles derived from — reveal and highlight the ambiguities of Collodi's poetic regarding the education of his day with semantic transparency. Despite writing a successful series of school books<sup>6</sup>, on more than one occasion Collodi expressed doubts regarding mandatory primary school, which was set into law on 15 July 1877 by will of Minister Coppino, «State Education Minister during the two De Pretis Governments, from 25 March 1876 to 23 March 1878»<sup>7</sup>.

Another vision of childhood and youth was, in fact, gaining ground in Collodi's work. It was one of romantic derivation and constituted an exception in the context of the predominance of a rigid pedagogy focusing primarily on educating and getting notions across. Renato Bertacchini has written as follows on this subject:

In other words Collodi does not fail to grasp the real importance of the school theme for children, or rather the importance of the conflict between the need for education and the simultaneous urge to play, an always open and possible clash between the three enemies school-lesson-teacher and the appeal of time-wasting adventure, the victorious call of fun, ruckus and the open air. From *Giannettino* to *Pinocchio*, Collodi tended to dramatise this inner conflict, this state of ambivalence replete with poetic and adventurous evocations in episodic and inventive narrative sequences<sup>8</sup>.

And it is equally true that it is the interpretative space offered by Collodi's conflict, the alternation between his stance on educational processes and, thus, the pedagogical ambivalence, which suffuses the novel – *Pinocchio* both puppet and respectable boy; duty and pleasure; school and adventure, ecc. – that took precedence in the rereadings put forward by the two cartoonists, both assiduous illustrators of fairy tales, *feuilletons*, novellas, novels and readers for children, all genres fed by the popular, lower class imagination underworld melding know-how, dreams and inventivity.

Oral culture, the coexistence in performance of legends, stories, myths, beliefs, the struggle for survival and religious traditions constituted a priceless baggage of deeply rooted archaic sources capable of being passed down by artists set apart – as the cartoonists were – who picked up knowledge around life's diversities, turning points of view on their heads, the legacy literature and popular visual images leaves for children's books and school readers.

This melding process was underlined by Faeti:

The first cartoonists, Enrico Mazzanti and Carlo Chiostri, above all came from a highly resonant publishing context: the popular iconography and the contents which this was capable of generating

<sup>6</sup> Collodi published two books of lessons for schools, ten text and reading books, one of which was *Minuzzolo* and nine from the *Giannettino* series. These illustrated works came out from 1877 to 1890, the year of Collodi's death.

<sup>7</sup> R. Bertacchini, *Collodi narratore*, Pisa, Lischi editore, 1961, pp. 213-214.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

were the sources the two illustrators were constantly inspired by. In this sense the images they produced can be seen as characteristic expressions of a complex terrain in which contradictions were reconciled and diverse motifs were condensed. The fairy tale illustrations reworked symbols drawn from the Italian vernacular, the types designed allude to clearly well established and compact repertoires<sup>9</sup>.

Mazzanti, an engineer and Collodi's friend and companion on long Florentine afternoon walks, illustrated Collodi's *La lanterna magica di Giannettino* in the first Bemporad edition of 1890. The book's cover was characteristic of the artist in melding the precision of science and experimentation with the appeal of mystery and the unexpected. Other plates by Mazzanti in Collodi's school books, for *Minuzzolo* (Paggi, Firenze, 1882), *Il viaggio in Italia di Giannettino*, parts I, II, III, (Bemporad, Firenze, 1886), and similarly for Emma Perodi's book *I bambini delle diverse nazioni a casa loro*, (Bemporad, Firenze, 1890)<sup>10</sup> favoured an illusory, Gothic edge, a penetrating, almost rough narrative style in the profile of the Pinocchio illustrations.

The trickster tot who accompanied the very young wandering musician in Emma Perodi's book is an illuminating example of "schoolless" childhood in which the cartoonist Mazzanti focuses on the authenticity, the childish otherness of the street child with a vital energy, which bubbles out of Pinocchio's classmates as they torment him. It is a figurative style, which illuminates a childhood that seems to come from elsewhere, a divergent childhood tending to conflict with the more orthodox image of childhood (and school) prevailing in the society of the day. It is a conflict which Faeti<sup>11</sup> highlights as a fundamentally important and revealing clue to the metaphorical power of cartoonists, in an even more significant way when it stands out in the great deal of work which Mazzanti did for school books.

Through the figures in them, the books that ended up on school desks spoke unpredictable and new languages, bringing to childhood the legacy of parallels that cartoonists drew from their involvement in the popular culture imagination combined with their artistic expertise: the result was alternative aesthetics, specific references to the deviance of fairy tales, and surrealism which marked out the lower classes. Mazzanti's plates were followed by those of Chiostrì the cartoonist.

Younger than Collodi and Mazzanti, Chiostrì spent his days on his own in his workshop, at the flat he shared with his wife and two daughters; an invisible and untiring creator of figures meticulously designed for books by a range of authors and of diverse narrative genres. The great deal of work in Chiostrì's repertoire includes Vampa, Collodi Nipote, the voluminous work he did for Emma Perodi's novellas, «for Invernizio, Palau, Capuana, as well as the dense collections that the publisher Salani personally built up and published anonymously in a multi-coloured series, which included *Il libro verde delle fate*,

<sup>9</sup> A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure. Gli illustratori italiani nei libri per l'infanzia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Bibliographic source of the illustration referred to: fig. 26, *Suonatori ambulanti*. From E. Perodi, *I bambini delle diverse nazioni a casa loro*, Firenze, Bemporad & F., 1890, p. 10, illustrations by Enrico Mazzanti (in L. Luatti, *Adulti si nasceva. Immagini e metafore letterarie sull'emigrazione minorile girovaga e di lavoro dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, Isernia, Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2016, p. 131).

<sup>11</sup> Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., p. 7.

*Il libro rosa delle fate, Il libro arancio delle fate* and even *Il libro oliva* and a silver coloured one»<sup>12</sup>.

Chiostri created representations from the fantastical, the magical and the improbable, which did not shy away from the vein of sophisticated realism that would also seem to have predominated, at first sight, in his work for Collodi. His style was open, like a secret window, to the unsayable and encompassed a vein of disquiet which the fairy tale figures exuded as did those for Pinocchio, for his school readers with *Minuzzolo* as an example.

His school teacher – captured by Chiostri in elegant clothing with attention to the austere details characterising his role – was a player in the school imagery mosaic of an era in which Collodi himself staged both the school hated by Giannettino in the school books of the same name, and the wonderful Dr. Boccadoro, the allegorical and complex testament to the historical figure of the maieutics tutor.

Bertacchini wrote of him:

In *Giannettino*, Dr. Boccadoro, «a nice, thin, edgy old man with clean, tidy clothing and manners... very well known for his attractive way of speaking clearly and telling the whole truth, even at the cost of sometimes gaining a reputation for a quick tongue (p. 8)», a sort of mentor, then, armed with patient severity, who takes on the task of educating Giannettino, that ultra-ignorant urchin<sup>13</sup>.

We might go as far as to see the portrait of Dr. Boccadoro as resembling Pinocchio's teacher – about whom Collodi tells us nothing except that he praised his puppet pupil – in the image that the sophisticated Chiostri gives us, paralleling him with the tradition of the teacher-mentor also in the exactitude and conviction he seem to put into his teaching role.

In the images which Chiostri devotes to Pinocchio's school episode the artist's twofold view of the diligent schoolboys and the same boys magnetically attracted to the adventurous discovery of the Monster comes across right away. Their eyes shine and are far away, their nimble run and amazed gestures that barely keep their excitement at bay. It is a powerful illustration in which each child's face is a portrayal of a childhood wanting to explore the unknown, the terrifying, the fantastical summed up in the figure of the Monster, the Dogfish.

School thus takes on the absence dimension, evaporating behind the boys' backs and visible only in the fluttering school bags and the sophistication of the clothing unsuited to an escape through fields to the beach. The group, the pack, skives off the lesson. They are now "school-less" and Pinocchio precedes them in their unfettered rush to the unknown.

«With the starting bell now having sounded, this pack of rascals, with their books and exercise books under their arms, start running through the fields with Pinocchio always ahead of them. They seemed to have wings on their feet»<sup>14</sup>.

Those books were then to become bullets and the puppet's good schoolboy interval comes to a brusque end (at least in the plot's narrative time frame). The hand-to-hand

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Bertacchini, *Collodi narratore*, cit., p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, cit., p. 100.

combat between Pinocchio and his school buddies offers Collodi the chance to stage his dilemma, the conflict between education, school and free childish adventure. «The *Sillabari*, *Grammatiche*, *Giannettini*, *Minuzzoli*, the tales of Thouar, *Pulcino* in Baccini and other school books were launched»<sup>15</sup>.

On closer examination, even the author's texts are bait and food for fish rejected, like the others, even by fish used to a very different diet. But we're past this now.

Chiostri anticipated all this in his depiction of the race, the enthusiasm, the light in the eyes of the schoolboys in flight. And further on in the *Adventures* he comes up with what is perhaps the boldest, most extreme and explicit of his illustrations. The apex of the smart aleck and transgressive alliance between Pinocchio and Candlewick.

«Candlewick was the naughtiness and most school-shy of the whole school but Pinocchio worshipped him»<sup>16</sup>.

That "but" sounds rather like an excuse by the author for his puppet, but it is anything but adversarial. It is as if he was saying: Pinocchio cannot but love the classmate who resembles him most, who most recalls his own transgressive self. In fact, giving in to a primal urge he never lost, the puppet follows in the footsteps of the friend the novel – and, it is implied, Chiostri's depiction – entrusts Pinocchio's doppelganger to. The loser doppelganger. In a shadowy illustration set at dusk, Chiostri gives the scene a suffused, dark aura. However, it is perfectly in line with the details describing the two boys' way of dressing and behaving and their mindset. On his side, Pinocchio, still in his flowery suit and pointed hat, harmoniously positioned alongside his friend, takes on the appearance of a grown-up boy, just a step away from the leap of faith that will drag him into the most dangerous of initiation adventures.

Sitting on a wall in the countryside next to each other, both seen in half profile, the two rascals are awaiting that fatal coach that will make donkeys of them. Candlewick is depicted by Chiostri as if he had just run away from home and school, dressed as all boys were in those days, and Pinocchio, sitting next to him but in the exact same pose, looks like or is his friend's alter ego, a wooden and metaphorical alter ego generated by Collodi's ambivalent writing and so intensely brought to life by Chiostri. And if they were a single boy and what we see here is the two bodies and faces that Collodi described? Not content with this, the author saves Pinocchio and kills off Candlewick, distressingly, as if as painful and implacable warning to "school-less" vagabonds.

The coach arrives at midnight, the fairy tale hour. In this image, the Tuscan countryside blending dream, nightmare and suspense, the cartoonist and the author combine their respective fairy tale literature legacies without either of them giving up the lifelike component always present in fairy tales and novels. It is thus the fantastic making its way in and surprising the reader. Midnight is the fairy tale hour and Collodi, together with Chiostri, starts thus:

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

In the meantime night had fallen. A dark night. When all of a sudden they see a flicker of light and hear bells and a trumpet sounding, so quiet and stifled that it felt like the whine of a mosquito.

"Here it is!" cried Candlewick, standing up straight.

"Who is it?", asked Pinocchio under his breath.

"It's the coach coming to get me. So are you coming or aren't you?"

"So it's true", asked the puppet, "that in that town boys are never forced to go to school?"

"Never, never, never!"

"What a wonderful town, wonderful town, wonderful town!"<sup>17</sup>.

In the distance a coach pulled by donkeys can just be made out. Lights, hazy figures of exhausted donkeys, the Coachman's whip. Chiostrì's is an off-putting, rural, sinister landscape.

Alongside Pinocchio, who wants a childhood free of even a thought of school, is the character who ultimately plays his alter ego, naughty Candlewick, the boy who chooses the road to ruin, a school drop-out as we would call him today, trusting to futile and dangerous enticements. Candlewick believes in the school-less vision as a means for freedom and rebellion, but we know that the land of milk and honey will turn out to be an illusion, punitive to the point of sadism, cruel and deadly.

The dilemma and what we might call the distance between childhood at school and school-less childhood is not simply a matter of the conflict between wisdom and duty and running away, of ideal and illusory freedom and carefreeness, of weeks of Thursdays and Sundays only.

Another category of school-less childhood and immature youth is added: the Italian school readers and children's stories and novels of the day often featured images of little harp players, ultra-young *figurina* – this is what the children who sold little statuettes and figurines were called – chimney sweeps, rose sellers and beggars sleeping rough and wearing rags. All inexorably school-less.

The figures which immortalise these street childhoods, the violence they suffered, trades created deliberately for children and young people sent to far off places, tell of a world of poverty and destitution in one of society's most marginalised worlds, one in which the children of the poorest could not even imagine school. But the cartoonist told the stories of the school-less with fierce realism, exalting school precisely in its absence, in the real and symbolic vacuum left by the place par excellence from which to assert children's rights to grow up and evolve.

On the subject of the definition of the art of the illustrators called *figurina* in Italian, just like the children who sold figurines, statuettes, who were so close to the historical, social and cultural truth of harsh living conditions, Faeti wrote:

The explicit allusion to a socially scorned trade – the dictionary definition of the real *figurina* was "travelling sellers of figurines and the like" – already encompasses an acknowledgement of one of the most significant components of the world of these illustrators. These latter benefited from a positive marginalisation which kept them constantly apart from the most elevated sectors of artistic officialdom and required them to seek out the contents with which they could compose an iconography with its

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

own specific physiognomy within the spaces closest and most congenial to them. The first and most authentic *figurinai* – still featuring the characteristics to be attributed to this type of illustrators – were working within a publishing milieu still very close to that of the old popular *imagerie* sold on the streets by matchsellers for a few coins. The earliest *figurinai* could thus offer child readers fragments of an iconography with a lengthy past and frequently alluding to emblematic contents born in the town squares and very familiar to the Italian vernacular universe<sup>18</sup>.

One of the many excellent examples of this comes once again from Chiostrì's illustrations for *Il piccolo figurinaio italiano. Romanzo originale per ragazzi*, by E. Simonatti Spinelli and published by Salvatore Rotondo, Palermo, 1901. The image I am referring to depicts a boy holding a basket containing clay figurines which he is showing one by one to passers-by, elegant ladies and gentlemen who are hurrying past him on a rainy, snowy day. No-one buys his goods and the begging gesture Chiostrì accords the boy opens up the theme of sentimentality as a noble and not to be criticised theme within the analysis of illustrations and literature as an indispensable source for the history of childhood, of the intimacy of childhood in its socio-historical journey.

Chiostrì's watercolour, once again, miraculously succeeds in melding pathos with the pure cynicism of the real world. The writer of the novel thus tells the story of the children doing this thankless task in a glimpse into the real lives of these school-less children. «And in the nocturnal gloom little shadows are visible, walking slowly, dragging themselves onwards, burdened down with the weight of unsold goods, like aimless beings at the mercy of their fates»<sup>19</sup>.

“Little shadows”, the right metaphor for invisible childhoods, a long way away even from the school-less elbowing their way out of the schoolwork straitjacket. Another life entirely.

School and the way it has been depicted over the years, like all things which have ever existed, always involves a contrast between its absence and the awareness, even contemplation, of a potential absence to be identified as a clue with which to decipher, narrate, reveal. The absence, distance, from school is perceived in figures which tell of school-less childhoods and do not depict desks and exercise books or even touch on them but rather shows childhoods and youths exiled from a right denied which falls on deaf ears.

If school-less childhood is considered in terms of a serious privation deriving from pauperised socio-economic conditions forcing children into marginalisation from school, the result is an image of an institution which existed but was still well away from being sufficiently rooted in the socio-cultural fabric to the extent of being ignored or, perhaps, seen as something of a mirage.

Thus the school that the “school-less” conjure up is an educational institution still incapable of truly making space for deprived children from the poorer classes and the

<sup>18</sup> Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., pp. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> E. Simonatti Spinelli, *Il piccolo figurinaio italiano. Romanzo originale per ragazzi*, editore Salvatore Rotondo, Palermo, 1901, illustrations by Carlo Chiostrì, pp. 41-42 (in Luatti, *Adulti si nasceva*, cit., pp. 153-154).



agricultural world that still populated the nation in the period in which the Italian peninsular was moving towards a unitary identity.

Those classrooms were very often full of physically exhausted girls and boys weighed down by the hard work required of them, which they suffered and put up with at the expense of their ability to be schoolboys and girls. Their duty to contribute to family survival often obliged them to violent separation, migration across the oceans in pursuit of a destiny as childhoods bought and sold, forced onto boats taking them far away from school. The lowest of the low, exploited children, sold and stolen from themselves, who abandoned their homelands having themselves been abandoned, they embodied the utmost extreme of childhoods destined to lose all contact with education and for whom poverty remained as pervasive as their humiliating subordination to their masters.

Childhoods deprived of school, slaves of poverty, do not earn the freedom dreamt of by Collodi's rascals, including Giannettino and Minuzzolo to some extent, emblems of the contradiction that Collodi keeps alive in his school books and openly portrays in his great novel, the *Adventures*. It is a novel which school rejected at length, suspecting and fearing the ambivalence pervading its poetics, language, aesthetics and thought. And this resistance to the reading of Collodi's books at school in some way enhanced and deepened the author's sense of conflict.

School thus seemed to be walking the tightrope of an inner conflict which the visual did nothing to diminish. Quite the opposite. Minuzzolo riding Baffino the donkey at breakneck speed, illustrated by Mazzanti (publisher Paggi, Florence, 1882), is an ideal interpreter of that childish desire to throw oneself headlong into an adventure which turns out to be much more dangerous than foreseen. But his daring experiment falls within the sequence of episodes that Collodi expertly uses to break the monotony of school learning.

Accepting the valuable proximity of Dr. Boccadoro, Giannettino learns from his mistakes but Collodi allows him to break off from his studies now and then to roam free across other more enjoyable meadows. A writer whose dilemma his earliest illustrators, the great cartoonists of his day, renarrated, depicted and visually reworked with their poetics, the dilemma which prompted him to explore the much sought after otherness of childhood too. And Pinocchio was the result.

And lastly, the school of the school-less is that of its absence. Three possible interpretative categories which the visual element in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century children's literature and school books chose to depict, in a circumscribed but paradigmatic writing, cartoonist, character and childhood framework.

# Dystopian Schools between Reality and Narrative Fiction

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## 1. “Educated words”

The massive educational-training apparatus set up in Italy during the Fascist period showed, with disconcerting and dramatic power, how the school, that is far from being a protected and safe’s place from the point of view of the transmission of educational models, could actually prove to be a very effective tool for anchoring propaganda and a vehicle for the spread of power and its ideas by totalitarian regimes.

Borrowing this awareness from the realities of twentieth-century dictatorships, science fiction-dystopian narratives<sup>1</sup>, both when they speak directly about schools and, more generally, educational institutions, and when they are silent about them, take it for granted that the protagonists of the stories have been formed within a particular system to which they are expected to conform<sup>2</sup>, but from which, contrary to the regime’s expectations, they often dissociate themselves. With outcomes that are not always positive.

Orwell in the novel 1984<sup>3</sup>, first published in 1949, highlights already how the promotion of ignorance or, at the very least, the polarization of knowledge, can prove to be one of the educational priorities of authoritarian regimes, whatever their ideology of reference. In his need to reflect, and make people reflect, on the consequences of totalitarianism<sup>4</sup>, the author narrates about how the doctrine of Soving – the form of socialism that rules in the state of Oceania – requires that words also be “educated”<sup>5</sup> in order to prevent them from being misused. The process also involves revising the meaning of key words such as war, freedom, and ignorance, which in the context of the novel, take on an oxymoronic meaning, as opposed to the one conventionally used. The slogans that

<sup>1</sup> See, in this regard: A. Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1984; M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Westport, Greenwood Press, 1994; G. Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016; W. Grandi, *Gli ingranaggi sognati. Scienza, fantasia e tecnologia nelle narrazioni per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> M. Colin, *I bambini di Mussolini. Letteratura, libri, letture per l’infanzia sotto il fascismo*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> G. Orwell, *1984*, London, Martin Seeker & Warburg, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> M. Ceretta (ed.), *G. Orwell. Antistalinismo e critica del totalitarismo. L’utopia negativa*, Firenze, Olschki, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> D. Montino, *Le parole educate. Libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, Milano, Selene, 2005.

stand out on the facade of the Ministry of Truth (Miniver in Newspeak) – *War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength*<sup>6</sup> – represent the Party's actual manifesto.

While it is simple enough to understand, though terrifying, how subverting the concept of war and freedom means for the Socing to keep the population in a condition of closure and total subservience, it is through the third concept, ignorance, that the Party makes explicit and enforces its position of absolute supremacy over a population progressively stripped of basic human prerogatives.

To this end, even the school, that boys and girls left at age nine<sup>7</sup> and then took specific courses at different ages of their life, is called upon to deplete cultural resources.

All ambiguities and shades of meaning had been purged out of them. So far as it could be achieved, a Newspeak word of this class was simply a staccato sound expressing ONE clearly understood concept. It would have been quite impossible to use the A vocabulary for literary purposes or for political or philosophical discussion. It was intended only to express simple, purposive thoughts, usually involving concrete objects or physical actions<sup>8</sup>.

Even the vocabulary of Newspeak, therefore, is constituted in such a way as to make any form of thought other than that of the Party impossible. And from this point of view, the banning of metaphorical language represents the height of the repressive boycott against critical thought and any form of divergence. More insidious still, if possible, is the continuous process of revision and purging: from the texts of words and concepts deemed alien to Socing; from the history of actual events in favor of regime propaganda.

A few years after the publication of George Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury reiterates in another novel, *Fahrenheit 451*<sup>9</sup>, the horror that dictatorial-dystopian regimes hold toward the past, and thus history, by telling of an unspecified future in which books are burned in the public squares and the population is "acculturated" through continuous, relentless and alienating television broadcasting. Yet even that dystopian world has a school system, articulated in the orders and grades we know, designed to provide power for the Government. A school system not intended to provide an adequate education for every citizen, but to ensure their homogenization and interchangeability. In a cynically lucid passage, Captain Beatty explains to Montag: «Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy»<sup>10</sup>. The ruthlessness of this statement is corroborated by the recognition that «Heredity and environment are funny things. You can't rid yourselves of all the odd ducks in just a few years. The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That's why we've lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we're almost snatching them from the cradle»<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> G. Orwell, *1984*, cit., p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>9</sup> R. Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Once again, it is emphasized that schools are a necessary educational institution for totalitarian regimes because they are completely subservient to their needs and malleable in the face of their requirements. This circumstance, present in both narrative fiction and historical reality, should lead, at least democratic nations, or so-called democratic nations, to protect education from possible and deleterious incursions of power within the mechanisms that regulate educational institutions and the content they are supposed to convey. Yet we know well that those incursions, at different levels, operate, more or less deliberately and more or less blatantly, within the school, wherever it is located.

And so, returning to *Fahrenheit 451*, in Montag – the oxymoronic fireman that is trained to burn books – only needs to note with Commander Beatty that:

Discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?<sup>12</sup>

And if anyone disagrees or appears interested in something as eccentric as reading, the strategies in place in the school need to be adopted even more vigorously. The captain, therefore, continues his harangue by showing what the government's own philosophy of education is:

Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of "facts" they feel stuffed, but absolutely "brilliant" with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy!<sup>13</sup>

People, Bradbury continues, have adapted to the new educational practices to such an extent that «the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord<sup>14</sup>». This observation, so fitting even for a society such as that of modern-day Italy, in which people read less and less and worse, should lead one to reflect on how schools should be an antidote against the abandonment of reading and not, on the contrary, a poison for the pleasure of reading.

## 2. *Where Dystopia and Utopia converge*

The fear that reading will become obsolete and that schools can help make this a reality permeates other "dystopian" novels, primarily *The Telling* by Ursula K. Le Guin<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53. See in this regard also M.C. Locchi, *Fahrenheit 451 e il dibattito sui limiti alla libertà di espressione*, «Anamorphosis: rivista internazionale de direito e literatura», vol. 2, n. 1, 2016, pp. 33-52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> U.K. Le Guin, *The Telling*, San Diego, Harcourt, 2000.

In the novel, the author narrates the events that occurred on Aka, a remote planet in time and space on which a despotic and obtuse technocratic<sup>16</sup> regime prevails.

The government of this world, to gain technological power and intellectual freedom, had outlawed the past. [...] To this government who had declared they would be free of tradition, custom, and history, all old habits, ways, modes, manners, ideas, pieties were sources of pestilence, rotten corpses to be burned or buried. The writing that had preserved them was to be erased<sup>17</sup>.

All texts written in the old fonts, in the name of Science, have been destroyed or, says Sutti, the protagonist, «if it exists, I don't know what it is, because the Ministry doesn't allow access to it. So all I was able to work on is modern aural literature. All written to Corporation specifications. It tends to be very standardised»<sup>18</sup>.

In Aka, therefore, there is a school system in which children «were educated as producer-consumers»<sup>19</sup>. Needless to say, that «Akan government was obsessive in its detestation of “deviance”»<sup>20</sup> and especially for those who secretly continued to practice the ancient cult of Narration. A cult that involves attending clandestine schools, learning the forbidden language and gaining access to a now-forgotten alphabet. All at the risk of one's freedom and sometimes one's existence.

Compared to Orwellian narratives<sup>21</sup>, *The Telling* seems to provide new life to the dystopian genre and point to original directions of meaning in adding to the plot the utopian twist that, already hinted at in Bradbury, becomes dominant in literature aimed at *Young Adults* in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Series such as Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*<sup>22</sup>, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*<sup>23</sup>, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*<sup>24</sup>, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*<sup>25</sup> and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*<sup>26</sup>, to name few of the best-known examples, pick up the baton passed on by Le Guin and turn dystopian regimes into an opportunity, though a dramatic and terrible one, to establish a new civilization.

<sup>16</sup> For further study: A. Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> K. Le Guin, *The Telling*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> The Orwellian adjective is used here to define those dystopian narratives characterized by a negative, tragically unresolved ending.

<sup>22</sup> Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* series consists of four volumes *Uglies*, *Pretties*, *Specials*, *Extras* published by Simon Pulse (New York) between 2005-2007.

<sup>23</sup> James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* series consists of three volumes *The Maze Runner*, *The Scorch Trials* and *The Death Cure* published by Delacorte Press (New York) between 2009-2011.

<sup>24</sup> Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series consists of three volumes *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* and *Mokinjay* published by Scholastic (New York) between 2008-2011.

<sup>25</sup> Veronica Roth's *The Divergent* series consists of three volumes *Divergent*, *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* published by Katherine Tegen Books (New York) between 2011-2013.

<sup>26</sup> Lauren Oliver's *The Delirium* series consists of three volumes *Delirium*, *Pandemonium* and *Requiem* published by HarperCollins (New York) between 2011-2013.

Suspended between science fiction and fantasy<sup>27</sup>, those series, in fact, advance the claim that only from the disruption of the status quo can a better world be born. And they do so by telling how the rebellious teenagers, that are considered “deviants” because they do not conform to the system and “different” because they do not conform to expectations, both physically and behaviorally, take it upon themselves to denounce, overturn, and subvert the rules imposed by an adult world fossilized in its own desire for self-preservation and self-reproduction.

In Scott Westfield’s *Uglies*<sup>28</sup> quadrilogy, for example, the story is told of a world in which boys and girls can be *Uglies*, or “normal”, until the age of fifteen; then they are subjected by law to extreme cosmetic surgery that corrects every flaw and makes them *Pretties*. Along with the physique, however, their minds are also manipulated, flattened, emptied of thoughts, feelings, desires.

The utopia manifested by the civilization of the New-Pretties in which all differences – physical and mental – are to be erased, hides under the veil of perfect equality, the dramatic dystopia of self-annihilation, homogenization, and stultification aimed at the anesthesia of all creative and critical capacity<sup>29</sup>.

The *Pretties* turn out, in fact, to be frozen in an eternal pursuit of pleasure and detached from any temptation of political and social participation. Leaving adults, who have discovered a way to stretch their existence almost to eternity, free field to continue to hold power, wealth, authority. To do so, however, they need an institution that educationally supports the choices of those who govern: schools.

Even in the world of the *Uglies*, as is the case in the other Young Adult dystopian novel series, the school remains at all times, an indispensable institution and a fundamental point of reference. The term school is used on an interminable series of occasions<sup>30</sup>, sometimes simply to mention that that institution also exists within the world the author is describing; others to emphasize characteristics peculiar to a particular educational system.

In the saga written by Scott Westerfield, the school has the overriding function of preparing schoolchildren for the future of perfection that society arranges for anyone who has turned sixteen<sup>31</sup> and to do so, it inevitably distorts history and alters its contents.

<sup>27</sup> For further study: S. Albertazzi, *La letteratura fantastica*, Bari, Laterza, 1993; W. Grandi, *Infanzia e mondi fantastici*, Bologna, BUP, 2007; R. Giovannoli, *La scienza della fantascienza*, Milano, Bompiani, 2015; G. De Turris, S. Fusco, *Le meraviglie dell'impossibile. Fantascienza: miti e simboli*, Milano-Udine, Mimesi Edizioni, 2016; W. Grandi, *Gli ingranaggi sognati*, cit.

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, only the first three volumes have been translated in Italy and the series has been given the title: *Beauty* instead of *Uglies*.

<sup>29</sup> A. Antoniazzi, *Contaminazioni. Letteratura per ragazzi e crossmedialità*, Roma, Carocci, 2012, p. 134. My translation.

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, it would be interesting to prepare quantitative research on the presence of the word school within narrative dystopias and activate comparative and interpretive strategies to better understand the phenomenon.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, sixteen years of age represents a threshold that is chorally considered valid when taking into account that it also represents the end of compulsory schooling in Italy.

Thinking about the past of the society prior to the New-Pretties, Shay, a friend of the protagonist Tally, recites (recited) what she learned in school:

«Everyone judged everyone else based on their appearance. People who were taller got better jobs, and people even voted for some politicians just because they weren't quite as ugly as everybody else. Blah, blah, blah».

«Yeah, and people killed one another over stuff like having different skin color». Tally shook her head. No matter how many times they repeated it at school, she'd never really quite believed that one.

«So what if people look more alike now? It's the only way to make people equal»<sup>32</sup>.

Scholastic indoctrination is pervasive and obstinate, and its effectiveness manifests itself on many levels, including in terms of self-awareness and one's projection into a future that those in power have already planned. In this sense, another dialogue between Tally and Shay becomes as symptomatic as ever:

«I'm serious, Tally», Shay said once they were out in the water. «Your nose isn't ugly. I like your eyes, too».

«My eyes? Now you're totally crazy. They're way too close together».

«Who says?»

«Biology says».

Shay splashed a handful of water at her. «You don't believe all that crap, do you, that there's only one way to look, and everyone's programmed to agree on it?»

«It's not about believing, Shay. You just know it. You've seen pretties. They look... wonderful».

«They all look the same».

«I used to think that too. But when Peris and I would go into town, we'd see a lot of them, and we realized that pretties do look different. They look like themselves. It's just a lot more subtle, because they're not all freaks».

«We're not freaks, Tally. We're normal. We may not be gorgeous, but at least we're not hyped-up Barbie dolls»<sup>33</sup>.

The idea of the doll, or at least the idea of a society pushing young girls toward an ideal of aesthetic perfection, accompanied by the idea of subservience and powerlessness harkens back to another dystopian novel, Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*<sup>34</sup>.

Just as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>35</sup>, from which it takes its cue, O'Neill's novel refers, inevitably, to dystopian narratives of a feminist matrix<sup>36</sup>. Mirella Billi, in this regard argues, that «Dystopian veins, always present in women's discourse, with the reassertion of repressive policies or even fundamentalist societies, turn into

<sup>32</sup> S. Westerfeld, *Uglies*, New York, Simon Pulse, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>34</sup> Louise O'Neill, *Only Ever Yours*, London, Quercus Editions Ltd, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> M. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1985.

<sup>36</sup> C.M. Adden, U.K. Le Guin, *Beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults*, New York-London, Routledge, 2005; S. Bernardo (ed.), *Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2006; D.E. Robert, *Race, Gender, and Genetic Technologies: A New Reproductive Dystopia?*, «Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society», vol. 34, n. 4, 2009, pp. 783-804; R. Onnis, A.C. Palladino, M. Spinelli, *Fantascienza femminista: immaginare il genere nella cultura italiana contemporanea*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2022.



real dystopias, which describe realities that are concretely possible or even exist<sup>37</sup>». The choice to dwell, on this occasion, on Louise O'Neill's work relates to the fact that her protagonist, Isabel, spelled with a lowercase initial, is a teenager and is about to turn sixteen. The age of sixteen represents, as we have seen, a kind of age-threshold beyond which it becomes difficult, at least in young adult narratives, to be able to reprogram one's existence independently, without wearing the habitus of expectations that societies seem to pour on adults.

*Only Ever Yours* is set in a dystopian future in which, following a natural cataclysm, the survivors have established a highly hierarchical society in which women have been disenfranchised and enslaved. Even their names are written all in lowercase letters since capital letters are reserved for authorities and men.

Gender discrimination occurs at the very moment of birth when the girls are taken to the School. There, for sixteen years, the girls study with the goal to be part of one of the three categories provided for adult women: *companion*, *concubine* and *chastity* (a kind of lay nuns dedicated to the care and training of new Eve). Needless to say, that the School trains them to be pretty. The School trains them to be good. The School trains them to always be willing. All their lives, the Eves have been waiting. The Penelope short stories – devoted, submissive and perpetually expectant – are thus trained (not instructed or educated) for the exclusive “use and consumption” of men. And it is on the Eve of their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday that reveals to the pupils the School's true purpose:

«Your Ceremony is mere months away. It is imperative that the correct choices are made and that each of you is placed within the appropriate third. All the theoretical knowledge that you have been taught during your sixteen years in School must now be put into practice».

She pauses, knowing we are hanging on her every word.

«Another element is to be added to your timetable. You will be introduced to the ten Inheritants that were born the same year that you were designed, the very men for whom you were created»<sup>38</sup>.

At that point a real selection process begins – similar to a beauty contest, but much more degrading – in which the Eve must try to win the most coveted role, that of *companion* or, at least, that of achieving *concubine* status in some lord's harem. Of course, those who score the lowest are destined for the neglected role of *chastity*.

As in *Huglies*, however, in *Only Ever Yours* something in the educational process does not work out as society had planned, and Isabel tries to rebel against the status quo, aware that, perhaps for her, the happy ending is an unplanned option.

While O'Neill's novel focuses on denouncing the plight of women by shifting educational and social responsibilities to the repressive and possessive behaviors of a society ruled exclusively by male power, dystopian sagas aimed generally at young readers, placing emphasis on other aspects that do not concern gender discrimination. Or, at least, they do not focus only on those.

<sup>37</sup> M. Billi, *Utopia al femminile: eutopie, distopie e fantasie compensatorie*, in L. De Michelis, G. Iannaccaro, A. Vescovi (edd.), *Il fascino inquieto dell'utopia*, Milano, Ledizioni, 2014, pp. 143-159.

<sup>38</sup> O'Neill, *Only Ever Yours*, cit., p. 125.

In those sagas, in fact, discrimination occurs predominantly by social strata, religious affiliations and/or mere geographical location. And the various governments present in those narratives, all authoritarian and short-sighted in the face of the needs of the people, particularly of the younger generation, see the school as the best tool for the transmission and reiteration of their dictates. Thus, for example, in Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games*, each of the Districts that make up Panem has its own school system suitably adapted to direct education toward specific models of society and to train schoolchildren for the life they will have to lead once they become adults.

As for District Twelve, it is the protagonist of the saga herself, Katniss Everdeen, who describes the programs that the school offers.

In school, they tell us the Capitol was built in a place once called the Rockies. District 12 was in a region known as Appalachia. Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here. Which is why our miners have to dig so deep. Somehow it all comes back to coal at school. Besides basic reading and math most of our instruction is coal-related. Except for the weekly lecture on the history of Panem. It's mostly a lot of blather about what we owe the Capitol. I know there must be more than they're telling us, an actual account of what happened during the rebellion. But I don't spend much time thinking about it. Whatever the truth is, I don't see how it will help me get food on the table<sup>39</sup>.

Different, but with the same expected outcomes, is the school system present in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series. In that closed, asphyxiated world, always the same, children from the different factions – *Abnegation*, *Amity*, *Candor*, *Dauntless* and *Erudite* – are educated together and together they learn the general rules of society and the codes of behavior of each group. It is not until the students turn sixteen that they are tested to determine the faction best suited to them. It is the children, however, who decide which faction will be their destination during the Ceremony of Choice. Only then do the factions take charge of completing each new adept's education. Those who do not complete initiation become stateless and live outcasts in the peripheries.

### 3. *It's better to go to school*

The examples of novels, graphic-novels, films, video games and other dystopian narratives for young adults could go on and on. In most of those stories, school represents a coercive institution that aims to homogenize, standardize, and plagiarize students rather than set them free. Yet, upon closer inspection, perhaps it is through school that Tally, Isabel, Katniss, Beatrix, and the other protagonists of the dystopian narratives we are analyzing, learn to look at their own reality with a different gaze and can make subversive choices vis-à-vis an obtuse and self-referential authority.

School, then, even when enslaved to an authoritarian power, deprived of critical approach and imbued with propaganda and regime rhetoric, is preferable to mere lack of

<sup>39</sup> S. Collins, *Hunger Games*, New York, Scholastic, 2008, p. 71.

education. Indeed, that institution, even when it presents dystopian traits, provides the basic tools so that the protagonists can break free from the known, the usual and those educational cages that seek to repress their every personal drive. Sometimes all it takes is a dash of curiosity, the reading of a few forbidden texts or, simply the perception of a few out-of-tune elements within the proposed content to ignite the spark of change. Indeed, even the most obscurantist school offers its pupils the minimum tools so that they can cultivate secretly their own curiosities.

It is the protagonists of the novels, with their doubts, perplexities, and weaknesses, who show the way out of the impasse by revealing that, in order to save oneself, human beings need to identify the boundaries of the cage within which they are locked and, subsequently, if possible, to unhinge it. The sentence uttered by Beatrice Prior, the protagonist of the series written by Veronica Roth, «I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I am Divergent. And I can't be controlled»<sup>40</sup> then becomes a veritable manifesto for those who find the courage to rebel against the *status quo*, ready to suffer the consequences.

If the school represents, in spite of everything, an indispensable point of reference for attempting to break free from dystopias, it is because the silence of educational institutions, characteristic of so many narratives, that the interpretations become more interesting, and the questions more pressing. The existential situation of the protagonists, both in historical reality and in narrative fiction, is undoubtedly extremely more complex when power, or some catastrophe, prevents boys and girls from going to school. It is at that juncture that the young protagonists, in order to extricate themselves from the terrible situations in which they are immersed, must draw on all their resources and, in the best of cases, rely on the school memories of those who retain some reminiscence of them. Often, on these occasions, it is books that are the emancipating tool par excellence: hated by dictatorships, burned in public squares to preserve citizens from knowledge that could set them free and make them yearn for a better world, they are a fundamental presence in dystopian literature and particularly in that aimed at young adults.

If in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* the book becomes a tale that is reiterated and preserved for posterity through the spoken word, it is in Beatrice Masini's *Bambini nel bosco*<sup>41</sup> (Children in the Woods) that that becomes a unique and unrepeatable opportunity for the little protagonists to recognize their humanity. Awakened without memory after an unspecified catastrophe, the boys and girls find themselves divided into bands within an impassable enclosure. From the loudspeaker, a voice continually repeats the rules to be followed, including, «Do not ask [...] things you cannot know»<sup>42</sup>.

The arrival of a new child triggers curiosity and distrust, especially because he always brings with him a very precious secret object that well hidden from the guardians' view. It is the most forbidden of all objects: a book. None of the children can read, or at least they do not remember being able to, so Tom, secretly, in the woods, reads to them. As if

<sup>40</sup> V. Roth, *Divergent*, New York, Katherine Tegen Books, 2011, p. 442.

<sup>41</sup> B. Masini, *Bambini nel bosco*, Milano, Fanucci, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

by magic, the stories awaken the children's memory. And with memory also awakened words, numbers, curiosity, the desire for freedom, and nothing can ever be the same again.

The book, therefore, does not represent for Tom and his friends a mere opportunity for knowledge, but a real tool for emancipation and intellectual awakening. In another dystopian novel, *Anna* by Nicolò Ammaniti<sup>43</sup>, the protagonist always carries with her an object intended to make up for the lack of school. This time it is not a book, but a pinned notebook.

A devastating pandemic – prophetically dated 2020 – has eradicated the adult population and with it the possibility of institutionally transmitting knowledge along with specific skills. Anna and little Astor's mother, aware that she had very little time, found in a simple notebook with a hard, brown cover the tool to deliver a future for her children. In that notebook are pinned, almost like a miniature school, "THE IMPORTANT THINGS". On the first page, under that almost shouted title, there is, written in round, precise handwriting, a kind of will whose bequest concerns, for the heirs, the very possibility of survival.

My beloved children, I love you so much. Before long your mother will be gone and you will have to fend for yourselves. You are good and smart and I am sure you will make it. I leave with you in this notebook directions that will help you cope with life and avoid dangers. Keep it carefully and every time you have a doubt open it and read it. Anna, you must teach Astor to read as well, so he can consult it on his own. Some of the advice you will find will not be useful in the world you will live in. The rules will change and I can only imagine them. You will be the ones to correct them and learn from mistakes. The important thing is that you always use your head. Your mother is leaving because of a virus that has spread all over the world. These are the things I know about the virus, and I tell them to you like this, without lies. Because you don't deserve them<sup>44</sup>.

The notebook contains instructions on how to use things, directions on how to prevent illness or, in case, to cure oneself, but also suggestions on how to pay attention to the world around us, to read and interpret its signs; to use creativity as an existential strategy.

The mother, then, leaves an implicit signal in the notebook: the last pages of the book are completely blank. Those blank pages are a real encouragement, representing a signal that the story continues and that Anna will write her own future from there on.

Anna [...] continued scrolling through the notebook and came to the last pages that were still empty. She stared at the horizon with the wind tousling her hair.

What if I wrote something in it too?

It was a kind of revelation. Before that moment she had never even dared to imagine such a thing. That was the notebook of Important Things that mother had given to her before she left. And that I will give to Astor<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> N. Ammaniti, *Anna*, Torino, Einaudi, 2015 (ebook). My translation.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pos. 342.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pos. 2319.

The schoolbook has, therefore, achieved its primary goal: to transmit knowledge in such a way that generation after generation can spread, expand and, at best, propel towards a better future.

Ultimately, one cannot fail to consider how schooling, even within despotic systems—real or fictional—is a concept that can be developed in a multiplicity of different ways and forms. Sometimes it is constrictive, sometimes oppressive, sometimes seemingly useless, but in any case it remains a necessary tool for any possible change within human societies. It is no coincidence that Malala Yousafzai<sup>46</sup> who has experienced firsthand the devastating effects of real dystopian power, said in her speech at the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize:

This award is not just for me. It is for those forgotten children who want an education. It is for those frightened children who want peace. It is for those voiceless children who want change. I am here to stand up for their rights, to raise their voice... it is not time to pity them. It is time to take action so it becomes the last time that we see a child deprived of education<sup>47</sup>.

And the conclusion of her speech, delivered with the courage of one who knows what it means to lose the chance to continue cultivating one's dreams and desires through school, sounds like an ideal conclusion to this paper.

Though I appear as one girl, one person, who is 5 foot 2 inches tall, if you include my high heels (it means I am 5 foot only), I am not a lone voice, I am many.

I am Malala. But I am also Shazia.

I am Kainat.

I am Kainat Soomro.

I am Mezon.

I am Amina. I am those 66 million girls who are deprived of education. And today I am not raising my voice, it is the voice of those 66 million girl.

[...]

Dear sisters and brothers, dear fellow children, we must work... not wait.

Not just the politicians and the world leaders, we all need to contribute. Me. You.

We. It is our duty.

Let us become the first generation that decides to be the last that sees empty classrooms, lost childhoods and wasted potentials.

Let this be the last time that a girl or a boy spends their childhood in a factory.

Let this be the last time that a girl is forced into early child marriage.

Let this be the last time that a child loses life in war.

Let this be the last time that we see a child out of school.

Let this end with us.

Let's begin this ending... together... today... right here, right now. Let's begin this ending now<sup>48</sup>.

Starting with school.

<sup>46</sup> Pakistani activist attacked for advocating for women's right to school.

<sup>47</sup> M. Yousafzai, *Nobel Lecture, December 10, 2014*, [https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/yousafzai-lecture\\_en.pdf](https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/yousafzai-lecture_en.pdf) (last access: 10.02.2023).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



# Memories of Students and Yearbooks: the Religious Schools in Spain Twentieth Century<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. *Private Religious Schools and Educational Historiography*

Religious schools in Spain during the contemporary period have not been a privileged object of educational historiography. The number and consequent relevance of private schools at different moments in the history of education in Spain had not gone hand in hand with the interest that historians of education had shown in this institution as an object of study<sup>2</sup>. Despite the fact that their study has recently been gaining more interest, almost three decades later, the situation does not seem to have improved too much, as there are many authors who have continued to point out the inaccessibility of the documentary sources of these institutions. Most of them refer to private schools run by different religious orders and congregations<sup>3</sup> convinced that research on them is

<sup>1</sup> This contribution stems from a doctoral thesis being carried out within the Ikasgarai Research Group at the University of the Basque Country, funded by a pre-doctoral grant from the Basque Government since 2021.

<sup>2</sup> A. Tiana Ferrer, *La escuela Privada*, in J.L. Guereña, J. Ruiz Berrio, A. Tiana (edd.), *Historia de la Educación en la España contemporánea. Diez años de investigación*, Madrid, Centro de Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1994, pp. 117-139.

<sup>3</sup> I. Amunarriz, A. Rodríguez, L.M. Naya, P. Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, in J.M. Hernández (ed.), *La prensa pedagógica de las confesiones religiosas y asociaciones filosóficas*, Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad Salamanca, 2022, pp. 369-382; E. Bernad, *La instrucción primaria a principios del siglo XX*, Zaragoza, IFC, 1984; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, *Las escuelas de los Hermanos de La Salle en Gipuzkoa. Evolución y tendencias en el alumnado y profesorado (1904-2006)*, «Ikastaria», n. 16, 2008, pp. 271-315; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, *Las memorias escolares como fuente para el estudio de los centros privados religiosos masculinos en España*, in A.M. Banadelli et alii (edd.), *XIX Coloquio Historia de la Educación. Imágenes, discursos y textos en Historia de la Educación. Retos metodológicos actuales*, Alcalá de Henares, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares – UNED – Universidad Complutense – SEDHE, 2017, pp. 349-352; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, in J.M. Hernández (ed.), *Prensa pedagógica, mujeres, niños, sectores populares y otros*, Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca, 2018, pp. 593-602; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, I. Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, in P. Dávila, L.M. Naya (edd.), *Espacios y patrimonio histórico-educativo*, Donostia, Erein, 2016, pp. 183-207; M. Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino “Los Olivos” de Málaga (1968-1978)*, in C. Sanchidrián (ed.), *La modernización de la enseñanza tras la Ley General de Educación. Contextos y experiencias*, Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2022, pp. 429-454; A. Llano, *La investigación en la historia de la educación del primer tercio del siglo XX*, in J.A. González de la Torre (ed.), *El patrimonio histórico-educativo: memorias de ayer y reflexiones de hoy*, Polanco, Centro de Recursos, Interpretación y Estudios de la Escuela – Consejería de Educación y Formación Profesional del Gobierno de Cantabria, 2021, pp. 181-198; S. Moll, B. Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys*



often unaffordable for most historians of education<sup>4</sup> due to the fact that it is the same congregations or religious orders themselves that, usually, have kept the documentation of the schools they run<sup>5</sup> in their own private archives<sup>6</sup>, so their consultation depends in many cases on the availability of time on the part of those in charge<sup>7</sup> or, rather, on their own will<sup>8</sup>.

That results in a type of history of poor quality and little historiographical value. In this sense, Sergi Moll and Bernat Sureda<sup>9</sup> denounce that the aversion shown by most religious congregations to allow outsiders to review their past, has given rise to a bibliography generally consisting of commemorative publications edited by people linked to the institutions in question. Like, for example, *Lourdes, Stella in Castella. Historia del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes de Valladolid (1884-2009)*<sup>10</sup> by Javier Burrieza on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school, who, – like the mayor of the town council of the same locality that published this commemorative book – as well as being a former student was president of the Association of Former Students of the school. Or *La Salle, una presencia: medio siglo de servicio en San Sebastián (1946-1996)* by the Lasalian Brother Luis Garitano e Igarza and published by the school itself in 1997 as a result of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Both public and private powers and administrations protect, offer and/or shape certain official versions of the past<sup>11</sup>, such as, for example, through the institutional histories usually promoted and financed by the institution itself, through the commemorative histories of certain secondary schools, universities, private schools, and religious congregations or orders dedicated to teaching<sup>12</sup>. These official versions would control the story about themselves by privileging some themes over others, making possible

*in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020, pp. 29-48; Tiana, *La escuela Privada*, cit., pp. 117-139.

<sup>4</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, cit., pp. 593-602; Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino "Los Olivos" de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454.

<sup>5</sup> Llano, *La investigación en la historia de la educación del primer tercio del siglo XX*, cit., pp. 181-198.

<sup>6</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48; Tiana, *La escuela Privada*, cit., pp. 117-139.

<sup>7</sup> Llano, *La investigación en la historia de la educación del primer tercio del siglo XX*, cit., p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> J. Burrieza, *Lourdes, Stella in Castella. Historia del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes de Valladolid (1884-2009)*, Valladolid, Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, 2009. In addition to interviewing several members of the educational community, he had access to the archives of Lasalian Brothers in general, and to the archives of the school in particular. As we shall see later on, he also used the yearbooks we are dealing with as a source.

<sup>11</sup> A. Viñao, *La historia de la educación ante el siglo XXI: Tensiones, retos y audiencias*, in A. Jiménez et alii (edd.), *Etnohistoria de la escuela. XII Coloquio Nacional de Historia de la Educación, Burgos, 18-21 junio 2003*, Burgos, Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de Burgos, 2003, pp. 1063-1074.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; A. Viñao, *La Historia de la Educación ante el siglo XXI: tensiones, retos y audiencias*, in M. Ferraz (ed.), *Repensar la historia de la educación. Nuevos desafíos, nuevas propuestas*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2005, pp. 147-165.

and/or promoting «interested uses»<sup>13</sup> of the (educational) past. In this situation, new sources are revalued and are necessary to carry out new research on the object of study in question<sup>14</sup>. Although it is true that the bibliography is mostly made up of commemorative publications edited and/or financed by the institution itself or by people linked to it, it is also true that more and more historians of education are approaching the study of the same object of research from new sources<sup>15</sup>, such as, for example, the reports of internship<sup>16</sup> written by teacher training students and the testimonies of former students of the same schools<sup>17</sup>, school magazines<sup>18</sup>, photographs published in different media, such as websites<sup>19</sup>, commemorative books<sup>20</sup>, or reports of the practical work carried out by the teacher training students mentioned above<sup>21</sup>.

## 2. *The yearbooks of the museum of education of the University of the Basque Country*

Yearbooks have also found their place among the set of new sources for the study of the history of education in general and of the private religious school in particular<sup>22</sup>. For

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> Tiana, *La escuela Privada*, cit., pp. 117-139.

<sup>15</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Reports that teacher training students wrote of the schools where interviewees were pupils.

<sup>17</sup> S. Moll Bagur, *L'educació masculina en els col·legis religiosos de la postguerra (1939-1945)*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Pedagogy and Specific Didactics (Supervisor: B. Sureda Garcia and F. Comas Rubí), Palma de Mallorca, Universitat de les Illes Balears, a.a. 2022; Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48.

<sup>18</sup> S. Moll, B. Sureda, *La generación de capital social y la conformación de identidades en los colegios de la posguerra española (1939-1945): estudio de la revista escolar Montesión*, «Social and Education History», vol. 10, n. 3, 2021, pp. 238-361.

<sup>19</sup> F. Comas, B. Sureda, *Album photographique scolaire, histoire et configuration de l'identité des établissements scolaires: le cas du collège Sant Josep Obrer de Palma*, «Encounters in Theory & History of Education», n. 17, 2016, pp. 119-140.

<sup>20</sup> P. Fullana Puigserver, S. González Gómez, F. Comas Rubí, *La fotografia en els llibres commemoratius dels centres escolars (1939-1975)*, in F. Comas, S. González, X. Motilla, B. Sureda (edd.), *Imatges de l'escola, imatge de l'educació. Actes de les XXI Jornades d'Història de l'Educació. Palma, del 26 al 28 de novembre de 2014*, Palma, Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2014, pp. 147-157.

<sup>21</sup> S. Ramos, T. Rabazas, C. Colmenar, *Fotografía y representación de la escuela privada madrileña en el franquismo. Entre la propaganda y el relato*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», vol. 8, 2018, pp. 397-448.

<sup>22</sup> I. Amunarriz, A. Rodríguez, L.M. Naya, P. Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, in C. Pires, M.F. Martins, M. Figueiredo (edd.), *XIX Congresso da Sociedade Portuguesa de Ciências da Educação (SPCE). Educação e Cidades: Tempos, espaços, atores e culturas*. 15, 16 e 17, Setembro, 2022/Lisboa & Online. *Livro de Resumos*, EventQualia, 2022, p. 207; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares como fuente para el estudio de los centros privados religiosos masculinos en España*, cit., pp. 349-352; Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, cit., pp. 593-602; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, J. Miguelena, *Yearbooks as a source in researching school practices in private religious schools*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020a, pp. 219-240; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, J. Miguelena, *Les Annuaire Scolaires: la richesse d'une source pour l'histoire de l'école et des élèves*,

example, analysed as a tool for the construction and dissemination of a certain image or identity of the private religious educational establishments that issue them, some historians of education have focused their attention on the use of photography in the yearbooks issued during Franco's regime for the construction of the school register as if it were a traditional photographic album<sup>23</sup>. In a similar way, they have also been analysed as a tool to offer a representation of the school that makes students feel identified with it based on a feeling of belonging to the group<sup>24</sup>. Likewise, yearbooks have been studied as advertising brochures for the marketing of its premises, infrastructures, buildings, and so on, to give prestige to the educational establishment in question<sup>25</sup>. Their structure and evolution as a tool for conveying institutional representation has also been studied, making yearbooks a source for studying the representation of the shared universe between the school and its community – families, students, former students –<sup>26</sup>; and the student participation in certain yearbooks gives them the status of a pedagogical press created by the students themselves<sup>27</sup>. Finally, the characteristics that justify the use of this document as a primary source for the History of Education have been highlighted<sup>28</sup>, outlining possible future lines of research with this documentary source<sup>29</sup>, like, for example, as a source for studying the extra-curricular activities of such schools<sup>30</sup>.

In view of this situation, the Yearbooks Fund held by the Museum of Education of the University of the Basque Country, which is made up of an important documentary

«Encounters in Theory and History of Education», vol. 21, 2020b, pp. 253-273; Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207; P. Dávila, L.M. Naya, I. Zabaleta, *Memory and Yearbooks: An Analysis of Their Structure and Evolution in Religious Schools in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer Publishing, 2017, pp. 65-79; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino "Los Olivos" de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454; S. González, F. Comas, P. Fullana, *La «construcción» del record escolar a través de la fotografía: «deconstrucción» de dos anuarios col-legials*, in F. Comas, S. González, X. Motilla, B. Sureda (edd.), *Imatges de l'escola, imatge de l'educació. Actes de les XXI Jornades d'Història de l'Educació. Palma, del 26 al 28 de novembre de 2014*, Palma, Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2014, pp. 159-169.

<sup>23</sup> González, Comas, Fullana, *La «construcción» del record escolar a través de la fotografía: «deconstrucción» de dos anuarios col-legials*, cit., pp. 159-169.

<sup>24</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino "Los Olivos" de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454.

<sup>25</sup> Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207.

<sup>26</sup> Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Memory and Yearbooks: An Analysis of Their Structure and Evolution in Religious Schools in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, cit., pp. 65-79.

<sup>27</sup> Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares, una forma de prensa escolar*, cit., pp. 593-602.

<sup>28</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Dávila, Naya, Miguelena, *Yearbooks as a source in researching school practices in private religious schools*, cit., pp. 219-240.

<sup>29</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, Miguelena, *Les Annuaire Scolaires: la richesse d'une source pour l'histoire de l'école et des élèves*, cit., pp. 253-273.

<sup>30</sup> Dávila, Naya, *Las memorias escolares como fuente para el estudio de los centros privados religiosos masculinos en España*, cit., pp. 349-352.

corpus of more than 2,000 documents, is of great value as a source. This documentary collection will be the basis of this contribution.

### 3. *Objective*

The starting point of this project is the consideration we give to yearbooks as a primary source, pointing out the features that make their use possible. However, the interest of this hypothesis lies in being able to know the limits that yearbooks may have as a document that can be used as a primary source in the historical construction of school institutions. Since, aware that any source elaborated by observers (e.g. diaries, memoirs, biographies, and so on) must be considered with certain caution<sup>31</sup>, it is the historian's responsibility to subject it to «historical-pedagogical» criticism<sup>32</sup>.

In our case, we cannot lose sight of the author of the yearbooks, or, in other words, the fact that they are a document edited by the very institution portrayed in the documents in question<sup>33</sup>; that is, they have the possibility of controlling the story about themselves by privileging some themes over others, which allows them to make «interested» uses of the story<sup>34</sup>. In addition, taking into account the various functions that can be attributed to the source in question, such as, for example, the construction of a collective memory that strengthens the common identity of its former students or a historical discourse that supports its current educational project<sup>35</sup>, that is, offering a representation of the school that makes students feel identified with it based on a sense of belonging to the group<sup>36</sup> for the generation of social capital through the construction and dissemination of a collective identity<sup>37</sup>; the construction of the school register as if it was a traditional photographic album<sup>38</sup> to project the portrait that the school wants to be engraved in the memory

<sup>31</sup> M. Poveda, T. Rabazas, *El fondo Romero Marín del Museo «Manuel B. Cossío». Análisis de las memorias de las prácticas de pedagogía*, in P.L. Moreno, A. Sebastián (edd.), *Patrimonio y Etnografía de la escuela en España y Portugal durante el siglo XX*, Murcia, Sociedad Española para el Estudio del Patrimonio Histórico-Educativo (SEPHE) – Centro de Estudios sobre la Memoria Educativa (CEME) de la Universidad de Murcia, 2012, pp. 323-336.

<sup>32</sup> P. Dávila, A. Rodríguez, J. Arpal, *Guía temática y bibliografía para la investigación de historia de la educación en el País Vasco*, San Sebastián, Caja de Ahorros Municipal de San Sebastián, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Moll, Sureda, *Private religious schools for boys in the Spanish post Civil War period: an analysis through triangulating historical sources*, cit., pp. 29-48; Viñao, *La historia de la educación ante el siglo XXI: Tensiones, retos y audiencias*, cit., pp. 1063-1074.

<sup>34</sup> Viñao, *La Historia de la Educación ante el siglo XXI: tensiones, retos y audiencias*, cit., pp. 155.

<sup>35</sup> Comas, Sureda, *Album photographique scolaire, histoire et configuration de l'identité des établissements scolaires: le cas du collège Sant Josep Obrer de Palma*, cit., pp. 119-140.

<sup>36</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Hijano del Río, *Un estudio de las memorias escolares: el Colegio agustino «Los Olivos» de Málaga (1968-1978)*, cit., pp. 429-454.

<sup>37</sup> Moll, Sureda, *La generación de capital social y la conformación de identidades en los colegios de la posguerra española (1939-1945): estudio de la revista escolar «Montesión»*, cit., pp. 238-361.

<sup>38</sup> González, Comas, Fullana, *La «construcción» del record escolar a través de la fotografía: «deconstrucción» de*

and school memories of its students<sup>39</sup>; building their own commercial brand through a narrative that distinguishes them from other schools of the same type, through identity characteristics that distinguish the schools of a certain order or congregation from the schools of other orders or congregations, through their distinguished extracurricular offer made up of certain religious, sporting and artistic-cultural activities<sup>40</sup>, or through the prestige that the advertising of its facilities gives the school<sup>41</sup> to give prestige and disseminate the school's identity in the social sphere of influence in which the educational establishment sought to consolidate itself; it is clear that the narrative offered by yearbooks is conditioned by the interests of the school, so there is a clear bias due to both the authors and the function they fulfil<sup>42</sup>.

However, it should be noted that «a biased or false document can be useful because it reveals ideological or material interests in adulterating information»<sup>43</sup>. That is why the aim of this collaboration is to contrast the contents of yearbooks – based on the hypothesis that they are a valid source – in order to find out the limits that this memoirs may have as a document that can be used as a primary source for the History of Education. To this end, the account of the yearbooks written by these schools and the memories of the students, expressed as oral testimonies, who attended the same schools in the period of time coinciding with the aforementioned yearbooks, have been compared.

#### 4. *Contrast of yearbooks and former students' memories*<sup>44</sup>

One discrepancy identified relates to the supposed fervour and faith of the students in the schools in question. We find numerous fragments in the yearbooks which boast of this, boasting not only of the fervent faith of their students, but also of their high level of participation in the various religious activities. However, the oral testimonies obtained through interviews reveal a very different reality.

The importance attached by the yearbooks to this type of religious activity is remarkable, when, for example, they consider that one of the indicators of the school's success is the religious activity of its students: «Considering that in Brother Leon, the

*dos anuaris col·legials*, cit., pp. 159-169.

<sup>39</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *El valor interpretativo de las memorias escolares como fuente primaria en el ámbito de la Historia de la Educación*, cit., p. 207; Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Amunarriz, Rodríguez, Naya, Dávila, *Las memorias escolares de centros educativos religiosos: metodología de estudio*, cit., pp. 369-382; Dávila, Naya, Zabaleta, *Internados religiosos: marketing del espacio a través de las memorias escolares*, cit., pp. 183-207.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Dávila, Rodríguez, Arpal, *Guía temática y bibliografía para la investigación de historia de la educación en el País Vasco*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Although the yearbooks and interviews are in Spanish, the direct quotes have been translated into English to exemplify what we are saying.

circumstances of zeal and perseverance in the educational work are present, as witnessed by the.... Religious activity of the students in the pious Congregations in particular»<sup>45</sup>. This, together with the number of pages, images and references devoted to these activities in the yearbooks published by these schools, is a reflection of the importance of these activities for the schools run by various religious orders and congregations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Spain. Moreover, the same document mentions and describes various specific activities of this type which took place during this period in the schools we are concerned about, to which, moreover, it attributes the merit of the religiosity of the students we have just mentioned: «the Magazine has spread throughout the five continents the high spiritual level reached through... the Eucharistic Crusade, Catholic Action, Catechism, the solemn and fervent 1<sup>st</sup> Communions»<sup>46</sup>.

However, if these fragments exemplify anything, they exemplify the importance given to these activities by the school, which, as we have seen in almost all the interviews, does not coincide with the importance given to them by the former students. They, for example, mention non-faith-based motives for such participation, such as, wanting to please the teachers:

*Interviewer:* And, was the Marian Congregation compulsory or optional?

*Participant 4:* The congregations were voluntary. All three. Both the Infant Jesus, the Eucharistic Crusade and the Marian Congregation.

*Interviewer:* Weren't all the students members of the congregation? Because in other schools we have seen that they were voluntary, but all the students were sodalists.

*Participant 4:* No, no, no... let's see, there were a lot of people who, in order to please the teachers, would sign up for whatever came up...<sup>47</sup>.

And certainly most of their testimonies do not attest to the supposed fervour and faith of the student body that the school boasts about:

The flowers month... we painted. Every day it was our turn to paint a flower on the blackboard, we went to the chapel for five minutes, which felt like a kick in the ass because it was five minutes less for playing football...<sup>48</sup>.

And although, both the yearbooks and various former students interviewed agreed that the participation in extracurricular activities (sports, artistic-cultural, and so on) in general and in religious activities in particular was voluntary, there are testimonies that cast doubt on the voluntariness of this participation, insinuating that they could not refuse it:

*Participant 5:* Escolanía meant that you missed break time because you had to go to rehearsal. So what I was looking forward to was going to recess and not rehearsing, of course, so I got myself kicked out,

<sup>45</sup> «Yearbook of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School», Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid, 1951-1952, pp. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> «Yearbook of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School», Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid, 1951-1952, pp. 14-16.

<sup>47</sup> Participant 4. Former student of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid.

<sup>48</sup> Participant 6. Former student of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid.



after four years, I... the priest of... Brother Velasco, that's what Julián Velasco was called, they got in between... when someone sounded bad, he got in and listened. And then one day, when I didn't feel like continuing with the choir, I started to sing... out of tune (laughs) and I got "Get out". And that's when they kicked me out.

*Interviewer:* So you couldn't leave voluntarily? You had to get yourself kicked out?

*Participant 5:* No doubt about it<sup>49</sup>.

*Interviewer:* Now that you mention the games room, in the yearbooks it says that it was an initiative of the Marian Congregation and that you could enter with a congregation card. If you weren't congregants, you couldn't enter?

*Participant 2:* Was there anyone who was not a congregant? (Participant 1 and 3 laugh) I am not aware of that....

*Interviewer:* The Marian Congregation is classified as a voluntary, optional, non-compulsory activity, but from what you say it seems that you were all congregants?

*Participant 2:* I don't know of anyone who would have refused<sup>50</sup>.

Another noteworthy question concerns the reason for the choice of the school by the families of its students. While the yearbooks – as well as the commemorative books – convey a vision of the families' confidence in the Brothers' mission, as if it were a question of choosing a specific educational project:

We had finished BUP in another Lasalian Centre in the province which did not have COU, and we had to choose between several possibilities.... A few of us decided – despite the early mornings and the daily commute – to enrol in this school... above all, because of its religious character<sup>51</sup>.

In the interviews we have seen reasons far removed from it, more related to location among others: «Because it was close to home»<sup>52</sup>.

*Interviewer:* What reasons do you think the families of the students at that time might have had for choosing La Salle as their school? Not in your particular case, many of you have told me that it was because of the location, because you lived 5 minutes away, but...

*Participant 2:* I think that the main reason was proximity, because at that time transport had serious problems, and proximity, and if you are at the Hernani tramway junction and the mole... and on top of that the school had two buses, which are the ones that people from the centre of...

*Interviewer:* Don't you think it was because of religious reasons, that your parents said I...?

*Participant 3:* No, not at that time, because religion was present in everything and in all areas of life, so no, no... that problem didn't exist...

*Participant 2:* At that time there was no distinction or different way of thinking.

*Interviewer:* I mean, no, they didn't say "let's take him because we are religious and we want our son"...

*Participant 3:* No, no, no<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Participant 5. Former student of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, Lasalian Brothers, Valladolid.

<sup>50</sup> Participants 1, 2 and 3. Former students of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.

<sup>51</sup> Garitano e Igarza, *La Salle, una presencia: medio siglo de servicio en San Sebastián (1946-1996)*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Participant 2. Former student of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.

<sup>53</sup> Participants 1, 2 and 3. Former students of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.



Finally, the yearbooks provide numerous references to multiple forms of rewarding students (award ceremonies, honour rolls in yearbooks, good behaviour vouchers redeemable for discipline walks, weekly prizes together with report cards, and so on) as a strategy to stimulate certain activities and/or attitudes, such as getting good grades. The students, moreover, in the interviews told us about all of them, so there is a high degree of similarity in the account given in the yearbooks in relation to the prizes and the former students' memories of them.

*Participant 3:* For us, every week, I don't know if it was on Fridays or Saturdays... they gave us the grades.

*Participant 1:* Yes, every week.

*Participant 3:* And then according to the grades you were lined up...

*Participant 2:* In order of grades.

*Participant 3:* First the ones with the best marks and the last one with the worst...

*Participant 1:* They took the report cards to the teacher's desk. The teacher, at the end of the class, the Brother would read: "Peter, so many points..." and so everyone in line... from the teacher's desk to the end in order of marks... and the first ten were given – we were given – a ZARA liquorice bar<sup>54</sup>.

The first discipline walks. Despite the difficulty of completing the 60 vouchers, the classes contrived to invent reasons and merits<sup>55</sup>.

«TABLE OF HONOUR» (with the names, surnames and photographs of the distinguished students)<sup>56</sup>.

However, the yearbooks omit the other side of the coin. That is to say, they do not mention the disciplinary measures aimed at the opposite, at punishing those behaviours and/or activities that they want to make disappear. Nevertheless, despite the fact that we did not find any references to punishment in the yearbooks, the former students told us about it in each of the interviews we conducted. But, given the function of these documents, it is not surprising that it is not something that schools want to be remembered for, nor is it something that could be a publicity stunt, so the fact that the yearbooks do not include stories and/or images of school punishment is not surprising.

However, the commemorative book of the fiftieth anniversary of the school in question includes references to both strategies, rewards and punishments, explaining the reasons for their use and their disappearance:

In other times, they had the aim (and they certainly achieved it!) of cultivating and rewarding the schoolchildren's sense of duty and solidarity, and stimulating compliance with the internal regulations (more demanding than the current ones), in matters of punctuality, silence in the general movements of entrances and exits, and so on, punishing infractions and rewarding their observance with vouchers<sup>57</sup>.

The supposed – or real! – psycho-pedagogical advances led to the suppression of stimuli of a comparative nature between students in the same class or classes of the same year: places in weekly, termly and final

<sup>54</sup> Participants 1, 2 and 3. Former students of La Salle School, Lasalian Brothers, Donostia-San Sebastián.

<sup>55</sup> «Yearbook of La Salle School», Lasalian Brothers, San Sebastián, 1954-1955, 2<sup>nd</sup> term, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> «Yearbook of La Salle School», Lasalian Brothers, San Sebastián, 1955-1956, 1<sup>st</sup> term, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

marks; diplomas, in order of the marks achieved in the year; knowledge competitions in the various subjects... The aim of such suppressions was to avoid rivalries between students and the rise of some and the fall of others, taking into account, almost exclusively, their intellectual capacity. Of course, application and behaviour also played a role!<sup>58</sup>.

However, when referring to possible punishments, or what is the same, to the typology of punishments, they do not include physical punishment, mentioning only copying, or retentions in class outside school hours, unlike the former students interviewed who do:

Long copying or repetition of a sentence or interminable “potencies”, or retentions in class after the established timetable... were once commonplace; now all this has become much milder, just as prizes are rare.... The figure of the Prefect of discipline has disappeared...<sup>59</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

Given this evidence, it is clear that the account offered by the yearbooks is conditioned by the interests of the school, so that there is a clear bias due to the authors and the function they fulfil. However, the fact that this documentary source allows to study the history of school representation that this type of school has tried to disseminate, is reason enough to incorporate these documents into the field of the History of Education.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

# The Recovered Memory of the Students of Bordeaux

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## *Introduction*

The definition we have of memory is first of all the fact of storing data in our brain to be used again for learning purposes, but there are other meanings. Memory is linked to a whole range of uses, for example the memory that an individual, a community or a people may have retained of their past or of an event linked to that past. The past is often seen through a particular prism and therefore distorted, so that the term memory can be used in the plural.

In the world of education, there are several types of memory: that of the headmaster, the teacher, the pupil, the pupils' parents or the technical employees, and there is another memory, that of the war memorials, which shows the extent to which the teachers of the Third Republic have paid a heavy tribute to the Republic. The collection of this memory can take various forms: interviews, correspondence, private writings. Whether provoked or not, there are several ways of collecting it, just as there are several ways of having recourse to it.

A multitude of historians and philosophers from Pierre Nora to Paul Ricoeur and Marcel Gauchet have been interested in memorial questions in France. Many of them, while working on the French Revolution, the Shoah, the Algerian War and the slave trade, have tackled the question of the «suffering memories»<sup>1</sup>, but as far as the history of education is concerned, this question of memory or memories of the school is still fairly recent. In France, Jacques Ozouf was a pioneer in the 1950s when he carried out a major survey of the teachers of the Third Republic. His main objective was not to forget the trajectories, behaviour and ways of thinking of the «black hussars of the Republic»<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Expression used by C. Liauzu, *Mémoires souffrantes de la guerre d'Algérie*, «L'Histoire», n. 260, December 2001, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Expression by Charles Péguy in Charles Péguy, *L'Argent*, published by *Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, 1912 and 1913, where he writes: «Our young masters were as beautiful as black hussars. Slender; severe; strapped. Serious, and a little trembling from their precocious, sudden omnipotence. Long black trousers, but, I think, with a purple border. Purple is not only the colour of bishops, it is also the colour of primary education. A black waistcoat. A long black frock coat, straight and drooping, but with two crosses of purple palms on the lapels. A flat, black cap, but a cross of purple palms above the forehead. This civilian uniform was a kind of military uniform, even more severe, even more military, being a civic uniform. Something, I think, like the famous Cadre Noir of Saumur. There is nothing like a beautiful black uniform among military uniforms. It's the line

Using this model, Gérard Vincent, greatly influenced by Bourdieu and the new current of sociohistory, launched a survey of high school students before and after 1968. More recently, attempts have been made to see how the educational past can be reconstructed with the help of private writings<sup>3</sup>. There are still a multitude of sources that have yet to be exploited, and the student association newspapers are among them. Preserved by the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (French National Library), they are particularly interesting in Bordeaux for the period 1880 to 1930. But what can the historian gain from these small daily student newspapers, which were not always worth preserving? In what way do they constitute an object of memory today? To answer this question, we will see that they are a source that reveals all the ways of life of a society, then we will try to identify the need and the objectives of writing and we will then examine how the historian can use these traces of the past.

## 1. *The diaries of a community...*

### 1.1 *The student press in Bordeaux under the Third Republic*

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period when the press was very important in all its forms<sup>4</sup>. While national and regional titles were expanding rapidly, the student press was developing rapidly and was read by everyone: teachers and their students, the general public, men and women. It is supported by the university, advertising, patrons and appeals to different currents of thought depending on ideological or religious affiliation. Laurence Corroy has shown the interest of this source, which she still finds underused and which nevertheless allows the student to speak by means of «sociability networks, relations with the adult press»<sup>5</sup>. Thus, at that time in Bordeaux, there was a magazine for Catholic students<sup>6</sup>, «La Gazette des Escholiers», which appeared from 1930 to 1948, and which provided information from the French Federation of Catholic Students as well as more local information, concerning, for example, the remit and influence of the new parish priest of Léognan. It also mentions new artistic trends such as Ray Ventura and hot jazz<sup>7</sup>. There is also «L'Escholier», a journal of the general association of Bordeaux

itself. And the severity. Worn by those kids who were really the children of the Republic. By these young hussars of the Republic. By these infants of the Republic. By these black hussars of severity. I think I said that they were very old. They were at least fifteen years old».

<sup>3</sup> P. Marchand, *Donnez-moi des nouvelles. Collèges et collégiens à travers les correspondances familiales, 1767-1787*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion and Archives Départementales du Nord, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> J.-C. Caron, *Une approche de la sociabilité de la jeunesse: la presse étudiante à Paris (1829-1850)*, «Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle», n. 8, 1992, <http://journals.openedition.org/rh19/63>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rh19.63> (last access : 15.02.2023).

<sup>5</sup> L. Corroy, *Une presse méconnue: la presse étudiante au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, «Semen: revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours», n. 25, 2008, <http://journals.openedition.org/semen/8140> (last access: 14.11.2022).

<sup>6</sup> It was published by the *Association catholique des étudiants de l'Université de Bordeaux*.

<sup>7</sup> «La Gazette des Escholiers: [puis grand organe estudiantin...], 1<sup>st</sup> January 1932, pp. 1-8.

students which appeared from 1892 to 1949. The use of the term is far from unique, as it exists for example in Limoges with «L'Escholier du Limousin», which was published from 1934 to 1965 throughout the region<sup>8</sup>. «Escholier» then appears to be a generic term, circulating from one university to another. At the time, students seemed to be very preoccupied with their annual ball. To this must be added «Bordeaux-Étudiant», the monthly organ of the Bordeaux students' association, which was published between 1921 and 1928<sup>9</sup>, along with an older bulletin: «L'Écho des Écoles: journal hebdomadaire illustré juridique, médical, littéraire et scientifique: organe des étudiants de l'Université de Bordeaux», published from 1894-1901<sup>10</sup>.

All these titles, which sometimes intersect with one another and were not necessarily published at the same time, cover the period 1892-1949 and accompany the university revival. From the Second Empire onwards, a current of thought developed which aimed to reform the university<sup>11</sup>. This state of mind, which permeated largely through the university, led to its transformation in 1901. Indeed, between 1885 and 1901, under the impetus of Jules Ferry, the Sorbonne was rebuilt. The new buildings were inaugurated on the occasion of the 1889 Universal Exhibition<sup>12</sup>. This was also the case in the provinces. The University of Bordeaux was caught up in a whirlwind of construction that began with the building of schools and lycées. In the space of a decade, from 1875 to 1885, at the time when the Republic was asserting itself, we witnessed the triumph of the university. In 1875, Bordeaux was chosen by the State to become the seat of a complete university (law, literature, theology, sciences, medicine, pharmacy). In 1880, the construction of the building for the faculties of theology, literature and science and the faculties of medicine and pharmacy began. These two «faculty buildings» were inaugurated in 1886 and 1888, with an extension in 1902<sup>13</sup>. It is therefore not surprising to see these journals being established in the 1890s. Beyond that, it was in this particular context that this student press was published, revealing a real sociability.

This student press is widely supported: by honorary members, the minister and the deans of the faculties, associated with great skill, benefactor members, the Bordeaux city council, the General Council of the Gironde, Lot-et-Garonne, Landes, Basses-Pyrénées, the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce, but also Gustave Gounouilhou, the director of the «La Petite Gironde». Then there were the honorary members, all the teachers or former students or shopkeepers of the town such as the photographer Panajou<sup>14</sup>. The list

<sup>8</sup> The Limousin Schoolboy, official organ of the General Association of Students.

<sup>9</sup> The Bordeaux Student, organ [then monthly] of the General Association of Students.

<sup>10</sup> The Echo of Schools: a weekly illustrated legal, medical, literary and scientific journal: the organ of the students of the University of Bordeaux.

<sup>11</sup> G. Weisz, *Le corps professoral de l'enseignement supérieur et l'idéologie de la réforme universitaire en France, 1860-1885*, «Revue Française de Sociologie», vol. 18, n. 2, 1977, pp. 201-232.

<sup>12</sup> *La nouvelle Sorbonne*, in D. Alexandre-Bidon, M.-M. Compère, Y. Gaulipeau, J. Verger, G. Bodé, P. Ferté, P. Marchand (edd.), *Le patrimoine de l'éducation nationale*, Charenton-le-Pont, Éditions FLOHIC, 1999, p. 673.

<sup>13</sup> M. Figeac-Monthus, *Bordeaux 1880: des facultés dans la ville*, in M. Figeac-Monthus (ed.), *L'Université de Bordeaux, des lieux, des objets, des savoirs*, La Crèche, La Geste, 2022, pp. 22-26.

<sup>14</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiant», n. 20, August 1926, pp. 5-7.

is long, but it is indicative of the interest that the population of a whole city shows for its university.

## 1.2 *Student sociability*

She began by describing the teachers: Mr. Despagnet, Professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law<sup>15</sup>, Mr. Perez, Professor of Zoology at the Faculty of Sciences<sup>16</sup>, Mr. Morache, Professor of Legal Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine<sup>17</sup>, Mr. Gayon, Professor of Organic Chemistry at the Faculty of Sciences<sup>18</sup>. Next to it, there is also that of Doctor Tissier who founded the Gironde league of physical education in Bordeaux<sup>19</sup>. The portrait of the teacher, in which his knowledge is highlighted, is accompanied by a caricature that occupies the front page of the newspaper. Signed with the name of the newspaper's director, Gabriel Roques, they are accompanied by an emblematic phrase. Thus, for Jean Perez: «a frog is worth the most charming flower to him»<sup>20</sup> or for Doctor Tissier «a man with strong biceps»<sup>21</sup>. Gabriel Roques was not a student but a well-known caricaturist in Bordeaux. In 1889 he created an illustrated republican weekly, «Le Martinet», and from 1892 onwards he mocked Bordeaux notables in «Silhouettes Bordelaises». On the other hand, the writing of articles for «L'Écho des Écoles» was done by students.

The articles, even if they can sometimes be critical, always remain very respectful of the teaching world and knowledge. Thus, at the launch of the first issue of «L'Écho des Écoles», one can read:

To our revered masters.

To the Professors of the University of Bordeaux.

As students, we thought, dear Masters, that you would welcome the new organ of the students of this University, which your science and your devotion have made one of the first in France. We hope that you will not refuse «L'Écho des Écoles» your moral support, which is so valuable to us that without it we would not be far from abandoning our task at its beginning<sup>22</sup>.

We have here a deep respect for the teaching world by the students. Beyond this text and these caricatures we find an osmosis between students and teachers and a deep respect for knowledge. Thus, the small notes in the margin are significant of this state of mind:

<sup>15</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 20, 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 7, 18 December 1892, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 28, 14 May 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 32, 11 June 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 29, 21 May 1893, pp. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 7, 18 December 1892, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 29, 21 May 1893, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 1, 6 November 1892, p. 2.

The students of Bordeaux were happy to learn that two of their most beloved teachers. M. Imbart de Latour and M. Bourciez have been appointed: the first, holder of the chair of history of the Middle Ages which has just been created at the Faculty of Letters of Bordeaux; and the second, Professor of languages and literature of the South-West at the same Faculty. «L'Écho des Écoles» would like to ask these two professors, who have been friends of his since the beginning, to receive its most sincere congratulations<sup>23</sup>.

Students such as René Normand are also mentioned in this student press:

It is with the deepest amazement that we learned on Monday of the very serious condition of our comrade Normand. A few students (a very small number) knew that he was ill: none of them suspected the seriousness of the illness. There was hardly any talk of malignant fever, intermittent fever, malaria, or any other kind of temporary illness. And suddenly a terrifying dispatch arrived, telling us of the desperate state of our poor comrade! Neither the most eager help, nor the heroic vigils of all those around him could pull him out of the typhoid fever, whose grip was so strong and so cruel, that for twenty-one days he lay unconscious in his bed of pain<sup>24</sup>.

This text is very interesting because it shows the precariousness of students at that time. Indeed, typhoid is caused by a bacterium from contaminated food or water, so we can imagine that this student was living in poor conditions and that the hygiene, due to lack of financial means, could leave something to be desired in the place where he was living.

Alongside «L'Écho des Écoles», a single issue of a collection of artistic works was published at the time of the student ball, usually in January<sup>25</sup>, containing poems, es-

BAL DES ÉTUDIANTS	
DE 1893	
Voici les résultats du bal de cette année, qui ont dépassé de beaucoup ceux des années précédentes :	
Recettes .....	F. 24,035 45
Dépenses .....	9,521 50
Bénéfice net .....	11,513 95
Ces bénéfices ont été ainsi répartis :	
Aux hospices : Droit des pauvres, 1,570 fr. 10 ; Hôpital St-André, 200 fr. ; Hôpital des Enfants, 200 fr ...	1,970 10
A la Société des auteurs et compositeurs .....	785 05
A la caisse des artistes .....	2,000 »
A l'Association générale des étudiants .....	500 »
A la caisse de réserve du bal .....	500 »
Au bureau de bienfaisance .....	400 »
Au bureau de mendicité .....	200 »
Aux enfants abandonnés de la Gironde .....	200 »
A la société protectrice de l'enfance .....	200 »
A l'Orphelinat de Gradignan .....	200 »
A l'Œuvre des prisonniers libérés .....	200 »
A l'Office central de charité .....	150 »
A la Crèche de La Bastide .....	150 »
Aux Ambulances urbaines .....	150 »
Au Sanatorium d'Arcachon .....	150 »
A l'Œuvre des malades pauvres .....	150 »
A la Maison de santé protestante .....	150 »
Aux Œuvres de bienfaisance israélites .....	150 »
Au Fourneau de charité du 7 <sup>e</sup> canton .....	150 »
A la Société de secours aux blessés militaires .....	100 »
A la Société de de sauvetage du Sud-Ouest .....	100 »
Au Souvenir français .....	100 »
A l'Œuvre des bains à bon marché .....	100 »
Aux Fourneaux économiques ouvriers .....	100 »
Aux Sourdes-Muettes .....	100 »
Aux Ecoles françaises en Egypte .....	100 »
A la Fédération des Sociétés de patronage .....	100 »
A la Société de patronage des Chartrons .....	100 »
Au patronage des Ecoles du Mulet et Villeneuve .....	100 »
Au patronage des Ecoles des 4 <sup>e</sup> et 5 <sup>e</sup> cantons .....	100 »
Au patronage de l'Ecole de la rue de Talence .....	100 »
A la Crèche de Saint-Michel-Saint-Eloi .....	100 »
A l'Hospice du Tondu .....	100 »
Au Refuge de Nazareth .....	100 »
A l'Orphelinat de St-Joseph .....	100 »
A la Société de secours mutuels des Alsaciens-Lorrains .....	100 »
A l'Œuvre des jeunes filles employées dans le commerce .....	100 »
A la Société de secours mutuels Sainte-Anne-Saint-Michel .....	100 »
A de nombreuses familles nécessiteuses .....	1,058 80
TOTAL .....	F. 11,513 95
Le Président du Comité du Bal, Raoul Derouy.	

Fig. 1. Receipts and expenses of the student ball in 1893 («L'Écho des Écoles», n. 24, 16 April 1893, p. 2)

<sup>23</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 29, 21 May 1893, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 46, 7 December 1893, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> «L'Escholier», 16 January 1892.



says, stories, fables, diary extracts and artistic drawings, many of which remained anonymous. The ball is indeed at the heart of this student sociability which is very present in the city. It was organised thanks to the sale of «L'Escholier de Bordeaux», but also to the payment of entrance fees and the purchase of drinks... funds collected by the organisers and redistributed. The 1893 accounts are significant in this respect, as they show the extent of the redistributions to various societies or associations such as the *Maison de santé des malades pauvres* (Health Centre for the Sick and Poor) and to the charitable associations of the three main religions in Bordeaux (Judaism, Protestantism and Catholicism)<sup>26</sup>. In this way, the students learn the principles of solidarity.

## 2. ... which reflect a society...

### 2.1 *Political issues and commitments*

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these student newspapers suggest either a politicisation or a Catholic commitment, depending on the sensibility. The students were imbued with a spirit of solidarity. Thus, in 1894, they organised a festival of charity in honour of Joan of Arc with the support of all the authorities: the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux, the General Commander-in-Chief of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army, the First President of the Court of Appeal, the Prefect of Gironde, the Mayor of Bordeaux, the Rector of the Academy. The objective is as follows:

On Sunday 6 May at 2 a.m., a great historical Cavalcade will run through the main streets of Bordeaux. The Festivities Committee has charged two delegates with checking the orders for material placed in Paris by M. Maxime, the contractor of the Cavalcade. Our comrades Kahn and Périer have brought back from Paris a whole collection of models relating to the execution of the planned floats, as well as the models of historical costumes which will appear in the Cavalcade<sup>27</sup>.

Through the cavalcade, the student youth is put on display in the city. While showing respect for the established order, it contributes to building an identity in the city, while revealing, through charity, a spirit of generosity and solidarity. They learn about commitment and collective life through festive games. These young people also expressed themselves through drawings, as shown on the cover by Georges de Sonnevill in 1907<sup>28</sup>. This student at the Faculty of Law from 1906 to 1909 was already known for his talent as a caricaturist. His activity as a painter, draughtsman and engraver continued until 1958.

This student solidarity was expressed in the aftermath of the First World War, in a context of gathering and European solidarity between students from Bordeaux, France and abroad. Thus, in 1924, young people from Bordeaux took part in the second congress

<sup>26</sup> «L'Escholier», 16 April 1893.

<sup>27</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 66, 18 April 1894, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> «L'Escholier», 1908, cover.

of the international student confederation held in Warsaw. In the atmosphere of the Roaring Twenties, when people were trying to forget the atrocities of the war, the scars of which were still visible in the streets, the objective was clear:

From 7 to 18 September, more than 300 students representing 21 nations met first in Warsaw and then in Krakow to discuss their interests, to develop intellectual relations between various countries, and finally to continue the world-wide work of student solidarity undertaken in the aftermath of the war<sup>29</sup>.

At that time, university cooperation and student exchanges were envisaged, including with Germany, which was still the university model in Europe at the time. In order to understand each other, some advocated the use of Esperanto<sup>30</sup>, a universal language created in 1887 by a Polish ophthalmologist.

This spirit of solidarity and the need for universality is reflected in the acceptance of the increase in tuition fees in 1926:

On the first of the year everyone gets a New Year's gift; the students got theirs. Indeed, when we went to take our second enrolment of the year, we learned with some astonishment that we had to pay twice as much as we were paying before.

The first movement of the students was a movement, I will not say of revolt, but at least of bad temper; then as the students, in spite of what some people think, are well-balanced and wise young people, they understood that in the present situation it was the duty of all Frenchmen to make sacrifices<sup>31</sup>.

Politicisation was initially manifested by a sort of fascination for some, and rejection for others, for socialism<sup>32</sup>. Although the Catholic students remained very respectful of the established order, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bordeaux students exchanged with the very active students of Geneva. Both boys and girls were represented. They also took part in the Congress of Socialist Students where French students gave their



Fig. 2. Cover page of «L'Escholier» (1908) signed by Georges Sonnevillle

<sup>29</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 1, November 1924, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 39, July 1928, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 13, January 1926, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> J.-C. Caron, *Jeunes élites et processus de politisation. Le rôle des étudiants dans la France de notables*, in F. Attal et alii (edd.), *Les universités en Europe du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours. Espaces, modèles et fonctions*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021, pp. 63-75.

opinions<sup>33</sup> particularly on the question of the integration of women into the university, work and more generally society.

## 2.2 *The women's issue*

One of the key issues that appear in these student newspapers is that of female students in society. In most issues, in the cartoons, female students are seen as an object of male desire. Even though some of the drawings or articles should be used with caution as humour often appears to convey certain representations, the female student is often presented as an object of desire that should contribute to the affirmation of male sexuality<sup>34</sup>. The case of Russian female students is quite emblematic in this respect:

If bullying is odious when it is directed at young men, who can at least console themselves with the secret thought of later reprisals, it is even more odious when their victims are young girls.

I would like to say a word, in this connection, about the pitiful situation of the female students of our Faculties, and especially of the Russian students who attend the Medical School.

For them, the vexations do not last only for a few days; they last from one end of the year to the other. [...]

The student, for him, is the companion of the brewery and of the room which serves to spend his leisure hours cheerfully. She is the first mistress that one takes, that one leaves, that one passes on to one's friends, with whom one celebrates [...]

Here she is, the classic student, the one who doesn't study.

But a student who studies, who attends classes, who prepares for her exams, who does not go to breweries, who lives alone with other girls like her, who is an intern, who wants to be a doctor, remains an enigma for most students<sup>35</sup>.

This must of course be seen in the context of the time when, according to a report dating from 1894<sup>36</sup>, there were only 343 women out of 11.940 students at the University of Paris, 171 French and 172 foreign. Thus, female students represent barely 2.87% and French women only 1.43%. The questions students are asking are interesting and also concern female teachers:

In the last few days, a report on higher education has been published for the year just ended. It is some thirty years since women first ventured into lecture halls and lecture theatres in France. First of all, it is worth noting that in France this change in customs and morals was accomplished, by a

<sup>33</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 50, 4 January 1894, pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> On these issues see Amélie Puche's thesis, *Les femmes à la conquête de l'université (1870-1940). Les implications sociales et universitaires de la poursuite du cursus scolaire dans l'enseignement supérieur par les femmes sous la Troisième République*, under the direction of Jean-François Condette, Université d'Artois, École doctorale Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, Lille-Nord de France, laboratoire CREHS (EA 4027), 2020.

<sup>35</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 51, 11 January 1894, pp. 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 59, 8 March 1894, p. 6.

rather rare phenomenon, without the intervention of the legislator. It took a law to create girls' lycées and collèges; but in higher education, courses are public<sup>37</sup>.

Cartoons of the inter-war period were often ambiguous about the position of female students at university, as shown by the one published in 1926 in the «Escholier de Bordeaux».

The University of Bordeaux is assimilated here to Paradise, Adam and Eve represent the male and female student. They are naked because they have no knowledge. In spite of this common state, their destiny is different. If the male student's journey is a long, quiet river where it is enough to fish for knowledge, the female student's one is more complicated. She arrives at university as an emancipated woman, recognisable here by her boyish haircut and androgynous body. She then finds herself obliged to sit in front of the tree of knowledge and to allow herself, although unwillingly, to be encircled

by a snake with the caricatured face of a professor. This drawing, which is intended to be critical, denounces the image that the bourgeois society of the time may have of the student who abandons her family and her destiny as a woman, for studies that are deemed superfluous. This rare independence leads one to believe that her virtue and success can only be dubious. This drawing clearly shows that the place of women at the University of Bordeaux, as elsewhere in France, is not self-evident and still remains marginal in the 1920s, remaining for many a subject of mockery. Of course, this drawing must be placed in the context of the Roaring Twenties, which were characterised by a desire for female emancipation. Beyond that, we notice that students used both writing and drawing to express themselves.

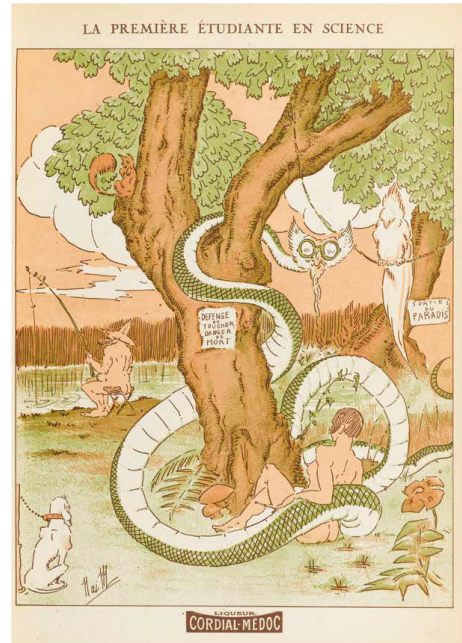


Fig. 3. Caricature of the first female Science student at the University of Bordeaux («L'Escholier», 1926)

<sup>37</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 59, 1 March 1894, supplement, p. 6.

### 3. ... *using a variety of means.*

#### 3.1 *The place of writing and the role of caricatures*

These journals, which are only a few pages long and appear fairly regularly, are characterised first and foremost by a way of writing. Poems, meeting reports, stories, philosophical, scientific, historical or literary reflections attest to a taste for writing, whether by lawyers, doctors or scientists.

Intellectual preoccupations are essential, they are present in all the Bordeaux journals at all times, and are revealing of the debates which could exist. The jurist will evoke «The hereditary seizure and its history»<sup>38</sup>, the «right to punish»<sup>39</sup>, the chemist «Chemistry and falsifications» with the example of chicory<sup>40</sup>. The literati tried their hand at writing, and presented their poetry, stories and essays. They also contacted the most popular authors of their time, such as Jean Balde, a writer from Bordeaux who was close to Jean Cocteau and François Mauriac and published under a male pseudonym. The students admired her. Thus, the first issue of «Bordeaux-Étudiants» in November 1924 reads:

Letters of encouragement.

We asked Mrs Jean Balde to take an interest in our Review. Our appeals did not go unheard, and, unworthy as we are of such an honour, the great writer generously gave us his support. We publish here the few lines by which the author of the *Vigne et la Maison*, the Chantre de la Gironde, shows us his precious sympathy; and we are happy to offer one of his poems to the admiration of our readers<sup>41</sup>.

The students, proud of the writer's response, did not hesitate to publish not only the poem but also the accompanying letter, which also showed that they all felt, beyond the genre, that they belonged to one and the same university community, and this is the generational support that prevails:

Sir,

I am very touched by your charming letter. The mark of sympathy given to me by your Association touches me all the more because I myself was enrolled for several years as a student at the Faculty of Letters of Bordeaux. I am therefore happy to know that enthusiasm and ardour continue to reign around Montaigne's sarcophagus in the wide and solemn hallway, which on certain days resembles a hive of life.

I wish your magazine a lot of friendship. It is a happy time when young people gather in this way, around the paper they have created, of which they are the animators, in a warm atmosphere of work and great hopes...<sup>42</sup>.

Some of them have a real talent for writing, like the law student who remembers the love affair he had with a young blonde girl who ended up preferring an older and,

<sup>38</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 18, 5 March 1893, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 20, 19 March 1893, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiants», n. 1, November 1924, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

above all, richer man. The theme of adulterous love, neglected love, impossible love, often appears in the student press. In the ballad *Réminiscence*, René d'Argy combines talent with humour and offers his poem to one of his classmates:

Spring was just beginning,  
From the gentle breeze, the breath  
Caressed your fine golden hair  
Where I had, from that beautiful morning,  
Plunged my two hands, wound of intoxication.  
Do you remember, blonde mistress?

Beautiful sunshine, countryside,  
Made a land of milk and honey,  
We were carefree and cheerful,  
Never tired, never weary,  
Giving caress for caress.  
Do you remember it, mistress?

You used to wear earrings,  
Made of two ruddy cherries,  
A rose adorned your hair,  
And in the blue of your big eyes,  
I read all your tenderness.  
Do you remember, blonde mistress?

Soon, in your burning fever,  
You held your lip to my lip,  
And, in our love for each other,  
Crazy with desire, crazy with happiness,  
We didn't care about wealth.  
Do you remember, blonde mistress?

Of an old monk, with cheerful features,  
You preferred the louis to me...  
How sad you must be...  
If you remember, blonde mistress?<sup>43</sup>

In 1930, the Catholic students organised a major literary and artistic competition with a prize of 600 francs, which was no small sum for the time<sup>44</sup>.

At the same time, there is a wealth of advice, such as this conference of 30 November 1926, in which Professor Lagrange gives advice on how to work<sup>45</sup>, and proposals for courses or assistance between students.

<sup>43</sup> «L'Écho des Écoles», n. 22, 2 April 1893, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> «La Gazette des Escholiers», n. 1, November 1930, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> «Bordeaux-Étudiant», January 1927, p. 9.





Fig. 4. Caricature of the Law professors at the University of Bordeaux by Framel (*L'Escholier*, 1924)

The drawings are done by talented students who are true artists, Georges de Sonnevile, Gaston Marc, Jehan Chappert, René Gaillard, Framel, A.R. Bault, Gabriel Roques, Henri Achille Zo, others prefer to remain anonymous. Most of the time they gently mock their teachers, especially the jurists.

#### 4. *The importance of advertisements*

In order to exist, these student newspapers were obliged to use advertising: first of all, «Cordial Médoc», which accompanied many of the drawings by Escholier. This is a liqueur that appeared during the phylloxera crisis and was created by G.A. Jourde. The name «Cordial Médoc» accompanies all the drawings. This liqueur contains 15 different fruits, spices and herbs. It was very popular and appreciated at the time, as were the Laroussie specialties such as Amer Picon. In addition, there are at least four pages of

advertisements that allow the student associations to have income and to subsist. If these advertisements are not evocative of student memory, they are evocative of social practices. There are photographers: Panajou, who was installed in the Cours de l'Intendance and Cours Vital Carles, but also Tepereau, to whom we owe a lot of photographs from this period, and the art photographer Alfred Naza in Rue du Loup. The advertisement gives a significant place to a whole series of restaurants, such as the Tourny restaurant where the students' ball takes place, but also the Grand Café, an unavoidable meeting place for a youth that is both reasonable and tumultuous. The Palais de Flore with its dance parties, the Jardin du Louvre, cours de l'Intendance, and its orchestra. Creauzan and Soulard who sell equipment for doctors, surgeons and hospitals. The Griffon cycles at Chastan's on Duffour-Dubergier street. The Mollat bookshop located in the Bordeaux galleries and then in rue Vital Carles. All these companies had their own advertising space, showing the interest they had in the university and its students in the city.

These student newspapers, which are likely to contribute to a feeling of belonging to a university, make it possible to examine how they have worked, while being forgotten by the educational community today, to build an urban identity, that of the city of Bordeaux. Thus, these documents, which the governance of higher education establishments does not always see the point of preserving, make it possible to analyse phenomena and



understand them better. They constitute, in a way, the database of a collective memory. Beyond that, they provide a multitude of elements to the historian: information on the teachers who were at the genesis of the new University of Bordeaux in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, data on the daily life of students. They also allow a better understanding of the place of the student in the world of knowledge, a better grasp of the sociability and mental universe of the students as well as the role of their associations in the construction of a university of belonging. Let us not forget the importance of advertising, which helps to understand urban activity and contributes to the development of the identity of the city of Bordeaux. Reflecting political and societal issues, student newspapers are today testimonies of the past, but also of practices and mentalities. They are the recovered memory of a lost identity likely to help us build the university of tomorrow by the birth or rebirth of a feeling of belonging.



Fig. 5. Page of advertisements («L'Escholier», 1925)



# Notes on School Photographs as Material Objects and Social Objects

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The event of photography is never over. It can only be suspended, caught in the anticipation of the next encounter that will allow for its actualization: an encounter that might allow a certain spectator to remark on the excess or lack inscribed in the photograph so as to re-articulate every detail including those that some believe to be fixed in place by the glossy emulsion of the photograph.

(A. Azoulay, *Photography: The Ontological Question*<sup>1</sup>)

Can photography render the complexity of schooling in images? Is it enough to rely on the conventional genre of school photography, the result of an idealised and even ideological interpretation of the school? Who is responsible for the gaze cast on the school? Can we consider that only the photographers are the authors of the image, or can we also regard the commissioners as such? Furthermore, we may wonder whether it is more advisable, in order to ensure a good school photograph, to rely on great masters of photography, who can provide an original and even critical interpretation of the school. Or, as happened in the majority of cases attested in history, whether it is sufficient to rely on professional photographers, from the town or village, who with their honest and pandering documentary photography merely show the school, remaining faithful to a dated canon of interpretation.

These questions perhaps appear legitimate but not central, since the crux of the significance of school photography lies neither in the authorship of the photographer nor in the relationship with the commissioner, but elsewhere. First of all, one might be forgiven for thinking that the significance of school photography lies in the image and its documentary content. Despite being a conventional and repetitive figurative genre, certain meanings can be retrieved from the periphery of the image. According to a number of studies in visual anthropology, history of photography and Cultural Visual Studies, which can be ascribed to the milieu of the Material Turn and New Materiality, analysing these other meanings requires considering the photograph not only as a flat image that provides facts and visual evidence, but as a material picture. In other words, as a real material object, with the aim of investigating its relevance as a social object that participates in and influences human relations<sup>2</sup>. On the basis of these assumptions,

<sup>1</sup> A. Azoulay, *Photography. The Ontological Question*, «Mafte'akh», n. 2, 2011, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> A summary on the subject is offered by a leading author on studies on the materiality of photography: E. Edwards, *Photographs and the Practise of the History*, London-New York-Dublin, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 97-112.

broader lines of research have developed on photographic 'things', with the intention of scrutinising both their role in processes of identity and memory construction and their ability to crystallise emotions.

These studies thus converge in considering photographs as things, objects that matter to people in complex ways. Analysing these complexities challenges traditional methods of analysis conducted on photographs.

1. In the late 1990s, Nicholas Nixon, an undisputed figurehead of contemporary American photography for his work as a portraitist, and Robert Coles, a psychiatrist, teacher and writer, developed a photographic project to be carried out in three sixth-grade schools in the Boston (MA) area. These were the Tobin School, the Perkins School for the Blind and Boston Latin School. The outcome was an interesting photo-text resembling an exhibition catalogue<sup>3</sup>. It challenged the consolidated tradition of school photography, profoundly reinventing the genre. *School*, which avoids explicit reference to the three schools in its title in order to generalise on the subject, presents photographic portraits of the pupils together with texts that reproduce their testimonies or simply talk about them.

Nixon worked for an extended period in the school spaces, in close contact with the pupils. He was joined by his wife Bebe, armed with a tape recorder, and writers George Howe Colt and Coles. During this time, the pupils expressed and discussed their opinions on what it meant to be a student and on the educational institution, and had their portraits taken. This artistic and psychological fieldwork, which involved the collaboration of the teachers, was intended to render «the complexity of schooling»<sup>4</sup> through a precise strategy. It involved combining observations on the present with reflections on the past, as well as different views of the school alongside different textual and figurative representations. The strategy was emphasised by the layout of the book, in which the oral testimonies of the pupils are given greater prominence by the photographic portraits and, at the same time, the significance of the photographs is enhanced by the testimonies.

It is a distinctive piece of work, not only because of the involvement of such an important photographer as Nixon, but also because this combination of textual and figurative evidence offers an original source for the history of the school, which is not usually found in archives. Moreover, what emerges in *School* is the explicit role of agent assigned to photography. For these pupils, photography was the means to bring about awareness of the self, the group, the school institution and the community. To crystallise all this into figurative forms. Photography played a key role in involving the pupils in the project during school hours. And, potentially, to involve them in future remembrance processes about their school past, at that moment of transition from childhood to adolescence. In other words, Nixon and the group worked to enhance photography's capacity to provide agency, using it as a predominantly social object, around which the

<sup>3</sup> R. Coles, N. Nixon, *School*, Boston, Bulfinch Press, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

actions of at least two people, who recognise it as having meaning, are determined: the object matters to them, it has value.

2. We can assert that photographs, as symbolic artefacts, can be analysed using Alfred Gell's theory of agency<sup>5</sup>. He recognises in artefacts a kind of intentionality that we can, indeed, also recognise in photographs. They function not only as simple two-dimensional images, which merely provide facts and visual evidence, but rather as material objects that involve the actants in the process of creating their meaning, through the acts of possession, touching, showing, keeping and even speaking<sup>6</sup>.

In Elizabeth Edwards' view, the materiality approach to photography involves the historian taking a vantage point and looking for those minimal, seemingly unimportant signs in the body of the photograph. When properly scrutinised together with the image, these signs are capable of revealing the history of its uses and meanings over time. To do so, it is necessary to subordinate the value attributed to the image with respect to the event it depicts (even in the case of an end-of-year group portrait) in order to explore the body of the photograph (with its cardboard, its various inscriptions, and its insertion and montage in a series or album). «Thinking materially» is essential when analysing photographs, because it «removes photographs from being simply “visual sources” to being complex material objects that work over time and space and that transcend content»<sup>7</sup>.

The agency of the photograph thus participates in and conditions the very process of meaning-making. This can be the result of simply looking at what is shown in the image and formulating even just a weak opinion (I like/dislike) or a quick decision (I will/won't linger on it). It should be remembered, however, that these actions are always based on relationships with the body of the photograph (even if it a digital image which is visible through electronic devices).

We could argue that, roughly speaking, the agency of photography comes into play in two different moments. The first is during the prelude to its production, before the *acte photographique*, as defined by Philippe Dubois<sup>8</sup>. Let us consider this in portraiture: the subject prepares to assume a pose (which is always a social pose) to become, as Roland Barthes has described, an object<sup>9</sup>. The second moment concerns photography as a picture, as it exists as a social object that transcends time, participates in different relationships between people and becomes the object of different interpretations.

If we now turn to the subject of school photography and the genre of official portraits, we might argue that pupils and teachers assume a conventional pose, suited to expressing the solemn moment intended to highlight the values of school, education, group, the inclusion of pupils and the levelling out of social differences. In these photographs, the

<sup>5</sup> A. Gell, *Art and Agency: an Anthropological Theory*, Oxford-New York, Clarendon Press, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> T. Campt, *Listening to Images*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, *Photographs and the Practise of the History*, cit., p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> F. Dubois, *L'acte photographique et autres essais*, Paris, Nathan, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on photography*, New York, Hill and Wang, 2010, pp. 11-15.

transformation of individuals from subjects into objects would resemble a broader process in which pupils are transformed into objects of the school and the state: like «report cards, they measure time dryly, picturing linear progress from one school year to the next»<sup>10</sup>.

3. In any case, in contrast to the traditional school photographs we all keep (individual posed portraits with school furniture and symbols of schooling and/or class portraits taken indoors or outdoors), Nixon's pictures are not conventional school photographs. These are usually assigned to professional photographers. It might be a specialist in architectural photography called upon to depict functional school spaces for certain purposes. (I am thinking, for example, of the photographs required of vocational schools during the Fascist period in Italy and their instrumental use in the rhetoric of the regime<sup>11</sup>). Or it might be a portraitist, accustomed to documenting weddings or other rites of social passage (as described in the volume on photography edited by Pierre Bourdieu as «a middle-brow Art»<sup>12</sup>). Over the course of a few hours, the photographer takes images of the school and its pupils, individually or in groups around one or more adults. The commissioners are the schools themselves, directly or indirectly. In any case, they influence the form of the official memory of school life to deliver to the families a photographic souvenir that is not exclusively private. Indeed, for families, school photographs fulfil a special role because the identity of the individual is validated by belonging to the identity of the given community.

Moreover, the cultural traits of the community are represented in the school photographs themselves. They belong to a conventional and repetitive figurative genre and are found in various Western and non-Western national contexts, albeit with variations. These concern furniture, teaching aids, clothing, ecc., or the way the images themselves are conceived and staged through the choice of settings and people's poses, as well as unintentional cultural signs: people's posture, gestures and the distance or proximity between their bodies.

Several studies of school history have focused attention on the cultural values represented in school photographs, analysing them as documents in which to discover relevant details (such as the design of teaching aids and furniture) and clues about the relationships between teachers and pupils. These studies therefore analyse photographs in their singularity. We could, however, argue that what all school photographs have in common is that they are instrumental in shaping the identity of communities. We must consider that school photographs are transferred out of the social space of the school and into private homes. As Richard Chalfen would say, they move from one symbolic

<sup>10</sup> M. Hirsh, L. Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time. Reframing difference*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, I. Zoppi, *Gli album fotografici dell'Archivio storico Indire. Memorie scolastiche negli anni Quaranta fra esposizioni e archiviazione*, «RSF. Rivista di studi di fotografia», n. 2, 2015, pp. 88-99.

<sup>12</sup> P. Bourdieu (ed.), *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990.

environment to another<sup>13</sup>. And in every symbolic environment, they promise memory and new meanings.

In a recent and important volume, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer have emphasised the need to consider school photographs not only as school records, but as broader historical documents of social and political life. This broadening of the historian's scope is therefore determined by the ability to analyse pictures as visual sources, endowed with specific characteristics. They suggest moving beyond the analysis of the timeless documentary value of images, which makes them «seemingly flat and opaque»<sup>14</sup>, to fully recover their ability to emotionally engage their interpreters. We could argue that feeling is one of the ways in which photographs exert their agency. When confronted with a photograph, emotional involvement is triggered by the formal aspects typical of photographic language, from which numerous identity processes of the self and of one's community related to memory processes take shape. We can thus argue that one of the merits of *School Photos in Liquid Time* was that it highlighted the importance of feeling in the understanding and study of historical school photographs.

The theme of feeling in photography was first addressed in a series of publications in early 2010. I am referring in particular to the volume edited by Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, which brought together a series of reflections on how the effect of feeling affects our experience and understanding of photography<sup>15</sup>. This new focus on feeling has prompted scholars to revisit areas of study, such as school photography and methodologies of analysis. These imply a transition from the analysis of the documentary aspect of an image, i.e. a logical analysis of its content at the pre-iconographic level (that classroom, those pupils, ecc.), to the scrutiny of the aspects related to emotion (and which concern identity and memory). This transition takes place through another intermediate step, in which the photograph is regarded as a material and social object, to be handled, to be kept close to the body, to the heart, to be shown off in frames or albums in the social spaces of the home, or through electronic devices. There has therefore been a shift from the elaboration of a meaning relative to the event in the fleeting moment that the photograph represents (more or less instantaneous) to the meanings that the photograph acquires over time as a material, pre-eminently social object.

While school photographs frame the space of the school and its actors, they also frame the value system of the educational institution. Indeed, they contain clues regarding the teachers' opinion of the school and the opinion of the children themselves. In these photographs, children often used to be portrayed as committed, studious, even thoughtful, in keeping with the role of photography in society during certain historical periods. It is a more recent habit, at least in Italy (over the last twenty years or so) to portray them in an informal pose, carefree and smiling. The photographer, together with the teachers, sets the scene by disguising the frontal pose and body rigidity, encouraging the pupils to express a more joyful (or more apparently joyful) concept of school. As Christina Kotchemidova

<sup>13</sup> R. Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> E. H. Brown, T. Phu (edd.), *Feeling photography*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.



wrote «the smile merits a critical communication analysis» because «Its widespread practice invites the Gramscian theory of “consent,” where individuals willingly subjugate themselves to ideologies when offered no alternatives»<sup>16</sup>. But whether serious or smiling, what were their real feelings? How, with the passing of time, will their opinions about themselves and the school be influenced by the format of the photographs?

This historiographical shift towards themes of feeling has enabled us to raise a number of other questions with regard to photographic objects. Among them, the main ones seem to me to be: which actors and what feelings are involved in the use of a school photograph? How does the photographic act legitimise a pupil's school experience, solemnising their pose as a child and pupil and projecting it into a future full of promise? How much do these promises influence the private retention of school photographs, or, more rarely, institutional retention?

In their study on the role of photography in the early years of schooling, Hirsch and Spitzer have pointed out that children envision a future «full of hope» at the moment of posing<sup>17</sup>. This is undoubtedly an important and poignant assertion, which should be taken into account. On solemn occasions, school photography stages the school space and the school value system to project it into the future. The two authors, criticising a reading of the image as a mere document, argue that this staging can reveal signs that at first glance are unsuspected, such as «Childhood vulnerability, the social integrationist effects of schooling, the process of creating community and group identity, the promise of a future»<sup>18</sup>.

The question arises as to whether or not the documentary value of the school photographs, along with the promise of the future, determines their fate in the archive. It is quite surprising to note that these photographs are not usually retained according to established practice by educational institutions<sup>19</sup>. Rather, they seem to be destined for private archives, where their evocative and emotional power seems to be enhanced by the context. However, their emotional functioning occurs even in the absence of a precise memory of the photograph itself, for instance where the names of the people portrayed are missing. This does not make them weakened documents. That is to say, photographs are rather weak documents, if considered from the perspective of Maurizio Ferraris' Documentality theory<sup>20</sup>, developed on the basis of Jacques Derrida's theory of inscription<sup>21</sup>, but they act – through the leverage of feeling – as powerful documents when involved in social acts.

<sup>16</sup> C. Kothemidova, *Why We Say “Cheese”: Producing the Smile in Snapshot Photography*, «Critical Studies in Media Communication», vol. 22, n. 1, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> In particular, they discuss children who have suffered immeasurable losses (such as the children of the Shoah).

<sup>18</sup> Hirsch, Spitzer, *School Photos in Liquid Time*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> This study considered, for example, two virtual archives in the absence of real archives: E. Margolis, *Class Pictures: Representations of Race, Gender, and Ability in a Century of School Photography*, «Visual Sociology», n. 14, 1999, pp. 7-38.

<sup>20</sup> M. Ferraris, *Documentality: Why is Necessary to Leave Traces*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> J. Derrida, *On Grammatology*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.



Fig. 1. Unknown author, *Alunne della scuola elementare*, 1920 ca. Photograph, 12x16,5 cm. from the Photo Album of the *Istituto Magistrale Parificato di Ivrea* (Archivio storico INDIRE in Florence, Fondo fotografico, 1-091-031)

4. Photography promises a prêt-à-porter memory (literally ready-to-wear: a locution that is appropriate for an industrial product, such as a medium-sized suit, not fine tailoring adapted to personal needs), thus offering flattery that raises expectations. Photography, it must be remembered, has since its origins presented itself at the gates of modernity as an inseparable combination of art and technology, endowed with an extraordinary capacity to depict reality and substantiate its memory. A memory superior to that of individuals or groups of people, scientists, explorers or archaeologists. The photograph was the first form of image to be recognised for its ability to remember, and remember so much. A promise we all believe.

This photograph of a girls' primary school class from the 1920s belongs to a type that I suspect we all have in similar forms in our drawers or albums. Many of us will not have written down the names of our classmates, thinking that they would be etched on our memory for a lifetime. After all, the photograph captures their faces and promises everlasting memory. But then time steps in. And today, perhaps we'd like to know who the two shortest girls in the front row were – the only ones who could overcome the awe of the solemn moment, for which they'd prepared in their minds, by bringing their toys with them.

This promise of memory was, in the early days of the history of photography, an absolute novelty in the world of images. It revealed a glimpse of the direction of a new path in the world of the figurative arts, characterised by a relationship with the social sphere that was imbued with a subversive charge: a new persuasive capacity that won over the public. Think of the early portraits: this was a whole new market, which conquered the major European cities of photography within the space of a few years. The bourgeoisie mirrored itself in photography, finding it well suited to its own idea of realism and productivity, and exalting its value as a form of urban and industrial expression. It later discovered its potential as an area of capitalist investment and its possible connections with the world of institutions, including schools. And, not least, photography as an art/technique opened its doors to democratisation, to the depiction of the new social classes. This was a time when the development of the gelatine silver bromide market was accompanied by the production of new cameras, which were easier to handle and more affordable. I am referring to the photography of amateur photographers, the aristocratic and bourgeois kodakers who dabbled in vernacular photography<sup>22</sup>. We are now in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, photography was a common visual vocabulary, with many even labelling it a universal language; the periodical press market was revolutionised by the inclusion of photographs, journalists became reporter-photographers, and professions and knowledge in the visual field intermingled. And this period virtually marked the beginning of a new era in school photography: one that saw the educators themselves as the photographers with cameras. Their view of the school was, at last, an inside look.

Those who view the school environment to create testimonial images have a gaze that is subjective and not objective. The author's gaze focuses on a point in space, which is physical and calculable: that of the point of view. There are few histories of photography that radicalise criticism on the analysis of such a radically new aspect as the point of view. The photographer does not move in space and time when creating their image; they do not depict reality according to a process of synthesis. Such a procedure is instead typical of drawing and painting and is intended to reduce the complexity of a series of actions. On the one hand, it condenses theory and practice of composition and drawing, and on the other, it reduces the set of perceptions received from the painter's movement of observation in space. The photographer instead has a monolithic, cyclopean gaze, their fixedness in space determining not the synthesis but the analysis of a space/time fragment. Yet in historical investigation, their role is always in danger of being overshadowed by the testimonial importance of the photograph, unless the composition of the photograph is such as to demand attention to their observational stance. As in this case.

<sup>22</sup> G. Batchen, *Vernacular Photographies*, «History of Photography», vol. 24, n. 3, 2000, pp. 262-271.



Fig. 2. Unknown author, *Physical Education*, n.d. Photograph (Archivio storico INDIRE in Florence, Fondo fotografico, 2-048-021)

In this visual fragment, i.e. the photograph, which can be understood as the precipitate of the knowledge of the subject in view and its being in time, middlebrow culture will always grasp the distinctive and meaningful features of the surface of the image. That is, its being in the here and now, before our eyes, and its having been there at that precise moment. Taking into consideration the photographer's point of view, and the stance that this point of view interprets (which is always an ideological stance) is one of the necessary steps towards a deeper understanding of the photographic source. We need to consider the author of the photograph and their ability to meet the cultural and ideological needs of the commissioner.

By observing the photograph in its material and social aspects, and by identifying the photographer and the culture of which they are the interpreter, we will be able to debunk a popular misconception about school photography. Its realism (but not its truth) has been the standard-bearer for the uses of photography in institutional school settings, persuaded by the fact – as Jo Spence, a photographer and educator who has worked on the depiction of childhood in unofficial moments, would say – that photography never lies.





Fig. 3. Unknown author, *Regio Istituto Tecnico "Caio Cornelio Tacito" in Terni, Sala per il Disegno ornamentale ed architettonico*, 1899. Photographs, 17x23 cm. from the Photo Album of the *Regio Istituto Tecnico "Caio Cornelio Tacito"* in Terni, p. 18 (Archivio storico INDIRE in Florence, Fondo fotografico, 1-002-018)

## Conclusions

The considerations and working hypotheses presented in this paper can be summarised in a schema, which I trust may be useful in posing a series of questions to photographs, understood as material and social objects, in order to formulate various working hypotheses.

### 1. Photographic object (source) area:

What is the relationship between the two-dimensional plane of the image and the photographic object in its complexity?

Is the source organised in a narrative (e.g. sequence, album)?

Is the visual text accompanied by a verbal text?

How does the material context (e.g. mounting on the page, media, captions, but also signs of wear, erasure, ecc.) influence the reading of the photographic source?

2. Author area:

Who is the author/photographer?

How is their gaze culturally structured?

What is their relationship with the commissioner?

How do they organise the narrative structure of their photographs?

3. Commissioner area:

Who is the commissioner?

What is their cultural background?

How do they influence the stance of the author/photographer?

How do they use (or not use) photographic sources?

4. Memory area:

What does the photographic source promise through its linguistic choices (e.g. composition, details, realism)?

What are the relationships with its symbolic environments?

How have these relationships been determined (and built over time)?





SECTION *The Representation of School in Mass Media*



# “Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini”: a Biopic That Blends Memory, Interpretation and Reality

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The TV movie *Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini* [Maria Montessori. A life for children], shot in 2006, was broadcast in two parts on 28 and 30 May 2007 by the Italian channel Canale 5, and became one of the most watched movies of the year, its audience share rising from 25% to 35% (6,059,000 and 8,184,000 viewers). The biopic follows Montessori's life from her entry to the Faculty of Medicine in Rome in 1893 up to 1934, when she left Italy. The title role was played by Paola Cortellesi, who received excellent reviews for her performance<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this paper is to see what impression the biopic created of Montessori and how it did so. We will start by analysing the movie, identifying which elements are true and false, then reviewing newspaper articles and viewers' opinions, to find out the impression the movie created internationally.

## 1. *Which kind of biopic? A variety of judgments*

After the first part aired, the renowned TV critic Aldo Grasso published a review in the influential newspaper *Corriere della Sera* under the significant title: «A touching portrait». He praised the movie: «finally, a good biopic», «it sits among the best for narrative strength, its ability to elicit emotion, Paola Cortellesi's interpretation (brava!), and Giulia Lazzarini and Lisa Gastoni's historical reconstruction»<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, Grazia Honegger Fresco, a pupil of Montessori who was a leading figure in Montessori's movement and the author of various books, who died in 2020, felt the need to add to her preface to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of her book on Montessori: «two really disappointing episodes [with]...too many fictional plots, a sickening sentimentality completely alien to Montessori, implausible relationships with Montesano's family or with Fascism, and lacking even one or two scenes to make

<sup>1</sup> E. Costantini, *Cortellesi, eroina da fiction fa rivivere Maria Montessori. L'attrice comica: svolta in TV nei panni di una vera femminista*, «Corriere della Sera», 24 June 2006, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> A. Grasso, *A touching portrait*, «Corriere della Sera», 30 May 2007, p. 47.

people understand the value of her innovations. Indeed, it is a telenovela that could have had any woman of the beginning of the XX century as the main character»<sup>3</sup>.

This disparity of judgment already provides us with the key to understanding reactions to the movie. Grasso watched it as a movie critic: as a film it works, the historical setting and acting are good, and it is captivating and moving. Honegger Fresco knew Montessori well and disliked the fictional elements, contesting the entire reconstruction as historically incorrect. But the film enjoyed great success and was awarded three prizes at the 2007 Rome FictionFest: best Italian TV fiction, best Italian screenplay, and best Italian actress for Cortellesi<sup>4</sup>.

To understand this contrast of views, we have to remember that a TV biopic is not an academic biography and cannot be a complete reconstruction of somebody's life. Many important parts of Maria's life are simply not shown. The director, Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, and the screenwriters, Monica Zapelli and Gianmario Pagano (a priest and author of religious and educational fiction) concentrated on the so-called «dark side of her legend»<sup>5</sup>: her private life (her love affair with the psychiatrist Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano, and her relationship with their son Mario and her parents). She is shown as a strong woman who faced many obstacles to affirming herself<sup>6</sup>.

Even taking into account that a biopic cannot show in detail 40 years of life, the problem of the falsification of facts remains. There are indeed too many inaccuracies. Montessori is presented as the first woman to graduate in medicine in Italy (a widely-held misconception). Women were allowed access to university and to graduate in 1875 under Minister Bonghi's regulations. The first woman graduate was Ernestina Paper, who indeed graduated in medicine in 1877<sup>7</sup>. Montessori was born in 1870. Having completed the physics/mathematics curriculum at the *Regio Istituto Tecnico* in Rome, as one of only two female students at an all-boys school, she decided, against her father's wishes, to study medicine. However, with the school-leaving certificate she had obtained, she was only eligible to enrol at the Faculty of Science. Montessori therefore attended the Faculty of Science for two years (1890-92) and privately studied Latin and Greek in order to gain admittance to the medical school at La Sapienza University in Rome (1893). Here she became the third woman to be awarded a degree in medicine, following Edvige Benigni (1890) and Viola Marcellina Corio (1894)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> G. Honegger Fresco, *Maria Montessori, una storia attuale. La vita, il pensiero, le testimonianze*, Preface to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Torino, Il leone verde, 2018, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mymovies.it/film/2007/mariamontessoriunavitaperibambini/premi/> (last access: 05.12.2022).

<sup>5</sup> M. Schwegman, *Maria Montessori*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> <https://ne-np.facebook.com/massimopoggiounofficial/videos/maria-montessori-una-vita-per-i-bambini-making-of-con-paola-cortellesi-e-massimo/634565760301943/> (last access: 05.12.2022).

<sup>7</sup> S. Polenghi, *Striving for recognition: the first five female professors in Italy (1887-1904)*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 56, n. 6, 2020, pp. 752-753.

<sup>8</sup> V. Ravà, *Le donne laureate in Italia*, «Bollettino Ufficiale della Pubblica Istruzione», n. 14, 1902, p. 651. On Montessori's education, see A. Matellicani, *La "Sapienza" di Maria Montessori. Dagli studi universitari alla docenza. 1890-1919*, Roma, Aracne, 2007, pp. 45-80.

There was no need to perpetuate this longstanding error: the falsification suggests an unnecessary wish to praise, or, more probably, stems from ignorance. Indeed, Cortellesi hailed Montessori as the first woman to have graduated in medicine in an interview in «Corriere della Sera» (an article full of historical errors)<sup>9</sup> and in publicity for the movie<sup>10</sup>. We find the same mistake in Grasso's article<sup>11</sup> and in the Wikipedia article about the movie<sup>12</sup>. The movie's website, on the other hand, corrected the error, defining Maria as «one of the first graduate women»<sup>13</sup>.

Maria's first anatomy lesson is depicted in a way that is historically inaccurate, portraying her as strong and without hesitation rather than showing her tensions and interior struggles<sup>14</sup>. These are, however, revealed in the following scene (the dialogue with her mother).

Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano is introduced as her Professor, when he was not yet a Professor: this too is an unnecessary mistake (he became director of the Psychiatric Hospital S. Maria della Pietà in 1898). But Montesano's use of music is correct. The *Scuola Magistrale Ortofrenica* is missing, as is the whole «Rome school» of C. Bonfigli, E. Sciamanna, S. De Sanctis, Montesano and Montessori<sup>15</sup>. Montesano is presented as a leading figure, alongside an unnamed dean (who somehow represents both Bonfigli and Sciamanna). The minister of education Guido Baccelli, an eminent professor of medicine at La Sapienza University and a champion of Montessori also remains unnamed (the movie just mentions «the Minister» during these years, without identifying him).

Montesano's mother is described as fiercely hostile to their wedding, he is depicted as a coward, and events are speeded up: since we still know very little about this love story, much of the narrative is invented, serving to make the plot more interesting and emotionally involving. Montessori's trips to Paris and London, which were fundamental for her method, are missing, hence her meeting with D-M. Bourneville and her reading and studying Itard and Séguin's books, which were so important for the development of her pedagogy<sup>16</sup>, are omitted. Montessori is thus presented as the sole inventor of her method.

Her relationship with her child Mario is not completely true (the scene with Mario in the *Casa dei bambini*, for instance, is invented and totally implausible). Her journey to the USA (Nov.-Dec. 1913) is delayed until after Minister Credaro's Instructions on

<sup>9</sup> E. Costantini, *Cortellesi, eroina da fiction fa rivivere Maria Montessori. L'attrice comica: svolta in TV nei panni di una vera femminista*, «Corriere della Sera», 24 June 2006, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> *Una Vita per i Bambini – Maria Montessori – Making Of*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mFQxueEz-I> (last access: 05.01.2023).

<sup>11</sup> Grasso, *A touching portrait*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria\\_Montessori\\_-\\_Una\\_vita\\_per\\_i\\_bambini](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Montessori_-_Una_vita_per_i_bambini) (last access: 05.01.2023).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fiction.mediaset.it/maria-montessori/stagione-1/> (last access: 05.01.2023).

<sup>14</sup> R. Kramer, *Maria Montessori. A Biography*, New York, Diversion books, 1976 (ed. 2017), pp. 36-41; Matellicani, *La "Sapienza" di Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 56-62.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. V.P. Babini, L.L. Lama, *Una «donna nuova». Il femminismo scientifico di Maria Montessori*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2000, pp. 46-49.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, p. 117; A. Scocchera, *Maria Montessori. Quasi un ritratto inedito*, Firenze, la Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 47. On her pedagogy see in particular P. Trabalzini, *Maria Montessori da "Il metodo" a "La scoperta del bambino"*, Roma, Aracne, 2003.

preschools, issued on 4 January 1914, which were in favour of Sisters Agazzi's method. Mario did not accompany Maria on this first journey, as shown in the film, but did so on her second one in 1915. The two journeys are conflated in the biopic. None of Montessori's other journeys, to France, the Netherlands, the UK, Belgium, Spain, and Argentina are mentioned<sup>17</sup>.

The entire issue of Montessori's spirituality<sup>18</sup> is not addressed, probably because it is too complex for a two-part movie. On the other hand, the complete silence about her engagement in feminist battles is quite astonishing and fails to do her justice<sup>19</sup>. Her teaching in the *Scuola Magistrale Ortofrenica*, her *libera docenza* (1904) and her subsequent academic teaching also go unmentioned<sup>20</sup>. Only one scene alludes to her teaching, but it is not clear whether it relates to the university or to one of Montessori's training courses<sup>21</sup>.

The founding of the *Casa dei bambini* in S. Lorenzo (1907) involves many invented episodes and the relationship with Fascism is squeezed into a few scenes, presenting Montessori as if she were against the regime from the beginning. Her «silence» speech took place in Milan in 1926, during the opening of the first international Montessori course<sup>22</sup>, but the movie shifts it to the opening of the *Regia Scuola Montessori* in Rome in 1929, which it moves to 1934, to link in with Montessori's self-imposed exile with her son Mario. This could be forgiven, since the scene expresses well her final clash with the *régime*. Nonetheless, the early years of Fascism saw a complex relationship between Mussolini and Montessori, which was effectively defined as «a marriage of convenience»<sup>23</sup>. Aside from the many invented or altered facts, the movie presents other episodes accurately, even using Montessori's own words, such as the national education conference at Turin in 1898, the importance of the layout and of order in the *Casa dei bambini*, and the significance of learning material that allows self-correction. Other scenes, although invented, express Montessori's thought well, for instance the children in the rain (to show the importance of the senses); Maria's reaction when the children from the asylum she taught managed to pass the elementary school exam; the dialogue with her mother in front of the *Madonna della seggiola*, that shows the Madonna's universality as a mother; the character of Giovanni; and the final scene: although wholly invented,

<sup>17</sup> M. Gilsoul, *Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini*, Firenze, Giunti, 2022 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 2020), pp. 152-178.

<sup>18</sup> G. Cives, *Maria Montessori tra scienza, spiritualità e laicità*, «Studi sulla formazione», n. 2, 2014, pp. 119-147; F. De Giorgi, *Maria Montessori tra modernisti, antimodernisti e gesuiti*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», vol. 25, 2018, pp. 27-73; Id., *Postfazione*, in M. Montessori, *Il peccato originale*, edited by Id., Brescia, Scholé, 2019, pp. 97-197.

<sup>19</sup> Babini, Lama, *Una «donna nuova»*, cit; Gilsoul, *Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 55-80; T. Pironi, *Percorsi di pedagogia al femminile*, Roma, Carocci, 2014, pp. 45-87.

<sup>20</sup> Babini, Lama, *Una «donna nuova»*, cit., pp. 119-164; Polenghi, *Striving for recognition*, cit., pp. 763-765; Matellicani, *La «Sapienza» di Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 106-116.

<sup>21</sup> See S. Bucci, *Educazione dell'infanzia e pedagogia scientifica. Da Froebel a Montessori*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1990, pp. 103-192.

<sup>22</sup> A. Scocchera, *Maria Montessori*, cit., pp. 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> A. Scocchera, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Introduzione a Mario M. Montessori*, Roma, Opera Nazionale Montessori, 1998, p. 45.

it expresses well the gulf between Montessori's education for freedom and peace and the Fascist ideology, showing the liberating power of education.

## 2. Audience reactions

To better understand audiences' reaction, we will turn to articles and web sources. As already stated, the authoritative *Corriere della Sera* praised the biopic, as did *La Stampa*<sup>24</sup> and *La Repubblica*, two other major national newspapers. *La Repubblica* hailed Cortellesi as «bravissima». The film's producer, Pietro Valsecchi, of TaoDue, explained that his aim was to give the public an important female character: «After judges, policemen, saints, in short, all men, we needed a film about a woman»<sup>25</sup>.

Giorgio Simonelli, professor of journalism and media, highlighted that a 35% audience share for the second part, two days after the first, was «a figure to dream of for Italian fiction [...] You have to imagine it reverberating like a gong, spreading from friend to friend, from colleague to colleague, from family to family» to increase the final figure to more than 8 million viewers. Simonelli considered this fiction, with a real woman as the main character, as different from traditional successes. Montessori is a well-known name in Italy, he remarked, but there are «chasms of ignorance» about her. Simonelli himself confessed his lack of knowledge. And according to him, this may be a key to its success: «here there are non-stop surprises, unusual environments [...], no stereotypical feminism, none of the usual hagiography». Instead there is «real information and knowledge». There is one defect, though: «the attention given to Montessori's life hinders the illustration of her pedagogical method»<sup>26</sup>.

Simonelli's opinion is relevant to our analysis. He admits being ignorant about Montessori, but at the same time considers the fiction historically soundly based. He sees that the pedagogical aspect suffers, but thinks the movie brings new knowledge about Maria, despite admitting his ignorance about her. This exact contradiction can be found in most of the audience reaction, if not always with this clarity.

Let us now move on to internet sources and see how the biopic was reviewed on Italian websites. On *Mymovies* it is rated 4.3/5. The following comments are typical of viewers' opinions: «an exceptional movie that linked private and professional life», Maria was a «strong woman», living in a «chauvinist society» as it is «still nowadays». «Moving film about motherhood and career», «about loving children», «unforgettable», «masterpiece [...] I did not know the story». «Montessori a forgotten myth, splendid

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.lastampa.it/blogs/2007/05/30/news/maria-montessori-la-rivoluzione-br-firmata-da-paola-cortellesi-1.37193177\\_30](https://www.lastampa.it/blogs/2007/05/30/news/maria-montessori-la-rivoluzione-br-firmata-da-paola-cortellesi-1.37193177_30) May 2007 (last access: 06.01.2023); <https://www.lastampa.it/spettacoli/2007/05/25/news/i-bimbi-salvati-dalla-cortellesi-1.37129041> 25 May 2007 (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.repubblica.it/2007/05/sezioni/spettacoli\\_e\\_cultura/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori.html](https://www.repubblica.it/2007/05/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori/cortellesi-montessori.html) 24 May 2007 (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>26</sup> G. Simonelli, *Ci salvi chi può. Cronache della Tv italiana dal 2000 a oggi*, Cantalupa (TO), Effatà Editrice, 2009, pp. 270-274.



acting by Cortellesi», «fascinating and very moving», «ultimately a realistic, passionate, moving, illuminating film on the life of a little known and undervalued Italian woman. Cortellesi exceptional». «Fantastic, I hope they release it on DVD», «I was quivering with emotion», «really moving, I cried a lot». «I missed the second part, can anybody give it to me, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please». It is worth noting that nearly all these viewers are women<sup>27</sup>. On the website *FilmTv* we find only one negative comment: the film presents Montessori as a pure heroine, without any ambiguities (e.g.: Fascism, her relationship with her son). «This does not diminish Montessori, but the film»<sup>28</sup>. The reviewer is a man.

In 2007 the movie was released on DVD in Italian. We can read the buyers' reviews on the IBS and Amazon websites. On IBS four women share their positive opinions: «fantastic film about a fantastic woman» (2019), «a really great and brave woman, strong and determined, the mother of pedagogy, who symbolises the courage of women who have had to fight for their rights» (2020), «very beautiful film, that allows us to discover the woman and not the character in textbooks. Masterful interpretation by Cortellesi» (2010). On Sept. 4, 2022: «I would like to buy it but it is not available. Pity since it is a wonderful story with a very beautiful ending»<sup>29</sup>.

On Amazon it is rated 4.3/5, with 33 reviews. Among those who rated it 5/5 are the following: «very beautiful, I recommend it to anyone who wants an overview of the character without having to read books» (2016); «very moving» (2018); «Montessori too often undervalued in Italy, exciting film» (2016); «a story everybody should know» (2019); «good scenography and historical reconstruction» (2016); «marvellous» (2018). Only one is rather negative, with a score of 3/5: «a love story rather than a documentary about Montessori's method and pedagogy». It is worth noting that the DVD was sought outside Italy: «Why isn't there a French or English edition?» (2020). A UK buyer (2011) wrote: «No subtitles in English, only Italian. Despite repeated mails to the seller, I never got a reply on this matter and in the end bought the DVD»<sup>30</sup>. From the USA (2019): «a wonderful and truthful story about Maria Montessori, it is all in Italian, without English subtitles [...] It tells the story of a real woman, no sugar coating, but I respect Maria Montessori 100% more now that I have seen her story». It is not possible to identify the gender of many of the writers, but where recorded, the names suggest men as well as women.

In 2016 a short official video on the making of the biopic was posted on YouTube. Up to the beginning of January 2023, it has had more than 40,000 views, with 12 positive comments (including in Spanish): «splendid», «fantastic», «really beautiful»,

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mymovies.it/film/2007/mariamontessoriunavitaperibambini/forum/> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.filmtv.it/film/59006/maria-montessori-una-vita-per-i-bambini/recensioni/949209/#fr:film-59006> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ibs.it/maria-montessori-vita-per-bambini-film-gianluca-maria-tavarelli/e/5050582490459> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>30</sup> The first part has been subtitled on the Mediaset website <https://www.mediasetdistribution.com/format/teaching-the-future-the-true-story-of-maria-montessori-112/> (last access: 09.01.2023).

«marvellous». One viewer spots a mistake: «she was not the first woman to graduate in Medicine», but this does not diminish Maria: «she was an immortal genius»<sup>31</sup>. These positive comments that keep being posted testify to the prolonged success of the movie, which was rebroadcast on different Italian TV channels (at least in 2010, 2018, and 2022).

The movie also reached a wider audience. It was broadcast in France in 2008 and again in 2012. *Le Figaro TV* reported it, repeating the usual mistake: «La première femme diplômée de médecine de Rome»<sup>32</sup>. In 2021 the French edition DVD came out, with a shorter title: «Maria Montessori» (possibly to avoid confusion with the book by Martin Gilsoul, *Une vie au service de l'enfant*)<sup>33</sup>. Two buyers left enthusiastic opinions (5/5 ratings): «Mini-série magistrale» (2021), «Je ne connaissais pas du tout. Très beau et bon film. C'est une suite de saint Jean Bosco» (2021)<sup>34</sup>. In the same year, the movie was reviewed on the website *Allociné*. «Un chef-d'oeuvre! Magnifiquement interprété, particulièrement émouvant»<sup>35</sup>. Again, we find the film's power to move and prior ignorance of the story, which even leads to the glorification of Montessori as a secular saint. A negative review on a blog indicates knowledge of Montessori's life and pedagogy:

L'histoire douloureuse de la mère séparée de son enfant prend ici la plus large importance sur les théories éducatives de Maria Montessori. L'approche mélodramatique est certes touchante mais ne permettra pas aux néophytes de découvrir la spécificité de la pédagogie révolutionnaire de Montessori. De même, le contexte social et politique est souvent complètement gommé sauf quand il s'agit d'évoquer le régime fasciste pour accélérer et clore le récit<sup>36</sup>.

In 2011 (on 24 November and 1<sup>st</sup> December) the film was broadcast in the Czech Republic. Online it was rated 73/100, with 33 votes. Interestingly, the description of the movie starts with a comparison with Comenius: «The Czech Republic has its Jan Amos Comenius, Italy has its Maria Montessori [...] She was the first female student in the entire history of the faculty» (the usual mistake). The viewers' comments are a bit less positive than in the other countries. More viewers are informed about Montessori and therefore do not like there being so many fictional scenes: «Uhm, so the movie was just "inspired" by all those real characters and events!» (2/5 rating, 2011). «Tavarelli really didn't skimp on pathos and clichés» (4/5 rating, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mFQxueEz-I> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>32</sup> <https://tvmag.lefigaro.fr/programme-tv/programme/maria-montessori-une-vie-au-service-des-enfants-f3296769> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>33</sup> Paris, Desclée de Brouweur, 2020. Italian edition quoted above, footnote n.17.

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.amazon.it/Maria-Montessori-Gianluca-Tavarelli/dp/B096TN7G3F/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=2R665LB2QJV56&keywords=maria+montessori&qid=1673037095&cs=dvd&srefix=maria+mon%2Cdvd%2C81&sr=1-1#customerReviews](https://www.amazon.it/Maria-Montessori-Gianluca-Tavarelli/dp/B096TN7G3F/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2R665LB2QJV56&keywords=maria+montessori&qid=1673037095&cs=dvd&srefix=maria+mon%2Cdvd%2C81&sr=1-1#customerReviews) (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-293151/critiques/spectateurs/#review\\_1017409833](https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-293151/critiques/spectateurs/#review_1017409833) (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>36</sup> <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/cedric-lepine/blog/220721/maria-montessori-un-telefilm-de-gianluca-maria-tavarelli> (last access: 06.01.2023).

What makes me so sad about “biographical” films like this is that they are not really very biographical (they make up too many things) and therefore cannot be taken seriously. Apart from the names of certain characters and some key events, we can’t consider the film as something credible, so we can only enjoy it cheaply, rather than learn a lot of interesting things from it. It’s a great shame, because a truly realistic depiction of Maria Montessori’s life would be no less interesting and engaging than a fluffed-up pile of screenplay fiction. Nevertheless, I rate this film relatively positively. It does not lack strong and heartfelt moments, and through the character of Maria Montessori, it inspires and encourages non-conformist thinking and attitudes towards life and society (and of course towards children and their upbringing!) (3/5 rating, 2014)<sup>37</sup>.

On another Czech webpage, the film is rated 8.8/10<sup>38</sup>.

In 2017 a German dubbed version was released on DVD: «*Maria Montessori – Ein Leben für die Kinder*», which received a very high 4.7 rating on Amazon, with 207 votes. Among the reviews that gave it 5/5, the key words are «wonderful», «important for our time», «realistic», «thrilling», «emotional». Montessori is a «great and strong woman»<sup>39</sup>. Here again we find viewers emotionally involved in Maria’s previously unknown private life.

However, it is in Spanish-speaking countries that the film has enjoyed striking success. In 2015 a Spanish YouTuber uploaded the entire movie with Spanish subtitles. The movie has reached an astonishing 1.6 million viewers, with 499 comments and more than 17,500 likes. Many reviewers are women, many among them teachers. Recurring words are «moving» and «inspiring»: «Con esta película, una vez más, pude reafirmar mi vocación como futura educadora. Y no sólo eso, sino también recordar lo fuerte que podemos ser las mujeres» (2020); «Admiración total. Una historia de vida muy conmovedora» (2022); «Maria Montessori fue una gran impulsora del método pedagógico llamado Nueva escuela, mucho de lo que tenemos en nuestra educación actualmente, se lo debemos a ella. Una gran pedagoga y ejemplo a seguir para los futuros docentes!» (2018); «Mujer valiente y guerrera!!» (2019); «Me emocione todo el tiempo, que genia esta mujer!!!» (2017); «He llorado todas las 3 horas, la mejor película que he visto en mi vida. Absolutamente

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.csfd.cz/film/243694-maria-montessoriova/prehled/> (last access: 06.01.2023). English translations by the author.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.7den.cz/film-maria-montessoriova/> (last access: 06.01.2023).

<sup>39</sup> «Sie war eine wirklich große Frau» (2017); «Toller Film über eine tolle Frau» (2022); «Wunderschöner Film über das Leben Maria Montessoris. Obwohl ich die Montessori Ausbildung habe und einen eigenen Montessori Kindergarten habe und alles schon mal gelesen habe, bringt dieser Film die private und emotionale Seite von Maria Montessori näher. Empfehlenswert!» (2019); «Das Thema und die Umsetzung sind für die heutige Zeit sehr wichtig» (2019); «Wunderbarer Film [...] Die Geschichte ist durchwegs spannend» (2017); «Sehr realistisch nachgestellt» (2018); «Dramaturgie hervorragend [...] Sehr empfehlenswert» (2017); «Emotionales Biopic. Jeder hat schon mal von Montessori Pädagogik gehört, aber nur die wenigsten wissen wer Maria Montessori war und was sie erlebt hat. Der Film erzählt die Geschichte einer intelligenten, starken und sturen Frau, die für ihr uneheliches Kind kämpft und gegen die herrschende Bildungsideologie. Tolle Schauspieler, sehr gut ausgestattet und nie langweilig» (2020); «Emotional und lehrreich» (2017). [https://www.amazon.it/Movie-Maria-Montessori-Ein-Edizione-Germania/dp/B01MRM8215/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?\\_\\_mk\\_it\\_IT=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5BD%C3%95%C3%91&crd=7HOP6KGVDSMV&keywords=maria+montessori+leben&qid=1673089182&s=dvd&sprefix=maria+montessori+leben%2Cdvd%2C82&sr=1-1#customerReviews](https://www.amazon.it/Movie-Maria-Montessori-Ein-Edizione-Germania/dp/B01MRM8215/ref=sr_1_1?__mk_it_IT=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5BD%C3%95%C3%91&crd=7HOP6KGVDSMV&keywords=maria+montessori+leben&qid=1673089182&s=dvd&sprefix=maria+montessori+leben%2Cdvd%2C82&sr=1-1#customerReviews) (last access: 06.01.2023).

inspiradora» (2017); «Un gran ejemplo de vida!» (2020); «Hermosa y conmovedora historia, pobre Dra Montessori, como sufrio, era admirable, decidida, fuerte y segura» (2021); «Mi admiración total para esta mujer» (2021); «WOW que maravilla de película» (2022); «El verla hizo que reafirmara más mi vocación como docente» 2021; «Excelente serie y extraordinaria actriz Paola Cortellesi» (2020); «La vida de esta dama es inspiradora» (2020); «Me ha emocionado mucho su historia» (2017); «Emoción profunda cada vez que la veo [...] admiración infinita que siento por esta mujer!» (2017); «Gracias a Dios por María Montessori» (2022); «Genia no se puede creer la fortaleza de esta mujer me conmovio totalmente mi mayor admiracion y respeto» (2017); «Pocas películas me han emocionado tanto» (2018); «Una historia de vida muy conmovedora» (2022). A number of reviews in Portuguese also ask for Portuguese subtitles<sup>40</sup>.

The sole criticism comes from a video posted on YouTube in June 2022, *Análisis de María Montessori: una vida dedicada a los niños* (2007), de Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, which in 6 months reached nearly 6,000 viewers. The 7 minute analysis demonstrates its author's sound pedagogical competence. His criticism is that the film depicts a chauvinist world but does not show Montessori's engagement in feminist battles. He then concentrates on the pedagogical and teaching scenes, underlining the importance of scientific observation, the respect for freedom, the value of every child, the democratic message, and the emancipating power of Montessori's pedagogy. It also makes an apt comparison with Truffaut's *L'enfant sauvage*<sup>41</sup>. The film is also recommended on many Spanish and South American websites, which is understandable in view of the spread of Montessori schools there (through her residence in Barcelona)<sup>42</sup>.

From analysing these sources, it appears that whereas the knowledgeable viewers (who are very few) are bothered by the inaccuracies, or made-up or missing parts, the great majority mistake the description of Montessori's life as true information (that they did not know). Since the story is well acted and credible, it is well-received and spreads an image of Montessori as a heroine. The viewers are won over by the story of a strong, clever, passionate and feminist woman whose impossible love story has a partially happy ending (Maria manages to keep her son and her relationship with him).

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BT248M49YgU> (last access: 07.01.2023). In January 2022 this video was linked to a Spanish webpage <https://wmcmmf.com/video/pelicula-completa-de-maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos/>, with four enthusiastic comments (last access: 07.01.2023). In July 2022 the subtitled video was posted on Facebook <https://m.facebook.com/montessori.red/videos/la-vida-de-mar%C3%ADa-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ni%C3%B1os-pel%C3%ADcula-completa/221271556519480/> (last access: 07.01.2023).

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Yh4epckrOA> (last access: 07.01.2023).

<sup>42</sup> A description of the film in: <https://educomunicacion.es/cineyeducacion/temasmontessori.htm>; <https://www.peliculasfeministas.com/maria-montessori-una-vita-per-in-bambini/#>; <https://www.lavanguardia.com/peliculas-series/peliculas/maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos-173483/actores>; <https://laescueladelarepublica.es/maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos/>; [http://blue.northcentralus.cloudapp.azure.com/ecotics/ecotics/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=437&catid=33&Itemid=295&lang=es](http://blue.northcentralus.cloudapp.azure.com/ecotics/ecotics/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=437&catid=33&Itemid=295&lang=es) (Mexico), website of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. The film was broadcast by 8TV in Catalonia [https://www.elmundo.es/television/programacion-tv/peliculas/1462534\\_maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos.html](https://www.elmundo.es/television/programacion-tv/peliculas/1462534_maria-montessori-una-vida-dedicada-a-los-ninos.html) (last access: 07.01.2023).

### 3. *Television, history and collective memory*

To conclude, we have to address the link between TV and history. «TV is the principal means by which most people learn about history today». Due to its immediacy, it is not «learning» history, it is «experiencing it»<sup>43</sup>, allowing greater emotional engagement. TV is «a facilitator of cultural history»: it creates «modes of interaction with the past. Although these models of interaction are subversive of many of the implicit goals of academic history, they play a significant role in cultural memory and the popular negotiation of the past»<sup>44</sup>. Astrid Erll states that «cultural memory is unthinkable without media»<sup>45</sup>. Memories of the past are reshaped and TV moulds popular culture: «Television histories today can be nonfictional, fictional, or somewhere in between», as G.R. Edgerton puts it<sup>46</sup>. He highlights that:

Collective memory is the site of mediation where professional history must ultimately share space with popular history [...] Memory studies are more concerned with how and why a remembered version has been constructed than whether a specific rendition of the past is historically correct and reliable above all else. Rather than think of professional and popular history as dramatically opposed traditions (with one more reliable and true, and the other unsophisticated and false), it is perhaps more helpful to consider them as two ends of the same continuum [...] In the final analysis, television histories enable unprecedentedly large audiences to become increasingly aware of and intrigued by the stories and figures of the past, spurring some viewers to pursue their newfound historical interests beyond the screen and into other forms of popular and professional history<sup>47</sup>.

I. Bondebjerg reminds us that «Fiction needs to be taken seriously as a factor influencing the human mind and our individual and collective memory»<sup>48</sup>. Finally, Rosenstone gives us the ultimate key to reaching a conclusion: «Fiction has by far the greatest emotional impact on viewers and is more popular because fiction bring history closer to the viewer»<sup>49</sup>.

Montessori's role as a strong, feminist woman and her dramatic personal love story seem to prevail in the viewers' opinions, while her pedagogical method remains in the background. This is the result of a screenplay that concentrates on particular aspects of Montessori's private life, triggering emotions in the viewers: the key for its success. We find many women among those making positive/moved comments, clearly identifying with the character, since children's education and women's difficulties in balancing career

<sup>43</sup> G.R. Edgerton, *Introduction. Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether*, in Id., P.C. Rollins (edd.), *Television Histories. Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2001, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> S. Anderson, *History TV and Popular Memory*, in *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> A. Erll, *Memory in Culture*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p.113.

<sup>46</sup> G.R. Edgerton, *The Past Is Now Present Onscreen: Television, History, and Collective Memory*, in J. Wasko, E.R. Meehan (edd.), *A Companion to Television*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2020 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2008), pp. 84-85.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> I. Bondebjerg, *Screening Twentieth Century Europe. Television, History, memory*, Cham, Palgrave European Film and Media Studies, 2020, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> R. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, London, Routledge, 2006 (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 2018), p. 47.

and love/motherhood are experienced as relevant topics today. Although accurate in its historical reconstruction of environments and costumes, the movie does not linger on pedagogical questions, which may prove difficult for a non-specialist audience. Nonetheless it succeeds in representing some key elements of her method, which seem to have been most noticed by Spanish audiences, where many teachers feel encouraged by Maria. Only a very small number of (particularly Czech) viewers spot the errors and missing elements.

The great majority of viewers were not aware of her private life and love story and believe the film description to be true. The size of the film's audience and positive comments lead us to suppose that Montessori is better known as a result of it, albeit, unbeknownst to the majority of viewers, in a partially fictional way. This movie contributes to strengthening the myth of Montessori (the first woman doctor in Italy, ecc.) in the popular collective transnational memory, but it also spreads some knowledge about her pedagogical work. Hence, from the point of view of popular collective memory, the judgement cannot be negative, even if it would have been more accurate to say: «This is a fiction based on real events».





# The Diverse Representations of Women Secondary Teachers in Selected Italian Films from the Past Fifty Years. A Case Study

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## *Introduction*

Over the past fifty years, the female secondary school teacher has been represented in several films in Italy, of different nature: sexy comedies, TV movies, teen movies. Such sources offer an in-depth knowledge about the «empirical culture» of school, in the form of glimpses into «school past», but also point up the counterposed reflection produced in the mind of spectators, in the past but also in the present<sup>1</sup>. According to the «visual turn» in the History of Education, audio-visual sources are «narrative practices» and they could offer also representations about the social and professional conditions of the teachers, their educational styles and other important indications, strictly connected to a process of collective imaginary<sup>2</sup>.

In this direction, it's important to underline that research on audio-visual sources promoted by recent advances in the History of Education can inform a process of semantic negotiation between personal memories and social memories, «experienced school pasts» (as recalled by direct participants) and «constructed school pasts»<sup>3</sup>, to dismantling the traditional image of school and, especially, of female secondary school teacher. According to Robert A. Rosenstone and Pierre Sorlin, we can say that audio-visual sources bear the potential to influence not only our knowledge of the past, but also our understanding

\* The entire contribution was conceived and shared by both authors; in particular, introduction and paragraph 1 are attributed to Evelina Scaglia, paragraph 2 and its subparagraphs to Alessandra Mazzini. Conclusions are written by both authors.

<sup>1</sup> P. Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019, pp. 7-17.

<sup>2</sup> P. Alfieri, *Memoria collettiva, cinema e televisione: un nuovo sguardo euristico per la storiografia scolastica in Italia*, in S. Polenghi, F. Cereda, P. Zini (edd.), *La responsabilità della pedagogia nelle trasformazioni dei rapporti sociali. Storia, linee di ricerca e prospettive. Atti del Congresso nazionale SIPED, Milano 14-16 gennaio 2021*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa Multimedia, 2021, pp. 741-743. The imaginary has been object of historical-educational studies in Italy since the end of the Nineties, as proved by: F. Cambi, *Immaginario e ricerca storico-educativa*, «Studi sulla formazione», vol. 1, n. 1, 1998, pp. 149-158.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 5.

of the present and our projects for the future<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, it is useful to focus the «heuristic function» of those sources in a complex and quite unknown field as that chosen for this intervention.

To date, few studies in the domain of pedagogical or historical-educational research have focused on women secondary teachers<sup>5</sup>, while even fewer have explored their images in cinematic history<sup>6</sup>. There is an absence of a historical memory about the women secondary teachers, and this is due to fact that only in the transition from the XIX to the XX century there was the explosion of a conflict between the traditional representation of woman, involved in the domestic environment, and the gradual affirmation of a new woman image as social subject, thanks especially for the possibility to attend a public school<sup>7</sup>. Engaging in the analysis of the figure of the woman teacher means making her a visible social subject with historical roots, to be brought to the surface from a forgotten past, and with a present made up of difficult situations<sup>8</sup>.

In this contribution, we want to explore how audio-visual sources could contribute to the implementation of the professionalisation of women secondary teachers, both during their initial training and their in-service training, according to recent epistemological and methodological developments of the History of Education<sup>9</sup>.

### 1. *A peculiar investigation on a topic insufficiently considered*

Starting from this awareness, the following contribution presents a qualitative investigation of different representations conveyed by filmic sources<sup>10</sup>, such as, for example, the sexy comedy *L'insegnante va in collegio* [*The Teacher goes to Boarding School*] (1978), the TV movie *Una vita in gioco* [*A Life in Play*] (1990), and the teen movie *Notte*

<sup>4</sup> R.A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996; P. Sorlin, *Introduction à une sociologie du cinéma*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> As explained in: C. Covato, *L'educazione e l'istruzione delle donne nella storiografia 1960-1990*, in S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Educazione e ruolo femminile: la condizione delle donne in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1992, pp. 283-305; S. Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, Pisa, ETS, 1995, pp. 185-228; S. Polenghi, «Missione naturale», *istruzione «artificiale» ed emancipazione femminile. Le donne e l'università tra Otto e Novecento*, in C. Ghizzoni, S. Polenghi (edd.), *L'altra metà della scuola. Educazione e lavoro delle donne tra Otto e Novecento*, Torino, SEI, 2008, pp. 283-318; G. Di Bello, *La professionalizzazione delle insegnanti della secondaria*, in E. Becchi, M. Ferrari (edd.), *Formare alle professioni: sacerdoti, principi, educatori*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009, pp. 492-499.

<sup>6</sup> F. Bocci, *Questi insegnanti: maestri e professori nel cinema*, Roma, Serarcangeli, 2002, pp. 91-92.

<sup>7</sup> T. Pironi, *La donna, l'istruzione superiore e l'accesso alle professioni in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Inclusione e promozione sociale nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità ad oggi*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2020, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, cit., p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> S. Polenghi, G. Bandini, *The history of education in its own light: signs of crisis, potential for growth*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. 3, n. 1, 2016, pp. 3-20.

<sup>10</sup> For example, as in: S. Polenghi, *Film as a source for historical enquiry in education. Research methods and a case study*, «Educació i Història», vol. 31, n. 1, 2018, pp. 89-99.

*prima degli esami* '82 [*The Night before the Exams: 1982*] (2011)<sup>11</sup>. The choice of filmic sources is due to the necessity of offering a well-defined and accurate analysis about a topic insufficiently considered, leaving to further wider studies the investigation of other kind of audio-visual sources. Moreover, it is due to overcome the stereotype of the female secondary teachers always gregarious, subordinate to the central male figure, and for whom the work is a tinsel, whose only role is to echo a life declined only on personal problems.

At the methodological level, the contribution draws on theoretical categories and tools from research domains such as *The Immaterial History of School*<sup>12</sup> and *The Black Box of Schooling*<sup>13</sup>, with a view to identifying the intrinsic dimensions of school settings and the educational practices adopted therein. At least three research questions are addressed: what imaginary surrounding the woman high school teacher is communicated by the school memories in the analysed filmic sources; do these memories reflect the actual conditions in the secondary schools of the period and if so in what way; what are the main thoughts, expectations, or doubts that these representations elicit in viewers.

Those questions are connected to two historiographical assumptions: firstly, in Italy the crisis of the authoritarian and selective school system in the Seventies was accompanied by a contextual implementation of the presence of women students in high schools and universities<sup>14</sup>; secondly, if initially women secondary teachers were inspired by a model of teaching as «vocation» (a calling to a life spent only in education), since the Seventies they preferred a model of teaching as «double presence» (the teaching was a professional activity that allowed women to be contemporary involved in the family care and work life)<sup>15</sup>. The development of a progressive «female presence» in teacher profession and the connected cultural and professional training are two problems that could be represented in the audio-visual sources analysed in this intervention, with all the possible implications, such as the lack of political visibility of women teachers, the complementary or substitute character of their work compared to male work and the connected difficulties to have the position of professionals involved in the transmission of intellectual knowledge<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> A synopsis of some of the filmic sources mentioned in this contribution can be found on the website <https://www.memoriascolastica.it> (last access: 30.03.2023).

<sup>12</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, *El patrimonio educativo intangible: un recurso emergente en la museología educativa*, «Cadernos de história da educação», vol. 6, 2007, pp. 71-85.

<sup>13</sup> S. Braster, I. Grosvenor, M. del Mar del Pozo Andrés (edd.), *The Black Box of Schooling. A Cultural History of the Classroom*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, cit., p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Barbagli, M. Dei, *Le vestali della classe media*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1969, p. 23; E. De Fort, *Gli insegnanti*, in G. Cives (ed.), *La scuola italiana dall'Unità ai giorni nostri*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> A. Porcheddu, *La donna nell'insegnamento: storia e prospettive*, «Scuola & Città», vol. 29, n. 9, 1978, pp. 353-360. See also S. Ulivieri, *Essere donne insegnanti. Storia, professionalità e cultura di genere*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1996.

For those reason, it's useful to recall that «collective memory is genetically descended from the collective imaginary, whose symbolic materials can either derive from the cultural heritage of a given community or be integrated and redefined by the culture or information industry»<sup>17</sup>. In this sense, a study of the *Collective School Memories* conveyed by the audio-visual sources analysed could offer new insights about the changes in the social perception of women secondary teachers in Italy in the last fifty years, the archetypes and also the stereotypes spread about women secondary teachers, the influence generated by common sense and the imaginary represented by the culture industry (such as cinema and TV) on the «ideal» profile of the woman secondary teacher.

Those remarks find a confirmation in what Simonetta Polenghi has underlined about the study of audio-visual sources promoted by the *Visual History*: «an adequate quantitative and qualitative analysis of the film allows the historian of education to approach a given period, grasping its collective mentality»<sup>18</sup>, in the meaning of its widespread educational sensibility, axiological categories, and pedagogical conceptions. All parameters, which will lead our qualitative investigation of the selected audio-visual resources, according to a peculiar attention on the personal access to them and the potential effects produced in the spectators of the past and of nowadays, also at level of educational reflections.

## 2. Preliminary results

Already in 1908 Enrico Thovez focused on the close relationship that cinema would have had with twentieth-century modernity, not only because it would have recorded most of the events that occurred in that period, but also because, by recording them, it would have defined the way in which the world had to be perceived<sup>19</sup>. Cinema, with its characteristics of immediacy and accessibility, has therefore built a type of gaze by working on the thrusts present from time to time in modernity, intercepting and sometimes revealing them, thus offering a key to interpretation.

This is what also happened for the figure of women secondary teachers, for whom cinema first and then television contributed to propose and sometimes even to impose certain imaginaries, helping to articulate the mental categories with which reality is faced and to offer schemes through which to observe the world of school, the female universe in the classrooms, and the educational and training relationship with the different generations of students.

<sup>17</sup> J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memoria ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità. Atti del Convegno nazionale SIPED, Padova 30 giugno-1 luglio 2020*, Lecce-Brescia, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> S. Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, in P. Malavasi, S. Polenghi, P.C. Rivoltella (edd.), *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> E. Thovez, *L'arte di cellulioide*, «La Stampa», vol. XLII, n. 209, 29 luglio 1908.

Since the 1970s, cinema, television, and then mobile devices with their possibility of cross-media and trans-media<sup>20</sup>, have not only contaminated the ways of telling and enjoying stories of the female secondary school teachers, but they have also become filters through which to read these figures, decipher them, interpret them.

Furthermore, since cinema by its very nature has the power to teach not only «to look at the world anew, but also in a new way»<sup>21</sup>, in defining a sample of teachers, the screens are not limited to a simple collection of lived, but have also contributed to communicating and spreading certain imaginaries of the female secondary teacher; sometimes through deformations born of deeply rooted clichés which then penetrated reality so much as to modify it. Cinema, as Walter Benjamin had highlighted, is not limited to a passive recording but reworks the surrounding ideas and returns them to current events<sup>22</sup>. One could then say that cinema (and by extension the screen) was not only the «eye of the twentieth century»<sup>23</sup>, but also in many ways its hand.

Therefore, films have been the witnesses, which have highlighted the internal tensions and the contradictions that over the years have gravitated around the world of Italian school system, the function of the teacher and the figure of the female teacher in the various moments of the History of Italian School, Education and Sociology. But films have also been guides, capable of articulating and recomposing these tensions.

### 2.1 *The sexy female secondary teacher in the comedies of the Seventies*

Starting from the reasons for the contestation of 1968 and sexual liberation, a sub-genre of the Italian comedy of the Seventies developed in Italy, which is the sexy Italian comedy, also embraces a sexy-scholastic trend. This line of unglued and trivial comedies, which will find its peak in the '80s with the various Pierinos<sup>24</sup> played by Alvaro Vitali, focus on the systematic demolition of the teaching function, seeking the consent of the more generalist, anti-institutional and goliardic public.

These are films that have contributed to a real dismantling of the education system and the authority of the role of female teachers in public opinion, through a caricatured repertoire of provocative female teachers caught in their provocative sexual attitudes towards pupils and colleagues.

Films such as *La supplente* [*The female Substitute*] (Guido Leoni, 1975), in which a high school student falls in love with the provocative female substitute teacher; *Classe*

<sup>20</sup> See H. Jenkins, *Cultura convergente*, Milano, Apogeo, 2007; A. Grasso, M. Scaglioni, (edd.), *Televisione convergente. La tv oltre il piccolo schermo*, Milano, Link Ricerca, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> F. Casetti, *L'occhio del Novecento. Cinema, esperienza, modernità*, Milano, Bompiani, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> W. Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, in *Opere complete di Walter Benjamin. Scritti 1934 1937*, VI, Torino, Einaudi, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Casetti, *L'occhio del Novecento*, cit.

<sup>24</sup> The young rascal Pierino is a traditional, humoristic character used as the protagonist of many Italian stories and jokes.

*mista* [*The mixed Class*] (Mariano Laurenti, 1976), which stars prof. Carla Moretti (Dagmar Lassander), a young and attractive teacher with whom students and adults fall infatuated; *La professoressa di scienze naturali* [*The Professor of Natural Sciences*] (Michele Massimo Tarantini, 1976), where a substitute teacher with her charm will wreak havoc among both the students and their parents; *L'insegnante va in collegio* [*The Teacher goes to Boarding School*] (Mariano Laurenti, 1978) where a father seduces his son's beautiful teacher, played by Edwige Fenech. These are films which become like distorted and deformed mirrors that, on the one hand, by placing female teachers at the centre, contribute to the progressive perception of the feminization of the teaching profession, on the other, as these women are examples of didactic sterility, they allow the image of the female teacher who is incompetent in terms of teaching and education and therefore on that level secondary and subordinate to her male colleague.

## 2.2 *Women secondary teachers as "mothers"*

Starting in the '90s some films and television series focus on female teachers who begin to get busy and take an active part in their work, but in which the educational and didactic functions intersect and in some cases overlap with stereotyped aspects of femininity: caring, motherhood, loving-kindness, empathic listening. These are teachers who, in the context of often degraded schools, collide with a selective, abstract school system, unable to listen, welcome and respond to the expectations, urgencies and needs of the adolescents who attend it and feel their own bewilderment in front of a disrupted social environment.

Faced with this environment, although moved by the best of intentions, the teachers become the protagonists of a mixture of functions and positions, letting themselves be involved in the attempt to recover the classic "hopeless case", only to be overwhelmed by the confusion between their role of teachers and the impossible one of friends, confidants, adoptive parents, thus abdicating the specificity of one's task.

This is what happens in the two-part drama *Una vita in gioco* [*A life in Play*] (Franco Giraldi, 1990) where Marianna (Mariangela Melato), who is in a personal crisis due to being away from her husband, pours her attentions on a "difficult" student, Samantha, who she hosts at home without her husband's approval, bonding to her with an emotional relationship that goes beyond the boundaries of teaching professionalism.

The same happens in the comedy *Ovosodo* (Paolo Virzì, 1997) where the secondary school teacher Giovanna, who, not only appreciates the writings of the young protagonist, makes him feel capable in studying and stimulates him to read, but becomes her emotional point of reference and to all intents and purposes substitute for the mother figure.

The resulting portraits are therefore those of teachers characterized by the typical stereotyped traits of femininity and who contribute to defining the progressive feminization of the Italian teaching profession.

The phenomenon also continues in the new millennium, with films such as *La scuola è finita* [*School is over*] (Valerio Jalongo, 2010), which has as protagonists two teachers engaged in “saving” the protagonist of the story, Alex Donadei, a boy who does not seem to be able to find ground solid under his feet and who sees in drugs the only way to escape from boredom, loneliness and the weight of a tormented family situation. The two teachers, who are interested in his fate and who offer him their help, deciding to make up for the absence of the boy’s parents by rebuilding a sort of family around him, are prof. Aldo Talarico (Vincenzo Amato) and Daria Quarenghi (Valeria Golino). However, both do not act because they are driven by a responsible educational action, but by mixing personal inner urgencies: the first, because, seeing the boy’s musical talent, he hopes to fill the frustrating void of a lack of personal fulfilment through him, and the second by maternal instinct.

The same happens in *Il rosso e il blu* [*The Red and the Blue*] (Giuseppe Piccioni, 2012), where three generations of teachers confront each other and with students who are unable to find stable points of reference within the family. The figure of the teacher is represented by an irreproachable school headmaster, played by Margherita Buy, who verbally states that «in the school there is an inside and an outside and we only deal with what happens inside», but takes to heart a particularly disadvantaged student, for whom she assumes more of a maternal function than an educational one, giving life to a relationship that will lead her to a profound existential crisis.

### 2.3 The great “excluded”. Between subordinate and absent female secondary teachers

With *Il maestro di Vigevano* [*The Teacher from Vigevano*] (Elio Petri, 1963), the character of the frustrated teacher takes shape, dissatisfied with his position and excluded from the pecuniary advantages of the economic boom. The film launches a line of films, which focus on the figure of the male teacher represented as a dramatic figure, first of all *La scuola* [*The School*] (Daniele Luchetti, 1995). These are films characterized by the presence of poor quality teachers who carry out pseudo clerical work, between homework to be corrected, an intrusive and useless bureaucracy, a grotesque collegiate comparisons, an innate lack of resources and difficult students, children of disengagement.

In a phase of severe crisis in the Italian school, with teachers grappling with chronic inefficiencies and dissatisfaction with the lack of consideration for their work, it is significant how the only teacher who seems to ask questions about his job is the male protagonist, played by Silvio Orlando, while the female figures are disinterested in what is happening to their role, they do not question their own existential and professional choices and are therefore wrapped in silence. From this film emerges a figure of female secondary school teachers who is always gregarious, subordinate to the central male figure, and for whom the work is not, as for the male figure, a meaningful experience, for better or for worse, but a tinsel, whose only role is to echo a life declined only on personal problems. This is what happens, for example, with the venal prof. Lidia Ostia,



who appears worried only about the costs of babysitting her little son, or with prof. Anna Rita Majello (Anna Galiena), represented more for her turbulent relationship with her husband and for her secret love with a colleague.

The role as teachers doesn't define these figures, it doesn't become decisive for their identity, nor does work become an opportunity for true self-fulfilment<sup>25</sup>.

The female teaching staff is extremely varied and made up of a group of colourful characters who are the receptacle of the various caricatures that gravitate around the teaching profession, such as for prof. Giorgia Lugo (Enrica Maria Modugno), an English teacher, insecure, careless and full of phobias, such as that for sharp objects, for which she suffers various jokes from students and colleagues.

These are figures whose fragility emerges above all and who are voluntarily not represented for their educational contribution in the school context, but above all for their role in the love dynamics of the school.

The same dynamic returns in *Auguri professore* [*Best wishes, Professor*] (Riccardo Milani, 1997), set in the winter of 1996 and taken from the novel *Solo se interrogato. Appunti sulla maleducazione di un insegnante volenteroso* [*Only if interrogated. Notes on the Rudeness of a willing Teacher*] (Domenico Starnone, 1995)<sup>26</sup>, which tells the story of a professor in crisis and of the intergenerational relationship between teachers and students, but also between generations of teachers. In fact, the professor meets Luisa (Claudia Pandolfi), who is outlined more for her educational role towards her colleague, who had also been her teacher, than towards the students. The young female teacher makes the protagonist rediscover his passion for teaching, through a relationship that winks at sentimentality, but she is once again a secondary figure, caught more as a support for her male colleague, by virtue of her young age, than for her actual skills.

These films were preceded in the '80s by two films in which the protagonist is a male figure and is once again the only one who gives rise to a self-reflection. The female figures act only as corollary, objects of attention only as protagonists of the sentimental relationship with the main character.

In *Una gita scolastica* [*A School Trip*] (Pupi Avati, 1983) the woman secondary school teacher is represented by Serena Stanzani (Tiziana Pini), who will lead the protagonist, prof. Balla, to rediscover his feelings and to meditate on his declared «fear of women». Serena intends to betray her adulterous husband on this occasion, out of spite; but after deluding Balla, she will have an adventure with one of the pupils. The same happens in *Bianca*, a 1984 film directed and interpreted by Nanni Moretti. In the story a teaching staff adapts, in order to solve the problems of the mass school, to the tastes of the students and offers "informative" lessons, thus renouncing the cultural and educative aspects of his own role. The protagonist is once again a male character, Michele Apicella, a young mathematics professor full of delusions and phobias. In the story, the figure of the

<sup>25</sup> G. Bertagna, *Luci e ombre sul valore formativo del lavoro. Una prospettiva pedagogica*, in G. Alessandrini (ed.), *Atlante di pedagogia del lavoro*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017, pp. 49-89.

<sup>26</sup> D. Starnone, *Solo se interrogato. Appunti sulla maleducazione di un insegnante volenteroso*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1995.

female secondary school teacher is represented by Bianca (Laura Morante), with whom Michele begins a relationship: in her portrait, however, only psychological dramas and sentimentality are intertwined.

From these films emerges the image of a stereotyped female figure, subordinated in the exercise of her profession to the various male colleagues, the only ones represented both for their didactic-educational skills and for their ability to make the profession of teacher an opportunity for maturation, self-realization and self-fulfilment. To the point that the male protagonists are the only ones to enter into crisis in the face of the awareness that the school from an experience of *scholè*<sup>27</sup>, a space of personal ascent to get self-realization and identity affirmation, is becoming a system of dry bureaucratic practices.

#### 2.4 Women secondary teachers as “friends” and “lovers”

In a similar way to the image of the mother-teacher created by some films of the '90s, in the new millennium some television series feature some female secondary school teachers, who contribute to accentuating the perception of a professional role in which the elements of friendship, empathy, and daily complicity with students become dominant and essential in this work.

It's about *Provaci ancora, Prof!* [*Try it again, Prof!*], aired on Rai1 from 2005 to 2017, where prof. Camilla Baudino (Veronica Pivetti) juggles between school, where she almost assumes more of a role as friend and confidant of her students, and the resolutions of some cases and crimes and *Fuoriclasse* [*The Champion*], broadcasted on Rai1 from 2011 to 2015, where the protagonist is Luciana Littizzetto. She plays Isa, a 50-year-old Greek and Latin teacher, divorced and with a teenage son and who often appears as overwhelmed by events, in which the role of friendship with the students often takes over.

On the same wavelength also runs the two-part miniseries *Notte prima degli esami '82* [*The Night before the Exams: 1982*] (Elisabetta Marchetti, 2011), a remake, revisited and adapted for TV, of the film *Notte prima degli esami* [*The Night before the Exams*] (Fausto Brizzi, 2006), which narrates the story of four friends and their last days of school before graduation. Inside a high school represented with the traditional image of a selective school, abstract and distant from the real needs of the boys, as well as a place of practice and customs in which injustice, recommendation, hypocrisy and prejudice predominate, the figure of the female professor Bianchi (Marina Massironi), the only one among the teachers who embodies an authentic educational relationship, but whose role often assumes the connotation of friendly adviser and confidant of her students.

Taking this progressive “friendliness” of the social image of the teaching profession to the extreme consequences, to the point of touching the boundaries of sexual and love

<sup>27</sup> G. Bertagna, *La pedagogia della scuola. Dimensioni storiche, epistemologiche ed ordinamentali*, in G. Bertagna, S. Ulivieri (edd.), *La ricerca pedagogica nell'Italia contemporanea. Problemi e prospettive*, Roma, Studium, 2017, pp. 46-74.

relationships, is the television series *I Cesaroni* [*The Cesaronis*], broadcasted on Canale 5 from 2006 to 2014 and in which pseudo-amorous ties between students and teachers, both caught in their fragility, intertwine. This is the case of Rachele Diotallevi (Martina Colombari), a charming and attractive teacher, desperate for the recent separation from her husband, who finds comfort in a troubled love story with one of the adolescent protagonists, who is one of her students.

## 2.5 *Women secondary teachers as “adolescents” and ultimately no longer needed*

With a deliberately, disenchanted and teasing representation of the bond between pupils and teachers, the film *Arrivano i prof* [*The Teachers arrive*] (Ivan Silvestrini, 2018), aims to uncover the distortions that the relationship between adults and adolescents has all assumed in the contemporary world. In fact, the film is presented as a thematic continuation of *Notte prima degli esami*, but, in this case, the high school troubles, first loves and eternal friendships remain on the sidelines, as well as the students themselves, to leave room only for adult teachers, who are actually more teenagers than those sitting among the desks.

Particularly significant are the “extreme” representations of two female secondary school teachers, unable to govern their impulses and who pose like two adolescents: the irascible and hysterical Sandra Melis, an English teacher who throws chalks at students who they say exactly what she wants to hear and the provocative and semi-naked prof. Amina Venturi, who overturns all the stereotypes and clichés related to the Italian language teacher, to take their opposite to extremes. She is in fact a teacher who appears in the classroom with provocative clothing and winks at her students.

Through the staging of teachers who are self-caricatures, the film therefore implements the ridiculing of a category, that of secondary teachers, who, in social perception, has abdicated their educational role and who no longer respect borders, nor roles. And the film does this to actually make fun of all adults, who have lost the role of educational guides.

Even more radical and pessimistic in its representation of the link between teachers and pupils is *Skam Italia*, a series distributed starting from 2018, created by Ludovico Bessegato for TIMvision, which deals with the daily life of some students, addressing typical social issues of adolescence. However, while revolving around a high school in Rome, the series features very few adult figures, mostly represented by some mothers of the students and the physical education teacher. Instead, female secondary school teachers are completely absent, replaced by the figure of a gynaecologist. As if to say that their pedagogical and educational role is no longer needed. As if to say that so much has never been needed.

## Conclusions

The research conducted confirms the thesis that filmic sources serve a «heuristic function»<sup>28</sup> in the transition from the screen to collective memory and, as such, may play a relevant role in fostering innovative approaches to secondary teacher education, helping to train practitioners habitually engage in reflexive practices with a specific attention to the peculiar character of female profession and life perspective.

As argued by Geoff Pingree in *History in what remains. Cinema's challenge to idea about the past*<sup>29</sup> (2007), the audio-visual sources bear at the richness of processes of representation of the past, with many possible theoretical and practical implications in the process of professionalisation. Moreover, as observed by Paolo Alfieri in some recent interventions<sup>30</sup>, the study of how films and TV programmes have described and interpreted teaching-learning processes in a given historical period offers insights into how such representations also acted to spread clichéd and specific images of teachers with the power to influence the *Collective School Memories* of the public for generations to follow. Cinema and television play a decisive role in this process for several reasons, such as their perceptual and affective impact with the consequence of an emotional involvement, and their contribution to build “imagined communities”<sup>31</sup>.

In particular, this study has highlighted how, starting from the success of the comedies of the Seventies and the diffusion of the image of the sexy female secondary teacher, Italian cinema has spread, on the one hand, the progressive perception of the feminization of the teaching profession, and on the other, the image of a female teacher who is frivolous, dedicated to emotional things, and so incompetent in terms of teaching and education and on that level secondary and subordinate to her male colleague.

Therefore, if in the Seventies the sexual revolution and the feminism processes led to the celebration of features typifying femininity and to the exposure of the female body, starting from the Eighties and then especially during the Nineties, precisely the “discovery”, the unveiling and the emphasis on typically feminine traits led first to an insistence and then to an exasperation of the representation of the female secondary teacher according to the stereotyped aspects of her femininity, consequently spreading a new imaginary about the female teacher. Up to the point that a figure of teacher, for whom life is declined only on personal problems, and for whom the work is not, as for the male figure, a significant experience, has therefore gradually emerged. A figure focused only on her own personal needs, a figure increasingly disinterested in the world of school

<sup>28</sup> I. Dussel, K. Priem, *The visual in histories of education: a reappraisal*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 53, n. 6, 2017, pp. 641-649.

<sup>29</sup> G. Pingree, *History in what remains. Cinema's challenge to ideas about the past*, in R. Francaviglia, J. Rodnitzky (edd.), *Lights, Camera, History: portraying the past in the film*, Arlington, University Press, 2007, pp. 37-38.

<sup>30</sup> Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> P. Alfieri, *Collective school memory, cinema and television: use of sources and interpretive perspectives*, in P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and Collective School Memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando, 2022, p. 100.

and in building true educational relationships. Whether she is represented as a mother, a lover, a friend of her students or as a frivolous teenager, the film sources examined have shown the gradual declining path experienced by this figure, perceived more and more as useless at an educational level, increasingly absent, increasingly subordinate to male colleagues, to the point of being completely eliminated in some recent series, significantly dedicated specifically to adolescents and enjoyed by them.

# *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*: Trajectories of Memory from the Literary Text to Filmic Mediations

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In December 1964, a lingering aura of expectation surrounded the TV listing for Rai television, which included eight episodes of a TV series inspired by the Italian children's literature classic *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*<sup>1</sup>. The festive Christmas period was certainly well suited to gather, on a steady basis, an audience of Italians of old and new generations in front of the "magic box". On Saturday night, they would have had the opportunity to relive, or experience for the first time, the adventures of the famous rascal created by Luigi Bertelli's pen, also known as Vamba, between 1907 and 1908<sup>2</sup>. The choice of prime time to broadcast the series seemed to address the national-popular objective of pulling together the original readers of *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, who may have well recalled their own childhood years, with a large portion of elderly people and adults with a low level of literacy that did not have any knowledge of Vamba's work, since in the first half of the twentieth century the book was not diffused at school due to its rebellious character, with a dangerous appeal for popular masses<sup>3</sup>. The *Giornalino* remained enclosed in the circle of the young children from the middle and high Italian bourgeoisie, who followed its development first in instalments in the magazine «Giornalino della Domenica» (between 1907 and 1908), and then in book form published in 1912<sup>4</sup>. On the contrary, for children in the 1960s the *Giornalino* was not among their favourite readings and the mediation of the TV series was indeed a novelty<sup>5</sup>. On such premises, in line with the state monopoly on television in Italy until the 1960s<sup>6</sup>, the new series aimed at educating while

<sup>1</sup> Rai Radiotelevisione italiana, *Relazione e bilancio esercizio 1964*, Roma, 29 aprile, 1965, p. 25; L. Zambotti, *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/352, published 25.10.2021 (last access: 07.03.2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca* by Vamba was published in the magazine «Giornalino della Domenica» from 17 February 1907 to 17 May 1908. Bemporad publishing house released the book in 1912.

<sup>3</sup> In the 1920s, after Gentile's Reform, the book was left out of the list of entertainment readings in school libraries. A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> About reading and reader's education in «Giornalino della Domenica» see S. Fava, *Piccoli lettori del Novecento. I bambini di Paola Carrara Lombroso sui giornali per ragazzi*, Torino, SEI, 2015, pp. 28-31.

<sup>5</sup> About the characteristics of neorealism in children's literature after the Second World War see P. Boero, C. De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012<sup>2</sup>, pp. 240-256.

<sup>6</sup> R. Farnè, *Buona maestra Tv. La Rai e l'educazione da Non è mai troppo tardi a Quark*, Roma, Carocci,

entertaining the audience, thus playing the role of school substitute that the Italian public broadcasting service (RAI) interpreted not only as news provider but also in entertainment as it drew inspiration from theatre, contemporary literature and literary classics<sup>7</sup>.

### 1. *The RAI miniseries torn between critics and audience*

RAI made a considerable economic investment in the series directed by Lina Wertmüller, who was then a young director of RAI variety shows like *Canzonissima* in 1959 and with previous theatrical experiences in cabaret and puppet shows<sup>8</sup>. Well-known theatre actors were part of the cast like Bice Valori and Sergio Tofano, playing the roles of principals in the Collegio Pierpaoli, but also Ivo Garrani, Giannino Stoppani's irascible father, and Valeria Valeri, the caring mother. The actress that really stood out with her surprising interpretation was Rita Pavone, not yet in her twenties, as the protagonist Gian Burrasca with a mysterious aura surrounding this dual role of boy and child, together with a very effective stage presence and a memorable singing performance.

The choice to include *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* in prime time and not in the afternoon listing left critics sceptical and uncertain in their evaluation. Reading the «Entertainment» column in the newspaper «Corriere della Sera» of 15 December 1964, the TV critic Vincenzo Buonassisi wrote that this choice was due to the fact that Gian Burrasca belonged to another generation and was not interesting for young people.

Why was it appealing for the young then, but not today? The reason – we believe – is that in its time it described everyday life as it was, there was an inherent sense of humour in each situation that became the reason why people used to read it and be entertained. Today, that reference disappeared, young people cannot make any sense out of dead things, which may still move those who experienced or at least had a faint knowledge of them. Moreover, the weight of the written word can be different from that of the image, more or less of impact, depending on each case. In this series the image may negatively emphasize some actions, some tricks played by Gian Burrasca which, if played through the fantasy of the written word seem to acquire a fairy-tale shading of something impossible and therefore less real<sup>9</sup>.

Some sort of resistance, less evident but more effective, regarded the belief that the message amplified through the television medium would have given more emphasis to the satirical and transgressive message of Gian Burrasca, thus transforming him in a dangerous role model for the young audience watching the series without adult supervision. In the days following the airing of the first episode on 19 December, the critics were far from being enthusiastic.

2003, pp. 9-12 and 19-24.

<sup>7</sup> F. Colombo, *Storie di quelli che non hanno fatto il '68*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> A. Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, Milano, Garzanti, 1996, p. 836.

<sup>9</sup> V. Buonassisi, *Gian Burrasca fustiga i costumi*, «Corriere della Sera», 15 December 1964, p. 12.



After having entertained three generations, *Gian Burrasca* landed on screen last Saturday evening, starring the unmistakable figure of Rita Pavone, in the form of a «contamination» between televised novel and musical comedy that may have left its original readers slightly disappointed. Translating the written word in pictures is always difficult<sup>10</sup>.

Journalistic criticism veered towards a comparison with the literary text, with a dismayed nostalgia for a screen rewriting that did not seem to maintain Vamba's narrative tension so often equalled to that of fairy-tales. The topic was discussed further even after the airing of the remaining episodes:

The world of the book has disappeared; the character, stepping away from the written page, is not convincing, absurd, lacking in fantasy: an empty message for young people today. The rewriting could have been more suitable for the former young generation, if only it succeeded<sup>11</sup>.

The reviews are not indulgent, Giannino is naughty, the «dull» tone is attributed to the boring, endlessly repetitive staging of his mischiefs.

Evidence suggests that critics' reviews are decidedly, almost excessively, negative and seem to move along a different path from the acceptance of the audience. Aldo Grasso mentioned that the miniseries reached an average audience rating of 13.6 million viewers and an approval rating of 64 points<sup>12</sup>. Within RAI TV listing, the show was categorised as «entertainment programme» because it mixed dialogue, music and singing<sup>13</sup>, and it should be noted the appreciation from the public of the music composed by Nino Rota and the songs performed mainly by Rita Pavone with the lyrics written by Lina Wertmüller. Among these stood out *Viva la pappa col pomodoro* [Hooray for tomato soup], still very much present in people's minds today, and a record bestseller back then as it persisted in the charts for a total of 15 weeks<sup>14</sup>. Success, as emerged by the quantitative data related to the audience appreciation, was confirmed by RAI which, in the occasion of Christmas holidays in 1965, aired the show in the early fringe time on the second RAI channel. RAI followed up with reruns in TV listings for a young audience, thus fostering the dissemination of the TV show across generations of viewers. Fausto Colombo may well provide a sound basis for a qualitative argument about the persistence of the programme on collective imagination. His sociological view ponders the value of the television medium on the formation of the imaginary for some generations born after the Second World War. They began their early literacy path through the parallel school medium of television for a young audience and fed their imagination with representations of school in stark contrast with the real one, but nonetheless accepted them because they were not old enough to take part in the cultural debate that led to the student movement in 1968.

<sup>10</sup> *Gian Burrasca alla Rita Pavone*, «Corriere della Sera», 21-22 December 1964, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Gian Burrasca quinta puntata*, «Corriere della Sera», 17 January 1965, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, cit., p. 301.

<sup>13</sup> Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Relazione e bilancio esercizio 1964*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, cit., p. 301.

Italian television took care of our education by making us have fun, starting from a representation of school that was satirical and very playful. *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* (1964) is an entertaining musical programme directed by Lina Wertmuller, inspired by the book bearing the same name by Vamba (immortal figure embodying the Italian sense of humour) written in 1912.

Gian Burrasca is a naughty and prankster schoolboy and in the tv show was played by Rita Pavone, even naughtier than the naughtiest boy, younger than the youngest child, simply perfect for the part. The original score still rings in our ears and our memory, even more than that of *Chissà chi lo sà?: La pappa col pomodoro*, music composed by Nino Rota, the great composer for Federico Fellini's movies (the lyrics, by Wertmuller herself, sound like: «Viva la pappa pappa, col popopopopomodoro. Viva la pappa pappa, ch'è un capopopolavoro. Viva la pa pappapà col popopomodòr...»).

Vamba's book, and the musical comedy, satirised the hypocrisies of the society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: frivolous girls, repressive teachers, unctuous politicians. Undoubtedly, for us as an audience dependent on the tv screen, the revolution brought about by Gian Burrasca in the school where he was exiled was destined to merge with other student movements, ours and – earlier in time – of elder brothers and sisters<sup>15</sup>.

Colombo's argument provides food for thought on the playful impact of the show on the audience, and the extent to which the dimension of education through entertainment resulted in an immediate appreciation and, on the long term, the sedimentation power on the collective imagination of several generations of Italians. This point of view illuminates the distance between the two worlds of audience and critics.

The marked conservative eye of television critics led on the one hand to favour the literary text and its originality against the TV show, on the other to rise in defence of childhood, which was not considered the natural addressee of the show, yet at risk of feeling dangerously attracted to the pranks set up by Gian Burrasca.

The audience, on the contrary, expressed their definite appreciation for the series in a process of positive empathy with that naive rascal, yet champion of justice that brought in the houses of Italians an old-fashioned representation of the school of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but somehow similar to the conservative and classist school that people wanted to change in the 1960s.

## 2. *The message reverberates through the young readers of «Corriere dei Piccoli»*

The interest of the young audience for the TV series grew stronger as the series progressed also thanks to the contribution of a genuinely ingenious idea from the Italian magazine for children «Corriere dei Piccoli». With a week's delay from the airing of each episode, the renowned magazine from Milan offered some of the most famous extracts from Vamba's work following a journalistic project characterised by a markedly modern communicative approach<sup>16</sup>. The editor-in-chief Carlo Triberti, who inherited from his

<sup>15</sup> Colombo, *Storie di quelli che non hanno fatto il '68*, cit., p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> The six episodes taken from *Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* were published in «Corriere dei Piccoli» between 27 December 1964 and 31 January 1965.

predecessor Guglielmo Zucconi an open-minded approach that included new multimedia languages<sup>17</sup>, brought together a literary style close to the original and the comic art by Giovanni Mosca with its satirical and caustic quality in order to present some frames from the TV series. This is an example of layered communication where there was no superposition of the various codes, on the contrary, it played on the possibility of an extended perspective offered by the different media languages. When, for example, in the second episode on the magazine the focus is on the story of Aunt Bettina's dittany plant<sup>18</sup>, Mosca's illustrations expand the perspective and sketch also the journey by train of the protagonist and the path he walks by to reach his aunt's house, but the frames from the series keep telling the story that words cannot describe. They evoke, in a more immediate way, the TV scenes related to Giannino's father called to fetch his rascal son, but also the organization of Luisa and Collalto's wedding and the scene of the firecrackers exploding on Collalto's dress suit<sup>19</sup>. This exchange resulted in a mutual emphasis between the messages offered by television and magazine, amplifying and consolidating the potential of the original story to feed the collective imagination of young readers, who continued to be the real addressees of Vamba's work thanks to the effort of the magazine.

A closer look at the choices adopted in the TV series and in «Corriere dei Piccoli», there seems to be a more cautious approach in the latter. In the selection of the episodes to be published, those that were left out had a marked satirical charge against the hypocrisy of adults or were most likely to result in a political fallout in view of their polemical tone. In the magazine, the editorial choice fell on Giannino's incursions to suggest a mixture of intemperance and innocence, and the verbal text is void of any hint of a direct connection with moral or ethical evaluations, or even political connections. In the fourth episode, for example, the action is on the escape by car of Giannino and Cecchino Bellucci, but the text does not linger on the political message inherent in the status of having an automobile, nor does it mention how Cecchino could have suffered from permanent disability after the car accident they got involved in<sup>20</sup>. What remains is the carefree – though disastrous – initiative of the two rascals that certainly elicits a good laugh and entertainment. Frames from the series simply tell the school story of Professor Muscolo, with his lanky gait and deformed profile, a severe – but completely ineffective – mask<sup>21</sup>. A mirroring structure between TV series and magazine can be found in Giannino's lucky trip to Rome accompanied by Signor Clodoveo Tyrrynnanzy, a travelling agent selling inks<sup>22</sup>. The famous ink splashing from the train window on the travellers on board another train

<sup>17</sup> Guglielmo Zucconi and Carlo Triberti managed to direct the magazine towards a structure open to the contamination of different codes, thanks to the journalistic experiences gained in RAI. They could seize the communicative opportunity offered by television to put on paper for a young audience the characters created on screen. Suffice it to mention Scaramacai and Topo Gigio, among the others.

<sup>18</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 3 January 1965, pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> The frames refer to the second episode of the series, called *La girandola sul frack* [The firecracker pinwheel on the dress suit] aired on 26 December 1964.

<sup>20</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 17 January 1965, pp. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> The frames refer to the fourth episode *I razzi nel camino* [Rockets in the chimney] aired on 9 January 1965.

<sup>22</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 24 January 1965, pp. 12-13.

waiting at the station is narrated in an exhilarating tone by Mosca's illustrations showing the result of the prank, and by the series' frames showing how the scene unfolded<sup>23</sup>.

In the sixth and last episode published in «Corriere dei Piccoli»<sup>24</sup>, Giannino is staying with the Maralli family. The story is about Giannino swapping lenses between two pairs of glasses, one of which belonged to uncle Venanzio. The old uncle panics without his glasses, because he believes he is going to die. Nothing happens, and when Giannino swaps the lenses back, Venanzio feels immediately better, eternally grateful to Gian Burrasca. What is left out is Venanzio's testament, where he disinherits his nephew<sup>25</sup>. The last episode narrates the delightful story of Mr. and Mrs. Pierpaoli holding a séance. The whole thing is uncovered by Giannino at school, the scene is illustrated by Mosca but does not appear in the TV series frames, which emphasize the deformed profile of the two principals and Gian Burrasca as member of the *One for All, All for One* secret society. The magazine leaves the ending open, making a reference to a further séance two days later, and eliminates the part dedicated to the famous «Pappa col pomodoro». Therefore, the narration is left to the song sung by Rita Pavone – which was going to be published in the following issue<sup>26</sup> – consequently directing the attention of readers towards the language of music.

### 3. *A representation of school between television and magazine*

*Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* published in the «Corriere dei Piccoli» magazine shows the illuminating modernity and novelty of an initiative interweaving different communication codes, with a highly successful potential of reaching the young audience of that period. It should be mentioned that the magazine, in the same years, reached its peak circulation with 378.715 copies<sup>27</sup>, offering an editorial project already in line with the television programmes dedicated to a young audience through the characters of Topo Gigio and Scaramacai. Specifically for these, the magazine offered contents that – unlike those on TV – could be read countless times by the young public, thus ensuring their survival over a long period. Among the extracts published, the “great excluded” is precisely the school with its intergenerational conflicts set out in Gian Burrasca's narration. The magazine clearly defined its boundaries outside the school environment through an attentive selection of contents. Its purpose<sup>28</sup> abandoned any attempt to intervene in the

<sup>23</sup> The frames refer to the fifth episode *Giannino in casa Collalto* [Giannino at Collaltos' house] aired on 16 January 1965.

<sup>24</sup> Vamba, *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 31 January 1965, pp. 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> Id., *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1994, p. 252.

<sup>26</sup> R. Pavone, *Viva la pappa col pomodoro*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», 7 February 1965, pp. 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> M. Marvulli, *Il «Corriere dei Piccoli». Cronologia e dati storici*, in G. Ginex (ed.), *Corriere dei Piccoli. Storie, fumetto e illustrazione per ragazzi*, Milano, Skira, 2009, pp. 271-274.

<sup>28</sup> With reference to the extra-scholastic environment and the purpose of «Corriere dei Piccoli» aimed at a young audience reading the magazine in their spare time at home, see S. Fava, *Piccoli lettori del Novecento*, cit. pp. 27-45.

debate around the school that was slowly gaining the public's attention before reaching its peak with Don Lorenzo Milani's *Letter to a teacher* and Mario Lodi's work<sup>29</sup>.

The mockery of teachers like Muscolo or Principals Stanislao and Geltrude Pierpaoli, is a pivotal issue in the TV series.

In the fourth episode, aired on 9 January 1965, the well-known narrative passage related to Gian Burrasca is presented. The tango music and the lyrics performed by Rita Pavone amplify the boring, compulsory, authoritative character of school and Giannino's complete lack of interest, like «This school is so boring, such uncivilized habits», the teacher is a «tyrant», «melancholy geography» or «parents listen to your conscience... don't make us suffer this way at school»<sup>30</sup>. The school institution is a punishment for children, and the following scene seems to justify the rebellious actions of Giannino and his schoolmates. Wertmüller's direction strived to adhere to the reality of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with pictures of the king and queen on the walls to emphasize the formal context, a map and a plant kingdom poster, the furniture with wooden double desks and the teacher desk. The caricatural appearance of Professor Muscolo is emphasized by Giannino's drawing in his diary. The modified picture (Muscolo is not bald as in Vamba's original story), together with the teacher's actions, clumsy and formal at the same time, amplify his lack of authority on the students. And the warning «Everybody freeze! Everybody silent! If Muscolo sees you, you're done for!» written on Nelli's shirt collar is a hilarious example of student prank that leaves the principal and the Professor speechless.

The school environment clearly stands out in the seventh episode *Giannino in collegio* (Giannino at boarding school), aired on 30 January 1965<sup>31</sup>. From the first frame, the audience can see a plain dorm room, its furniture being only a crucifix and a fresco by the founder Pierpaolo Pierpaoli. The scene appears artificially mystical, considering the contradictory messages against any religious message that is consequently derivative of the adult hypocrisy. Every detail points to a punitive place and in the series it is nicknamed «prison facility», where people «atone for their sins». This is not education, it is military discipline made of marches and uniforms that elicit verbal reactions such as: «down with tyrants» naming Frederick Barbarossa, the Visconti family and Count Radetzky, but hailing Silvio Pellico and his famous effort of domesticating a spider written in his account of his sufferings in *My Prisons*.

The characters of the Principals Stanislao and Geltrude are veritable icons of caricature, excess and an ideal link to the tradition of history and the literary text. The

<sup>29</sup> Don Milani's argument against an elitist and classist school that is traditionally led to share equal terms among unequal people, or Mario Lodi's thoughts that evolved by observing students smothered by a school system that did not offer them the conditions to authentically express themselves, are part of the cultural debate that shook the foundations of the educational dynamics at school between the end of the 1960s and the 1970s, bringing about a revolution in the field. M. Lodi, *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*, Milano, Edizioni Avanti, 1963; Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967.

<sup>30</sup> *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, TV series, 1964; <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/Il-giornalino-di-Gian-Burrasca---I-razzi-nel-caminetto-0809940f-1757-46b9-b1db-aecca8d94d7b.html> (last access: 18.02.2023).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/Il-giornalino-di-Gian-Burrasca---Giannino-in-collegio-ff33467e-21ce-496d-a4ae-13bc7b9ef2ef.html> (last access: 18.02.2023).

actors interpreting the principals are two figures closely related to the loyal circle of «Giornalino»<sup>32</sup>. Stanislao is interpreted by an old Sergio Tofano, who saw the first release of the «Giornalino della Domenica» magazine, for which he drew splendid covers<sup>33</sup> and in 1943 he was also assistant director for the movie *Gian Burrasca*<sup>34</sup>. The actor worked on the character to fit him perfectly, emphasizing the clumsiness, the barely credible identity to the extent that he is nicknamed Calpurnio (with reference to the corrupted tribune of the plebs Lucius Calpurnius Bestia) for his subordinate behaviour to his wife. Geltrude is interpreted by Bice Valori<sup>35</sup>, a memorable theatrical comedian and for RAI, daughter of Aldo Valori, famous in Italy under the pseudonym of *Ceralacca* for Vamba's weekly magazine and pivotal member of the magazine's editorial staff. Both actors, either directly or indirectly, knew Vamba's work in depth and were able to give prominence to the smallest detail. To make the character of Geltrude credible, with her deformed aspect that made her look like a beignet, Bice Valori performed on her knees, and the make-up emphasized the caricature adding a mole on the cheek<sup>36</sup>. In terms of relations, her distinctive traits are her habit of chasing everyone with offensive words and violent acts that emphasized the lack of the most basic rules for respect. Disciplinary violence of adults against boarding school students is a distinctive trait also in other scenes: for example, when janitors hit on the head the students eating their lunch<sup>37</sup>. It seems that the TV series pushes the message of the literary text to the limit, creating a sharp opposition against students and a definite point of view siding with Gian Burrasca, always represented as an innocent victim of unspeakable violence, such as in the scene of the «pappa col pomodoro» that eventually marks the revenge of students on the principals' falsity. It seems apt here to recall Andersen's ending in *The Emperor's New Clothes*<sup>38</sup>. Children can surely make the truth emerge, but not necessarily can they scratch the surface of the political behaviour of adults, who – in the name of other plans – maintain a single-handed approach to education.

<sup>32</sup> The Italian term «giornalinesco» refers to a typical feature that characterized the readers of «Giornalino della Domenica». It is known that one of the objectives of the magazine was to grow a sense of loyalty among its readers, and ensure that they, together with collaborators, felt like a big family clustered around the magazine's values.

<sup>33</sup> About Sergio Tofano illustrator for Vamba's magazine, see P. Pallottino, *L'irripetibile stagione de «Il giornalino della domenica»*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> R. Chiti, E. Lancia (edd.), *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, vol. 1 *Tutti i film italiani dal 1930 al 1944*, Roma, Gremese Editore, 2005, p. 162 <https://www.cinematografo.it/film/gian-burrasca-h8cal8xq> (last access: 18.02.2023); <https://www.archiviodelcinemaitaliano.it/index.php/scheda.html?codice=SV286&jjj=1668413582519> (last access: 18.02.2023).

<sup>35</sup> E. Lancia, R. Poppi (edd.), *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, vol. 2 *Le attrici: dal 1930 ai giorni nostri*, Roma, Gremese Editore, 2005, p. 360.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2016/11/Il-giornalino-di-Gian-Burrasca---Giannino-in-collegio-f33467e-21ce-496d-a4ae-13be7b9ef2ef.html> (last access: 18.02.2023).

<sup>38</sup> H. C. Andersen, *Quaranta novelle*, translated by M. Pezzè Pascolato, Milano, Hoepli, 1904, pp. 19-27.



#### 4. *Historical background of the text and collective memory*

The history of *Giornalino di Giamburrasca* is characterised by different phases that mark the new media development, and therefore of successive revisions of the original text thus fostering a diverse – and wider – circulation of contents as well as its sedimentation in the collective memory of the audience.

The first publishing phase focuses on the success of the magazine for young readers «Il Giornalino della Domenica», which between 1907 and 1908 gathered the first loyal readers. Thanks to the worn-out pages from the innumerable occasions for rereading, it built lasting friendships in the *Confederazione del Girotondo* that accompanied their growth and at the same time nurtured the future ruling class of Italy. Such elitist and solid relations clearly supported the definitive success of *Gian Burrasca* when it was published in book form in 1912<sup>39</sup>.

The second phase is characterized by the film production of *Gian Burrasca* in 1943, directed by Sergio Tofano, with the original score by Giuseppe Bertelli, Vamba's son<sup>40</sup>. At that time, the critics, especially Giorgio Almirante, a debuting cinema critic on the verge of a political career, were ruthless:

Tofano is stuck between the show for young children and older children: between fun and style. To be honest, it seems that he focused mainly on style. He lacks the ability (or the courage?) to master it properly; the result is a caricatural movie, [...] where hilarious scenes are still there, together with typical characters, even the tone is perfect here and there. But there is no continuity, no coherence, not even the intimate and irresistible comical character of truly, wholly intelligent works of art. The audience may laugh (or even better, the young audience may laugh), but bursts of laughter are intermittent, when a fun, unexpected figure suddenly appears, or when a diabolical prank is getting through. Most of the times, narration is jammed, it lingers on superfluous details, it gets lost in ineffective descriptions of the environment because they are basically unnecessary. It seems that Tofano lacks the rhythm of the director<sup>41</sup>.

The movie cannot distance itself from the literary text even if Tofano is both a high-profile director and actor, and he has the skills and knowledge to look beyond the text itself. The chance to match or even surpass Vamba's work on screen is only partly successful. Tofano ends the movie on a positive note. Giannino moves his father to tears by purchasing a comfortable armchair for him, and the father renounces the idea of sending Giannino to a youth detention centre. This solution is far from Vamba's intentions who, on the contrary, chose an open ending where Giannino does not correct his behaviour, but suggests more pranks on the way. Therefore, the movie seems stuck and even if it loses ground in comparison with the literary text, the presence of Tofano as director and

<sup>39</sup> Fava, *Piccoli lettori del Novecento*, cit., pp. 256-264.

<sup>40</sup> Chiti, Lancia (edd.), *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, vol. 1 *Tutti i film italiani dal 1930 al 1944*, cit., p. 162. L. Zambotti, *Gian Burrasca*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/1015, published on: 28.12.2021 (last access: 10.03.2023).

<sup>41</sup> G. Almirante, «Il Tevere», 11 June 1943.



actor, Mimmo Battaglia and Cesco Baseggio, leaves it in the hands of collective memory and contributes to keep alive the memory of middle-class imagined features of that time.

Moreover, in 1961, some loyal supporters of the «Giornalino della Domenica» family of long ago made their voice heard in defence of Giuseppe Bertelli, composer of the music for Gian Burrasca's film in 1943, and a child like many others who read the «Giornalino» at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An article by Giovanni Mosca informing about the passing of Vamba's son mistakenly reported that he was the inspirational source of Giannino's character because he was just as naughty as him, and this oversight stirred discontent from a number of affectionate readers of «Giornalino»<sup>42</sup>.

Cesarina Lorenzoni, children's writer and former reader of Vamba's work, strongly states her position in defence of Giuseppe Bertelli.

«Not a naughty boy, Beppino Bertelli, but not even an exaggeratedly calm boy to the point that he seemed obtuse». This statement hurt me deeply. And I believe it hurt all those who, in their youth, followed Vamba in his unforgettable work and then followed and loved his son in his life as an artist. This life, despite your somewhat quick judgement, was known and held in high esteem by many, precisely in the world of musicians, of those that counted. Indeed, in a world led by sensational and profitable famous figures created by films and juke-boxes, the life of a man who silently, devotedly and truthfully served the Art he loved may look like a failure. But this is true only for those who forgot the real measure of things that does not change according to changing times and fashions<sup>43</sup>.

Lorenzoni's letter, among other things, emphasizes the socially elitist origin of the loyal readers of «Giornalino», and the difficulty of accepting some sort of cultural decadence caused by the consolidation of mass media occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War. Therefore, for those affectionate past readers, all that remains is their loyalty to the literary tradition of the original text, as it continues its sedimentation and feeding of memory in spite of all adaptations.

The third phase is characterised by the Rai TV series that accompanied Vamba's work towards its diffusion to the wide popular public, feeding the imagination of the new adults who reached literacy also through television itself. For them, Rita Pavone, interpreting Gian Burrasca, found her place in their hearts with memorable songs that became the soundtrack of their everyday lives. Giannino's message of freedom and justice conquered them all, leaving a smile on their face, guaranteeing fun for everyone<sup>44</sup>. There is a looming idea of a possible social change involving the young audience between television and «Corriere dei Piccoli», spreading the message of vitality and spontaneity of the protagonist from one generation to the next. What remained in the collective memory clearly had a lesser impact than the original author's intentions. The subversive change of Gian Burrasca lost its strength as time went by, as did the clear political message in Vamba. Through this process, Gian Burrasca's series protagonist fixed himself in the

<sup>42</sup> S. Fava, *Il progetto culturale avviato da Silvio Spaventa Filippi*, in R. Lollo (ed.), *Il «Corriere dei Piccoli» in un secolo di riviste per ragazzi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2009, pp. 67-71.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup> L. Zambotti, *Giamburrasca & Co.*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/1681, published on: 27.04.2022 (last access: 08.03.2023).

popular imaginary as a character that was loved and supported. The analysis of the writing and re-writing process of the text<sup>45</sup>, from one communication code to the other, allowed to outline the construction of a space for imagination and collective memory<sup>46</sup> where the multifarious contaminations changed the knowledge of the past. They ensured that each generation passed on a dynamic representation that could undergo new interpretations of schools and the relations among students, teachers, and principals.

<sup>45</sup> Ead., *Gian Burrasca*, in «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/345, published on: 25.10.2021 (last access: 08/03/2023).

<sup>46</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao Frago, *School memory: historiographical balance and heuristic perspectives*, in C. Yanes Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao, (edd.), *School memories. New trends in the history of education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019.



# The Image of the Female Elementary School Teacher in the Works of Edmondo De Amicis across Literary and Visual Sources

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The late 1800s saw strong feminization of the elementary teaching profession, a phenomenon that would further intensify over the 1900s<sup>1</sup>. Female elementary school teachers began to populate the physical spaces of the classroom and the real-life spaces of press reports, as well as places of the imagination such as novels and novellas. The construction of the woman teacher cannot be properly analysed without considering the works of Edmondo De Amicis. This author, from his perspective as an investigative journalist even more so than as a novelist, offered his readers skilful depictions of a gallery of schoolmistresses: from the idealization of lady teachers who were rich in pathos and a spirit of self-sacrifice in *Cuore. Libro per i ragazzi* (1886), via the condemnation of the difficult working conditions inflicted upon teachers in *Il romanzo di un maestro* (1890), to more realistic and diverse representations of women teachers in *Fra scuola e casa* (1892), a collection of writings including *Amore e ginnastica* and *La maestrina degli operai*. From the resolute and energetic Maria Pedani, admirer of the gymnastics coach Emilio Baumann and supporter of the De Sanctis Law – which in 1878 introduced physical education into the elementary school curriculum – to the more timorous Enrica Varetto, De Amicis portrayed a set of teachers who were variously embittered, neurotic, or eccentric<sup>2</sup>.

The present study, which falls within the domain of historical-educational research into school memory, examines *La maestrina degli operai*, a television adaptation directed by Guglielmo Morandi (1970), *Amore e ginnastica* directed by Luigi Filippo D'Amico (1973) and filmic versions of *Cuore* directed by Duilio Coletti (1948), Luigi Comencini (1984), and Maurizio Zaccaro (2001), as well as the Japanese animated series *La scuola dell'amore: la storia di Cuore*, a 26-episodes rendering of *Cuore* produced in 1981 by Nippon Animation. The anime is of particular interest because it is the only adaptation of a work by De Amicis that specifically targets children. In general, the aim of my inquiry is

<sup>1</sup> A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Macerata, eum, 2012, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 133-156; G. Bini, La maestra nella letteratura: uno specchio della realtà, in S. Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1989, pp. 331-362.

to compare traditional literary sources with visual sources<sup>3</sup>, in relation to reconstructions of the past, interpretations of collective memory, and the continuous need to adapt to changing historical and social conditions.

### 1. *Filmic reinterpretations of Cuore: "the little schoolmistress with the red feather"*

*Cuore. Libro per ragazzi* first appeared in the bookstores of the Kingdom of Italy on 15 October 1886; by the end of the same year, the book had already been through 41 editions and requests had been received to translate it into leading foreign languages. The publisher Emilio Treves basked in the popularity of *Cuore*, stating in «L'Illustrazione Italiana» that it was «the great success of the year»<sup>4</sup>. However, *Cuore* was not only a best seller, but also a long seller. By 1913, over one million copies had been printed, while on the eve of the Second World War this figure had gone up to over two million copies<sup>5</sup>. De Amicis' *Cuore* continued to be an integral part of the education of young Italians at least until the late 1950s<sup>6</sup>, but – judging by the numerous film and television adaptations – the shadow cast by the work stretches much further into the present. Although De Amicis described a rich assortment of teachers in his novel, the same cannot be said for the film and television remakes, which have focused almost exclusively on the character of the “little schoolmistress with the red feather”. Indeed, despite offering diverse reinterpretations of De Amicis' novel, the film versions share this reduction in variety among the schoolmistresses at the Sezione Baretti in Turin<sup>7</sup>, who all seem to be merged into one character, that of the teacher «who has two pretty dimples in her cheeks, and who wears a large red feather on her little bonnet»<sup>8</sup>. This choice is understandable if we compare the historical timing of the novel, which was written towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that of its adaptations for cinema and TV, all of which span the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Between these two periods, societal perspectives on women underwent substantial changes. It is not surprising, therefore, that in place of the consumptive «schoolmistress of the upper first» – described by Enrico Bottini in his fictitious diary account of the 1881-82 school year as «plainly dressed and

<sup>3</sup> For further background on the use of cinema as a historical source cf. S. Polenghi, *Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa*, in P. Malavasi, S. Polenghi, P.C. Rivoltella, *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005, pp. 19-49.

<sup>4</sup> P. Boero, G. Genovesi, *Cuore. De Amicis tra critica e utopia*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009, posizione 1702 (edizione Kindle).

<sup>5</sup> M. Mosso, *I tempi del Cuore. Vita e lettere di Edmondo De Amicis a Emilio Treves*, Milano, Mondadori, 1925, pp. 370-371.

<sup>6</sup> S. Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri "vista" oggi. Le trasposizioni filmiche del libro Cuore nell'Italia repubblicana (1948-2001)*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> It has now been established that the boys' elementary school in the city of Turin that De Amicis drew his inspiration from was the *Sezione Moncenisio* at via Doragrossa 51, which the writer's own sons had attended.

<sup>8</sup> E. De Amicis, *Cuore. Libro per ragazzi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2018, p. 71.

her hair carelessly arranged, [with] less colour than she had last year [...], and some white hair»<sup>9</sup>, and reported dead in the diary entry of 28 June – the adapted versions have favoured the «always happy»<sup>10</sup> little schoolmistress with the red feather. Especially given that in two out of the three films in our analysis (leaving the animated version aside for now), the teacher falls – back – in love with Perboni, Enrico's third grade teacher. The directors and screenwriters<sup>11</sup> of the 1948 and 2001 adaptations – who, not coincidentally, were all men – must have perceived as unappealing both the drab first grade teacher and the «little nun» who was always dressed in dark colours, and was meek and shy, with such a small voice that she always seemed to be «murmuring prayers»<sup>12</sup> by comparison with that cheeky and intriguing red feather. I do not believe it incidental that the only version of *Cuore* in which the “little schoolmistress” does not find self-affirmation in her relationship with Master Perboni is that of 1984, directed by Luigi Comencini but scripted by the director with two women screenwriters: his daughter Cristina, who has always been involved in the struggle for gender equality, and Suso (Giovanna) Cecchi D'Amico<sup>13</sup>.

In Duilio Coletti's 1948 interpretation of *Cuore*<sup>14</sup>, it is the schoolmistress with the red feather who recounts the salient episodes of De Amicis' novel by sharing her memories with Enrico Amici (a seeming blend of Enrico Bottini and Edmondo De Amicis), her former student who has looked her up again after reading about her in a newspaper. Here reality and fantasy meet, given that the “real-life” schoolmistress with the red feather, who taught De Amicis' son Ugo and was said to have inspired the author's brief portrait of her, did become somewhat famous thanks to her fictitious counterpart. Many articles were written about Eugenia Barruero, her real name, during her lifetime, and when she died, a tribute to her was published on the cover page of the «Domenica del Corriere»<sup>15</sup>. An article by Ugo Zatterin published in «La Stampa» described the arrival of «Miss Eugenia» in Cinecittà, where Coletti's *Cuore* was being filmed: «Actors and actresses surrounded her full of curiosity, and the old lady entertained them»<sup>16</sup>. Barruero, however, confessed that she could barely remember the famous bonnet and that the notorious red feather was actually brown<sup>17</sup>. Thus, Maria Mercader – who played the part of the “schoolmistress” – had the opportunity to “study” Barruero close up. In the film, the schoolmistress character is called Clotilde Serra. Like her counterpart in the novel, she displays motherly affection

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> *Cuore* (1948): director Duilio Coletti, screenwriters Oreste Biancoli, Gaspare Cataldo, Adolfo Franci, Vittorio De Sica; *Cuore* (2001): director Maurizio Zaccaro, screenwriters Massimo De Rita, Mario Falcone.

<sup>12</sup> De Amicis, *Cuore*, cit., p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> For further background on this leading Italian screenwriter cf. S. Cecchi D'Amico, *Storie di cinema (e d'altro) raccontate a Margherita D'Amico*, Milano, Bompiani, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Produced by S.A.F.I.R. (Società Anonima Film Italiani Roma), it was distributed by E.N.I.C. (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche). For a more detailed presentation, see P. Mereghetti (ed.), *Dizionario dei film*, Milano, Baldini & Castoldi, 1995, p. 386; P. Boero, D. Boero, *La letteratura per l'infanzia in cento film*, Genova, Le Mani, 2008, pp. 77-79; Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri “vista” oggi*, cit., pp. 29-32.

<sup>15</sup> «La Domenica del Corriere», 28 aprile 1957, n.17, 59, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ugo Zatterin, È arrivata a Roma la maestrina di “Cuore”, «La Stampa», 11 novembre 1947, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

towards her pupils: she remembers their names years later, welcomes and consoles the children who are on their first day at school, and caresses the older ones. For the nineteenth-century bourgeois world, the woman's "essential function" was motherhood, and the maternal figure was universally exalted in literature, journalism, and pedagogical, moral, and religious treatises. The schoolmistress, the idealized, non-domestic continuation of the mother, had similar traits to her, such as sweetness, understanding, and patience, but also dimensions such as self-sacrifice and a vocational calling<sup>18</sup>. The female schoolteacher acted as a «link between the maternal and the civic dimensions»<sup>19</sup>. This view, however, lasted beyond the nineteenth century, transferring its moral codes to the first half of the twentieth, until the rebellions of 1968 and the feminist movement. Thus, Coletti's "little schoolmistress" reflects the historical condition of women teachers in the nineteenth century, but also – partly – in the early twentieth century, the period in which the film was made. To the lieutenant who courts her and seems to want to marry her, Clotilde declares that she is the mother of thirty-six children, her pupils. Meanwhile, on learning that the young woman is to be married, Vittorio De Sica in the role of Master Perboni is sad – not just because he is secretly in love with Clotilde – but also because the school will thereby lose a good teacher, in keeping with social norms dictating that women could not be both workers and homemakers. The film, like the book, devotes little or no attention to the educational methods used by the schoolmistress, apart from a good-natured remark by Perboni who jokingly reproaches her for teaching with stereotypes, setting essay titles such as «On a beautiful spring day» or «It is snowing heavily» or other weather-related clichés. However, the young woman displays resourcefulness in defending said schoolmaster, who is suspended from his teaching post on account of his socialist ideals. Specifically, she approaches the member of parliament Pestelli, the father of one of her pupils, complaining about the treatment received by her colleague, who is subsequently reinstated. The teacher with the red feather and Perboni get engaged but the marriage never comes to pass because the schoolmaster is conscripted to fight in the first war in Ethiopia, ultimately meeting his death in Africa<sup>20</sup>. The little schoolmistress with the red feather remains a spinster, like Eugenia Barruero, faithful to the memory of Master Perboni.

In 1984, the director Luigi Comencini, on the strength of his success with *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1972), tackled the other classic of Italian children's literature, *Cuore*. The resulting series in six parts was co-produced by Rai 2, the French channel Antenne 2, and Swiss broadcaster RTSI. It was warmly received by audiences and critics alike<sup>21</sup>. Characterized by a high-quality screenplay and a historically accurate portrayal

<sup>18</sup> C. Covato, *Educata ad educare: ruolo materno ed itinerari formativi*, in Soldani (ed.), *L'educazione delle donne*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> S. Soldani, *Maestre d'Italia*, in Groppi (ed.), *Il lavoro delle donne*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996, p. 370.

<sup>20</sup> As observed by Simonetta Polenghi «the events in the book are shifted to a decade later, from 1881-82 to 1893-94, so as to incorporate the war in Abyssinia into the plot [...]. This modification meant that the contents of the book could be updated» (cit. in Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri "vista" oggi*, cit., pp. 30-31).

<sup>21</sup> For more in-depth background on the production, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 36-41; A. Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, Milano, Garzanti, 1992, pp. 430-431; Boero, Boero, *La letteratura per l'infanzia in cento film*, cit., p.



of Turin, the series was set at a later period than was the novel, and specifically in the years 1898-99. This meant that the Great War, in which former students of the Sezione Baretti would participate as soldiers, could be included in the story. The series unfolds in tandem with the memories of Enrico who, while on his way to the front, meets some of his former classmates and – while home on leave – goes to visit Master Perboni, who has always been a socialist and supporter of neutralism. As earlier stated, the screenplay by the Comencini father and daughter and Suso Cecchi D'Amico is the only one that does not incorporate a love story between the little schoolmistress with the red feather, in this production played by Giuliana De Sio, and Master Perboni, played here by Johnny Dorelli. The young schoolmistress is portrayed in a more contemporary light than in the film by Coletti. After all, the public addressed by Comencini was no longer that of the post-war period but a public that had become more sophisticated as a result of the economic boom and the 1968 and civil rights movements. Nevertheless, there is little trace of feminism in the production, although this is the only film adaptation in which the schoolmistress manages to hold her own against Perboni in competing for the affection of the pupils, even though she features relatively little in the screenplay. From an educational point of view, this version of the “little schoolmistress” comes across as decidedly more modern, so much so that – when she is called to sub in Enrico's class when Perboni is out sick – she uses games to teach mathematics and jokes with the children while reciting poetry, given that «study should also be fun». Unlike those of Coletti's Clotilde, an essay assignment given by Comencini's schoolmistress is designed to help her get to know her pupils and, significantly, is entitled “A description of myself”. The experiments of Gianni Rodari and Mario Lodi, both of whom were known to the film director, had not been in vain. Furthermore, the schoolmistress is the only one who is able to find the “key to getting good” of Franti, defined by De Amicis, in the manner of Lombroso, as a born criminal. Embracing the teaching of Umberto Eco, who in 1962 wrote *Elogio di Franti*<sup>22</sup>, Comencini's little schoolmistress with the red feather encourages the young daredevil and tries to develop his sense of responsibility, even naming him class prefect. Franti still ends up in a reformatory but, in a departure from De Amicis' original storyline, seeks to redeem himself by signing up to fight in the Great War, thus meeting his death. Comencini also involves the schoolmistress with the red feather in the episode with the elderly gentleman who is injured by a flying snowball. In the screenplay, it is the teacher, not Garrone, who takes Garoffi's defense against the adults who are ragign against the boy. While the schoolmistress' character in this series is in line with the sickly-sweet representation offered to us by De Amicis – especially in the episode with the young chimney sweep, when the teacher gets her face black by kissing the little boy – the youthful schoolmistress brought to the television screen by De Sio also displays new traits, thus offering a hint of a new imaginary.

78; M. Tortora, *Primi schermi di Cuore*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2007; A. Nobile, *Cuore in 120 anni di critica deamicisiana*, Roma, Aracne, 2009, pp. 71-76; A. Boschi, *De Amicis al cinema: la scuola di Cuore nella filmografia italiana*, in L. Bellatalla, G. Genovesi, E. Marescotti (edd.), *La scuola nell'Italia unita. 150 anni di storia*, Bologna, Cleup, 2012, pp. 97-105.

<sup>22</sup> U. Eco, *Elogio di Franti*, in De Amicis, *Cuore*, cit., pp. 355-364.

The six episodes in director Maurizio Zaccaro's reinterpretation of *Cuore*, aired in 2001, during prime time on Canale 5, depart even more radically from De Amicis' novel. The series was well received, although it was not as spectacular a success as Comencini's version<sup>23</sup>. The plot was truly a "free adaptation" of De Amicis' novel: in this remake, Master Giulio Perboni (played by Giulio Scarpati in this case) is married to a woman who is mentally ill. Following his wife's death, he initiates a romantic relationship with the schoolmistress with the red feather (played by Anna Valle), who has always been in love with him. Original additions to the plot include Perboni's opium addiction and his two suspensions from the school – one for having organized a football match between the boys of the *Sezione Moncenisio* and their peers at a private school, and the other for sheltering Garrone's father who was wanted by the law for organizing a railway workers' strike. Franti's character is also given a major overhaul and transformed from a rebel to a hero. Even the character of the schoolmistress – who features abundantly in the screenplay – takes on unprecedented facets. Margherita Capuano, the new fictitious name given to the female teacher, is independent by nature and unwilling to submit to social norms. She confides in Perboni that she came to Turin from Sicily. Her father, a cooper, had decided to marry her off to a man much older than her, a marriage the girl rejected, causing an irreparable rift between her and her parent. Margherita's large family had then emigrated to America, while she herself had chosen to stay in Italy and to support herself by working as a teacher. Capuano further asserts her independence by leaving her accommodation in a residence run by nuns to go and live alone. However, the screenplay waters down this decision by having her aunt live in the apartment above hers, in contrast with the real-life nineteenth-century conditions of many teachers who were forced to live alone because they had found work far away from their homeplaces. In any case, both the headteacher of the *Sezione Moncenisio* (Leo Gullotta) and Maestro Perboni warn Margherita that she may be targeted by gossips over this decision. Overall, however, the subversive impetus of Zaccaro's schoolmistress with the red feather is entirely channelled into the personal and romantic sphere, while at school she is portrayed as submissive and a loving mother towards her pupils, to the extent of entreating Perboni to be gentle with them. Again, the teacher's educational role is represented more in terms of feelings than in relation to the transmission of knowledge, thus remaining close to the nineteenth-century image conveyed by De Amicis. In short, while contemporary society requires female teachers to be more modern from a private and sentimental point of view, it does not demand such a big change in how they approach their professional role. Nevertheless, something has changed. The divide between Coletti's *Cuore* and that of Zaccaro is made evident by the ending of the 2001 series. While Perboni had thought that Clotilde would abandon school for home on becoming a wife, by the end of Zaccaro's series, the schoolmistress played by Anna Valle is married, pregnant, and sharing with her diary her hopes for the

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed treatment of the TV series, cf. S. Polenghi, *La scuola di ieri "vista" oggi*, cit., pp. 41-44; M. Buonanno (edd.), *Storie memorie. La fiction italiana, l'Italia nella fiction. Anno quattordicesimo*, Roma, Rai Eri, 2003, pp. 257-259; D.E. Viganò, *Cari maestri. Da Susanne Bier a Gianni Amelio i registi si interrogano sull'importanza dell'educazione*, Assisi, Cittadella Editrice, 2011, pp. 32-33.

future pupils – each with his or her own story – who will enter her life in the years to come. Evidently it had become difficult by 2001 for viewers to accept, even in relation to the past, that social norms might force women to choose between motherhood and working outside the home.

The animated version of De Amicis' *Cuore* is a different matter. The Japanese cartoon series, produced in 1981 by Nippon Animation was entitled *The Story of Cuore, School of Love* and ran for twenty-six episodes. Despite some poetic license, the series is relatively faithful to the novel, so much so that the teacher protagonist is actually Enrico's upper first school mistress, now given the surname Delcati. Always dressed in black, with a large nose and dark circles under her eyes, she is not beautiful but, like her counterpart in the novel, is capable of winning deep affection from the boys. The anime opens with Enrico, still on vacation, reading a letter sent to him by Miss Delcati. As he reads, an image of the woman appears in the background, with her hair tied up, and a tender, mournful gaze. In the initial sequences, the teacher is surrounded by "her" children who, jubilant, pull her along by arms. The same joy is reflected in the faces of the boys when Miss Delcati – who is never referred to as "Teacher" in the cartoon – is sent to Enrico's class to substitute Perboni. However, due to Franti's pranks, she is forced to confess to the headteacher that she is unable to manage the pupils, demonstrating – once again – the gap between the image of the female teacher and that of the male teacher. Thus, the traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century notion of women as the "weaker sex" persisted in the anime by Nippon Animation and was still being conveyed to children in the 1980s.

## 2. *The schoolmistress prey to prejudice and sexual harassment: Il romanzo di un maestro and La maestrina degli operai*

In 1959, the director Mario Landi was inspired by the novel *Il romanzo di un maestro* (1890) to make a five-part drama of the same title to be broadcast by *Programma Nazionale*, the broadcasting company today known as Rai<sup>24</sup>. The TV series, which represented the struggles of male teacher Emilio Ratti (Armando Francioli) as he grapples with his hopes and disappointments in both the personal and professional spheres, focused on three women elementary school teachers: Mrs. Falbrizio (Paola Borboni), who represents the category of unqualified schoolteachers, Felicita Ratti (Lucilla Morlacchi), a passionate and enterprising schoolmistress, and Faustina Galli (Cosetta Greco), a teacher who is persecuted by gossip and tormented by unwanted advances from the mayor of Altarana. The screenwriters, Anna Maria Rimoaldi and Grazia Dore, offered a masterly outline of the historical and social circumstances of teachers in the period in question, drawing on

<sup>24</sup> For further background, cf. E.C., *Il romanzo di un maestro di Edmondo De Amicis*, «Radiocorriere TV. Settimanale della radio e della televisione», n. 36, 12-18 April 1959, pp. 10 and 46; F. Targhetta, *Il romanzo di un maestro di Edmondo De Amicis: le ragioni della sua recente riscoperta*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XI, n. 2, 2016, pp. 457-464.

representative female figures from De Amicis' *Cuore*. Mrs. Falbrizio, for example, was one of the teachers who had not complied with the new requirements introduced by the Ministry and – hence – were replaced by the “licensed” graduates of the *Scuola Normale*. Falbrizio, a forty-eight-year-old widow with three dependent children, is subjected, at the mayor's behest, to a visit from a ministerial inspector who reports that her pupils barely know how to read and spend most of their time at school sewing. Although she is much loved by her pupils, Falbrizio is removed from the school, returning at the end of the series to show her support for her colleague Galli in the context of her disgraceful treatment by the mayor.

Emilio's cousin, Felicita Ratti, portrays the enthusiastic teacher with a strong calling to the profession. Her conversations with her cousin, with whom she is secretly in love, reveal her story: she first taught in a small town in Sicily, then in a mountain village in Piedmont and, finally, in America among Italian emigrants. To reinforce the vocational nature of Felicita's choices, the young woman is not the daughter of a penniless violinist, as in De Amicis's novel, practically forcing her to become a teacher, but comes from a loving and stereotypically middle-class family.

The co-protagonist of the drama, however, is the teacher Faustina Galli who, having studied for a teacher's license out of personal interest, finds herself having to use it to earn a living. Her life has been ruined by her sister's running off with a man, an event that led to Faustina's engagement being broken off. This teacher, who is beautiful and elegant, was hired by the mayor of Altarana based on her photograph and not due to her qualifications, although “the license” was the official justification for employing her. Although she is discrete and keeps her distance from Master Ratti, who is in love with her, Faustina's attractiveness turns out to be a constant source of trouble for her: she attracts the attention of the mayor who attempts to kiss her, and – when she rejects him – threatens to make public the scandal caused by her sister. She also arouses the envy of the women of the town who start a petition to get her removed from her teaching post. Faustina, now looked down upon by the very pupils who previously adored her, is suspended. Displaying great dignity, the schoolmistress endures all privations and gossip, until, thanks to a letter published by Ratti in a teachers' journal and a meeting with the Superintendent to whom the young woman goes to plead her case, she is finally reinstated. In the case of this schoolmistress, her private life eclipses the dimension of her teaching and education, as happened in real life to Italia Donati, a case that De Amicis must have been familiar with.

*La maestrina degli operai* also features a main character who is forced to deal with harassment from a male world that struggles to respect not only the role of female teachers but also women in general. In 1970, this De Amicis novel was televised, under the direction of Guglielmo Morandi based on screenplay by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi<sup>25</sup>. Enrica Varetti (Mariella Zanetti), a teacher from an upper-class social background, is put in charge of teaching night classes for male students by the school where she works.

<sup>25</sup> For further background, cf. A. Bentoglio (ed.), *Giuseppe Patroni Griffi e il suo teatro. Settimana del teatro, 5-9 maggio 1997*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1998, p. 221.

The young woman experiences this task as a “nuisance” and a source of great distress. In particular, she is terrified of a man with a bad reputation, Muroi (Luciano Virgilio), who has been spying on her for some time. De Amicis describes the teacher as marked by a «childish grace» and a «dignified timidity»<sup>26</sup>, a characterization that was respected by the actress chosen to play Varetti in the television drama. The young woman, after a first lesson that gives her hope, is unable to stand up to the turbulent class, who, day after day, become increasingly disrespectful towards her, in a crescendo of sexual allusions that culminate in a text handed to her by Muroi to be corrected. The schoolteacher, shocked and offended, tears it up exclaiming: «Go back to your seat, please. And keep certain expressions for other women, who are worthy of you, who are equal to you. Remember that I am the teacher». Despite this attempt to reaffirm her role, Varetti lacks the necessary strength of character to win out in such a difficult situation. Among other issues, she is not even supported by her female colleagues who constantly reproach her for being high-born and for lacking empathy with the working class. The situation worsens when Muroi attempts to kiss the schoolmistress, with whom he has fallen in love. Paradoxically, in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel, the erotic tension is far more pronounced than in the 1970 drama; the fact that the series was aired on national television likely led to the toning down of De Amicis’ original portrayal. Muroi’s jealousy leads to a tragic ending. The man is killed by a group of classmates, but on his death bed he obtains the longed-for kiss from Varetti, who, called in by Muroi’s elderly mother, kisses him so that he may die in peace with God. The redeeming function of the woman, which was dear to the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, is also conveyed by Morandi’s screenplay, which drew very little from the 1970s.

### 3. Amore e ginnastica: *the manly schoolmistress*

De Amicis presented the female schoolteacher Maria Pedani, the protagonist of *Amore e ginnastica* (1892), as «a male character»<sup>27</sup>. In 1973, the novella was adapted for cinema by the film director Luigi Filippo D’Amico, who wrote the screenplay himself with the help of Suso Cecchi D’Amico and Tullio Pinelli<sup>28</sup>. «Stampa Sera» announced the film’s cinema debut, emphasizing that it had been shot on location in Turin and that *Amore e ginnastica* had been integrated with content from another of De Amicis’ novels, *La maestrina degli operai*<sup>29</sup>. This strange admixture featured two lady teachers who share an apartment, Maria Pedani (Senta Berger) – a great promoter of gymnastics – and Elena Zibelli (Adriana Asti), who in the book offers a dull counterpoint to her colleague, but in the film – while retaining this function – also takes on the role of the schoolmistress who

<sup>26</sup> E. De Amicis, *Amore e ginnastica e altri racconti*, Milano, BUR, 1986, p. 205.

<sup>27</sup> E. De Amicis, *Amore e ginnastica*, Bagno a Ripoli, Passigli Editore, 2009, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> For further background, cf. Mereghetti (ed.), *Dizionario dei film*, cit., p. 79; R. Ubbidente, *L’officina del poeta. Studi su Edmondo De Amicis*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2013, pp. 272-276.

<sup>29</sup> Cinema. *Le prime*, «Stampa Sera», 6 September 1973, p. 7.

faces harassment from her worker students. Pedani, gymnastics lover and disciple of the gymnasiarch Emilio Baumann, who saw physical activity as crucial for girls as well as boys, fights – following the introduction of gymnastics in elementary schools under the De Sanctis law (1878) – for physical education to be viewed as equal to other school subjects, given its importance for health and its educational value. An awkward ex-seminarian Simone Celzani (Lino Capolicchio) who lives in the same building, falls in love with Pedani, who is an independent-minded and energetic young woman. The enterprising teacher is not afraid to adopt countercultural positions, for example she recommends her students not to wear a corset, at least in the gym. A gymnastics display that she organizes to demonstrate the benefits of movement “in anaemic young girls”, ends by causing great scandal. This is because – after performing traditional bodyweight and hoop exercises – in a final gymnastic sequence, the girls’ movements lead them to show their knickers under their bulky clothes. However, Pedani fights on, pushing back against criticism, to the extent that she makes a name for herself in the emergent gymnastics movement. In the film, even the Minister of Public Education comes to attend one of her lessons, congratulating her on defending “the new teaching post” to the bitter end. Pedani is asked to present a report at the First National Pedagogical Congress, where positions for and against gymnastics clash. The report is very well received. Moral strength and physical vigour go hand in hand in Schoolmistress Pedani. However, the adjectives that are used to characterize the young woman are “tomboyish” or “manly”, as though to deny that energy and power can be female characteristics. Her irrepressible physicality disturbs the men in her neighbourhood, but Pedani does not seem to notice, consumed as she is by her love for her sacred gymnastics. Celzani is ignored by the schoolmistress and mocked by other neighbours, who are convinced that Pedani, with her manly nature, is not interested in marriage but wishes to remain free «in body and soul». «Her mission» – a colleague says of her – «is not to have children, but to straighten up other people’s children». Once again, female teaching was viewed as an exclusive vocation that precluded women from marrying. After all, as Pedani’s colleague Zibelli also explains, the work of a teacher is a mission that must be put before all else. Save embarking on an all-out quest to find someone to marry her, and getting angry with Pedani who appears to steal all her potential suitors. However, Zibelli’s somewhat caricatured character takes on an extra dimension vis-à-vis the novella by being blended with the character of the workers’ schoolmistress. Unlike in De Amicis’ original work and Mario Landi’s film, the teacher in this case is enthusiastic about teaching adults, but she soon changes her mind when one of her pupils harasses her in class, even going so far as to kiss her. In *Amore e ginnastica*, however, the tension is tempered by a vein of irony that runs through the entire film. The film is also pervaded by a sort of voyeurism, such as in a scene where Pedani is demonstrating to her elderly neighbour how to breathe correctly, naively unbuttoning her jacket and eliciting a seductive effect on both the man and her suitor Celzani, who is spying on her through the keyhole. Indeed, Italo Calvino described this novel as the «richest in humour, malice, and sensuality»<sup>30</sup> among De Amicis’ writings. The film sets the seal upon this view via the very

<sup>30</sup> I. Calvino, *Nota introduttiva*, in E. De Amicis, *Amore e ginnastica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1971.

long final kiss that officialises the engagement between the schoolmistress Pedani and her suitor Simone Celzani. *Amore e ginnastica* offers us a taste of some of the characteristics of the sensual teacher in the Italian “commedia sexy” genre, which concomitantly – in the early 1970s – was beginning its ascent to popularity, reflecting an attempt to bring back the traditional male role then being challenged by feminism.





# Collective and Public School Memory: the Case of Professor Kosta Vujić<sup>1</sup>

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## *Introduction*

Professor Kosta Vujić's Hat is a story that has been adapted into a film (1972, 2012), a book (1983), and a television series (2012) by writer and playwright Milovan Vitezović. It follows the adventures of the class of high school graduates and their teacher, Kosta Vujić, based on true events and personalities from Serbian education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper explores the various forms of individual, collective, and public school memories associated with these events and individuals.

In this study, we examine school memories related to Professor Kosta Vujić, specifically «understanding what today's society knows, or thinks it knows, about the schools of the past, and how close this is to the truth or is the result of prejudices and stereotypes...»<sup>2</sup>. Halbwachs suggests that collective memory should be investigated as a unique representation of the past, grounded in present-day interests<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, we attempt to determine the functions this memory achieves today in public discourse. To accomplish this, we argue that «the collective memory can only be studied as a “process”, since it consists of a social reconstruction of the past deriving from the fusion of the “experienced school past” (recalled by direct participants) and the “constructed school past” (recalled by observers, readers and spectators)»<sup>4</sup>.

Bearing in mind that «a historical analysis must take into account the question of the audience [...] if we want to check how the film interpreted the collective school memory or influenced it»<sup>5</sup>, we will examine the extent and content of online comments related to the film and series, of course, without neglecting other relevant sources. Comments represent a genre for expressing opinions, «creative thinking» which allows providing

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<sup>2</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories: New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>3</sup> I. Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, Beograd, Institut za Psihologiju, 2022, p. 16; M. Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Meda, Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> S. Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., p. 204.

information as well as explaining, promoting, or criticising<sup>6</sup>. The main characteristics of online comments are quick reactions, timeliness, specificity, and conciseness of the text. In this sense, we view comments as a reflection of the immediate connection between the individual and the collective. In the concluding part of the paper, we will consider how this memory can be interpreted.

### 1. *Professor Kosta Vujić: historical facts and individual school memories*

Kosta Vujić was born in 1829 in Zemun and started his teaching career in 1857 at the Belgrade Gymnasium<sup>7</sup>. He retired in 1889 as a professor at the Second Belgrade Gymnasium and passed away in 1909. At that time, the gymnasium in Serbia was a secondary school whose primary task was to prepare students for further education. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the profile of gymnasiums was still developing. Due to a lack of specialised pedagogical staff for certain subjects, teachers taught subjects for which they did not have adequate education. In addition, the place of service also depended on the school's needs, so teachers moved from one gymnasium to another. Kosta Vujić worked during his career in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Požarevac, Zaječar, Negotin, and Šabac. He taught German and Serbian language, Serbian history, history of Serbian literature, and church singing, and was a school choir conductor in Kragujevac.

The event that represented a turning point in Vujić's pedagogical attitude occurred in 1870 at the First Belgrade Gymnasium. It is possible to reconstruct that event based on archival sources and the memories of the then-student Sava Paunović. Until 1870, the German language was taught to sixth-grade students by Professor Aleksandar Čvarković – who was ill, old, and known for his lenient grading. After his retirement, Kosta Vujić came, who was strict in comparison to his predecessor and unjust in the students' opinion<sup>8</sup>. The further development of the situation is described in archival documents. The sixth-grade students rebelled by making noise by stomping their feet on the ground as soon as Professor Vujić entered the classroom. As a consequence, the school administration punished all the students in that class – seven were expelled from school, while the rest were punished with detention and deprivation of benefits. According to the student's assessment, the punishment was too severe and unfair, so they decided to raise the protest to a higher level – to boycott Professor Vujić's lectures and to send a written request to the Minister of Education and Church Affairs to remove all the unfairly imposed penalties. In the letter they sent to the minister, among other things, it is stated that their dignity did not allow them to «endure rude behaviour» towards themselves, and they all agreed

<sup>6</sup> J. Kleut, *Ja (ni)sam bot: Komentari čitalaca kao žanr participacije u digitalnom prostoru*, Novi Sad, Filozofski Fakultet – Univerzitet u Novom Sadu, 2020, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> V. Grujić, *Gimnazijsko obrazovanje u Srbiji do Prvog Svetskog*, Beograd, SANU, 1997, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Spomenica stogodišnjice Prve muške gimnazije u Beogradu, 1839-1939*, Beograd, Štamparija Drag. Gregorića, 1939, p. 176.

that they «only expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher»<sup>9</sup>. After that, Kosta Vujić calmed down and interested his students and fellow citizens with his bohemian tendencies<sup>10</sup>.

The most complete and vivid memory of this professor was left by Mihailo Petrović Alas, whom Professor Vujić taught the German language. He states that his students called the old professor Gida and that they listened to stories about him being friends with Branko Radičević. Petrović notes his pedagogical attitude:

The old and original teacher whom we all loved even though we didn't learn anything from him... we recognised that he is a good and soulful man who understands children and loves their mischief, even if there was exaggeration in them, and that he didn't worry too much about how much the students would learn in his classes<sup>11</sup>.

The students who wanted to learn German had to make an effort themselves, but they could always get support whenever they asked Professor Vujić for explanations.

Petrović also shares memories of other professors, but the part of those memories that pertain to Vujić served as the basis for a TV drama, book, and screenplay entitled *The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić*, written by Milovan Vitezović.

## 2. *The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić and the creation of the collective school memory*

*The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić* is the title of the TV drama, book, and screenplay by Milovan Vitezović. The work began in 1969 when the editors of the Drama Program of Television Belgrade invited Vitezović to an internal competition for a TV drama, asking him to do something «where he could be himself»<sup>12</sup>. According to Vitezović, he thought about what to write for days. When he accidentally found a record book of the First Male Belgrade Gymnasium in an antiquarian bookstore, he was drawn to Mihailo Petrović Alas's memory of the unusual professor Vujić, and he decided to write about him. Thus, the TV drama directed by Vladimir Andrić was created and first aired in 1971<sup>13</sup>. The famous actor Pavle Vujisić played the role of Professor Kosta Vujić. Vitezović turned the drama into a novel in 1983, for which he received the *Politikin Zabavnik* award<sup>14</sup>. The novel has had seventeen editions in Serbian, two editions in Greek, and one in Hebrew to this date. A second version of the film was made based on Vitezović's screenplay in 2012, directed by Zdravko Šotra, with actor Aleksandar Berček playing the role of Kosta Vujić. In the same year, eight fifty-minute episodes were made from the filmed material.

<sup>9</sup> V. Tešić, *Moralno vaspitanje u školama Srbije (1830-1878)*, Beograd, ZUNS, 1974, p. 357.

<sup>10</sup> *Spomenica stogodišnjice Prve muške gimnazije u Beogradu*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> *Svako ima svoga Kostu*, «Politikin Zabavnik», februar 1984, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> This is award given for children's and youth literature since 1979, and it has been awarded 44 times to date.

The plot takes place in the spring of 1886. The story follows the adventures of one class of high school graduates and their class teacher, Kosta Vujić, who is about to retire. Vujić was educated in Vienna and was a good friend of the famous and beloved poet Branko Radičević. He is an original professor because his pedagogical attitude towards his students is based on love, his lifestyle, elegant hats, a special organisation of living space, a gourmet attitude, and great love for nature. His communication with students is sincere, open, tolerant, and full of understanding for students' pranks, love troubles, and artistic attempts. For example, as a disciplinary measure in cases of inappropriate behaviour by a student, he obliges the student to donate a book to the library.

He knew his students so well that he never knew exactly what awaited him in the class. For years, they persistently accustomed him to expect only the unexpected from them. Only if something is impossible, only then is it possible for them, but as a class teacher, he could not complain; they were good students. Everything was going well for them. Now they are high school graduates and know where the sky stands. The only thing is that they don't collapse the sky, he thought so many times, convinced they can do that too<sup>15</sup>.

In the following, we will take a closer look at the relationship between the facts relevant to our topic and the fiction in the studied phenomenon.

Professor Kosta Vujić was educated in Zemun, Sremski Karlovci, and Belgrade<sup>16</sup>. According to Vitezović's narrative, he also studied in Vienna. This detail is significant because his experiences in Vienna are emphasised in the series, and Vienna was a centre where the Serbian intellectual elite gathered and studied abroad. According to the book Vujić retired in 1886 as the professor of the First Belgrade Gymnasium; the fact is that he retired as the professor of the Second Belgrade Gymnasium in 1889.

In the novel and drama, Kosta Vujić is portrayed as a friend of the Serbian poet Branko Radičević, and this friendship is emphasised. However, this is inaccurate information that seems to have not been refuted by Vujić himself. Mihailo Petrović stated that his students had heard about this friendship. The recollection of Serbian writer Branislav Nušić of an accidental meeting with Professor Vujić confirms this<sup>17</sup>. Branko Radičević was a famous and beloved Serbian poet who died of tuberculosis in Vienna in 1853. One of this poet's friends was Kosta Vujić, born in Zemun and a medical student in Vienna. He later also fell ill with the same disease and passed away. Therefore, Professor Kosta Vujić could not have been a friend of Branko Radičević<sup>18</sup>.

The book «gathered» the most famous students of the First Belgrade Gymnasium who attended it in the 1880s but were not in the same class<sup>19</sup>. This fact can be determined

<sup>15</sup> M. Vitezović, *Šešir profesora Koste Vujića*, Beograd, Srpska književna zadruga, 1991, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Grujić, *Gimnazijsko obrazovanje u Srbiji do Prvog Svetskog*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Ц. Зузорић у Манежу, Ризница српска: «Причање Бранислава Нушића на Шантићевом вечери», <http://www.riznicasrpska.net/> (last access: 12.12.2022).

<sup>18</sup> [https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NBN:RS:SD\\_DBBF8191E59823DBD747FA1965AD240C-1900-02-B008](https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NBN:RS:SD_DBBF8191E59823DBD747FA1965AD240C-1900-02-B008) (last access: 12.12.2022).

<sup>19</sup> Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927), geographer, scientist. Jaša Prodanović (1867-1948), politician, journalist, writer. Ljubomir Stojanović (1860-1930), philologist, politician. Mihailo Petrović Alas (1868-1943), mathematician, university professor. Pavle Popović (1868-1939), literary historian, professor and rector of

by examining the lists of students in the monograph of the school, which Vitezović used as his primary source for the story. This means that Vujić couldn't have been their class teacher.

The fact is that other professors were appreciated for the scientific knowledge they imparted and their pedagogical attitude towards students. In his recollections, Mihailo Petrović divides all of the professors he encountered into three groups: those who made exceptional contributions to their students' achievements, influencing their acquisition of knowledge and the development of their love for science through their pedagogical stance and work. Examples of such professors include Miloš Zečević, a historian, and Marko Leko, a chemist. The second group consists of professors not worth remembering, primarily those who behaved poorly towards their students. The third group is made up of professors from whom nothing could be learned but who were good people, and Vujić falls into this category<sup>20</sup>.

Vitezović notes that after the TV drama produced in 1971, he continued to research the life and times of Vujić. He highlights that he spent ten years gathering data and investigating biographies, records, memories, and other sources for the purposes of the book. He describes his book as «an attempt to convey his knowledge in one story that may not be true, but is believable in all respects so that the reader does not doubt its veracity for a moment»<sup>21</sup>.

### 3. *The key characteristics of collective memory in the case of Professor Kosta Vujić*

«To classify something as collective memory, it is not sufficient for it to be a mere story about the past of one's own group». Instead, collective memory is defined as a «shared set of representations of the past», with a «consensus among members of the group that these representations are mutually established and shared interpretations of the past»<sup>22</sup>. Essentially, collective memory is the understanding of the past shared among people. The extent and continuity of this sharing in the case of professor Vujić can be inferred from the following data: In the first week of its release in cinemas in 2012, the film *The Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić* was seen by about 100,000 viewers. Since 2016, free access has been granted to video works produced under the mentioned title<sup>23</sup>. The films combined have

the University of Belgrade. Milorad Mitrović (1867-1905), poet. Pera Todorović (1852-1907), journalist and writer.

<sup>20</sup> *Spomenica stogodišnjice Prve muške gimnazije u Beogradu*, cit., p. 297.

<sup>21</sup> *Svako ima svoga Kostu*, «Politikin Zabavnik», februar 1984, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit.; L. Licata, O. Klein, *Regards croisés sur un passé commun: anciens colonisés et anciens coloniaux face à l'action belge au Congo*, in M. Sanchez-Mazas, L. Licata (edd.), *L'Autre: regards psychosociaux*, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble 2005, p. 243.

<sup>23</sup> TV drama (1971) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWCZAMd1WL8&t=21s>; Film (2012) English subtitle [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_K0Z3jeZL0&t=11s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_K0Z3jeZL0&t=11s); Series (2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpYBoXIYfc8&list=PLQHMdtzBxexuGOCzyrT'Z2s1Zq4Pn54zG>. (last access: 24.03.2023).

about 11 million views, while each episode of the series averages around 600.000 views on YouTube<sup>24</sup>.

In the following text, we will pay closer attention to the qualitative aspects of collective memory, including its relationship to individual memory, centrality to identity, narrativity, and linearity<sup>25</sup>.

### 3.1 *Relations between individual and collective memory*

Žeželj considers the connection between personal and communal memory as either utilising memory-related artefacts or participating in cultural customs related to memory<sup>26</sup>. This pertains to how individuals interpret these practices and whether they influence their perspectives on the past. In our study, we can analyse the consumption of historical content in a video format by examining the comments left by viewers on the YouTube network. Under both versions of the film and series, there are 2.945 comments. The 2012 film has the most comments, with over 2.000, while each episode of the series has an average of about 110 comments. These comments mostly express a positive attitude towards the material viewed. Based on the form of expression, the comments can be roughly classified into five categories: those expressing emotions, comparisons between old and new, personal memories, questions, and discussions.

Many editions of the book, airing on TV channels, and providing open access on the internet can be considered memory practices that maintain continuity and thus influence the shaping of historical thinking across generations related to the era of Professor Vujić. «The more a film is seen, the more a book is read, throughout generations, the more that school memory is perceived as a shared memory of a group»<sup>27</sup>. How is this constant interaction between individual and collective achieved in the case of Vujić? The answer lies in the explanation of the decision of the «Politikin Zabavnik» jury: «Vitezović, in his work, which carries its own genre colour, easily established a harmony between the documentary and the poetic, building the character of a strange professor who is typical and unique, in whose image all teachers can somewhat recognise themselves»<sup>28</sup>. By creating such a character of the main protagonist, the author ensured a constant renewal of the relationship between individual and collective in collective memory. Each agent contributed their individual memories of schooling and teachers to the creation and revival of the character of Prof. Vujić<sup>29</sup>. They include their own individual school memories in the construction of Vujić's character. In this sense, the title of an interview

<sup>24</sup> Open access, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpYBoXIYfc8> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>25</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies*, cit., p. 204.

<sup>28</sup> *Svako ima svoga Kostu*, «Politikin Zabavnik», februar 1984, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> The author of the work Vitezović, actor Pavle Vujisić, who starred in the first version of the film (1971), and Zdravko Šotra, the director of the film (2012).



with Vitezović regarding the aforementioned award is illustrative: «Everyone has their own Kosta». This connection is also evident in viewer comments, which even extend to the memories of the teachers about their practice in some cases, and in others, to the creation of alternative personal histories. For example:

1. I recognised myself in this professor, and unconsciously I also managed to connect with the high school graduates... I got chills at the part where he predicted their future... and I did the same thing in my last classes.
2. If I had professors like Vujić, I would have excellent grades and even willingly enrol in college. Unfortunately, there are none today; no one values a diploma or education as it was then.

### 3.2 *Central to identity, narrativity and linearity*

Collective memory is woven only with events significant to the group's image that fit the content of a shared group identity. Thus, only those events central to identity will be included<sup>30</sup>. In the case of remembering Professor Kosta Vujić, this attribute is also noticeable, but in an expanded form. The narrative about the professor points to the illustrious history of education as a potential new dimension of Serbian identity. The glorious past is mostly associated with rulers, the struggle for liberation, and great heroes in events related to it<sup>31</sup>.

Regarding the film and series screening in 2012, Vitezović made several statements to the media, indicating that he had questions about identity in mind. Through the story of «beautiful and irresistible generations who created the scientific, cultural, and political history of Serbia and conquered both readers and viewers because their story was about the romanticism of our people»<sup>32</sup>. He believed the film «would be for national pride», and that a good example from the past shown in the film would stimulate thinking in the following direction: «Well, we were like this; why don't we try again?»<sup>33</sup>. He expected the film and series to be «a balm for our souls, and on this occasion, they will awaken hope and even the desire for renewal»<sup>34</sup>.

Vitezović aimed to activate collective nostalgia in readers and viewers, believing that nostalgia for the group's past represents a «self-referential feeling – regulates the relationship towards the own group» and «contributes to the experience of the group's

<sup>30</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit., p. 18; L. Licata, O. Klein, *Regards croisés sur un passé commun*, cit., p. 243.

<sup>31</sup> A. Ilić, *Udžbenici i nacionalno vaspitanje u Srbiji (1878-1918)*, Beograd, Filozofski Fakultet, 2010; A. Pavlović, A. Ilić Rajković, *National Romanticism in Serbian Education: Comparing Romantic-National and Recent Serbian History Textbooks*, in I. Cvejić, P. Krstić, N. Lacković, O. Nikolić (edd.), *Liberating Education: What from, What for?* Beograd, Institut za Filozofiju i Društvenu Teoriju, 2021, pp. 223-243.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/covek-intelektualne-vrline/> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/kultura/kultura\\_vijesti/milovan-vitezovic-film-sesir-za-nacionalni-ponos/68845](https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/kultura/kultura_vijesti/milovan-vitezovic-film-sesir-za-nacionalni-ponos/68845) (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/covek-intelektualne-vrline/> (last access: 24.03.2023).

continuity»<sup>35</sup>. A significant number of comments left by viewers after watching both versions of the film and series are tinged with nostalgia. These comments express sadness for the past way of life, education and upbringing, culture, and relationships. Here are a few examples:

1. «The youth of that time had culture, knowledge, and ideals to change the world; today's youth does not have that».
2. «Versatile education, which has unfortunately disappeared. We could be an example of how a young man should live».
3. «I got goosebumps... Serbia will no longer have such a class, but this will never die».

Narrativity and linearity, defining characteristics of collective memory, are present, also in the phenomenon being studied. According to Bruner, collective memories are given in the narrative form, as stories that represent the construction of reality<sup>36</sup>. These are meaningful stories about the past, in which events are in a cause-and-effect relationship, and the actors have their roles. The convincingness of these stories depends on their «authenticity, significance, and coherence, which again depend on the correct use of narrative elements – time, plot, characters, intentions, and evaluations»<sup>37</sup>. In the case of Professor Kosta Vujić, the film director Zdravko Šotra explains these features in the following way:

First of all, there is a main character, and there is also a story that has a beginning, middle, and end. In addition to the character of Kosta Vujić, many other interesting characters, both professors and students, are clearly outlined. Furthermore, the story is full of events, which are coloured by poetic humour. All my efforts were directed towards bringing to life what Vitezović clearly told us in his written narrative through acting in those elements of the story<sup>38</sup>.

#### 4. *Public school memory: How professor Vujić became the paradigm of an ideal teacher*

After the release of the film in 2012, several memorial practices were established relating to Professor Kosta Vujić. In the explanations of these practices, by mass media, teachers, the film director, and even city services, all components of the narrative from the book and films were accepted as historical and truthful. That narrative was integrated into the current context of education in Serbia. The attitude towards facts is illustrated in the explanation of the naming of Professor Kosta Vujić Street in Belgrade. The «Official Gazette» states: «Kosta Vujić was a German language professor at the First Belgrade

<sup>35</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit., p. 20; J.H. Liu, J. László, *A narrative theory of history and identity*, in G. Moloney, I. Walker (edd.), *Social representations and identity*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 85-107.

<sup>36</sup> Žeželj, *Prošlost koje nije bilo: Kako ulepšavamo lična i kolektivna sećanja*, cit., p. 18; J. Bruner, *The narrative construction of reality*, «Critical Inquiry», vol. 18, n. 1, 1991, pp. 1-21.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20; Liu, László, *A narrative theory of history and identity*, cit., p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Zdravko Šotra in the conversation with the authors of this research (Belgrade, 3.12.2022).

Gymnasium and one of the notable figures of 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia. Recognisable also by the last generation of his students, which is remembered for a pleiad of pupils who later became famous»<sup>39</sup>.

“Kosta Vujić” became a paradigm used in the media and everyday speech with the implied meaning of an ideal teacher. This paradigm was used as a reference point in the discussion regarding certain phenomena that were not considered desirable in the educational context. For example, in relation to situations in which teachers are under pressure from students and parents, an author of an article on children’s rights asks: «Would Professor Kosta Vujić lose his license and get fired today?»<sup>40</sup>. There was also a renewed interest in the history of the First Belgrade Gymnasium, written about under the title *What the Hat of Professor Kosta Vujić Hides?*<sup>41</sup>.

In July 2013, Rajna Dragičević, a professor at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade, gave an inspiring speech to graduates of that faculty – future professors, on the importance and role of their profession. Some students shared her speech on social networks, which sparked media interest in this professor. A headline in a widely circulated daily newspaper read: «Kosta Vujić of our time: Professor Rajna Dragičević gave students a speech they will remember for life!». The article states that the speech was «proof that true and dedicated professors like the legendary Kosta Vujić still exist today». It goes on to argue that today, when the education system is “in collapse” such teachers are needed who remind students «that true values have not died out and that it is up to them to preserve and strengthen them»<sup>42</sup>. Then the same newspaper became interested in how students perceive Professor Dragičević. One of the interviewed students stated that her lectures are «like a good theatre play that leaves no one indifferent” and that “she is, above all, a good person who taught us to be human»<sup>43</sup>.

The media interest continued with a search for teachers similar to Professor Dragičević and Professor Vujić. Soon after, an article was published under the title «Rajna Dragičević is not alone: 10 professors who inspire their students every day». The article begins with a quote from the film «“Something tells me that in the future, I will only be known for having taught brilliant future names”, is the sentence with which the legendary Kosta Vujić marked the end of his service. After more than a century, when Serbian education is sinking into despair, Rajna Dragičević shows that such teachers still exist. Little is known about them, but they only value the popularity they have among their students». The journalist then asks, «What makes an excellent teacher? Today’s successors of Kosta

<sup>39</sup> Formal decision about name of the streets: [http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2019\\_07/t07\\_0241.htm](http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2019_07/t07_0241.htm) (last access: 24.03.2023). There is a restaurant in Belgrade named “Šešir profesora Koste Vujića” <https://kf.rs/kafana/1270/sesir-profesora-koste-vujica>.

<sup>40</sup> Last updated: 09.01.2022. <https://www.srpskaistorija.com/bojanic-decija-prava-da-li-bi-danas-profesor-kosta-vujic-izgubio-licencu-i-dobio-otkaz/> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>41</sup> Last updated: 25.10.2014. <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/beograd.74.html:515808-Sta-krije-sesir-Koste-Vujica> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>42</sup> Last updated: 09.7.2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/profesorka-rajna-dragicevic-odrzala-govor-koji-ce-studenti-pamtiti-celog-zivota/1fr7wg> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>43</sup> Last updated: 12.7.2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/studenti-filoloskog-fakulteta-sramota-binas-bilo-da-odustanemo-posle-govora/nk4nd80> (last access: 24.03.2023).

Vujić have a simple answer – excellent pupils and students. ... They transfer knowledge and motivate them to progress. The only thing is that they do not tolerate lying and cheating»<sup>44</sup>.

In 2016, a private kindergarten and school named “Kosta Vujić” was founded and is still successfully operating today. The management of this institution justified its choice of name as follows: «Professor Kosta Vujić supported and encouraged informal education among his students, preparing them for life. From there comes our mission, by promoting critical thinking, and strengthening self-confidence, we create young people who will be able to fight for their place “under the sun” tomorrow»<sup>45</sup>.

If we compare the interpretations of Professor Kosta Vujić’s personality with historical data and individual memories, we can notice significant deviations, primarily regarding the attitude towards teaching and student achievements.

### 5. *Why did Kosta Vujić become the paradigm of the ideal teacher?*

The memorial practices in the case of Professor Kosta Vujić are based on symbolic interpretations that speak more about the context and aspirations of the creators of those practices than about Vujić himself. Polenghi arrives at a similar conclusion after analysing films based on literary works<sup>46</sup>. Representations of the past about Professor Vujić can therefore be interpreted in relation «contemporary school scene and situate the educational strategies it portrays within a broader theoretical framework»<sup>47</sup>. In this sense, Vujić is a symbolic carrier of the values that society strives for. In public memory, Kosta Vujić is seen as a light from the past in the tunnel of the general crisis of education in Serbia. Within the framework of post-critical pedagogy<sup>48</sup>, this paradigm can be interpreted as the application of the history of education in the search for ways out of the crisis. According to the advocates of post-critical pedagogy, the essence of education lies primarily in intergenerational communication, which implies a certain degree of principled consent of adults in terms of taking responsibility for the values of the existing world – education is a collective endeavour to preserve the continuity of the human world, i.e. rejuvenating the world.

<sup>44</sup> Last updated: 14.7.2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/rajna-dragicevic-nije-usamljena-10-profesora-koji-svakog-dana-inspirisu-svoje-ucenike/vs2xvj3> (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>45</sup> The explanation is given by the school management for the purpose of this research, 24.03.2023.

<sup>46</sup> Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies*, cit., p. 214.

<sup>47</sup> A. Debè, *Constructing Memory: School in Italy in the 1970s as Narrated in the TV Drama “Diario di un Maestro”*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., p. 238.

<sup>48</sup> H. Arent, *Kriza u obrazovanju*, «Reč», vol. 86, n. 32, 2016, pp. 177-193; N. Hodgson, J. Vlieghe, P. Zamojski, *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy*, Goleta (CA), Punctum books, 2017; B. Bodroški Spariousu, *Povratak obrazovanju kao pedagoški odgovor na korona krizu*, in Ž. Krnjaja, M. Senić Ružić, Z. Milošević (edd.), *Obrazovanje u vreme krize i kako dalje*, Beograd, Filozofski Fakultet – Institut za Pedagogiju i Andragogiju – Pedagoško Društvo Srbije, 2022, pp. 19-33.

In the narrative about Professor Vujić, several theses are recognisable that are advocated by post-critical pedagogy: education as intergenerational communication; the teacher as an educator; the teacher as a human being. Also prominent in the narrative is Vujić's extremely positive attitude towards young people and youth<sup>49</sup>. One of the lines in the film reads: «So they read, so they think, so they work. That is the generation for the future»<sup>50</sup>. Vujić encouraged rethinking the belief in youth: «Everything tells me that in the future we will only be known as their professors»<sup>51</sup>. For Vujić, education is a wonderful challenge of the uncertain<sup>52</sup>, which carries a message to the contemporary era that there was a teacher in the past who accepted the challenge of uncertainty, and nothing wrong happened, on the contrary... This message encourages rethinking on the freedom and creativity of the teacher and students.

Overall, the view from the past that the work of Professor Kosta Vujić brings to the public discourse instils optimism in times of crisis – education was valued in the past so that it could be again. In this case, the history of education is promoted as one of the directions that can be followed in solving contemporary problems.

<sup>49</sup> J. Jaranović, *The Development of Authentic Personality with Limitations of the Educational System (in the examples of films: "Professor Vujić's Hat", directed by Z. Šotra, and "Dead Poets Society", directed by P. Weir)*, «Journal of Education, Culture and Society», vol. 4, n. 2, 2020, pp. 79-87.

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i\\_K0Z3jeZL0&t=27s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_K0Z3jeZL0&t=27s), 35:49 (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:47:15 (last access: 24.03.2023).

<sup>52</sup> G. Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, London-New York, Routledge, 2013.



# The Janitor on Screen. A Proposed Study of the School Imaginary in Twentieth-Century Italy

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## 1. *A silence that may be filled*

The janitor (whose current title is school assistant) is undoubtedly among the figures in the world of Italian schooling that have been most overlooked by educational historiography. This is mainly down to the sources that even the most advanced history of education research has tended to rely upon. The two routes most frequently taken when examining the complex dynamics of past schooling – which entail analysis of official regulations and documentation on the internal life of schools, respectively – offer little information about the aspects of the janitor's occupation that may be of interest to historians of education and schooling, and namely how janitors contributed to students' informal education and what role they typically played within the broader system of the school. Indeed, while legislative sources only tell us how janitors were ranked in relation to other school staff and outline their logistical and support duties<sup>1</sup>, it is rare for even documentary sources to convey any sense of their real-life experience as they interacted with students within the organizational and educational framework of schools.

New routes to investigating the figure of the janitor from a historical-educational perspective are offered by the study of school memory, where "school memory" is understood, following Maurice Halbwachs and Jan and Aleida Assmann<sup>2</sup>, as «a practice of individual remembrance or collective and public commemoration of a common school past»<sup>3</sup>. The research hypothesis presented here concerns collective school memory,

<sup>1</sup> For further background on legislation regulating the role of janitors, see V. Piazza, *Per chi suona la campanella? Il ruolo del personale non docente nell'integrazione scolastica degli alunni disabili*, Gardolo (Trento), Erikson, 2022; S. Intravaia, *L'Italia che va a scuola*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012, pp. 126-135.

<sup>2</sup> M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950; J. Assmann, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München, CH Beck, 1992; A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 2.



as it has been constructed and transmitted by the culture industry and information and communication outlets. Among the various sources that can inform this line of inquiry, filmic sources are certainly key, given their crucial influence on the construction of the shared imaginary. This influence has been demonstrated by pioneering historiographical research on the relationship between cinema and collective mindset<sup>4</sup> as well as by more recent methodological contributions on the use of filmic sources in history of education research<sup>5</sup> and more specifically in the study of school memories<sup>6</sup>.

Within the broader interpretative framework just outlined, the heuristic approach adopted in this study speaks to an article by António Nóvoa on the discursive value of images in historical-educational research surrounding the representation of teachers<sup>7</sup>. Although Nóvoa is only concerned with iconography, his observations also apply – gaining, indeed, even greater hermeneutic power – to audio-visual sources, which fall under the extended concept of image that has characterized the increasingly wide-ranging and sophisticated development of the so-called “visual turn”<sup>8</sup>.

First, Nóvoa invites us to view «the image as a means of expression». Thus, the portrayal of a janitor in a film should not be viewed as objective evidence of the historical role of janitors, but rather as a representation of this role. Although the film may well contain traces of historical fact concerning janitors, the janitor whom we see on the screen is the product of a particular reinterpretation of historical reality. Thus, «the image mark[s] the significance of the movement remembering-imagining for the historian’s work»<sup>9</sup>. In other words, films impact on the mutual influencing of history and memory and on the complex layering of meaning that is generated by this reciprocal process. Such a «mobilisation of meanings» is triggered – to draw on an interpretation offered by Geert Thyssen and Karin Priem – by the deployment of a «technology», via a «translocation» from the past of a media narrative to the present of its consumption by an audience, within an audio-visual experience based on «multimodal» social practices that give rise to a shared «heritage» of ideas, beliefs, and values<sup>10</sup>.

A second concept from Nóvoa’s article confirms and further enriches this interpretative perspective, namely his invitation to view «images as relationships»<sup>11</sup>. The on-screen

<sup>4</sup> M. Ferro, *Cinéma et Histoire*, Paris, Denoël-Gonthier, 1977; P. Sorlin, *Sociologie du cinéma*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Polenghi, *Film as a source for historical enquiry in education. Research methods and a case study: film adaptations of “Pinocchio” and their reception in Italy*, «Educató i Història», vol. 31, 2018, pp. 89-111.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent historiographical overview, see P. Alfieri, *Collective school memory, cinema and television: use of sources and interpretive perspectives*, in P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando, 2022, pp. 97-114.

<sup>7</sup> A. Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing Public Images of Teachers (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 36, n. 1, 2000, pp. 20-52.

<sup>8</sup> See at least M.M. del Pozo Andrés, S. Braster, *The Visual Turn in the History of Education. Origins, Methodologies, and Examples*, in T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education. Debates, Tensions, and Directions*, Singapore, Springer, 2020, pp. 893-908.

<sup>9</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying*, cit., p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> G. Thyssen, K. Priem, *Mobilising meaning: multimodality, translocation, technology and heritage*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 49, n. 6, 2013, pp. 735-744.

<sup>11</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying*, cit., p. 28.

image of the janitor undoubtedly stems from the authorial intentions of directors and screenwriters, who, however, are not only driven by their own artistic and cultural preferences and potentially by commercial pressures from production companies, but also by the historical context in which they are immersed, the collective imaginary of their era, and the attitudes and tastes of their audiences. For this reason, the study of an audio-visual must consider all these aspects and their systemic interrelationships. In the case of audiences, however, a particular caveat applies: in evaluating the impact of a film on the shared imaginary – primarily via diachronic analysis of its audience data and of its reception by critics, the press, and other media platforms – it must be recalled that, because public sensibilities vary over time, viewers may interact with the contents of a media offering of the past from changing semantic perspectives, which may also be different to those that the offering was originally intended to convey. In short, when studying the on-screen representation of the janitor and its evolution within the collective imagination, we must take into account «not only the diverse communities of producers and consumers of images, but above all their relationship»<sup>12</sup>.

In the present study, I apply the methodological criteria just outlined to the analysis of the only film in the Italian cinematographic repertoire whose main character is a janitor: *Mio figlio professore* (1946). Then I also briefly examine the media representation of the janitor in relation to key socio-economic, political-educational, and cultural factors in the history of schooling in Italy. The heuristic evidence reported here illustrates the potential of this line of inquiry, laying the ground for further investigation.

## 2. *A unique instance within Italian cinema: the janitor protagonist of the film Mio figlio professore*

The only film in the Italian cinematographic repertoire with a janitor as its lead character is the 1946 production *Mio figlio professore*, directed by Renato Castellani and set in the period between 1919-20 and the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The movie tells the story of Orazio Belli (played by the famous actor Aldo Fabrizi), the custodian-janitor of a classical studies secondary school in Rome. Following the death of his wife, Belli helps his son Orazio Jr. to work towards becoming a Latin teacher and to attain – thanks to a recommendation – a teaching post at the school where he himself works<sup>13</sup>.

The janitor's role in students' informal education is only minimally represented in the film, which is primarily focused on the protagonist's relationship with his son. In addressing the pupils, the janitor is brusque but resolute and authoritative: he supervises

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed summary of the plot, which focuses on how school more generally is represented in the film, see P. Alfieri, *Mio figlio professore*, «Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti», DOI: 10.53164/505, last updated: 25.10.2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/audiovisivi/mio-figlio-professore> (last access: 03.11.2022).

the schoolboys as they enter the building, reprimands them if they are late or rowdy, and exhorts them to take their schoolwork seriously. On their part, the students interact little with the janitor and are informal but respectful in their encounters with him.

Towards the end of the film, however, the protagonist begins to lose his authority. When Orazio Sr. finally manages to land Orazio Jr. a permanent teaching post at the school, he is unable to accept that the young man has now achieved existential and professional independence. His concern for his son becomes increasingly invasive and so ill-concealed as to attract the derision of the students, who draw a caricature of the “two Orazios” on the blackboard, depicting the janitor, armed with a broom, as blocking the path of his son who is carrying a book. It is this prank that induces the janitor to leave the school once and for all, having «attained the definitive awareness that social codes require the sacrifice of affective ones»<sup>14</sup>.

With regard to the representation of the janitor's role within the school from a systemic perspective, a first observation is that the high school where Orazio Sr. works is tied up with his personal identity. He inherited the post of janitor from his father and, like his father, lives in a modest apartment inside the school. Hence, the school has always been his home, the place of his family ties, which – following his wife's death – he dreams of rebuilding by confining his son there too. However, another part of the janitor's identity that he associates with the school is his strong commitment to his job and sense of duty. He sees to his organizational responsibilities with promptness and care, first and foremost that of going around the different classrooms at each change of class to announce the “*fnis*”, the word used to flag the end of a lesson.

Orazio Sr. is assisted by two other janitors who are his subordinates. Even more marked however is the inferior status that he attributes to the janitor at his son's elementary school, from whom he demands special treatment for his child. This expectation is not based on Orazio Sr.'s personal merits, but rather on the fact that – as he explicitly states himself – the boy «is the son of the high school custodian and you have to respect the hierarchy». Thus, Orazio Sr. becomes the voice of the traditional hierarchy among schools of different levels within the Italian education system, a hierarchy that is topped by high schools, especially those that offer a classical studies curriculum. Indeed, the classical studies route is seen by Orazio Sr. himself as the only one that will allow his son to rise to a higher position in society. And not just his own son, but the youth in general. This attitude may also be deduced from the scant regard that Orazio Sr. displays for the working students who attend the night school classes that are held in the school building.

The janitor also holds a hierarchical view of the various subjects taught at his school. This is borne out by his great respect for the teachers of the humanities disciplines and his corresponding lack of regard for the gym teacher Giraldi. The latter, even before the rise of fascism, had sought the title of *professore* (secondary school teacher), while Orazio Sr. only viewed him as worthy of the title *maestro* (primary school teacher). Even when Giraldi becomes a senior official at the Fascist government's Ministry of National

<sup>14</sup> G.P. Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. III: *Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico. 1945-1959*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1993, p. 469.

Education, the janitor displays no respect for him, while he remains obsequious towards the principal and other school administration officers.

The film director uses Orazio Sr.'s reservations about Giraldi to advance a veiled criticism of fascism, which however is only slightly touched upon in the filmic narrative, without being thoroughly thematized. Indeed, as the media scholar Francesco Pitassio suggests, in this film, as in many others within the neorealist cinematographic genre, «whatever identifies with Fascism is tossed into an unspeakable past: Fascism is nothing but an unfortunate break in the spontaneous flow of national identity»<sup>15</sup>.

What Pitassio calls «lies of memory» also affect the representation of the janitor, who, even in this neorealist film, is presented in terms of an imagined reinterpretation of his historical characteristics. This is borne out by the context in which the idea of making *Mio figlio professore* took shape: produced at an economically straitened time for Italian cinema, the film's low budget did not allow the director to realize his greatest ambitions for the production. Hence, the decision to exploit Fabrizi's popularity as an actor, but also to base the film on a «little story in the style of De Amicis», thus situating it within a narrative and symbolic tradition whose romantic and emotionally-led vision of schooling was likely to appeal to audiences<sup>16</sup>.

And indeed, this goal was met in practice. If – to draw on the terminology coined by Nóvoa – we shift our focus from communities of producers to communities of consumers, the first observation to be made is that the film met with considerable success immediately upon its release<sup>17</sup>. Of further interest is how *Mio figlio professore* was received by critics, who noted the film's excellent box-office receipts in their reviews<sup>18</sup>, but were negative about its artistic value in some cases<sup>19</sup>. For example, while some critics emphasized Orazio Sr.'s «positive side, based on his confidence in himself and in life»<sup>20</sup>, others accused the director of not «realizing that times [had] changed» and thus of having brought forth «an apologism for the petty bourgeois» by telling «the simple tale of an easy-going and good-hearted janitor at a city grammar school»<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> F. Pitassio, *Neorealist Film Culture, 1945-1954*. Rome, *Open Cinema*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, p. 151. On the film's neo-realist underpinnings, see P.M. Bocchi, *Mio figlio professore: prima di Umberto D.*, in G. Carluccio, L. Malavasi, F. Villa (edd.), *Il cinema di Renato Castellani*, Roma, Carocci, 2015, pp. 142-146.

<sup>16</sup> S. Trasatti, *Renato Castellani*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1984, p. 40. On the symbolic tradition in the work of De Amicis, which featured first in his novel *Cuore* (1886) and later in Italian film and TV adaptations of the book during the second half of the Twentieth century, see S. Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 203-217.

<sup>17</sup> Between 1946 and 1952, the film earned box-office receipts of 93m lire, less than the most popular film of the 1945-1946 season (*Roma città aperta*, which came out in 1943 and netted box-office takings of 124.5m lire), but more than another extremely famous film (*Sciucsià*, which came out in 1946, and had box-office earnings of 55.8m lire): see O. Levi (ed.), *Catalogo Bolaffi del cinema italiano. Tutti i film italiani del dopoguerra*, directed by G. Rondolino, Torino, Bolaffi, 1967.

<sup>18</sup> V. Calvino, *Profili di registi*. Renato Castellani, «La Cinematografia Italiana», vol. 3, n. 4, 1947, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> See G. Ferrara, *Renato Castellani*, «Bianco e Nero», vol. 16, n. 12, 1955, pp. 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> F. Di Giammatteo, *Il gioco dello scetticismo in Renato Castellani*, «Bianco e Nero», vol. 18, n. 7, 1957, p. 2.

After the 1950s, the film was no longer widely or continuously circulated. It was broadcast on television for the first time in 1983<sup>22</sup>, coming out on videotape in 1986 and 1992 and as a DVD in 2008 and 2010<sup>23</sup>; since 2021, it has been available for viewing on YouTube<sup>24</sup> and RaiPlay, the digital streaming channel of the national radio and television broadcasting service, RAI<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, film historians have not omitted the film from their longer-term analyses. Again, they tend to see the janitor as the «voice of the petty bourgeoisie», framed as a class whose «non-involvement in fascism» implied that it could be acquitted from blame as the «historically defeated»<sup>26</sup>. In addition, worthy of note is the opinion of contemporary historian, Guido Crainz, who – interpreting the film as documenting the transition from the fascist regime to the dawn of democracy – has described it as «bitter in warning us of the continuation of social hierarchies»<sup>27</sup>.

The fact that the film was not widely broadcast from the 1950s onwards means that its contents have not been able to contribute over the longer term to the construction of Italians' collective school memory. We thus lack the means to reconstruct the relationship between our observations about the context in which the film was produced and the reactions of the public and critics of the time, and communities of consumers in subsequent periods. To date, only the comments of viewers on YouTube, where – as mentioned above – the film was recently posted, offer some small insight into the effects of the mobilization of *Mio figlio professore*'s meanings from past to present<sup>28</sup>. Most of the online viewers' observations about the janitor refer to Fabrizi's masterful performance in the role and, as the film's producers expected, to the emotional power of the character. Only a small number of comments allude to the janitor's humble social status within a school system and a society marked by inequality but also by sound moral values.

### 3. *Other lines of inquiry*

As stated at the outset, apart from *Mio figlio professore*, no other Italian films have a janitor as protagonist, but there are some in which a janitor plays a minor role or makes a brief appearance. Based on a review of films listed in the *Banca dati degli audiovisivi*

<sup>22</sup> This information was gleaned from RAI's weekly magazine, *Radiocorriere TV*, which continued to be published up to 1995.

<sup>23</sup> VHS: 1986 (Home Video) e 1992 (Laser Vision); DVD: 2008 (Hobby & Work Publishing) e 2010 (Cristaldi Film).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKN9uIip7g> (last access: 04.11.2022).

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.raipplay.it/video/2017/03/Mio-figlio-professore-549cd077-9541-4200-a198-008e9ff6542c8.html> (last access: 04.11.2022).

<sup>26</sup> G.P. Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano*, Vol. II: *Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004, p. 88. See also Id., *Storia del cinema italiano*, cit., pp. 313, 224, 468-469, and M. D'Amico, *La commedia all'italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2008, pp. 56-62.

<sup>27</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia della repubblica. L'Italia dalla Liberazione ad oggi*, Roma, Donzelli, 2016, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Up to recently, the film had received 32,582 views on YouTube with 128 comments (last access: 06.11.2022).

*sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti* (Database of audio-visual materials on schools and teachers), which was created by a research team at the Catholic University of Milan in the context of the national research project *School memories between social perception and collective representation. Italy, 1861-2001*<sup>29</sup>, let us now introduce further potential lines of inquiry that examine the image of the janitor in relation to broader systematic themes within the history of Italian education.

An initial starting point concerns representations of janitors and their socio-economic status relative to that of teachers. This theme is clearly to the fore in Alberto Lattuada's *Scuola Elementare* (1954), the story of a primary school teacher, Trilli, who moves from a small town in Lazio to Milan. Here he is hosted by a fellow villager, the janitor Pilade, who supplements his own meagre salary by doing odd jobs and selling razor blades on the black market. The janitor, while recognizing his own lower status, immediately warns the teacher about the high cost of living in the city which is on the brink of an economic boom. At first, Trilli is sure of himself and of his position. Soon, however, he realizes that his income as a teacher does not enable him to keep up with the economic progress around him. So, he decides to take leave of absence from the school and join the business enterprise in which Pilade has invested all his savings. However, the project fails and the two now find themselves at the same level, having both met defeat in their attempt to climb the social ladder. Only at the end of the film does each succeed in recovering their initial position, in an epilogue that «confirms [...] the inevitability of a situation dominated by money and the de facto separation of the two worlds»<sup>30</sup>.

In this film, the representation of the janitor, who is nevertheless characterized in his own right, mainly serves to throw the image of the teacher more clearly into relief; specifically, the film director – following in the earlier-mention symbolic tradition of the «De Amicis-style school» – sets out to reaffirm the teacher's calling as an educator, attributing him with «a leading role in the life of the nation»<sup>31</sup>, at a time in Italian history when primary school teachers were losing social prestige, amongst other reasons because their paygrade dictated a lifestyle that fell short of the consumerist standards of the nascent capitalist society<sup>32</sup>. The famous film *Il maestro di Vigevano* (1963) by Elio Petri, based on the novel of the same title by Lucio Mastronardi (1962), focuses specifically on this issue. In this film, the janitor only makes a fleeting appearance, again serving mainly to shed light – in this case however a grotesque one – on the professional and existential crisis that the lead character, the teacher, is going through<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, the teacher treats the

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/audiovisivi> (last access: 07.11.2022).

<sup>30</sup> C. Camerini, *Alberto Lattuada*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1982, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> G. Fofi, *Com'era la scuola elementare italiana e com'è oggi*, «Internazionale», last updated: 26.09.2017, <https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/goffredo-fofi/2017/09/26/scuola-elementare-italiana> (last access: 07.11.2022).

<sup>32</sup> See at least A. Santoni Rugiu, *Maestre e maestri. La difficile storia degli insegnanti elementari*, Roma, Carocci, 2021, pp. 129-143; R. Sani, *Le associazioni degli insegnanti cattolici nel secondo dopoguerra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Concerning how the teacher is represented in the film, see E. Scaglia, *The counterposed representations of the Italian primary school teachers in the Sixties: some case studies from audio-visual sources*, in Alfieri, Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories*, cit., pp. 115-131.



janitor with arrogance and does not return his salute, believing that this proves his own superiority.

In other Italian films, the janitor is represented in relation to the institutional role of the school, offering us a second potential line of inquiry. A prime example of an anti-system character is Angelo, the school janitor who features in the film *Luna e l'altra*, directed by Maurizio Nichetti in 1996 but set in the 1950s. Within a broader plot centred on the theme of doubleness that unfolds against a fantastical backdrop, upright and strict teacher Luna loses her shadow, which is embodied in Ombretta, a sunny and eccentric woman who goes to live in a brothel. It is Ombretta who convinces Angelo, after he is kicked out of the school for performing leftist songs with an amateur band, to pursue a circus career. In the film – which also contains a citation from *Zéro de conduite* (1933), a celebrated French film by Jean Vigo that conveyed a strongly anti-authoritarian political message<sup>34</sup> – the janitor, together with Ombretta, sends a clear signal of «otherness» with respect to the conformism of social and school norms<sup>35</sup>. It is not surprising therefore that this film has also been analysed from the perspective of postcolonial cinema studies, according to which the janitor Angelo «is neither a colonizer nor [...] a successfully colonized subject» especially in light of his joining the circus, which, interpreted as the opposite of school, «suggests intriguing alternatives to exclusionary party politics, nationalist geography and historiography, and binary constructions of self and other»<sup>36</sup>.

Another janitor film character represented as alternative to the institutional function of the school – no longer at the political level but rather at the socio-educational level – features in *Io speriamo che me la cavo* (1992) by Lina Wertmüller. In contrast to the teacher protagonist, who, having been mistakenly transferred from Liguria to a poor town in the province of Naples, strives to make the school a place of social redemption, the lazy janitor exploits the children's disadvantaged socio-economic status by selling them snacks, chalk, and even toilet paper, thus conniving with the criminal mentality that the teacher is trying to eradicate.

This emphasis on a janitor's prioritizing of personal gain over professional duty has illustrious antecedents in Italian cinematography. A leading example is *Maddalena... zero in condotta* (1940) directed by Vittorio De Sica, in which the janitor Bondani, although seen as trustworthy by the headmistress and teachers at the girls' school where he works, repeatedly violates regulations: to please the student protagonist, he delivers directly to her, instead of to her parents, a report card showing her poor marks, covers for the girl and her classmates when they are late for school, and is bribed by two young men with a romantic interest in some of the female students to do detective work on their behalf. Although his intentions are more benign than those of Wertmüller, De Sica also portrays a janitor who encourages the breaking of school rules.

<sup>34</sup> On this film, see I. Dussel, *Iconoclastic images in the history of education: another look at children in revolt in two children's films from the 1930s*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 53, n. 6, 2017, pp. 668-682.

<sup>35</sup> M. Pistoia, *Maurizio Nichetti*, Milano, Il Castoro, 1997, p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> M. Waller, *The postcolonial circus. Maurizio Nichetti's "Luna e l'altra"*, in S. Ponzanesi, M. Waller (edd.), *Postcolonial cinema studies*, London-New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 157-171 (quotations from pp. 161, 164).



At the same time, however, Bondani expresses another, more social, kind of normativity, concerning gender, which is the third line of further inquiry that I propose here. The janitor's readiness to look after the cosmetics that the pupils are not allowed to use during school hours – he says: «After all, what's wrong with it? The poor coquettes, they are women after all! Women can do without history and mathematics, but they can't do without face powder and lipstick!» – makes him a «good fatherly custodian» of their «femininity», and a voice for the notion that «the transgressions are fun while they last, but at the end of the day they aren't allowed to violate the regulations of gender or to distract from the 'conjugal imperative' that the film forcefully delivers»<sup>37</sup>.

A typically Italian film genre that offers many salient insights into the theme of gender is the so-called “*commedia sexy*”, which in the 1970s and 1980s especially, staged «risqué tales» imbued with «voyeurism» that reflected «all the dysfunctionality and negative aspects of post-economic miracle Italy»<sup>38</sup>. When these tales are set in schools, the janitor is represented as a sexually unprincipled man who, like all the other men in the film, is obsessively attracted by the sensual female characters who dominate the scene. In Mariano Laurenti's *La compagna di banco* (1977), for example, the janitor cheekily but unsuccessfully attempts to seduce a girl, because the students deliberately make a fool of him by implying that she is a woman of loose morals. Similarly in *La liceale seduce i professori* (1979), again directed by Laurenti, the janitor is the butt of many vulgar pranks by the students and is in constant rivalry with the principal. This rivalry, together with clumsy and ineffectual games of seduction, speaks to the crisis of traditional male identity and its social power, which began in Italy in the 1950s<sup>39</sup> and found in the highly successful “*commedia sexy*” genre an effective popular magnifier with the capacity to «objectivise the mechanisms through which [masculinity] exercised its dominion, thus making them largely ineffective»<sup>40</sup>, including in the world of school.

A more general point may also be made regarding the issue of gender. Specifically, in Italian film, the janitor has almost always been represented as a male figure, despite the fact that an increasingly high proportion of women took up this role in the course of the twentieth century.

This last line of inquiry and the others that have been touched upon in this section may be further pursued with a view to advancing, in relation to the collective imaginary surrounding schooling, our understanding of key issues that have historically concerned Italian schools. To this end, it could also be of value to extend our research to television dramas, especially those of more recent years, which – superficial scrutiny suggests – may offer additional insights to the present analysis. Significant examples include the figure of the sympathetic and affectionate janitor in the Mediaset TV series *Sei forte maestro*

<sup>37</sup> R. McGlazer, *Learning by Hart: Gender, Image, and Ideology in Vittorio De Sica's "Maddalena zero in condotta"*, «The Italianist», vol. 36, n. 2, 2016, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> G.P. Brunetta, *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano. 1905-2003*, Torino, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 346, 349.

<sup>39</sup> S. Bellassai, *Mascolinità, mutamento, merce. Crisi dell'identità maschile nell'Italia del boom*, in P. Capuzzo (ed.), *Genere, generazione e consumi. L'Italia degli anni Sessanta*, Roma, Carocci, 2003, pp. 105-137.

<sup>40</sup> G. Manzoli, *Italians do it worse. La crisi della mascolinità nella commedia erotica degli anni Settanta*, «La Valle dell'Eden», vol. 9, n. 19, 2007, pp. 154-165 (quotation from p. 163).

(2000-2001)<sup>41</sup> and the appearance of a woman janitor in another Mediaset series *Caro Maestro* (1996-1997).

Both cinema and television may be drawn upon to pursue a more challenging but undoubtedly rewarding line of inquiry with a specific focus on media representations of janitors, which would involve applying the methodological criteria suggested here for the analysis of *Mio figlio professore* to a wider repertoire of audio-visual materials to be assessed from a comparative-diachronic perspective. More specifically, the aim would be to investigate these sources as agents with the power to reorganize what Halbwachs has referred to as «social frameworks of memory»<sup>42</sup>, and therefore to document the influence of both the big and the small screen on the evolving image of the janitor in the collective memory of Italians, as well as on janitors' own perceptions of themselves and of their professional identity. In this way, we may aspire to attaining, in relation to the figure of the school assistant or janitor, one of the loftiest goals of the earlier-mentioned interpretative hypothesis advanced by Nóvoa in relation to teachers, and namely: «to understand the role of images in the governing of the» janitor's «profession – i.e. the social and political definition of norms, rules, beliefs, convictions and “truths” about what it means to be a “good” and “reasonable”» janitor<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> My thanks go to Carlotta Frigerio for drawing my attention to this production.

<sup>42</sup> M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Mouton, 1975.

<sup>43</sup> Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying*, cit., p. 23.

# Images of School Inclusion: Education for Persons with Disabilities in 1970s Italy across Big and Small Screens

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Milan (Italy)

## *Introduction*

Within the rich and diversified domain of films produced in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italy on the schools of the past, the theme of special education occupies a marginal place. In this study, a keyword search of the “Database of audiovisual materials on schools and teachers” – published on the website *memoriascolastica.it* as part of the National Research Project PRIN 2019 “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1961-2001)”<sup>1</sup> – was conducted, with a view to quantitatively analysing the over 90 records that currently comprise this electronic directory. On the topic of special education, the most frequently recurring terms were *disabilità* [*disability*] (four audiovisual productions), *classi differenziali* [*differential classes*] (three audiovisual productions), *disabilità mentale* [*mental disability*], *disabilità visiva* [*visual impairment*], *esclusione sociale* [*social exclusion*], and *integrazione scolastica* [*school integration*] (two audiovisual productions each)<sup>2</sup>. Overall, these terms are associated with a relatively small number of audiovisual productions, some of which, while touching upon the issue of special education, only represent it in a fragmentary fashion. Once the latter cases have been excluded, only four productions offer a representative image of the theme of disability in the schools of the past. Specifically, these are two documentary films (*La bicicletta* [*The bicycle*] directed by Luigi Comencini from 1970 and *I “diversi”* [*The “different”*] by Vittorio De Seta from 1978) and two drama films, one produced for the cinema (*Rosso come il cielo* [*Red like the sky*] directed by Cristiano Bortone from 2007) and the other for television (*La classe degli asini* [*The class of dunces*] by Andrea Porporati from 2016).

<sup>1</sup> The database was assembled by the research unit at the Catholic University of Milan, in collaboration with the University of Padua research unit.

<sup>2</sup> A further series of keywords were associated with one audiovisual production each, namely: *bambino difficile* (problem child), *educazione speciale* (special education), *esclusione scolastica* (exclusive education), *pedagogia speciale* (special pedagogy) and *scuola speciale* (special school).

It is not surprising that, in addition to their shared general theme, all four films were made or set in Italy in the 1970s. As is well known, this decade was a turning point for Italian schools, which were then encouraged to open their doors to those who had previously been excluded from them. More specifically, students with disabilities were the beneficiaries of a series of legislative measures, including the decisive laws No. 118/1971 and No. 517/1977, which provided for the design of individualized and inclusive educational pathways. The transition to school integration was certainly not without its challenges and complexities, given that it required both the system as a whole and individual teachers and pupils to revise their understanding of schooling<sup>3</sup>.

This controversial phase has been widely investigated by history of education scholars<sup>4</sup>. Still, there appears to be little awareness of it outside academia. Films produced for TV and cinema, as instruments that «reduce or eliminate the distance between the past and the present»<sup>5</sup>, can help to shed light on the theme and draw it to the attention of the wider public.

In this essay, I set out to analyse the four earlier-listed audiovisual productions, with a view to establishing how they recorded contemporary reality (in the case of the documentaries) or re-evoked and revisited a past historical period (in the case of the drama films). Following other studies of school memories<sup>6</sup>, I compare these media products, assessing whether and how their representations of an extremely important development for our country reflect changes in the collective mindset of Italians over time.

### 1. La bicicletta by L. Comencini

Over October and November 1970, the documentary series *I bambini e noi* [*The children and us*] was broadcast on Rai 2, the second national TV channel. The film director Luigi Comencini, who was already well-known at the time, used the series to denounce the marked rift in Italian society that divided wealthy and privileged children from their poor and exploited peers. The six-part series was mainly focused on schools, where social inequality was often amplified by a “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching and by the fact that teachers generally lacked the tools required to bring about genuine

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Canevaro, L. De Anna, *The historical evolution of school integration in Italy: some witnesses and considerations*, «Alter», vol. 4, n. 3, 2010, pp. 203-216; S. D'Alessio, *Inclusive education in Italy. A critical analysis of the policy of integrazione scolastica*, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See F. Pruneri, *La politica scolastica dell'integrazione nel secondo dopoguerra*, in G.M. Cappai (ed.), *Percorsi dell'integrazione. Per una didattica delle diversità personali*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2003, pp. 55-80; S. Polenghi, *The History of Educational Inclusion of the Disabled in Italy*, «Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education», 28 June 2021, <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-1608> (last access: 04.01.2023).

<sup>5</sup> P. Alfieri, *Introduzione*, in Id. (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

change<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, by the same token, schools could also represent children's best hope of social redemption, as borne out by testimonies presented during the final episode in the series.

«One of my finest works about children»<sup>8</sup>: such was assessment of the director himself, who had already made other films on the theme of childhood, beginning with his first popular success *Bambini in città* [*Children in city*] (1946), and would go on to make others, such as *Cuore* [*Heart*] (1984) and *Marcellino pane e vino* [*Marcellino bread and wine*] (1992), and of course *Le avventure di Pinocchio* [*The adventures of Pinocchio*] (1972)<sup>9</sup>. The aim of *I bambini e noi* was to tell the true stories of the many Pinocchios then living out their existences in Italy. In each episode, the part of Pinocchio was metaphorically played by a different child, chosen by Comencini as the puppet of the moment. The director did not audition children for these lead roles, but rather selected those who emerged as having a difficult life, because they were «the most beleaguered, the most unhappy, or the scoundrel»<sup>10</sup> of the situation.

The Pinocchio of the fourth episode, entitled *La bicicletta* and broadcast during prime time on 27 October 1970, is Maurizio Gualà, a 10-year-old schoolboy who lives with his family in the working-class district of Prima Porta, on the outskirts of Rome. Chosen by Comencini because he obstinately wears the ribbon on his school apron backwards, Maurizio, who is also stubborn in personality, attends a differential class of third-grade students at an elementary school that has been set up, due to a lack of alternative spaces, in a couple of apartments inside a residential building<sup>11</sup>. Comencini's documentary narrative draws out the complexity of life at this school, which is bound up with the personal and family history of the child protagonist. The Gualà family, which has immigrated to Rome from Abruzzo, is presented in all its «brutality», beginning with the father who guilelessly declares that he uses the whip to discipline his son. The child was assigned to a differential

<sup>7</sup> For further background on this documentary, see L. Agostini, *Una teleinchiesta a puntate sul mondo dell'infanzia*, «Radiocorriere TV», n. 38, 20-26 September 1970, pp. 32-34; S. Finetti, *I bambini e noi*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti. Vol. 1*, Milano, EDUCatt, 2021, pp. 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> L. Comencini, *Davvero un bel mestiere! Infanzia, vocazione, esperienze di un regista*, Milano, Baldini&Castoldi, 2016, pp. 123-127.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. Gosetti, *Luigi Comencini*, Roma, La Nuova Italia, 1988, pp. 7-8. For Comencini's complete filmography, see D. Monetti, L. Pallanch (edd.), *Luigi Comencini: architetto dei sentimenti*, Roma, Centro Sperimentale Cinematografia, 2007. In relation to *Cuore*, a highly successful TV drama, cf. S. Polenghi, *Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 203-217.

<sup>10</sup> Agostini, *Una teleinchiesta a puntate sul mondo dell'infanzia*, cit., p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> In Italy, differential classes were instituted in the early 1900s to accommodate children who were «late» developers or «deceptively abnormal», in other words who did not display obvious intellectual deficits but yet had difficulty learning, often because they were disadvantaged by an unfavourable social and familial context. For further background on how differential classes came to be introduced, cf. B. Di Pofi, *L'educazione dei minori «anormali» nell'opera di Giuseppe Ferruccio Montesano*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, 2008, pp. 50-52. On their rapid spread in the Scuola media unica (unified junior high school) introduced in 1962, see A. Zelioli, 1963-1978. *Dalle classi differenziali all'integrazione scolastica degli handicappati*, «Scuola Italiana Moderna», n. 5, 1978, pp. 14-19. On the Scuola media unica programme itself, cf. E. Damiano, B. Orizio, E. Scaglia (edd.), *I due popoli. Vittorino Chizzolini e «Scuola Italiana Moderna» contro il dualismo scolastico*, Roma, Studium, 2019.

class due to his lack of familiarity with standard Italian and his aggressive behaviour, which the teachers – one of their number affirms – were unable to «solve».

Although Comencini avoids taking an explicitly controversial approach, he implicitly conveys his critique of this system in various ways, firstly by means of the pressing questions he puts to his interviewees. For example, when – during his conversation with Maurizio's teacher – he asks if she thinks that creating differential classes could negatively impact on the self-perceptions that children build up by comparing themselves with peers, she replies – with evident discomfiture – that the pupils in the regular classes are not meant to know which of their companions have been assigned to the special classes, which of course is a highly unlikely state of affairs. Similarly, when asked whether selecting for superior intellectual abilities is one of the functions of schooling, the teacher says she thinks it unfair that the «most advanced minds» should have to wait for the «less capable and more handicapped». Thus, the teacher's own words convey an image of differential classes as places where the rejects of the public school system may be received.

Only at the end of the film, citing a recent article in the *Corriere della Sera*, does Comencini explicitly point the finger at the segregative nature of these classes, which «isolate the weakest without providing them with the slightest means of redemption». Differential classes reflected the social inequalities then forcing large segments of the Italian population into difficult living conditions. Inequalities that are in plain sight in the footage of *La bicicletta*, which shows a socio-economically backward neighbourhood marred by illegal construction. Given the cultural climate of the period, which was even further exacerbated by the civic unrest of 1968, special educational pathways were meeting with increasing opposition. Thus, the purpose of the documentary film was not only to illustrate a contemporary problem, but also to make its audience more sympathetic to a change of course that would require universal support. Comencini himself attempts to do his bit by gifting Maurizio – who has declared himself ready to try harder at his schoolwork – with a bicycle, soon to be broken by his drunken father, and by openly condemning the miserable life that the child was forced to lead, both at home and at school.

## 2. I «diversi» by V. De Seta

In the 1970s, Vittorio De Seta – a director renowned especially for his films of social inquiry – turned his attention to the world of school. While in his docudrama *Diario di un maestro* [*Diary of an elementary school teacher*], which aired for the first time in 1973, he had placed a teacher-actor in charge of a class group put together ad hoc for the production, towards the close of the decade, he took a different approach with the four-part docuseries *Quando la scuola cambia* [*When the school changes*]<sup>12</sup>. Advised on

<sup>12</sup> On De Seta cf. A. Rais (ed.), *Il cinema di Vittorio De Seta*, Catania, Maimone, 1995; *Il mondo perduto: i cortometraggi di Vittorio De Seta, 1954-1959*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2008; P. Nappi, *L'avventura del reale: il*

this second project, as on the first, by education specialist Francesco Tonucci, De Seta documented life at four schools, in different regions of Italy, which were then successfully experimenting with innovative teaching methods in response to the needs of an increasingly large and diverse student body.

*I “diversi”*, first broadcast on Rai1 – the national flagship TV channel – on 24 June 1978, is the closing episode in the series and explores a project implemented by the Italian Association for Assistance to Spastics (AIAS) at Cutrofiano Rehabilitation Centre in the province of Lecce<sup>13</sup>. The Centre’s initial far-sighted experimentation with including children with disabilities in ordinary school pathways only lasted a few years, however it subsequently remained in operation as an outpatient and administrative service<sup>14</sup>.

The episode is divided into three parts. In the first part, the narrative voice of actor and playwright Stefano Satta Flores, accompanied by a sequence of photographs and video clips of children in a range of unidentified educational settings, offers a harsh critique of contemporary educational and healthcare institutions for the “handicapped” as they were then labelled. Described as «places of concentration» and «segregation», these institutions stood accused of reducing children with disabilities to mere objects of care, with an exclusive focus on medical health. Indeed, it was their awareness of such limitations that had prompted the directors of the Cutrofiano Rehabilitation Centre to revisit the centre’s aims and structure, leading to a series of attempts in the early 1970s to include children with disabilities in regular school pathways, as presented in the second segment of the episode.

Specifically, the school-related experiences of four children with disabilities are shown to the viewer. Through the testimonies of practitioners involved in these children’s individual educational pathways (teachers, social workers, psychologists, and education specialists), together with the observations of parents and classmates, the many positive aspects of transferring pupils from the rehabilitation centre to ordinary schools are brought to light. Importantly, building up a network of friendships in a mainstream classroom allowed the children to break out of the social isolation they had previously been forced into. The same mechanism also extended to their parents, who thus no longer felt marginalized on account of their situation. While the film director does not hide the challenges that the teachers encountered in striving to appropriately adapt their teaching methods, his main focus is on their insights and experiments, which – although only mentioned in passing by the interviewees – proved key to drawing out the potential of the individual students. The third part of the episode reinforces this last point by interviewing a physical education teacher at an elementary school in Lecce. Based his

*cinema di Vittorio De Seta*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2015. For more in-depth background on *Diario di un maestro*, see A. Debè, *Constructing Memory: School in Italy in the 1970s as Narrated in the TV Drama «Diario di un Maestro»*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 231-244.

<sup>13</sup> On the broader project, see works by Damiano Felini, including *Una proposta pedagogica sullo schermo. La scuola in due produzioni televisive di Vittorio De Seta (1970-1979)*, «Orientamenti Pedagogici», vol. 62, n. 2, 2015, pp. 273-291; *Quando la scuola cambia*, in Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti*. Vol. 1, cit., pp. 1-6.

<sup>14</sup> S. Dinelli, *Al Centro di Cutrofiano*, «Riforma della Scuola», n. 1, 1974, pp. 24-29.



own experience, he believes that the presence in the classroom of children with disabilities is a stimulus not only for the other classmates, but also for teachers, who must acquire the competence required to fulfil the right to education of all students.

It is evident that De Seta's goal was to illustrate the feasibility of an inclusive education system, almost as though to support the legislation on school integration that had recently been introduced. He had also set out to promote inclusion, albeit not exclusively in relation to disability, in *Diario di un maestro*. In that docudrama however, his simulation of reality was viewed as unconvincing by some critics<sup>15</sup>. In *Quando la scuola cambia*, in contrast, De Seta presented real-life examples of innovation, recording replicable teaching practices and bringing to the television screen a sort of «in-service teacher training course»<sup>16</sup>.

However, *I "diversi"* is in a somewhat different style to the other three episodes in the series. The Cutrofiano project is presented without practical suggestions on how to include children with disabilities. In contrast, the other episodes place much more emphasis on the practical dimension. For example, in the first episode, entitled *Partire dal bambino* [*Begin with the child*], concerning the work of teacher Mario Lodi with his primary school class in Vho di Piadena, a small village in northern Italy, the teacher's educational approach is conveyed in great detail, being outlined and explained by the teacher himself<sup>17</sup>. In *I "diversi"*, on the other hand, the accent is on offering a positive message to encourage school inclusion rather than on indicating the concrete steps required to bring it about. The teachers interviewed in the episode discuss their experience, but rarely define their chosen educational practices in detail. It is likely that this reticence reflects the climate of uncertainty generated by the introduction in the 1970s of the previously mentioned legislation on including children with disabilities in public schools. Many teachers were unprepared for the speed with which the change was implemented and only gradually did school practices come to be revisited<sup>18</sup>.

### 3. Rosso come il cielo by C. Bortone

Directed by Cristiano Bortone, the drama film *Rosso come il cielo* was released in 2007. A considerably successful production, it was screened all over the world and won multiple awards<sup>19</sup>. Set in 1970, it tells the story of 10-year-old Mirco, who following an accident with a rifle, loses his sight, first partially and then completely. Leaving Pontedera, near

<sup>15</sup> Nappi, *L'avventura del reale*, cit., pp. 133-138 and A. Debè, *The Italian TV series «Diario di un maestro»: a new way of experiencing school in the 1970s*, in P. Alfieri, I. Garai (edd.), *Individual and collective school memories. Research perspectives and case studies in Italy and Hungary*, Roma, Armando editore, 2022, pp. 132-154.

<sup>16</sup> Felini, *Una proposta pedagogica sullo schermo*, cit., p. 289.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277-279.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pruneri, *La politica scolastica dell'integrazione nel secondo dopoguerra*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> For further background, see A. Debè, *Rosso come il cielo*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti. Vol. 2*, Milano, EDUCatt, 2022, pp. 1-5.

Florence, where he lives, he moves to Genoa to attend the local institute for the blind. Being separated from his family, along with the strict rules imposed by the director and the nuns who run the school, and severe difficulty with learning because he does not know Braille alphabets, makes life at the institution unbearable for the child<sup>20</sup>.

From a history of education perspective, the film combines two key dimensions. First, there is the narration of Mirco's personal story. Although the situation in which he finds himself causes him great suffering, he gradually manages to attribute meaning to his new everyday existence, rediscovering through sound the world that he can no longer perceive with sight. At the same time, the film also tells the story of the institute, presenting its educational aims and teaching methods. The task of narrating everyday educational life at the institution is mainly entrusted to the visual dimension of the film, the soundtrack by Ezio Bosso, and brief remarks by the story characters. The resulting representation is that of an educationally functional school: the classroom is a well-equipped to meet the sensory and mobility requirements of the blind; the religious sisters who form the teaching staff are conscientious and well-trained; there is an emphasis on vocational education, with a view to teaching each individual students «an occupation suited to his needs». Alongside this apparent efficiency, however, everyday life at the school is drab, marked by cold, impersonal spaces and a rigid sequence of predefined activities. «We eat, we study, and we sleep», states one child in the film.

These two dimensions – that of the main character and that of the institute – are closely intertwined, and so, the change in Mirco catalyses the transformation of the entire institute, which – the viewer is left to infer – is ultimately destined to transcend its self-referential and marginalizing approach. However, as the plot unfolds, the dimension of life at the school becomes increasingly less prominent compared to the dimension of Mirco, the true protagonist. Bortone himself stated that the purpose of the film was to present «an extraordinary story that deserved to be told», referring specifically to the story of the child<sup>21</sup>. This choice is conducive to eliciting strong empathy on the part of the viewer. Indeed, comments from audiences typically allude to Mirco's tenacity and fortitude and also to the director's ability to portray the potential for personal redemption of persons with disabilities. «Touching» and «moving» are among the most frequently used terms in reviews, both in Italy and abroad<sup>22</sup>. Even a journalist with the daily newspaper *la Repubblica* described the film as «touching and poetic»<sup>23</sup>. The film's sentimental character

<sup>20</sup> The story is based on the life of Mirco Mencacci, today a well-known sound editor in the Italian film industry. For further background on the film, cf. C.Z. Baruffi, *Il cinema tra percorsi educativi e sentieri formativi*, Padova, Libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2011, pp. 141-143; Laura, Luisa and Morando Morandini (edd.), *Il Morandini: dizionario dei film e delle serie televisive*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 2021, p. 1325.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ve7W0juiXXo> (last access: 04.01.2023).

<sup>22</sup> The reviews analysed for this study were drawn from several different websites, both Italian and international (given that the film was also screened in other countries). The main platforms consulted include *amazon.it*, *mymovies.it*, and *rottentomatoes.com*.

<sup>23</sup> P. D'Agostini, *Quando il cinema è suono storia di un cieco di talent*, «La Repubblica», 9 March 2007 (<https://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/rosso-come-il-cielo/rassegnastampa/143577/>, last access: 04.01.2023).

is strongly to the fore then, so much so that it was described by a critic writing for the newspaper *Liberazione* as a «sweet tale about the blind»<sup>24</sup>.

Clearly, therefore, the film resonates with changes over time in public sensibilities surrounding the theme of disability. At the same time, however, the film director's efforts to describe the characteristics of the institute's educational program have mostly passed over spectators' heads. Only an attentive and expert eye can clearly discern the image of the school that is conveyed by the film, which encompasses both a directional and self-referential educational approach, and teaching methods that are partially effective in meeting the needs of the student. The one-sided perspective adopted by most of the film's audience is exemplified in the words of an anonymous reviewer, who merely describes the institute attended by Mirco as a «distant and unknown place, where all the children were marginalized from the outside world»<sup>25</sup>. While there is an undeniable grain of truth in this statement, it was certainly influenced by the commentator's emotional engagement with Mirco's heartbreaking story, which likely prevented him or her from fully apprehending the characteristics of the educational institution.

#### 4. La classe degli asini by A. Porporati

Directed by Andrea Porporati and first broadcast on Rai1 on 14 November 2016, the film *La classe degli asini* is set in Turin between 1970 and 1971 and presents part of the personal and professional life story of Mirella, a meticulous middle school teacher and champion of the “old-fashioned” method of knowledge transmission, who at a certain point finds herself questioning all of her strongest convictions. A colleague, a male teacher called Felice, opens her eyes to the limitations of a teaching method that excludes those who are different, marginalizing disabled and maladjusted students by relegating them to “dunce” classes, special schools and institutes, or differential classes. In response to this situation, Felice sets up an after-school program that is open to all those who have been rejected by the school system.

Mirella's change of heart is strongly influenced by the experience of Riccardo, one of her young students. The oldest child in a Southern Italian family that emigrated to the North and now lives in poverty on the outskirts of Turin, Riccardo has been abandoned by his father, and is restless and unruly, leading his teachers to mistakenly categorize him as of below average intelligence. The teachers decide to exclude him from mainstream schooling, assigning him to a differential class – although in the film, Riccardo is placed in a residential centre that deploys mainly coercive and violent methods. At the same time, Flavia, Mirella's daughter who has severe mental and physical disabilities, is also sent

<sup>24</sup> B. Sollazzo, *Gli altri occhi del piccolo Mirco*, «Liberazione», 9 March 2007 (<https://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/rosso-come-il-cielo/rassegnastampa/144255/>, last access: 04.01.2023).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/rosso-come-il-cielo/pubblico/> (last access: 04.01.2023).

home from the private school where she is enrolled, on the grounds that she is incapable of learning.

Seeking help for her family situation, Mirella contacts the Turin branch of the National Association of Families of Subnormal Children (ANFFAS). Thanks to her encounter with this group and spurred on by her colleague Felice's "revolutionary" drive to revisit educational practice, she comes to the conclusion that the public school system needs to be reformed so that it can cater for all different kinds of special needs. When she becomes headteacher of the school, Mirella allows Riccardo to re-enroll, and with him also Flavia and other previously excluded children, thus launching an experiment in school integration<sup>26</sup>.

In contrast with *Rosso come il cielo*, this TV drama was not primarily driven by the desire to tell the story of its main character, but rather by the goal of shedding light on the process of school integration that took place in Italy in the 1970s. In 2013, Antonio Nocchetti, president of the Neapolitan association "Tutti a Scuola", whose mission is to safeguard the rights of students with disabilities, had written a letter to Francesco Pinto, then head of Rai, to enquire «why the public [broadcasting] service had never attended to an important law such as that which, in 1977, abolished differential classes»<sup>27</sup>. Getting the message, Rai chose to televise the real-life experience of Mirella Casale Antonione, on whose story the drama is based, as an example of farsighted advocacy for educational inclusion<sup>28</sup>.

The film firmly condemns "special" institutions, whether they take the form of differential classes, special schools, or combined healthcare and education institutes, which in the film overlap and are confounded with one other. These institutions are critiqued because they act as a means of exclusion and are self-referential. The institute that takes in Mirella's student is in practice a containment centre, which offers little or no education and has nearly no teachers or educational staff. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the inclusive project that Mirella launches at the middle school where she is headmistress. Although the film does not touch on the educational details of this project, it presents Mirella's school as a place where all students can grow and develop.

It is thus very clear that the film director's position is one of full approval of school inclusion and condemnation of segregation processes. While we may be sympathetic to his support for inclusive education and admire the fact that he represented Italy's courageous change in special education policy on TV, nevertheless, the film omits some of the historical nuance surrounding that change. Specifically it overlooks the fact that

<sup>26</sup> C. Gumirato, *La classe degli asini*, in Alfieri (ed.), *Banca dati degli audiovisivi sulla scuola e sugli insegnanti*, Vol. 1, cit., pp. 1-4.

<sup>27</sup> M. Basile, *Disabili a scuola, il sogno di Insinna: un Paese che non lascia indietro nessuno*, «Corriere del Mezzogiorno. Campania», 12 November 2016, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> A secondary school teacher, Casale was headteacher at the "Camillo Olivetti" middle school in Turin, where in the early 1970s, she launched some successful experiments in inclusion. A member of ANFFAS from 1964, she held various positions within the association over time, up to that of national vice president. For fuller biographical details, see M. Levita, *Mirella Antonione Casale: la battaglia per i minori con disabilità tra ieri e oggi*, «Quaderni di Intercultura», vol. XI, 2019, pp. 192-210.

the strength of traditional educational facilities for the disabled lay in their deployment of specialized teaching methods, and that, at the same time, the new pattern of “wild integration” of the disabled was not without its challenges<sup>29</sup>.

The director’s simplified portrayal of the process of school inclusion has not gone unnoticed outside the education sector. The journalist and television critic Aldo Grasso, for example, wrote that «The topic is beyond dispute [...]. The content is so important that the script inevitably becomes secondary», yet the film «reflects [...] a somewhat dated view [of the public service] that is strongly characterized by a pedagogical mission and a paternalistic tone. It doesn’t make it to the next level»<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, the journalist Andrea Fagioli commented on the «many stereotypes» in the film, which «clearly divides the “good guys” from the “bad guys”... [it is] all somewhat simplified. But perhaps this is the way to reach a general public that is thirsty for simple and positive messages, and for characters who fight worthy battles and with whom they can identify»<sup>31</sup>.

It might be said that the purely historical dimension of this film is overshadowed by its educational dimension, in terms of educating the public to accept and include those who are different. This is confirmed by the words of Eleonora Andreatta, director of Rai fiction in 2016, who stated that «*La classe degli asini* is an integral part of the editorial line of the public [broadcasting] service, whose aim is to engage all viewers and to offer respectful [treatment] of themes, values, and civic dedication and effort»<sup>32</sup>. At the same time, however, it must be noted that this emphasis on inclusive practices and the values of solidarity and sharing, as well as on arousing spectators’ emotions rather than engaging their rational sphere, also fits with the need to please audiences. Certainly, the film won a large following. It attracted almost 6 million viewers and was the prime time offering with by far the highest ratings on the evening it was broadcasted.

### Conclusions

This comparative analysis of four filmic productions shows that each of these works reflects cultural aspects of the period in which it was produced. For example, the films directed by Comencini and De Seta offer insight into the anti-authoritarian and emancipatory current that characterized 1960s and 1970s Italy, a movement that we know to have had key repercussions on the educational system. In relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities, these two works focused on a process that had just been initiated and that still needed to be fully embraced by public opinion. Hence, both films support the principle of inclusion, and are less concerned with providing viewers,

<sup>29</sup> Polenghi, *The History of Educational Inclusion of the Disabled in Italy*, cit.; L. Cottini, *Didattica speciale e inclusione scolastica*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> «*La classe degli asini*» e la missione educativa di Vanessa Incontrada, «Corriere della Sera», 15 November 2016, pp. 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> «*La classe degli asini*», valori e stereotipi, «Avvenire», 16 November 2016, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Incontrada e Insinna nella battaglia contro le classi differenziali, «Il Tirreno», 10 November 2016, p. 36.

especially teachers, with educational guidance, than with pointing up the desirable and legitimate nature of the integration process. This means that the directors were aware that legislation alone would not be enough to bring about change in schools, but that a shift in the collective image of schooling was also required.

On the other hand, in the years in which the films by Bortone and Porporati were produced, the principles underlying inclusive education had become established. These works, therefore, were not aimed at promoting structural change in schooling, but rather at confirming the choices previously made and inviting the public to continue to support them, within a broader approach that extended from schools to the wider social context. To this end, the narratives of the two films – which are partly fictionalized – are designed to tug at the audience's heartstrings, in contrast with the documentaries, which by their nature offer a more objective perspective<sup>33</sup>.

What the four filmic productions have in common, however, is their condemnation of the differential pathways for disabled and maladapted children that characterized the Italian school system prior to the 1970s. In contrast, the opening of schools to all students is portrayed as a completely positive experience. In pursuing this line of thinking, all the films take a rather simplistic approach, which, for example, leads them to avoid illustrating the valuable characteristics of some special education formats, especially in terms of targeted teaching methods<sup>34</sup>. The outcome is a gap between the complex history of special education institutes and their representation in filmic sources, whereby the latter tend to perpetuate a stereotypical and univocal vision of the topic within the collective imagination, choosing to offer not a faithful historical picture but rather a set of values to be conserved over time.

<sup>33</sup> In relation to documentaries and how they go about capturing reality, cf. S. Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a critical introduction*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 4; P. Warmington, A. Van Gorp, I. Grosvenor, *Education in motion: use of documentary film in education research*, «Paedagogica Historica», n. 4, 2011, pp. 457-472.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, the case of deaf people in Italy and the well-structured and specialized educational pathways that were offered to them from the late 1800s onwards. For background on this topic, cf. R. Sani (ed.), *L'educazione dei sordomuti nell'Italia dell'800: Istituzioni, metodi, proposte formative*, Torino, SEI, 2008; M.C. Morandini, *L'educazione dei sordomuti: Il lungo cammino verso l'inclusione*, in M. Gecchele, P. Dal Toso (edd.), *Educare alle diversità: Una prospettiva storica*, Siena, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 137-159.





# The Traditional Jewish School and Its Many Pasts: History and Memories

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At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Jewish children in Europe attended school. In France, England, Italy, and Germany, where the emancipatory process moved quickly, Jewish children studied primarily in state schools with their non-Jewish fellow students. However, in Eastern Europe, where the emancipatory process evolved more slowly, many children continued studying in the *Heder*, the most widespread elementary educational framework in Eastern European Jewry that dated back to the Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>.

In the traditional *Heder*, classes took place in a room (*Heder*, in Hebrew) at one of the local synagogues or at times in the teacher (*Melamed*)'s home. Depending on era and region, the teacher's salary was paid by the Jewish community or directly by children's parents.

Typically, pupils, generally boys, attended classes until the age of four or five. After learning to read Hebrew, they immediately began studying the basic texts in the Jewish tradition: the *Torah* (Bible), and after a few years, the *Talmud*, the rules of the law of Jewish daily life. Instruction was based on rote repetition and learning by heart<sup>2</sup>. Study was seen as an integral part of the education and socialization process of the Jewish child. Education and literacy are considered a religious duty in Jewish tradition and have been so since Antiquity<sup>3</sup>. Thus in all the Jewish communities, and not only in Eastern Europe, education was considered primordial, and had major repercussions on the social, intellectual and economic life not only of the Jews but also their non-Jewish neighbors<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction to the *Heder*, see M. Zalkin, *Heder*, in G.D. Hundert (ed.), *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 708-710. In French: M. Toledano, *L'école juive de la Miséricorde: les cheders de l'Est européen*, Paris, Le Cerf, 2000; R. Ertel, *Les cheders: l'école juive traditionnelle en Europe de l'Est*, Paris, Le Cerf, 2002; R. Wallek, *Les cheders: l'école juive du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2005. In Hebrew: D. Assaf, E. Etkes (edd.), *The Heder. Studies, Documents, Literature and Memoirs*, Tel-Aviv, Tel-Aviv University, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the traditional Jewish education of girls, and the integration of girls into the *Heder* model see S. Stampfer, *Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe*, «Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Fifteen», vol. 7, 1992, pp. 63-87.

<sup>3</sup> L. Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints*, Lanham (MD), University Press of America, pp. 1-34. See also: J. Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History*, Lanham (MD), Jason Aronson Inc. Publishers, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> M. Botticini, Z. Eckstein, *The Chosen Few, How Education Shaped Jewish History*, Princetown, Princetown University Press, 2012.

Historical information on the *Heder* can be found in the hundreds if not thousands of documents carefully preserved to this day that include legal documents and official minutes of meetings, memoirs and narratives, photographs, drawings, and other media<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, historical analysis cannot plunge blindly into these sources without applying the critical lens needed for a true methodological approach. This type of approach is particularly important when dealing with historical themes related to childhood: the lapse of time between the actual event and its literary description can blur the fragile boundary between reality and embellished recollection. Historian Philippe Ariès commented that people's recollections of their childhood are so altered that the actual facts need to be constantly confirmed by other sources<sup>6</sup>.

Although there is an inherent difference between memory and history, this does not mean that the historians researching history should reject recollections. Rather, history is based on memory in that it can transform it into a source of knowledge.

This notion was perhaps best formulated by Pierre Nora in the introduction to his work, *Les lieux de mémoire*:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting [...]. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic [...]. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism [...]. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things<sup>7</sup>.

For scholars of the school of New History, a *lieu de mémoire* in the broad sense is not only a material or concrete object that can be situated geographically like a building, a museum, or archives, but also an abstract or intellectually defined object, such as a symbol, a motto, an event, or an institution. A *lieu de mémoire* is no less interesting than a historical location. It may be even more intriguing since memory has shaped the present. This is why the distinction between history and memory is so crucial to the historian studying social life and to a better understanding of intellectual trends.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see D.K. Roskies, *Heder: Primary Education among East European Jews. A Selected and Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources*, «Working Papers in Yiddish and Eastern European Jewish Studies», vol. 25, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> «Le souvenir que nous avons de notre propre enfance est souvent si altéré, si amplifié, si transformé, qu'il est nécessaire de vérifier sans cesse, auprès d'autres témoins, les faits réels qui s'y rapportent», P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Plon, 1960 (*Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, translated by R. Baldick, New York, Vintage, 1965). See also M. Augé, *Les formes de l'oubli*, Paris, Payot, 1998. P. Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000; and in particular: A. Viñao Frago, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», vol. 12, 2009, pp. 19-33.

<sup>7</sup> P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire*, «Représentations», vol. 26, 1989, pp. 7-24. For another approach to history and memory, see P. Caspard, *L'historiographie de l'éducation dans un contexte mémoriel. Réflexion sur quelques évolutions problématiques*, «Histoire de l'Éducation», vol. 121, 2009, pp. 67-82.

This article probes the historiographical sources of the *Heder*, the institution that characterized the intersection of social and intellectual life of Eastern European Jewry at the dawn of the modern era. It shed light on its potential and relevance but also its limitations.

### 1. *Literary Depictions*

The *Heder* is frequently mentioned in the literature and in memoirs. Numerous authors have described their childhoods and their positive and negative experiences in the *Heder*<sup>8</sup>. Some discuss the importance of studying the sacred texts and the transmission of Jewish traditions in the *Heder*. They also stress the friendships and bonds between students, and their memories of happy moments in the classroom. Others also mention the shortcomings of education in the *Heder*: the authoritarian teachers, the pressure to excel, and the complex and at times conflictual relationships between students and teachers:

If I committed some infraction of school conduct, he would hang his leather belt directly behind me on a bedpost and thus increase the intensity of my studying with the visible symbol of discipline<sup>9</sup>.

There is no doubt that there were instances of violence in the *Heder*:

Once, his father asked me if the *Melamed* [the teacher] whipped the children... It is not a simple thing to withdraw a youngster from a despotic *Melamed*. The *Heder*, even with its cat-o'-nine-tails, is a holy place. The children dare not tell of the punishments and the parents dare not interfere with the *Melamed's* authority. How can the authority be effective without slaps, pinches, and blows? To end punishment would be to end the discipline that ensures that a youngster will grow up with learning and self-control. It was not easy to differentiate between necessary discipline and sadism<sup>10</sup>.

It would be erroneous to see this passage as a simple description of the use of violence as a form of punishment in the *Heder*. These lines are much more informative because they testify to the relationship to violence as a punitive method. The text underscores how difficult it was for parents to confront the authority of the *Melamed*, who was seen as a powerful, respected figure but could also be perceived as a tyrant. Although the pupils were subjected to corporal punishment, the author acknowledges that discipline is a vital component for learning and acquiring self-control.

<sup>8</sup> Most of them are written in Hebrew. Translated in English, see for example L. Stein *et alii* (edd.), *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America 1969; N. Marsden (ed.), *A Jewish Life under the Tsars: The Autobiography of Chaim Aronson 1825-1888*, New Jersey, Allanheld, 1983. See also M. Blaustein (ed.), *Memoirs of David Blaustein*, New York, McBride, Nast & Company, 1975; I. Cohen, *History of the Jews in Vilna*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America 1992, p. 129; M.S. Shulzinger, *The Tale of a Litvak*, New York, Philosophical Library 1985, pp. 30-43; B. Wolsky, *My Life in Three Worlds*, Miami Beach (FL), Wolsky, 1979, pp. 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Stein, *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The text also illustrates the complexities and ambiguities of traditional Jewish education, where discipline was seen as a cardinal virtue, but where physical punishment could be abusive. The writer goes beyond mere description and take a stance. He highlights the dialectic between maintaining discipline and the abuse of power. For the historian, the acknowledgment of these tensions is no less important than the narrative itself.

This complexity appears most clearly when he states «The *Heder*, even with its cat-o'-nine-tails, is a holy place», which lends itself to a number of interpretations. On the one hand, it affirms the sacredness of the traditional Jewish school, which is described as a holy place despite the punitive practices enacted there. Clearly the *Heder* was a locus of transmission of Jewish tradition and Torah study, which was seen as a sacred activity. In this sense, even though recourse to violence is hard to justify, the fact that learning indeed took place in this setting can be seen as positive. On the other, this sentence can be seen as ambiguous or ironic. The mention of the cat o' nine tails as characteristic of the *Heder* can be seen as an implicit criticism of corporal punishment. The use of the term "holy place" to describe the traditional Jewish school setting can also be seen as an ironic way to highlight the contradictions of this institution, which was simultaneously a sacred place and a place where violence was committed.

However, is it really possible to capture the author's position or his personal opinion? It is possible that his stance was ambivalent and that his personal judgment was not clearly expressed in the text. This issue is obviously pertinent for biographers but is equally so for the historian of the *Heder*. For historians, the importance of this ambiguity lies in the fact that it can reveal dilemmas and contradictions within traditional Jewish communities with respect to education and discipline. This suggests that the community could favor education and discipline while being aware of the abuses of power that could arise from it. For the historian of the *Heder*, this ambiguity can help clarify the norms and cultural values of the community as well as the challenges confronting parents, students and teachers. Passages such as these can also shed light on the factors that led to changes in educational practices, such as restrictions on the use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure in traditional Jewish schools. These narratives are designed to transmit recollections of the authors' lives, and thus often reflect the complexity of their experiences, which at times are purposely exaggerated, as shown below.

The next day I refused to go back to the *Heder*. The *Melamed's* son, Kasriel, a young man with a sharp, bobbing Adam's apple, came to fetch me. Mother tried to persuade Father to let me skip Heder for another day or two, but he insisted I be sent, by force if necessary.

«A boy must come to love *Heder*» he said, «the Torah is sweet». I did not taste this sweetness when Kasriel picked me up and slung me over his shoulder like a side of beef. I scratched him, kicked him, and shrieked, and the people again came outside to enjoy the spectacle.

«That's the way, Kasriel!» they shouted in encouragement. «Drag him in by his hair, the rabbi's pampered brat!». With one hand Kasriel held me firmly, while in the other he carried the box of bread slices for his father's pupils. This scene was repeated day after day. I resisted the despised *Heder* with all the determination of a three-year-old<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> I.J. Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, New York, Vanguard Press, 1970, pp. 26-28.

This anecdote captures the traumatic experiences of a very young boy who refuses to go to the *Heder*. Despite attempts by his mother to let him stay at home for a few more days, his father insists on his going, even if this requires literally carrying him there. The scene is both touching and troubling since it depicts a child who needs to face a reality he is not willing to accept, despite the expectations of the community. More broadly, this story underscores the importance ascribed to religious education in Jewish culture and the social pressure on children to comply. Clearly the little boy has not tasted 'the sweetness' of the Torah evoked by his father. He resists the obligations imposed by his parents and society.

The narrative, told from the point of view of the little boy, is full of details and presents a range of emotions through its descriptions of the child's resistance, which bolster the impression of physical strictures imposed on him. However, it is difficult to determine how much of the description corresponds to reality or to literary license. Although the author could have drawn on his own experience or those of others in his childhood community, it is also possible that he interjected fictional elements to enliven his characters and fashion a more dramatic situation. This points to the importance of reading this story with a grain of salt and not taking it as a fully accurate picture of social reality. Despite the fact that certain elements are fictitious, this story can be seen as a symbolic representation of social pressure and resistance to religious education in traditional Jewish communities. Thus, clearly historians must be aware of the limitations of these recollections, and the narrators' potential biases. It is crucial to contextualize testimonies by comparing and contrasting them with other sources to obtain a fuller and more comprehensive picture of the history of the *Heder* and traditional Jewish education in particular.

Is this enough to differentiate history from memory? According to Nurit Govrin, criticism of the *Heder* was one of the leitmotifs of modern Hebrew literature throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>. After collecting, comparing and analyzing hundreds of different stories, she identified several semantic categories spanning all of these narratives that depict the *Heder*. In each category, the descriptions can be situated on a spectrum, where most are negative and a few are positive.

- The *Melamed*: in general poor, old, cruel and prone to anger. He has little education and is often actually ignorant. A few texts describe the *Melamed* as paternal and protective of the students.
- Instruction: limited exclusively to the traditional texts, based on rote repetition without any real understanding of the material. Dreamers and less proficient students are left by the wayside. A few mentions a spirit of comradeship and individual development.
- The students: very young, spend their entire day at the *Heder* with no toys, no recreational activities and no vacations. They are often hit and humiliated, except sons of wealthy or leading families. Experiences at the *Heder* impacted students' whole lives and could lead to a partial or total rejection of

<sup>12</sup> N. Govrin, "*Hedrey-Hederim*": *Bikoret Sidrey ha-Limud ba-Heder be-Sifrut ha-Ivrit le-Dorotey'ha* ["At the *Heder*": criticism of teaching methods in the *Heder* in Hebrew literature], *Moreshet Israel*, vol. 1, 2004, pp. 56-77. See also S. Werses, *Jewish Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia in the Eyes of Mendeleyev Sefarim*, in G. Abramson, T. Parfitts (edd.), *Jewish Education and Learning*, Chur, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994, pp. 243-260.

traditional Jewish cultural values. The 'good' students were often hypocrites, who aimed to be in the *Melamed's* good graces and avoid punishment.

– The school environment: generally decrepit and dirty, not appropriate for teaching. The *Heder* was often located in the *Melamed's* own home, in the main room where his wife and children continued to go about their daily lives, including household chores. The one glimmer of hope: the *Melamed's* wife often took the youngest children under her wing to shield them from the toxic atmosphere of the *Heder*.

The features described so often in these narratives appear to be confirmed by this analysis. However, Govrin argues that drawing this type of conclusion would be erroneous: these stories are not realistic depictions but rather the output of a literary movement engaged in a cultural and social combat to modernize and secularize Jewish identity. The portrait of the *Heder* in these works is always negative, since it supports the goals of this movement. In addition, by focalizing on individual lives and destinies, these literary depictions elicit the readers' identification with the characters and transforms the particular into the general such that it is no longer one child who suffered at the hands of one cruel *Melamed* but rather all children who suffered cruelly at the hands of all teachers in all traditional Jewish schools<sup>13</sup>.

However, historians dealing with both history and memory should not simply discard these stories. An analysis of the rationales motivating their criticism and their choice of literary style can lead to a better understanding of their cultural orientation and their actual impact. As Hayden White pointed out:

Narrative discourse, in short, is not only a way of "making sense" of things, of finding order in the universe; it is also a way of imposing order upon the universe, of organizing and mastering it through the use of language, which in turn is a means of legitimating the self and its activities in relation to others and to social and physical environments<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Pictorial documentation

There is growing interest among researchers in the use of photographs to document the history of education<sup>15</sup>. Photographs are primary sources of invaluable information

<sup>13</sup> Govrin, *Hedrey-Hederim*, cit., p. 57 (translated by the author).

<sup>14</sup> H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> For example: M. Brunelli, *Las fotografías escolares como "objetos sociales". Primeras reflexiones sobre el uso educativo y social del patrimonio fotográfico en el museo de la escuela*, in A. Badanelli Runio et alii (edd.), *Pedagogía museística*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014, pp. 203-217; C. Burke, *A picture of learning: Children's experiences in the early years of formal education*, «Journal of Early Childhood Research», vol. 12, n. 2, 2014, pp. 135-149; J. Dubois, *L'image photographique dans les manuels scolaires français d'histoire-géographie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, «Revue française de pédagogie», vol. 207, n. 3, 2019, pp. 73-92; J. Hardy, R. Bell, *Seeing and believing: Visual images, teachers and teacher education*, «Teaching and Teacher Education», vol. 24, n. 1, 2008, pp. 14-25; S. Wagnon, *La photographie de classe dans l'école française: une source sous-estimée de compréhension de l'histoire de l'école, interface entre sphères privée et publique (XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup>)*, «Encounters in Theory and History of





Fig. 1. *Melamed* and students in a *Heder*, Lublin, Poland. Alter Kacyzne, 1920s. Gelatin silver print. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York (Forward Association/YIVO)

on pedagogical practices, students' and teachers' daily routines, changes in education, the architecture of educational institutions, classroom settings, equipment, uniforms, ecc. Clearly the use of photographs in historical research can entail methodological difficulties, such as the reliability of the photos, the lack of context or appropriate captions, or biases in their selection. Nevertheless, the differentiation between fact and fiction may be easier to achieve with photographs than with literary works. Examining multiple photographs of *Heder* can shed light on the specifics of daily life in terms of the furniture, gestures, light, and even the facial expressions of the individuals in them as shown in Figure 1. This well-known photo was taken after 1920 in a *Heder* in Poland and is often used as an example of a *Heder* or of traditional Jewish life.

The picture shows 15 or so children sitting at a long wooden table that is clearly not adapted to their stature: their heads are at table height, which makes it difficult to read a book laid flat on the table. The *Melamed* is standing behind a student concentrated on a reading assignment and pointing to the place in the book with a pencil. These details confirm descriptions of the *Heder* in the literature. The novelty of this picture lies primarily in what it reveals about the children's behavior. Perhaps because they were disturbed or intimidated by the photographer, these children do not seem to be engaged in reading at all. Two or three are looking at the camera, another is looking at his fellow student, and yet another seems to be daydreaming. Another student, leaning on his classmate's shoulder, seems particularly uninterested in the *Melamed* and the photographer. In other



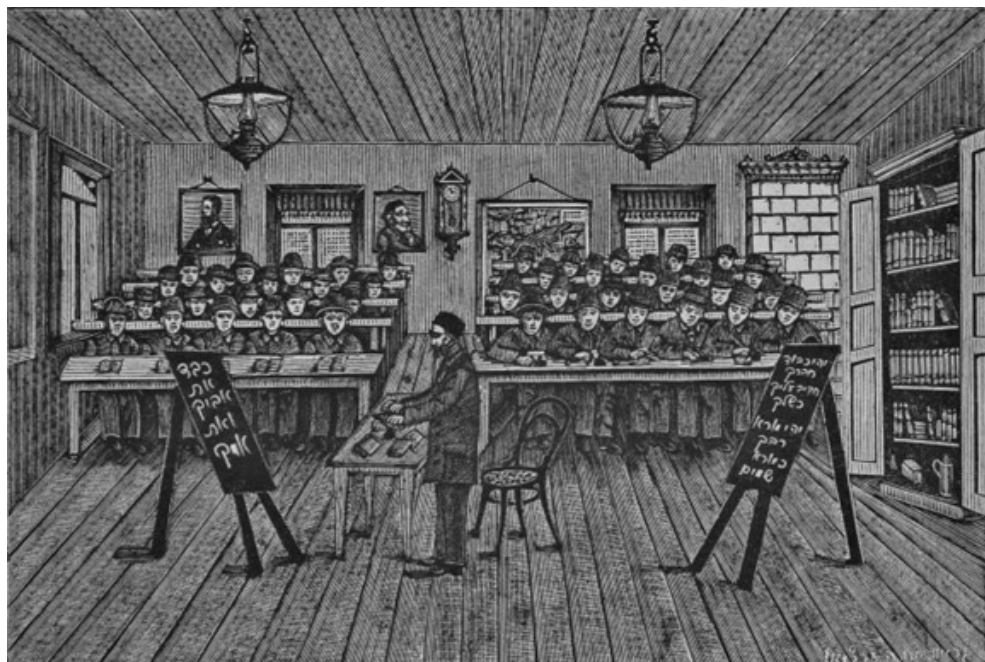


Fig. 2. *Melamed* and students in a “reformed” *Heder*. H.L. Herzman. Printed engraving in A.B. Temkin, *Ha-torah Ve-hasafah*, Vilnius, 1898 (The National Library of Israel)

words, this photograph captures the disconnect between the *Melamed* and his students for all eternity. Was this typical of all *Heders* or was this a unique circumstance? Obviously, this question cannot be answered without a quantitative, in-depth examination of other sources. However, this photo enables the historian to approach the issue of the effectiveness of traditional teaching in the *Heder*. By contrast to the written narratives where the *Heder* experience is conveyed through literary devices, a photograph provides documentation of reality. Other visual media, including drawings, also depict forms of reality, as shown in Figure 2.

This picture shows the cover page of a textbook published in Vilna entitled *Ha-Torah ve-hasafah* (Torah and Language). Its author, Abraham Baruch Temkin, designed the book to teach Biblical texts and the Hebrew language (as well as Russian) to Yiddish-speaking Jewish children. It departed from the curriculum of the traditional *Heder*, where the Hebrew biblical text was taught directly in Yiddish. This textbook was used in *Heder Metukan*, the “reformed” *Heder*, a new educational framework created on the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to respond to efforts by the *Maskilim* (the leaders of the Jewish Enlightenment movement) to modernize Jewish life and Jewish education in particular, to encourage the social integration of Jews into the local population<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> For more on these changes in traditional Jewish education: S. Kraiz, *Russian-language Jewish schools*

The proponents of the “reformed” *Heder* wanted to combine the traditional *Heder* for children from religious families, where most of the daily study would continue to be traditional learning, with a reformed classroom, where instruction was based on modern pedagogical principles on teaching and learning. The picture shows a spacious, clean, well-laid out classroom with windows that can be opened for ventilation, oil lamps when there was not enough natural light, and a large woodburning stove for cold winter days. The students are wearing uniforms, are sitting on benches, with their books and notebooks placed neatly on their desks. The teacher has his own chair, writes on the blackboard, and keeps books arranged in an orderly fashion in a bookcase. The only clock in the room is located behind the students, and is thus only visible to the teacher, who uses it to decide when to end the lesson.

The staging is perfect. However, there are some particularities that make this idyllic classroom setting a little less believable. The teacher is not facing the students, and there are two blackboards in the room, unlike in modern classrooms that typically only have one. It appears that the class is divided into two groups, with one group facing the teacher and the other group completing a writing assignment since their hands are on the desk rather than under it as for the first group. The two blackboards enable the teacher to teach two different groups, as is done today when teaching large or multilevel classes. The difference between then and now is that modern teachers are trained to use this technique, whereas in the past, teachers drew on their own professional experience or shared experiences with colleagues. Any teacher who has attempted to teach a divided class knows that it is not always effective. Students who are assigned a writing task may become distracted by the lesson being taught to the other group and find it difficult to concentrate. However, the teacher in the picture seems to have found a solution to this challenge. By utilizing two separate blackboards, one for each group, the teacher gives each group their own distinct space and minimize distractions. While this technique may not have been foolproof, it was likely an effective way to manage a divided class in an era before modern teaching techniques and resources were available.

A closer look at the two blackboards in the classroom shows that the artist has oriented them so that the viewer can read different sentences on each, one of which is short (5 words), while the other is longer. The shorter one is from the Ten Commandments: Honor thy father and mother (*Exodus*, 20, 12). The second is a quote from the Ethics of the Fathers, a tractate of the Mishna that states: Let the honor of the other be as dear to you as your own, and the reverence for your master as the reverence for Heaven (*Ethics*

*in Tsarist Russia*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Jewish History, Jerusalem The Hebrew University, 1990-1994; S.J. Zipperstein, *Transforming the Heder: Maskilic Politics in Imperial Russia*, in A. Rapoport-Albert, S.J. Zipperstein (edd.), *Jewish History. Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky*, London, P. Halban, 1988, pp. 87-109 and recently: S. Stampfer, *Traditional Education and the Appearance of New Types of Schools before the First World War*, in V. Sirutavičius, D. Staliūnas, J. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (edd.), *The History of Jews in Lithuania. From the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 202-205. On the revised *Heder* specially: J. Pilch, *The Heder Metukan*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Pedagogy, Philadelphia The Dropsie College, a.y. 1950-1952. See also E. Adler, *Educational Options for Jewish Girls in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe*, «Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Fifteen», vol. 15, 2002, pp. 301-310.

of the Fathers, 2, 10). Both deal with honor and respect. The teacher thus found a good solution to help his students focus on their tasks. Instead of teaching two completely different subjects, he taught two subjects that were closely related, despite the varying levels of knowledge. By doing so, the students who were writing were still exposed to ideas drawing on the same vocabulary and semantic field, thus minimizing potential distractions. This solution shows the teacher's pedagogical sensibility and ability to understand his students' difficulties while finding a creative and effective solution. Unlike modern teachers who have access to courses in pedagogy or education and teaching books, teachers in the "reformed" *Heder* did not have these resources. However, they had a good understanding of pedagogy and were able to use their own professional experiences and insights to develop effective teaching techniques.

These details thus appear to reflect a pedagogical reality rooted in the daily life of the "reformed" *Heder* and not staging. Although it is an engraving, it appears to capture reality.

Does this mean that the engraving only serves as a representation of reality, without conveying an ideological message? The artist intentionally oriented the engraving towards the viewer to convey a message. It is not simply a static depiction captured on paper, but rather a meaningful moment that is intended to be shared and disseminated. This indeed makes engraving an ideological affirmation linked to the theme chosen to represent the "reformed" *Heder*.

However, the topic of the lesson in the picture is not straightforward: while half of the students are studying the Bible, the other half are studying Talmud. Still, the title of the lesson could be *Honor and Respect*, with a focus on moral and social values such as respecting one's parents, teachers, and others. The lesson's true subject, for the two groups in the same class, is values as the foundation of an ethical society. This raises the more general question of whether honor and respect are Jewish or universal values. The principles of "reformed" *Heder* were that even universal values should be taught through Jewish sources, since Judaism has a privileged approach to universal values. The illustrator's decision to depict the striking atmosphere of this educational framework through the texts on the blackboard is intentional. Instead of writing the first sentence of the Bible to emphasize the traditional nature of the "reformed" *Heder*, or an arithmetic exercise to showcase its modern orientation, the artist represented the fusion of tradition and modernity. This image is not simply an illustration, but rather a deliberate statement, where each component was carefully planned to convey a specific message.

For the historian of education, the redrawn image of the classroom is as interesting as the actual classroom itself. This visual representation of a school setting in a specific era does not only reflect what schools looked like during this period but also the changes and the issues facing education characterizing this period. The methodological goal behind the analysis of pictorial material is not to reject a staged image of reality but rather to make a distinction between the two to better understand how they intersect. As Peter Burke commented: «The visual representation of a historical reality, as restored by images,

is often as important for historical analysis as the reality itself, because it reflects the values and ideals of the period in which it was created»<sup>17</sup>.

### 3. *Musical Sources*

In 1901, Max Warshavsky (1848-1907), a prominent figure in the world of Yiddish music and culture, published his seminal collection of Yiddish folk songs. Yiddish folk songs long served as an essential mode of cultural expression for Eastern European Jews and Warshavsky's collection provided a platform for preserving and disseminating these treasured musical traditions. One of the songs featured in this collection is *Oyfn Pripetshik* (By the Fireside), a very moving song describing the teaching of the Hebrew alphabet by a *Melamed* to a group of children in a *Heder*.

The song's title, *Oyfn Pripetshik*, is somewhat enigmatic and has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry<sup>18</sup>. While the title has come to be associated with a specific image of a child in the *Heder* sitting by the fire while studying Torah, there is little scholarly consensus about the origins and true meaning of the title. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the original title may have been *The Alphabet*, given that the refrain of the song contains a genuine grammar rule in Yiddish. Specifically, the song's refrain contains a reference to the Yiddish rule known as *komets alef*, which stipulates that the letter *alef* should be pronounced *o* as in *ore* when associated with the *komets* vowel sign. This rule is an essential component of Yiddish orthography, and the fact that it is referenced in a popular Yiddish folk song speaks to the centrality of language and literacy in Jewish culture<sup>19</sup>.

By capturing both a key moment of traditional Jewish education and a typical scene from the life of Eastern European Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the song quickly found an audience. It sweetly and nostalgically evokes the first steps in learning to read and Torah learning through simple repetition. From an anthropological and sociological perspective, the acquisition of literacy skills is not only a key individual milestone, but also a significant factor in shaping social and cultural development. Literacy enables individuals to access and participate in various forms of knowledge and communication. In the context of traditional Jewish culture, the act of reading has even deeper significance, as it is intricately linked to the study of the sacred texts of Judaism. The process of learning to read Hebrew script and understanding its meaning are considered fundamental aspects of Jewish spiritual life, because they are believed to connect the individual to a divine source of wisdom and understanding. The acquisition of literacy skills is not only a personal

<sup>17</sup> P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> R. Rubin, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991; M. Slobin, M. Kligman, *Yiddish Folk Songs from the Ruth Rubin Archive*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> D.K. Roskies, *Alphabet Instruction in the East-European Heder: Some Creative and Historical Notes*, «YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences», vol. 17, 1978, pp. 21-53.

achievement, but also a social and cultural phenomenon that reflects and shapes the values, beliefs, and practices of the society<sup>20</sup>.

In *Oyfn Pripetshik* education is not presented as an easy or streamlined process. Children are encouraged to overcome these difficulties and persevere to achieve their goals. The text emphasizes the importance of determination, patience, and learning. By overcoming obstacles, the child can acquire valuable skills for their future. The lyrics of this song, in one of the best-known English versions is as follows:

In the hearth, a fire burns,  
And in the house it is warm.  
And the rabbi is teaching little children,  
The alphabet.

*Refrain:*

*See, children, remember, dear ones,  
What you learn here;  
Repeat and repeat yet again,  
Komets-alef: o!*

Learn children, don't be afraid,  
Every beginning is hard;  
Lucky is the one has learned Torah,  
What more does a person need?

*Refrain:*

*See, children, remember, dear ones,  
What you learn here;  
Repeat and repeat yet again,  
Komets-alef: o!*

When you grow older, children,  
You will understand by yourselves,  
How many tears lie in these letters,  
And how much lament.

*Refrain:*

*See, children, remember, dear ones,  
What you learn here;  
Repeat and repeat yet again,  
Komets-alef: o!*

When you, children, will bear the Exile,  
And will be exhausted,  
May you derive strength from these letters, Look in at them!

<sup>20</sup> B.V. Street, *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education*, London, Longman Publishing Group, 1995.

The last stanzas of the song broaden the initial perspective of the *Heder* to address the Jewish condition in the Diaspora. The transition of the Jewish child to adulthood, symbolized by learning to read, is transformed into a brutal realization of the suffering and distress that characterize Jewish life. In this context, the study of sacred texts becomes the essential source of strength and resilience to overcome the trials of existence. During the Holocaust, *Oyfen Prifeshetik* was often sung by Jewish prisoners in concentration camps to express their resilience and to hold onto their cultural heritage in the face of extreme adversity. Some versions of the song included new stanzas that specifically addressed the horrific conditions of the camps and the hope for eventual liberation. Today, the song has become associated with the fate of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and is often performed as a tribute to the victims and as a symbol of Jewish survival and resilience<sup>21</sup>.

Despite Warshawsky's hints to the contrary, it is worth noting that *Oyfen Prifeshetik* is not an old traditional folk song whose author is unknown, but rather a poem that was composed by Warshawsky himself and subsequently set to music. For historian David Assaf, who drew attention to this little-known fact, the issue is not whether it is a folk song, but rather understanding why Warshawsky chose to depict the *Heder* in such a positive manner<sup>22</sup>. Warshawsky and the cultural and social milieu he was a part of represented a new facet of Jewish identity; namely, the generation that grew up in a traditional Jewish environment where religion was the center of daily life, but who chose to become secular. Although Warshawsky spent his childhood in a *Heder*, it was not the educational framework he would choose for his own children. This reflected a broader shift in Jewish society at the time, when more Jews were embracing secularism and seeking to integrate into the wider non-Jewish world.

The positive portrayal of the *Heder* in *Oyfen Prifeshetik* can be seen as an affirmation of Jewish cultural heritage and a celebration of the role that traditional education played in shaping Jewish identity, even as Jews were beginning to explore new forms of identity and expression. As Assaf noted, this presentation of the *Heder* contrasts sharply with the negative portrayal of the *Heder* as a place of violence and frustration, as depicted by the early *Maskilim*. They saw the *Heder* as the source of the precarity of Jewish existence and as a threat to its future on the eve of modernity. In contrast, Warshawsky saw the *Heder* as a symbol of the strength of Israel and the continuity of the Jewish people.

There are several explanations for these changes in attitudes toward traditional education. The early *Maskilim*'s battle against the *Heder* was a struggle to improve the conditions of Jews in Eastern Europe through modernization and secularization of both

<sup>21</sup> J. Rubin, *Yiddish folksong as cultural resistance: The Holocaust period*, in G.E. Pozzetta, J.V. D'Agostino (edd.), *Oral history and the Holocaust*, Westport, Greenwood Press, pp. 209-226. *Oyfen Prifeshetik* has also been featured in contemporary cultural productions that reflect on the Holocaust and its legacy. For example, the song is used in the soundtrack of the film "Schindler's List" (1993), directed by Steven Spielberg. The song underscores its significance as a cultural touchstone for Jewish identity and resilience, and its association with the Holocaust contributed to introducing the song to wider audiences.

<sup>22</sup> D. Assaf, "Katan ve-Hamim"? *Ha-Shir Oyfen Prifeshetik ve-ha-Shinoy be-Dimuyav shel ha-Heder* ["Small and Cozy"? The Song *Oyfen Prifeshetik* and the Transformation of the Image of the *Heder*] in D. Assaf, E. Erkes (edd.), *The Heder: Studies, Documents, Literature and Memoirs*, cit., pp. 111-130.



infrastructure and mentality. The *Heder* perpetuated traditional society, and thus needed to be condemned in order to be transformed<sup>23</sup>.

However, as of the 1870s, waves of Eastern European Jews began immigrating to the United States in search of a better world and a more equitable society. After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and the waves of pogroms that followed, immigration became massive. This was further strengthened by the expulsion of Jews from Moscow in 1890, the Kishinev pogroms in 1903, and those that followed Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The instability of the government and the failure of the 1905 Revolution further increased this immigration, which brought two million Jews to America before the outbreak of World War I.

Warshavsky's perspective on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Russia was not one of hope and progress for the Jewish community. Rather he saw it as a period of tragic loss, marking the end of the Jewish world he had known. The uncertain future, coupled with the rising tide of anti-Semitism, made it difficult for Warshavsky and others to envision what lay ahead. In Warshavsky's view, the disappearance of the traditional Jewish way of life was particularly poignant. He was nostalgic for the small Jewish village (*Shtetl*) and its *Heder*, while its slow demise was a painful reminder of the loss of Jewish heritage and perpetuity. The *tears* and *road of exile* mentioned *Oyfen Pripetshik* were thus a reflection of the profound sadness and sense of displacement felt by the Jewish community as they were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in America<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the *Heder* itself does not represent a *lieu de mémoire*, but rather the act of learning to read in the *Heder*. This suggests that learning to read is a formative experience that has universal symbolic significance.

### Conclusion

This article explored the historiographical sources of the traditional Jewish school known as the *Heder* through literary accounts, memoirs, photographs, and folk songs. It differentiated between the historical core of these documents and the imaginary constructs behind them. Rather than dismissing the historical image in favor of historical reality, this approach views the historical image as a reality in itself, which acts as a repository of human perceptions, values, and meanings. A considerable part of this the article was devoted to methodological issues related to the analysis of historical documents.

Overall, the *Heder* played a crucial role in the social and ethical framework of Eastern European Jews. However, as a theme that deals with childhood in general and educational

<sup>23</sup> S. Stampfer, *Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society*, «Studies in Jewish Education», vol. 3, 1988, pp. 271-289.

<sup>24</sup> As noted by C. Shaw and M. Chase: «Nostalgia can be seen as a means of preserving the continuity of a particular identity, in which memories of the past help to maintain a sense of connection to the present and the future» (C. Shaw, M. Chase (edd.), *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989, p. 3).



experiences in particular, the findings extend beyond the specific context of the *Heder* and the Jewish people. The messages of hope and perseverance conveyed by the images of the *Heder* have universal significance and can resonate with societies and cultures worldwide. Thus, the relevance of the Heder speaks to broader issues of the human condition, and in particular the importance of education and the role of childhood in shaping society.



# School as Seen by the Radio (1945-1975)

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## 1. *The first relations between radio and school*

In Italy, the first distance learning experiences were produced by state radio. The latter experienced its first development in the Fascist twenties, in particular from 1924, with the birth of the Ministry of Communications, entrusted to Costanzo Ciano<sup>1</sup>. The latter boasted relations with Guglielmo Marconi and with his advisor, Solari, one of the very earliest fascists. On 27 August 1924, the minister's mediation enabled the establishment of the *Unione Radiofonica Italiana* (URI), from the merger of the *Radiofono* of the Marconi group and the *Società Italiana Radio Audizioni Circolari* (SIRAC)<sup>2</sup>. From January 1925, the weekly "Radio Hour", the official organ of the URI, published all the hours of radio broadcasts receivable. From the summer of 1926, the URI was commissioned to produce short programmes for collective listening, to be broadcast in the venues of recreational societies and in the meeting places of the Opera Nazionale Balilla.

On 25 December 1926, Elisabetta Oddone, a primary school teacher, lent her voice for the first time to a radio programme for children, broadcast from the headquarters in Milan and entitled *Il cantuccio degli bambini*. The following year, the URI changed its acronym to EIAR, *Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche* (Italian Body for Radio Listening)<sup>3</sup>, and in 1930 it started the new official press organ called «Radiocorriere». In 1933, EIAR followed the message expressed explicitly by Mussolini: «Every village must have its own radio»; and if each city had to have its own radio listening apparatus, schools were immediately identified as particularly suitable venues for the purpose of spreading fascist ideology: these were places that were present in a large part of the territory and above all were the recognised bodies for the education of the younger generations.

In 1934, there were 900.000 radio listeners in Italy, the devices were present in very limited numbers and, based on the mandatory possession fee, there were 350.000 subscribers, with large disproportions in the presence of devices between the north and south of the country<sup>4</sup>. At the time of the 1936 census, the resident Italian population was estimated at about 42 million people<sup>5</sup>. The decision to spread economic models that were capable of entering the greatest number of places frequented by Italians, such as Radio

<sup>1</sup> C. Ciano, *Le comunicazioni nel primo decennio fascista*, Milano, Mondadori, 1932.

<sup>2</sup> F. Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> RAI, *Annuario RAI 1988/1989*, Torino, Nuova ERI, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> P. Ortoleva, B. Scaramucci (edd.), *Enciclopedia della Radio*, Milano, Garzanti, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> ISTAT, VIII Censimento generale della popolazione, Roma, 1937.

Rurale (produced since 1933) and Radio Balilla (produced in 1937), signalled the well-defined objective of using the new media as a propaganda tool. The device called Radio Rurale was intended for public bodies and for schools in particular, while Radio Balilla was later designed for the homes of private citizens. Consider that in 1939 the EIAR reached one million subscribers (0.4% of the population), but in the European context, the Italian data were far from the 13 million subscribers in Germany (9%) and the 9 million in Great Britain (4%). The diffusion of rural radio in a thorough way with respect to the orders received began in February 1934 and the recording of deliveries concerned in particular schools and institutions of the regime: the apparatuses were often delivered free of charge to primary schools, to the offices of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and those of the fascist party, the directors of educational institutions, school inspectors, rural parishes, rural offices of the national recreational centre, to the itinerant agriculture chairs, to the offices of the Fascist agricultural trade union confederation and to those of the farmers' confederation. The gifts were the result of the financial commitment of banks, insurers and private citizens who reported in this way their participation in the purposes indicated by the party. In 1934, there were 4.123 devices in operation: 1.405 at the organisations of the regime and 2.718 in primary schools. In 1938, the data indicated 16.418 devices delivered to the institutional headquarters of the regime and 23.945 to primary schools. The use of radio for educational purposes allowed schools to be exempted from paying the subscription fee.

In April 1934, the transmissions of the *Ente Radio Rurale* [Rural Radio Authority] began with the aim of spreading fascist culture widely within primary schools. This ambitious project with a strongly ideological focus was supported by the Rural Radio Authority, the Ministry of National Education, the Fascist Party and the Ministry of Communications. Francesco Ercole, the Minister of Education, had sought to assert his competences by setting up a committee for the preparation of the programmes which included the educational superintendent for the Lazio region, an Inspector of the Ministry of Education and the Director of the EIAR.

In a speech that Mussolini had given for the inauguration of the congress of the school corporation in 1925, the objectives that guided the activity of the Rural Radio Authority had already been expressed:

[It] is required that the whole school in all its classes and in all its teachings educate the Italian youth to understand Fascism, to renew themselves in Fascism and to live in the historical climate created by the Fascist revolution.

In 1934, radio became the chosen tool to spread the voice of the regime widely, especially in places of training and education that were located far from the main communication routes.

Listening to the broadcasts provided a rigid methodology: the teacher prepared the class to listen also thanks to «Radiocorriere», which provided the worksheets with the themes that would be covered on the various occasions of collective listening, then the group of students were prepared to listen passively to radio messages of thirty minutes'

duration composed of hymns, music and messages from Mussolini; finally, the activity ended with tasks to be carried out on the theme presented in the programme.

The final papers often consisted of comments written by the students and some of them were sent to the editorial staff of «Radiocorriere» to be published in the following weeks. Some of the first writings proposed by the official press organ of the EIAR date back to 1933, the year of the two experimental broadcasts carried out on 19 April and 30 May, with the obvious aim of underlining the ability of the radio to bring to peripheral places and those areas that were less connected with cities, the image of a kind of progress that in the broadcasts corresponded to insistent propaganda, linked to the words of the *Duce* «addressed to students, farmers and their children»:

Letter from the children of the rural school of Vidiana-Parma

We are few students of a small rural school located in the hills of Emilia. None of the beautiful and lively things that delight the children of Italy reach us up here, and we must make do with what the teacher tells us. Yesterday, however, we experienced a stroke of luck: without you knowing, you who do not even imagine our existence, we too rushed to the invitation you extended to all the children of Italy, to listen to your wonderful voice delivering all the most beautiful and dearest hymns. You can't imagine how much wonder and joy we felt for the first time<sup>6</sup>.

On the same occasion of the experimental broadcasts of 1933, «Radiocorriere» also included the evaluations of an educational director and also in this case the words insisted on the need to follow up on the experience of radio in school:

Letter from the educational director of Vigevano

An hour after the students of my school left the gyms, where I had set up the radio sets and where we listened to the transmission for the schools, commotion still dominated. I do not know: I felt tears in my eyes and I also saw some of my teachers who were trying to hide an emotion that was stronger than their will. The experiment was successful and we, school men, ask that you do not remain isolated. Radio in schools has many possibilities and a long way to go. In this hour, our children experienced the most pulsating feeling of the Homeland, they felt close to their brothers and their sisters in other schools, those in the small, remote schools of the mountains and the countryside: they felt united on the same path, almost as if they were all a part of the same family, and they were moved<sup>7</sup>.

In the following years of broadcasting for schools, the written accounts of the students continued to express the utmost enthusiasm for listening to rural radio broadcasts:

Today, we heard the last radio transmission of choral singing that closed the programme of the year 1938. The radio broadcaster told us that, at that time, more than 3 million schoolchildren were gathered around the Radio, and told us that the *Duce's* two children, Anna Maria and Romano Mussolini, were also among the children who were singing. At this revelation, applause broke out and waves of clapping engulfed the classroom where we were gathered and cheers were heard honouring the two illustrious schoolchildren. The radio broadcast began with the song of the Royal March and Youth and a new song entitled *Moschetto e vanga* [Musket and Spade]. Oh! If only I could sing like that<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> «Radiocorriere», n. 11, 1933, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Written work by the student Elvina Manfreda of the fifth class of the Gorizia primary school, dated 30

Some pamphlets published by the Rural Radio Authority in 1938 clarified the connections perceived by fascism between schools and the agricultural world, considered essential for autarchy:

Our rural radio, unlike all the others, is inspired by a unitary conception that embraces both school and agricultural spheres, considering one as a complement and preparation for the other. Both school and agricultural radio are also not a summarily controlled initiative of private radio bodies, but the prerogative and responsibility of a state body, officially created, qualified and financed by the state and operating with eminently political purposes and responsibilities<sup>9</sup>.

It was precisely the attempt to connect instruction, education and agricultural work that appeared to be the most interesting aspect of the experiment described, on which, however, the push from ideology weighed at all costs.

Since 1935, the war in Ethiopia had meanwhile taken hold in all the programming for primary school and one of the tasks planned for the students in listening, had become that of constantly updating the Italian conquests in Africa by placing flags on the map. The experiences of war fought progressively on several fronts until Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 laid bare the shortcomings of Italian broadcasting. In the context of the war, the radio became an even more useful tool for information and the secretariat of the Duce began to be flooded with communications from rural headquarters of the party that complained of being totally cut off from broadcasting over the air. More than half of the Italian territory was without receivers and despite the attempt to produce more sophisticated and efficient models at low cost, from Radio Balilla to Radio Roma, many schools and institutions had not had the opportunity to receive them, because the industries had not detected any real interest in production: the costs remained high and the number of devices was inadequate<sup>10</sup>.

Between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, Italian schools were finally forced to close due to the Second World War and Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of National Education who was responsible for the educational programming of EIAR, advocated for the beginning of radio programming that was no longer to be understood as complementary to, but as a substitute for school:

Imagine a boat without oars. It would be tossed here and there by the waves or the wind. The teacher can build the boat, but you have to build the oars... Well, you have already understood, the oars are, precisely, attention. But there is no need to worry because the boys of 1942 are capable people: are you not, perhaps, the sons, brothers, relatives and friends of the soldiers who are fighting so bravely on various fronts?<sup>11</sup>

May 1938, housed in the "School Materials" fund of the historical archive of the INDIRE within which there are 18 copybooks with activities carried out in relation to listening to the programming of radio broadcasts for schools.

<sup>9</sup> *L'ora dell'agricoltura, strumento dell'autarchia*, Roma, Ente Radio Rurale, 1938, p.10.

<sup>10</sup> F. Monteleone, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista. Studi e documenti: 1922-1945*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1976.

<sup>11</sup> G. Isola, *Abbassa la tua radio per favore*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1990, p. 56.

The radio broadcast was minimal and of course the supposed distance school was not met with any possibility for popular following. Meanwhile, the armistice of September 1943 also caused the transfer of the headquarters of the EIAR from Rome to Milan and its transformation into the radio of the Italian Social Republic.

## 2. *The new radio for schools*

On 22 October 1946, Guido Gonella, Minister of Public Education, announced on the radio the beginning of the new school year. It was also the sign of the recovery of social life after the world war and in his speech he emphasised the need to use radio broadcasts to combat illiteracy. By 1944, the EIAR had changed its acronym to Rai, *Radio Audizioni Italiane*. A programme called *La radio per le scuole* (Radio for Schools) was already broadcast and continued its broadcasts until the mid-1970s. Once again, state radio programming identified the training and education segment as a fundamental reference for public service and again the construction of student-oriented programming took place in close cooperation with the Ministry of Public Education. The broadcasts included the involvement of an advisory committee composed, as far as the Rai was concerned, of the president, the advisor, the delegate and the general director and, as far as the Ministry was concerned, of the heads of the student broadcasts, the general director for primary education, for classical, scientific and master's education, assisted by experts on school-related issues. If the radio of the fascist regime had been an instrument of ideological diffusion, the "Radio for Schools" assumed the traits of a path towards the reconstruction of democratic culture. The programmes could be listened to every 15 days inside the classrooms of the institutes (if equipped to do so) according to a schedule that was communicated to the schools and also broadcast on «Radiocorriere». The most innovative part of that experience of radio lessons was the direct relationship that the young primary students could establish with directors, authors and actors of the Rai. The many programmes made by *La Radio per le Scuole* were broadcast from Monday to Saturday, played again in the morning and afternoon, accompanied by interviews with actors and cultural figures and with the participation of the theatre companies of Rome, Turin, Milan, Florence and Trieste. These were stable theatrical companies constituted by the Rai made up of well-known actresses and actors, as well as young and promising talent gaining initial work experience.

The programmes were of various kinds: literary, musical, historical, geographical, religious, pedagogical, scientific and folkloric, and took place from early November to mid-May. Most of the fairy tales and stories that were offered through the radio programmes aimed at schools were works based on a model that was soon renamed "prose for radio" or "radio drama". This narrative choice enabled the creation of empathy in children when listening, but it also offered an introduction to theatrical language and was a useful pedagogical medium that was also enjoyed by adults. Alongside the theatre, space had been allocated for the radio transposition of literary works read by great actors or writers:





Fig. 1. Cover of the magazine «La radio per le scuole», n. 1-2, 1958



Fig. 2. Inauguration of the school-radio year in Catania («La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1962, p. 5)

the radio format would inspire, a few years later, the first television experiments related to the cultural field. One aspect of particular interest is the group of experts who supported the Rai and the Ministry of Public Education in this radio education experience. In 1951, the teacher Alberto Manzi won a radio prize for a children's story presented on Rai. From that moment, he established a constant collaboration with the "Radio for Schools" which then translated into his best-known television programme *Non è mai troppo tardi* [It is never too late]. Alongside Manzi, there were other figures from the world of teaching who collaborated with this radio project connected to the school environment, such as Giacomo Cives and Bruno Munari. It was a first step for the renewal of Rai that would then take place in the subsequent experience of pedagogical television, linked to Rai's recruitment of personalities such as Umberto Eco, Furio Colombo, Gianni Vattimo, Enrico Vaime and Piero Angela, Tullio de Mauro and Sergio Zavoli, accompanied by young university professors such as Antonio Santoni Rugiu, Luigi Silori and Leone Piccioni. Each of them had previously had more or less ongoing collaborations with radio for schools<sup>12</sup>. Since July 2020, the Rai's *Teche* have made available 66 broadcasts of "Radio for Schools" and collected the testimonies of those who participated in that

<sup>12</sup> G. Gozzini, *La mutazione individualista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014.

era of culture. The transmission ended definitively in the mid-1970s<sup>13</sup>. In 1950, it was Antonio Santoni Rugiu, after numerous experiences of radio dramas prepared for Rai, who proposed a critical analysis of the school project through radio:

[School by radio] can work well, but only as a supplement to the teacher's work<sup>14</sup>.

This was the careful reflection of a scholar who had also trained himself through "doing radio" and was therefore aware that the teacher had to be "the conductor" of a teaching form that was in the process of renewal, and that they could not rely merely on the novelty of the media available. In any case, an opening to the outside was being established, mediated by high-quality radio that involved directors, authors, actors, teachers, pedagogues and psychologists and that brought a new communicative language to classrooms. This was also specified by Antonio Segni who, in a speech made in 1951, stated as Minister of Public Education:

Radio broadcasts for schools are certainly of undeniable utility and are an excellent means of supporting the irreplaceable role of the teacher, especially in smaller town centres and isolated locations<sup>15</sup>.

The official nature of this remote experience was marked by the opening and closing ceremonies of each radio school year and, between these two dates, the broadcasts that were aired all opened remembering the saint of the day.

The post-war broadcasts were often focused on the construction of the new democratic identity of the country: "The songs of the tricolour" and "Visit to the Quirinale" were thus played, but the programming also included stories and fairy tales adapted to radio reading and addressed to the different ages of the students listening, such as "Brave men", "Friends of humanity", "Modern narrators" and "The wonderful rose tree". Santoni Rugiu himself added in a 2011 interview with Rodolfo Sacchettini:

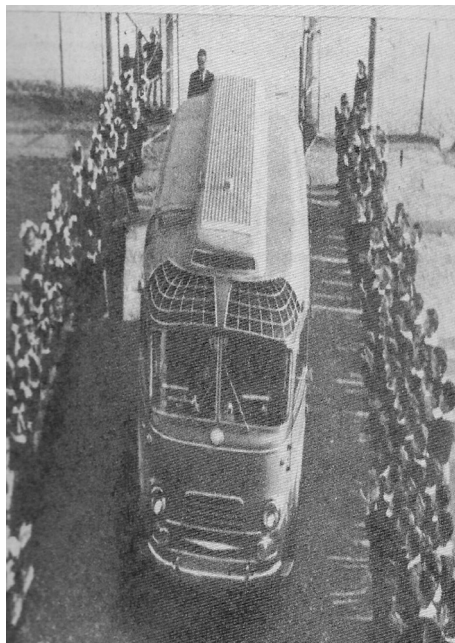


Fig. 3. The radio team arrives in schools («La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1955, p. 6)

<sup>13</sup> The 66 songs offered online by *Teche Rai* are available at the following link: <https://www.raiplayradio.it/playlist/2019/03/La-Radio-per-le-Scuole-5606135c-0058-4c77-a0de-0d7f99a9a1c4.html> (last access: 20.03.2021).

<sup>14</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Si e no della Radioscuola*, «Radioquadrante», n. 1, 1950, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> «La radio per le scuole», n. 1, 1950, p. 2.

Of that [radio] experience, I tried to bring something into the school environment as well. My belief was that the teacher had to also be, in a sense, a “theatrical director” in building relationships with students and with the contents of the teaching<sup>16</sup>.

In the mid-1970s, the “Radio for Schools” project ended, because the use of media had changed profoundly, but above all due to the appearance of television in the lifestyles and habits of Italians. Television has proved to be the medium that has most influenced and compelled the transition of Italy from a rural country to an industrialised society. The approach taken by the first educational television, aimed at defeating illiteracy, gradually also transformed the radio broadcasts of the sixties and seventies, but a social change was also underway that imposed new choices in the national media system<sup>17</sup>. Radio as a public service was not defeated by the rivalry that television represented, but rather was changed profoundly. In the first decade of state television, Rai radio had retained a greater circulation and daily use than that of television, but in 1968 Tullio De Mauro defined the Italian language used in radio at that stage as flat and removed from everyday language<sup>18</sup>. There is another interesting fact that the linguist highlighted: before the advent of television, despite the commitment to the dissemination of the Italian language through radio, two out of three Italians still used dialect for both public and private communication. The advent of television reversed this proportion within a few decades. The particular period in which the co-presence of television next to radio began and stabilised, between the sixties and seventies, saw the emergence of the reference figure of Leone Piccioni, who had been deputy general director of Rai since 1969, but responsible for radio programmes until that year. It was Piccioni, a man of deep literary culture, who represented the top figure of reference for the renewal of state radio programming. The choice for radio was to compile broadcasts aimed at a specific audience, while in those same years television was directed towards a more general and less sectoral audience. Cultural broadcasts did not disappear from radio, but instead became shorter. After 1975, the company’s interest in what we could define as pedagogical radio, understood in the strictest sense of the term, that is, that specifically addressed to didactic training and schools, ceased. The audience also changed, because the surrounding society changed, but the choices made for Radio Rai, which were more related to entertainment and music, did not prove to be a total *debacle* from a cultural point of view<sup>19</sup>. Rai radio, with its three channels, became a space in which to try to communicate outside the pre-established schemes, but in a way that was also more scholarly than what was offered by television: the singer Mina became the companion to a more highbrow approach to listening to music through the Sunday programme *Pomeriggio con Mina* [Afternoon with Mina], while *Il quarto d’ora del romanzo sceneggiato* [A fifteen-minute scripted novel] or *La commedia in trenta minuti* [A comedy in thirty minutes], were aimed in particular at

<sup>16</sup> R. Sacchetti, *Scrittori alla radio*, Firenze, FUP, 2018, p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> U. Eco, *Storia della televisione in Italia*, Roma, Carocci, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> T. De Mauro, *Lingua parlata e TV*, in F. Alberoni et alii, *Televisione e vita italiana*, Torino, ERI, 1968, pp. 245-294.

<sup>19</sup> Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, cit.

housewives listening on weekday mornings, but still offered a clear reference to theatre and radio dramas. Consideration of young audiences was underlined by the success of programmes such as *Bandiera Gialla* [Yellow Flag] or *Per voi giovani* [For you young people] by Renzo Arbore. Certainly this was no longer the pedagogical radio that had been broadcast in schools, but it was precisely this more entertaining approach that allowed the radio medium to retain a specific role in the tastes of the new ruling class that was forming in those years and for whom radio still held attention for critical and informative functions, made even more compelling by the spread of portable radios and car radios that enabled that new entertainment medium to be brought along with listeners out of the home. The radio feature *La tribuna dei giovani* was an example of this new approach to the youth world: through music, the programme curved towards the discussion of generational themes in the present<sup>20</sup>.

Radio certainly ended up to a lesser extent under the critical lens of the protest movements of the late sixties that instead described television as the main tool to replicate the hegemony of the ruling class. Radio Rai was able to elaborate some proposals that marked a minimum break with respect to television, including *Chiamate Roma 3131*, presented by Gianni Boncompagni and Franco Moccagatta and broadcast for the first time in 1969. The broadcast was a great success for the audience: three hours of conversations with listeners, by telephone, about their own stories and personal problems. The public decreed the same success also through its *high approval* of Boncompagni himself alongside Renzo Arbore, as well as for the *Interviste impossibili* that paved the way for the interview formula, which involved the participation of leading intellectuals and writers such as Eco, Sanguineti, Sciascia, or Calvino, who agreed to invent miraculous dialogues with illustrious characters of the past, often overcoming a certain backwardness for the media. However, Radio Rai certainly could not guarantee the flexibility necessary to fully respond to the demand for alternative information and counter-information and full freedom that the young generations began to bring forcefully to the streets and public opinion. In that cultural context of '68, it is evident that although innovative and built through the direct participation of the public, broadcasts were still subject to the strict control of the editorial staff.

That role of free expression demanded loudly by young people was instead sought in free radios that opened to an exchange in which, at least initially, there were no top figures, but instead a microphone that was open to the world and to new trends. The radio did not return to interact officially with schools, but instead continued a path that also implied an informal education project.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



# Cinema in Greece during the Interwar Period under the Lens of History of Education

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During the interwar period, the discussion in Greece in the field of education, was mainly related to the lingual-educational issue, as well as the illiteracy challenge, in a society deeply experiencing the results of the War. With no infrastructure in schools — sometimes meaning no desks, no books, and even no shoes or food — the discussion about producing and benefiting from the use of films for educational purposes probably seemed grotesque.

Concurrently, cinematography in Greece was rather poor. During that period, the production of films as well as the means used, were limited. Although a lot of cinema theatres were constructed all over the country, bureaucracy, rigid legislation and censorship prevented a critical mass of major productions. Financial difficulties impeded cinematographers from purchasing decent equipment essential for the synchronization of sound, thus leading to a decline in film production, alongside their projection and viewing.

Nevertheless, the discussion about the use of the moving image in education had already started, diffidently at the beginning – given the hostile environment – and mostly by people who were not directly related to education. The issue was mainly dealt in the light of the relationship between youth and cinema, not of the relationship between education and cinema. It meant, though, that the seeds towards a more serious discussion about the issue had been planted. Surprisingly, through the few identified texts regarding this subject, it becomes clear that relevant discussions on the international level had affected local understanding and perception.

## 1. *The present common knowledge was not always the case*

Nowadays, it seems to be common knowledge that films can focus attention on matters and concerns in the public sphere. More or less, they can mirror a certain society. Production, as well as acceptance or rejection of a certain film, represents an interactive process and this exact process embodies the power relations and cultural arguments of a greater society<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> J. von Moltke, K. Rawson (edd.), *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, Oakland (CA), University of California Press, 2012.



Cinema can stand as a historical source that provides the complexity of human relationships far more clearly and multifaceted than other sources can, giving say to people who would otherwise remain overlooked<sup>2</sup>.

Until Mark Ferro succeeded in convincing his academic colleagues that it was worth including film production among the tools used by historians, films were not acknowledged as historical sources.

Various kinds of films can serve as sources for the historian. There was a tendency to legitimize documentaries and current affairs more easily than fiction films, but quite early Siegfried Kracauer (1947) had claimed that especially these films can capture the collective unconscious.

Shared understanding accepts that integration of cinema into dimensions of our present way of life (e.g. education) has been part of a long term and gradual process. Considering that film literacy – as a component of educational literacy<sup>3</sup> – has been argued within a period of more than a century now, cinematography was not positioned from the first instance as a «viable and valuable educational tool»<sup>4</sup>. Nor was it always acknowledged for its contribution in molding young people's characters by leaving a positive imprint or for its support to the objective understanding of social reality<sup>5</sup>. Though, educational movie dates from the infant days of the medium, emphasis on audio-visual education must be traced later on and it was after World War II when development of educational film began systematically in all branches of human activity.

Even the most successful case ("film") has its boundaries. Films can serve as a historical document, but not a precise one. They are only an indicator of a historical period and are not professional witnesses. Moreover, as the distance between the release date of a film and the viewing of the film grows, understanding will shift and adjust because of the changing cultural values and norms<sup>6</sup>. Films can also offer a powerful force for shaping public memory, they can shape people and establish content and significance, but not

<sup>2</sup> Historians' preoccupation with "who speaks" each time through sources is one of the factors that have overturned the certainty of objective truth. The source has been associated with the social group it represents. The truth of the elites can be very different from the truth of the many, who as a rule have no way to make it public.

<sup>3</sup> H. Giroux, *Breaking into the Movies: public pedagogy and the politics of film*, «Policy Futures in Education», vol. 9, n. 6, 2011, p. 688, notes: «The powerful role that films now played within a visual culture employing new forms of pedagogy, signaling different forms of literacy».

<sup>4</sup> St. Groening, «We Can See Ourselves as Others See Us»: *Women Workers and Western Union's Training Films in the 1920s*, in Ch. Acland, H. Wasson (edd.), *Useful Cinema*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> A growing dynamic international and interdisciplinary conversation (i.e. Georg Eckert Institute with the *The Journal for Educational Media, Memory and Society (JEMMS)* edited as of 2009, UCL Institute of Education with the *Film Educational Journal* edited as of 2018, Cinémathèque Française with the "Le Cinéma, Cent Ans de Jeunesse" Project) has contributed to investigating relevant connections, considering broader trends, understanding terminology, exploring approaches and new analytical tools, considering implications and consequences, providing insight on features (in terms of time and space), seeking for a more global perspective, as well as encouraging further and deeper research.

<sup>6</sup> M. Dalton, *The Hollywood curriculum: Teachers in the movies*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999, doi:10.1080/0965975950030102 (last access: 09.06.2023).



alone nor can they alter the condition of our society. According to Siegfried Kracauer, in fact, «films help change mass attitudes on condition that these attitudes have already begun to change»<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. *Why examine the interwar period?*

The interwar period is a distinctive part of history during which socio-cultural and sociopolitical discourse, as well as technological advancements: a. effected educational developments, b. determined the production, dissemination and use of cinematography in education and c. allowed (at least to some extent) for a number of social issues and values that provoke the public imaginary, to become mirrored in the cinematography of the time.

Cinema gained its own momentum as an educational medium during the interwar period, but it also reflected the whole socioeconomic landscape. Correspondingly, a chance to reflect upon different features of different cultures, allows for a wider perspective. For example, Anne Bruch portrayed educational films in Weimar Germany and examined how, as well as why these were introduced as a new medium in schools. While she examined interdisciplinary arguments (educationalists, teachers and film producers), she discussed the way these films were utilized to communicate new teaching contents in the field of civic education, she concluded that «the possibility to visualize controversial attitudes which could help the students to create an independent democratic opinion was rarely used» and noted their use a «propagandistic device»<sup>8</sup>. Also, drawing upon long-standing historical and cultural traditions (including during the interwar period), Bettina Henzler compared discourses and practices of film education in Germany and France and explained the existence of two different pedagogical strategies: film as a means of learning and film as a cultural object<sup>9</sup>.

Introducing films into the classroom was not an obvious action. Early cinema had already been marked as inexpensive entertainment and low-quality attraction<sup>10</sup>, while

<sup>7</sup> Moltke, Rawson (edd.), *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings*, cit., p. 104 (see chapter *National Types as Hollywood Presents Them*).

<sup>8</sup> A. Bruch, *Educational Cinema in the Weimar Republic*, «Educació i Història», n. 31, January-June 2018, p. 124: «A close analysis of educational films which were a reflection of the dominating political discourse reveal that educational media were an ambivalent instrument used often as a propagandistic device».

<sup>9</sup> B. Henzler, «*Education à l'image*» and «*Medienkompetenz*»: *On the discourses and practices of film education in France and Germany*, «Film Education Journal», vol. 1, n. 1, June 2018, pp. 16-17. She states that: «These paradigms reflect different political strategies and pedagogical approaches, as well as the different cultural traditions of which they are a product. [...] both the history and the current state of film education are connected to cultural traditions and, above all, to the different cinematic discourses in the two countries – a fact that demonstrates the important influence of cultural traditions on political and educational realities today».

<sup>10</sup> T. Gunning, *The Cinema of Attraction: Early Films, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde*, in Th. Elsaesser, A. Barker (edd.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London, British Film Institute, 1990, pp. 56-62.

physical and moral side effects had caused additional considerations<sup>11</sup>. In her work, Bettina Henzler notes that cinema was addressed as a way of relaxation, while it was also «sharply criticised, and even fought against, in bourgeois and educational environments», thus leading to state censorship and as in the German case in the 1930's, it was linked to institutionalization of film education by the state. It was because of broad-minded educators that the two countries fostered a new educational paradigm, and began to use film as an instructional tool (*Nouvelle pédagogie* and *Reformpädagogik*, respectively)<sup>12</sup>.

This new educational medium was also related to an entire set of necessary “infrastructure” in order to be used as teaching material; this included not only equipment and sophisticated film technology, but also film institutes and film libraries, teachers' associations and journals supporting this newly suggested undertaking, institutions responsible for classifying and distributing educational films and venue for film screenings. However, this infrastructure was not available in all settings.

Whether conventional or not, educational film usage during the interwar period, paved the way for a “next big thing” in education for the years that followed by changing the process of teaching and learning, not by substituting old modes, but by accompanying existing<sup>13</sup>. However, film usage was neither at the same pace nor with similar features among various countries.

### 3. *Education in Greece during the interwar period: a constant inconsistency*

During the interwar period Greek society was expressed in a polarized way, trying to serve the formation of an imperfect, often contradictory collective ideal. Government changes, political unrest, poverty, reforms which did not prosper, social and political division produced an unfriendly environment against new ideas or new technological developments. Therefore, these were faced with reluctance and, at times, even with hostility.

Education seemed to be detached from both reality and the actual needs of the nation. The general educational framework was far from idyllic. The lack of schools, the downgrading of teacher training, the pseudo-classicism, along with illiteracy<sup>14</sup> and

<sup>11</sup> A. Killen, *Homo Cinematicus. Science, Motion Pictures and the Making of Modern Germany*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017 (see especially chapter 2: *Film Reform, Mental Hygiene, and the Campaign against “Trash”, 1912-34*, pp. 65-102).

<sup>12</sup> Henzler, “*Education à l'image*” and “*Medienkompetenz*”, cit., p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> E. Fuchs, A. Bruch, M. Annegarn-Gläß, *Introduction. Educational Films: A Historical Review of Media Innovation in Schools*, «Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society», vol. 8, n. 1, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> In 1913 only 12% of boys and 5% of girls aged between 6-12 attended state primary schools (see D. Glinos, *Ένας άταφος νεκρός. Μελέτες για το εκπαιδευτικό μας σύστημα* [An unburied dead. Studies on our Education System], Athens, Εκδ. Εταιρεία Αθηνών, 1925, p. 45), percentage which remains extremely high in the 1930's when illiteracy in the general population reaches 40% of men and 60% of women, according to the 1928 census.

elements of sexism, brought about the first attempt of reform<sup>15</sup> soon before the Great War. Nonetheless, while facing strong opposition, reform was abandoned. Later on, towards the end of the Great War, the second attempt took place in the years 1917-1918, aiming at solving the lingual-educational issue which had afflicted society as back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>. With the fall of Venizelos' government in 1920 everything was postponed and reform effort only started again in 1928-1929 with the enactment of a new policy which was faced with relief, while gathering many advocates. The modernist elements contained in that new policy were restricted to the teaching of ancient authors in translation, the approval of more books per subject, the use of companion books and free reading along with other such measures which might seem rather bourgeois. Still, these were radical in their perception and, if implemented, they would have changed the society as a whole. As prominent Greek education historian Alexis Dimaras claims, never before had there been such a radical reform of the educational system – a reform which was based upon, both, structural adjustments and functional novelties. The duration of the primary school changed again from four years to six. In addition, special attention was given to the subject of the so called *dimotiki* (the Modern Greek Language), the teaching of which was reinforced. Furthermore, the professional dimension of secondary education was upgraded. All these, followed by a broad program of school construction (funded by a particular loan from abroad) and the founding of a new University in Thessaloniki, constitute a reform which, presented –even in its most specific manifestations – great cohesion and consistency towards a uniform conception<sup>17</sup>.

After the resignation of Eleftherios Venizelos in 1932, the deconstruction of the attempted reform was only a matter of time. Thus, every legislation had been abolished by 4 August 1936, when Metaxas' authoritarian regime was established. The Educational Advisory Board<sup>18</sup> was abolished, the legislation about schoolbooks was altered and whichever innovative characteristics of the secondary school programme were modified. Educational life within the country went backwards, while reforming trends did not appear – at least at an institutional level – up until the late 60's<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Amongst other measures, this reform included: a) compulsory attendance at kindergartens – where they existed, b) six-year attendance at the primary school, c) two types of secondary school: the three-year Urban School (with technical and practical character) and the six-year secondary school which could lead to university, d) concern for the education of women and for linking school to the production process (A. Dimaras, *Παιδεία: Συντηρητική απερίθωρη* [Education: Conservative Counterattack], «Kathimerini», 31 October 1999 (special issue: *Greece in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1920-1930*), pp. 93-97.

<sup>16</sup> The language issue was about the conflict of two contradicting powers, both wishing to express the new-Greek collectivity and its ideals: the advocates of the puristic language (*katharevousa*) and the advocates of the demotic language (*dimotiki*). With the Laws n. 2585 of 1917 and n. 1332 of 1918 the use of the demotic language was established all through the primary school, with the parallel teaching of the puristic language (*katharevousa*) in the two last years.

<sup>17</sup> A. Dimaras, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής εκπαίδευσης. Το «ανακοπόμενο άλμα». Τάσεις και αντιστάσεις στην ελληνική εκπαίδευση, 1833-2000* [History of modern Greek education. The “interrupted jump”. Trends and resistances in Greek education, 1833-2000], Athens, Metehmio 2013, pp. 147-191 & 193-217.

<sup>18</sup> The Educational Advisory Board entrusted with the modernization of the Greek educational system.

<sup>19</sup> A. Dimaras, *Modernisation and Reaction in Greek Education during the Venizelos Era*, in P. Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos. The Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 325-338.

4. *Cinematography in Greece and the lens of education: a lot of pioneer ideas of the time were more heard than done*<sup>20</sup>

As regards to cinematography in Greece, the situation was no better than what the country experienced in other fields. Although the first film projection took place in Athens in 1896, and a lot of filming took place within the Greek territory<sup>21</sup>, it proved a really difficult task for the country to follow the development of the cinema in other countries. This was mainly due to the lack of technical means, combined with insufficient funding<sup>22</sup>. The first films had a lot of technical problems as they were filmed with one, usually cheap, camera, while one or two persons were engaged in multiple roles (i.e. director, actor, operator, scriptwriter and photographer). Filming in open spaces, documenting life and then mixing shots from the relevant scenes did not reach excellent results, thus causing many gaps in the plot, as well as discontinuity of the film<sup>23</sup>.

The first attempts of Greek cinematography were faltering between genres, mostly between documentaries and fiction. They will, therefore, be called “docufiction” as these were an attempt to capture reality and create fiction through their inflexible static photograph – just like frames. The first attempts for the creation of cinema literacy and criticism were fragmentary and restricted to some magazines, such as «Kinimatografikos Astir» [Cinematographic Star], one of the most popular ones. Iris Skaraveou, a known film critic of the time, tried to convince production companies to cooperate with foreign artists in order to initiate reliable productions<sup>24</sup>.

The interwar period of course brought the stabilization of the cinema in the entertainment sector. There was an increase in the cinema theatres throughout the country, around 71 in 1926<sup>25</sup>. The production companies, despite being family owned or extremely small, increased. Though, the import of films may not have been great but it was significant, yet the funding was not sufficient. An indicative example of this is the fact that, although the first talking film (Alan Grosland’s *The Jazz Singer*) was projected in 1927, only two film theatres projected films with sound in Greece as late as October 1929. Other problems, such as censorship, as well as a lot of restricting laws<sup>26</sup> and heavy

<sup>20</sup> I owe thanks to my PhD candidate Ms. Kalliopi Kaklamani for her research contribution to this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Mainly by French companies such as Pathé and Gaumont, which filmed scenes from the Greek–Turkish 1897 war.

<sup>22</sup> G. Soldatos, *Συνοπτική ιστορία του ελληνικού κινηματογράφου* [Brief history of Greek cinema], Athens, Aegokeros, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, New York–London, The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012, p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> E. Delveroudi, *Film Criticism International: Women, Cinema and Modernity through the Eyes of a Greek Film Critic in the 1920’s*, in *International Conference: Doing Women’s Film History*, Sunderland, 13–15 April 2011, <http://www.philology.uoc.gr/staff/delveroudi/> (last access: 09.06.2023).

<sup>25</sup> M. Arkolakis, *Greek Film Industry (1896–1939): Economic Structure and Representation*, presented in the *Symposium European Economic and Business development: National Historical Perspectives and European Osmosis, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Athens, 28 November 2003), [https://www.academia.edu/3776020/Greek\\_Film\\_Industry\\_1896\\_1939\\_Economic\\_Structure\\_and\\_Representation](https://www.academia.edu/3776020/Greek_Film_Industry_1896_1939_Economic_Structure_and_Representation) (last access: 09.06.2023).

<sup>26</sup> For example, it was required for every film producer to get a special permission by the police in order to

taxation led the cinema to a noteworthy decrease. As Vrasidas Karalis poses it: «The lack of funding, of organized and technically equipped spaces, of trained screenwriters, actors and critics made early Greek cinema a heroic but doomed enterprise for those involved»<sup>27</sup>.

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a shift in the discussion regarding education. The child became the epicenter of the attention and at the same time the starting point of education. Pestalozzi, Decroly and Montessori theories attracted featured attention. Such notions were adopted mainly by advocates of the *dimotiki* language (such as Glinos, Delmouzos and Fotiadis) in an era during which development of psychology led to the acceptance of more child-centered practices. Several measures were taken aiming at improving school hygiene, student vaccination, summer camp participation and the changing of their books. Still, aforementioned ideas failed to prevail, due to the fact that Greek society, as a whole, was deeply conservative<sup>28</sup>.

Within this context, the discussion about the use of educational films in schools did not really take place, at least not officially. Difficulties related to such an attempt would have been many, while also seemingly unresolved. First of all, the missing and failing infrastructure is worth mentioning. School buildings were few and could not offer such potential. Poverty of rural areas was evident. A considerable proportion of children were underfed, families could not provide for other basic needs such as shoes, clothing and books, while book sharing was the most common reality. Electricity was not available in rural areas and tough living conditions — due to prolonged involvement in military operations — led to the outbreak of infectious diseases. As expected, aforesaid problems of such a critical nature were puzzling the authorities more than any other issue (i.e. the creation and introduction of educational films in schools).

Apart from these, the conservatism of the Greek society is another issue of serious consideration. Not only the thought of implementing such a practice was far from existent, but there were “voices” — usually those of the official state and its representatives — against the new medium. Suspicion against cinema was expressed through its denouncement «on the grounds of its promoting criminality, corruption, promiscuity and immortality»<sup>29</sup>.

A lot of ink was wasted in order to convince society about cinema's catastrophic influence on the children's soul. The lawyer Aristides Poulantzas wrote in 1930 an article claiming that the cinema relates directly to the increasing violence and criminality of the youngsters. For, he said, young people are flooded by the momentum and immaturity of youth, while the influence of the moving image is such that it removes any sort of obstacles towards the commitment of any kind of crime. He quoted examples of European origin to strengthen his thesis: France and Germany where the alleged criminals committed their crimes right after seeing a film. He strongly supported the establishment of the

film, after giving a detailed report on the materials, the scenes and the plot of the film. The permission was given only if these were judged as “appropriate”. There were guidelines as far as behavior or clothes were concerned.

<sup>27</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> V. Foukas, S. Ziogou, P. Hatzibei, *Childhood and Pedagogical theory in Greece (19<sup>th</sup>-first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century): From “the little adult” to the “child’s psychology”*, in L. Hopkins, M. Macleod, W. C. Turgeon (edd.), *Negotiating Childhoods*, Oxford, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010, pp. 87-97.

<sup>29</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, cit., p. 21.

preventive control over films, pointing out that they should not: a) put public order in danger, b) offend religious feelings or c) unsettle international relations, and compared the Greek case with restrictive measures taken in other countries such as Italy or Britain. He defended the censorship, as well as police intervention in order to grant permission for the making of a film. He also went further to propose parental escorting to the cinemas and the establishment of a committee for advice on such matters<sup>30</sup>.

A lot of other writers moved on the same wavelength. Georgios Paleologou analyzed the serious danger which derived from the cinema and went a step further so as to propose the banning of all youngsters under the age of 16 to visit cinema either without or with their parents<sup>31</sup>. A. Koutsoumaris, a lawyer and former police officer of the highest rank, unbanned all the cases of petty crimes, trying to prove that they were all caused by the fondness of youngsters for cinema and their admiration to stars in criminal roles<sup>32</sup>. It was a common practice to profile the petty criminals as frequenting popular cinemas. This could have an explanation which lies to the fact that authorities knew very little about the new medium and their confusion about it was such that led them to the imposition of censorship. Censorship which was broadened after the first anti-communist laws billed in 1929.

It was then that the pursuit of “authentic Greek images” was also becoming prevalent with the literacy generation of the 1930’s as a cultural project of self — reinvention after the Asia Minor Catastrophe<sup>33</sup>. But even the films which provided such images — bucolic dramas for example — did not entirely satisfy the authorities as they used the vernacular and were widely accepted by the audiences throughout the country. This caused quite another stir in the society and fears were raised by the most prominent intellectuals that the *dimotiki* would finally become the prevalent language. That constituted one more reason for fighting against the new medium, especially its talking version.

Nonetheless, there were advocates of the cinema in general and its use in the educational process more specifically. Nikos Kazantzakis, one of the most well — known and influential figures of Greek literature, who affected deeply by the Russian avant-garde films, expressed his admiration for the new “weapon” — as he characterized cinematography — and admitted that he wished to learn how to use it well.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, a few inspired people wrote about the use of educational films, sometimes openly, other times in a more indirect way. K. Saroglou, a pediatrician, in an

<sup>30</sup> A. Poulantzas, *Παιδική εγκληματικότητα και προληπτικός έλεγχος του κινηματογράφου*, «Το Παιδί» [The Child], n. 1, May-June 1930.

<sup>31</sup> G. Paleologou, *Η προστασία της εφηβικής ηλικίας από εκπαιδευτικο-κοινωνικής απόψεως*, «Το Παιδί», n. 4, November-December 1930.

<sup>32</sup> A. Koutsoumaris, *Ο κινηματογράφος και η επίδρασις αυτού στην αύξηση της εγκληματικότητας των νέων*, «Το Παιδί», n. 22, November-December 1933.

<sup>33</sup> V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



article written in 1930, characterized the educational system as a system which supported intelligence only by emotionless, stiff knowledge of mathematics, language, history or botanology, without depositing any kind of sentimental value to the child's soul. He tracked the problem in the training of teachers, while claiming that the system needed teachers able to use every available means so as to motivate students: «discourse, books and the image, moving or not, alike»<sup>35</sup>.

There were clearer voices which spoke about educational films cohesively and passionately. P. Zouvas enthusiastically supported the use of educational films in the classroom and proposed a series of measures that could be taken in order to overcome the problems of underfunding and lack of infrastructure. With great detail he presented what was taking place in other developed countries and suggested that students should be taught geography, botanology and other school subjects. He also went a step further in order to be noticed. He proposed the use of educational films so as on the one hand, to help even those less diligent to learn and on the other hand, to prevent children from going to the cinemas to see an entertaining film which could be harmful to their morals<sup>36</sup>.

Another article was translated and presented in the 30<sup>th</sup> issue of the magazine *To Pedi* [*The child*]. A. Roussopoulou translated an article by Dreyfus Barney titled “Cinema and Education” addressing educational film as a complement to teaching. In the same article, apart from presenting relevant issues in other countries, both at production and research level, especially in the USA, urgent need for teacher training was identified, more specifically regarding how to use the means both technically and in terms of potential. Readers were also informed about the studies conducted, especially of those studies proving the usefulness of the means. Moreover, this article included some suggestions on how to better use the means through a combination of books and film, a practice which was probably even beyond the imagination of the educational policy makers<sup>37</sup>.

An article by Dora Papakonstantinou informs about the existence of projection equipment in schools within the Greek territory and the decision of providing other schools with the necessary equipment in as early as 1931. With the initiative of the Macedonian Educational Society she wrote, all schools in Macedonia were provided with cinema projectors. She went on to propose that teachers should be trained on how to use educational films properly<sup>38</sup>. Unfortunately, it has so far been impossible to cross-check the information provided, as, due to lack of records, it has been an extremely arduous, interesting though task to be considered.

<sup>35</sup> K. Saroglou, *Ανάγκη μορφώσεως κοινωνικής συνειδήσεως*, «Το Παιδί», n. 2, July-August 1930.

<sup>36</sup> P. Zouvas, *Κινηματογράφος και Παιδαγωγική*, «Το Παιδί», n. 25, May-June 1934.

<sup>37</sup> Dreyfus Barney (translation: A. Roussopoulou), *Cinema and education*, «Το Παιδί», n. 30, March-April 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Dora Papakonstantinou, *Η σημασία του κινηματογράφου για την διανοητικήν και ηθική μόρφωσι των παιδιών*, «Το Παιδί», n. 9, September-October 1931.



### *Conclusion*

It seems that roughly around the 1930's, thus, later than in the rest of Europe, the discussion about the use of the moving image under the lens of education had already started, diffidently at the beginning – given the hostile environment – and mostly by people who were not directly related to education. The issue was mainly dealt in the light of the relationship between youth and cinema, not of the relationship between education and cinema.

A lot of peculiarities of the Greek case played an important role in the implementation of such an aspiring project. The political turbulence, the Balkan Wars, the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the influx of immigrants, the extremely low living standards of the population, the illiteracy and the prevalent conservatism of people and the intellectual community of the country were factors which hindered society from moving forward. On the other hand, the prevalence of Eleftherios Venizelos – a very prominent political figure, a visionary of his time – created a contradictory political scene in which a lot of reforms were attempted but went forth and back, according to who was in power.

It is worth mentioning that relevant international practice influenced the progressive forces of the country and some steps were taken while a lot of pioneer ideas were more heard than done.

Films must not be addressed through a narrow lens, but within the wider context in which they were created, generated, spread and renegotiated.

# Resist! Italy's Teachers and Students in the Face of Neoliberalism in Education

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## 1. *Neoliberalism and education: an unprecedented contamination*

There is a disconnect in the values, behaviours and educational styles traversing education systems at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: it is the long wave of neoliberalism that even in Italy, at a later time and with results as yet incomplete, has left many traces behind it. The aim of this essay is to highlight the transformative aspect of neoliberal ideology and its effects on education in Italy. These effects may be partial, but they still have two important and distinctive characteristics:

In the first place, they are shared more widely by the population and the political class than they are in the economic field, the preferred arena of neoliberalism and the main battlefield for the opposing factions. Secondly, although Italian education has traditionally been strongly anchored to other paradigms, both operational and idealistic, neoliberalism has brought about several major changes which have now entered the mainstream public debate on education. They have in essence “naturalised” the use of a general framework for interpreting educational phenomena that is different from the past. Even those who challenge these views (not only in Italy<sup>1</sup>) and who find themselves in a position of cultural resistance have had to discuss them within a set of questions and an agenda that was imposed from outside the world of education. However, as will be seen below, the feelings and perceptions of teachers and students do not appear to be engaged, except to a minimal degree, with the prevailing public debate or with the national (also in some cases regional) laws that have implemented certain ideas.

In this context we can refer to certain events that, through various changes in the law and a new public narrative, have on several occasions encouraged schools to cast off traditional educational ideas and practices, which are broadly shared even among different schools of thought and are essentially based on the primacy attributed to certain basic principles of education that can be summarised as follows:

1. the importance of collaboration between pupils;
2. a focus on the disadvantaged, with the objective of inclusion;

<sup>1</sup> See S. O'Brien, *Resisting neoliberal education: For freedom's sake*, in T. Rudd, I.F. Goodson (eds.), *Negotiating Neoliberalism: Developing alternative educational visions*, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2017, pp. 149-166.

3. the role of schools as peer communities;
4. the devaluation of tests and of quantitative educational assessment practices in general;
5. the priority given to state schooling, in the light of two principles: 1) only state schools offer a secular education that is open to all cultural expressions; 2) the indicator of average cost per student is not helpful in assessing the state school/private school relationship (Article 33, paragraph 3, of the Italian Constitution: «Entities and private persons have the right to establish schools and institutions of education, at no cost to the State»);
6. the conceptualisation of the school as a cultural community not governed by market logic, maintaining the substantial difference between education and the systems used to produce tangible and intangible goods (so-called “services”).

Particularly since the first Berlusconi government (10 May 1994 to 17 January 1995, XII Legislature) the new neoliberal lexicon has emphasised:

1. the importance of competition among pupils as form of preparation, training and anticipation of a society based on this principle;
2. a focus on the merits of the best and brightest, in other words the percentage of the school population that is destined to play a leading role in society;
3. the world of education considered mainly as an organisation which, despite existing in a specific area, cannot escape the rules of efficacy and efficiency that apply to the world of economics, as seen in the corporate world;
4. absolute reliance on tests and other quantitative methods of assessing scholastic performance, as an objective way of giving an account to the general population of the money spent on public education;
5. a necessary balancing between state schools and private state-recognised schools, in the light of two concepts: 1) schools not run by the state are an expression of the educational freedom of the parents, the only ones who have the right to choose; 2) the lower cost per pupil of state-recognised schools is an indicator to be taken into account in order to regulate funding levels (Art. 33, paragraph 3, of the Constitution does not prohibit the granting of tax breaks and subsidies to families choosing state-recognised schools, almost always religious schools);
6. the conceptualisation of the school as an organisation with its own special characteristics that is part of a market of education service providers, in a competitive system. The issue (which also includes the cost of education, referred to above) must be framed within the broader concept of liberalising public utilities and privatising services which can be delivered better and more efficiently by the market than by the state.

As a preliminary point, it is also worth noting that the neoliberal agenda has been based on a new communicative model, aimed at emphasising that the needs for change have an objective value that can only be challenged by unionised teachers who are not open to dialogue. Think of the repeated references to the Europe that wants to impose a series of virtuous behaviours on its Member States; think, above all, of the use of quantitative research and assessment methods, touted as the only possible rational and scientific vision, and therefore not subject to the opinions of teachers.

## 2. *From collaboration to competition: the advent of a new public narrative on education.*

Going back quickly over the various points, we can start with the «school of the three I: English, Computer Science and Enterprise» (*Inglese, Informatica, Impresa*) according to the programmatic definition given by Silvio Berlusconi in 2000, when talking about the technological revolution and new literacy<sup>2</sup>. This is the most obvious evidence of a neoliberal agenda in the education sector, although clues can be found from much earlier, especially from the 1980s onwards.

Within a short time, Letizia Moratti, Minister of Education, University and Research, in explaining the plans of her department<sup>3</sup>, started by commenting on the dramatic situation in schools and by highlighting that reforms from within were impossible:

We are aware that we face a complex world and that time is running out if we want to ward off the risk of a gradual decline in our education and training system. The first sign of this decline is the growing distance between the efforts being made within the world of education and the results those efforts produce<sup>4</sup>.

Moratti went on to highlight very clearly some of the basic principles of the neoliberal approach, starting with the need for a competitive structure both in the economy and the world of education:

The gravity of the situation is therefore known, but I believe that the implications are becoming more and more serious. Worldwide, the level of scholarisation is rising and there is an increase in the number of people entering the world of education (I am of course referring to the developing nations but also to the inclusion of women and young people), and this has led to a widespread strengthening of earning capacity and the ability to participate in improving wellbeing. In this type of context, the meritocratic values typical of a competitive society will also tend to be strengthened.

The causes of the decline in schools can be identified in a system that cannot reform by itself and which is not adequate for a competitive society because it is still anchored to statist visions:

I believe that the crisis in the education system is due to insufficient quality and also to a lack of freedom of choice for families. We believe that the State cannot be the sole promoter of the value of human capital, nor the sole guardian of technical and scientific knowledge. [...] this is how we want to

<sup>2</sup> L. Lanna, *Lottimismo della libertà, interview with Silvio Berlusconi*, «Ideazione», 7 November 2000, [http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05\\_07-11-2000/lanna.htm](http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05_07-11-2000/lanna.htm), available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20010124070000/http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05\\_07-11-2000/lanna.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20010124070000/http://www.ideazione.com/www.ideazione.com/1.politica/05_07-11-2000/lanna.htm) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>3</sup> Letizia Moratti, Minister in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Berlusconi Government (11 June 2001-23 April 2005) and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> (23 April 2005-17 May 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Hearing of Letizia Moratti, the Minister of Education, University and Research, at the Chamber of Deputies – 7<sup>th</sup> Committee on Culture, Science and Education (under Article 143, paragraph 2 of the Regulation), session held on Wednesday 18 July 2001, stenographic report, Ferdinando Adornato, President, [http://documenti.camera.it/\\_dati/leg14/lavori/stencomm/07/audiz2/2001/0718/s010.htm](http://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg14/lavori/stencomm/07/audiz2/2001/0718/s010.htm) (last access: 30.01.2023).

interpret the role of schools and education. We imagine a modern system that is certainly competitive, innovative, democratic, open and transparent. [...] We believe that families should be guaranteed equal conditions with respect to their choices [...], in a system that integrates state and non-state components to create a school that genuinely belongs to the civil society.

The new narrative for education has thus introduced terms that are antithetical to those shared in the educational community, with great awareness that this is constructing a dialogue that opposes teacher sentiment, as Moratti states: «We strongly feel the responsibility of representing different opinions».

The plethora of official documents and interviews issued by the minister contain several which are particularly important when analysing the new language of education<sup>5</sup>. If we use as an example the hearing of Minister Moratti on the implementation of Law No. 62/2000, we realise that its reasoning is dotted with all the concepts (and their terminological variants) identified in the first paragraph: “competition”, “merit”, “meritocracy”, “INVALSI” (national assessment tests organised by INVALSI, the *National Institute for the Assessment of Education and Learning*), “freedom of choice”, “freedom of education” and “state-recognised schools”<sup>6</sup>.

Not only the political world but also some intellectuals and journalists lend strong support to the competitive and operational vision of education: examples include Angelo Panebianco, Luca Ricolfi, Ernesto Galli della Loggia, Roger Abravanel but also Luciano Canfora and Umberto Galimberti who have not missed an opportunity to chastise the state schools of today with nostalgic observations.

In the years that followed, we must mention a watershed reform, the one implemented by education minister Mariastella Gelmini<sup>7</sup> (Law 133/2008 and Law 169/2008; in effect from 1 September 2009 for primary and middle schools and from 2010 for secondary schools). At primary level, these reforms reintroduced the “single class teacher” (cancelling out more than thirty years of educational thinking) and introduced the 1-10 assessment scale (although this was mitigated by a teacher assessment of the pupil’s level of achievement). The 1-10 assessment system was also introduced for middle schools, while at high school the mark for behaviour (which in practice had never been abolished), was re-included in the range of grades used to decide the pupil’s final mark.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the new language of political communication in Italy, see V. Bagolini, E. Lombardi Vallauri, *La comunicazione della nuova élite politica: novità e continuità*, «Parolechiave», n. 2, 2018, pp. 63-82; E. Lombardi Vallauri, *La lingua disonesta. Contenuti impliciti e strategie di persuasione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2019. In the international context: J. Gray, J.P. O’Regan, C. Wallace, *Education and the discourse of global neoliberalism*, «Language and Intercultural Communication», vol. 18, n. 5, 2018, pp. 471-477; M. Sardoč (ed.), *The Language of neoliberal education: Problems, challenges and opportunities*, «Šolskopolje», vol. 29, n. 1-2, 2018 (see, in particular, the interview with Henry Giroux, pp. 97-106).

<sup>6</sup> Hearing of the Minister of Education, University and Research, Letizia Moratti, on the implementation of Law No. 62/2000, laying down rules for equal education and provisions on the right to study, Chamber of Deputies, 7<sup>th</sup> Committee on Culture, Science and Education, session held on Tuesday 4 May 2004, stenographic report, Ferdinando Adornato, President, [https://leg14.camera.it/\\_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/frsmcdin.asp?AD=1&perc Boll=/\\_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/200405/0504/html/07/\[pagpro=all=off\]commis=07](https://leg14.camera.it/_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/frsmcdin.asp?AD=1&perc Boll=/_dati/leg14/lavori/bollet/200405/0504/html/07/[pagpro=all=off]commis=07) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>7</sup> Mariastella Gelmini, Minister in the 4<sup>th</sup> Berlusconi Government (8 May 2008-16 November 2011).

Again, it is easy to pinpoint the various sources in which the vision of the school as a “sick” institution has become consolidated, with an accentuation of the importance of merit, seen as the individual value of the more intelligent students and the result of better-managed schools. According to Maria Stella Gelmini:

High doses of meritocracy must be introduced at all levels. First of all, the best-performing students should be rewarded. Their talent should primarily be rewarded in terms of opportunities for their future. I am thinking, for example, of ways to enable them to enrol in universities and the best courses in the future. Secondly, create incentives for the better-organised schools which are best able to improve their pupils' learning, taking into account the starting points. We will give them more resources and the means to offer an ever better service<sup>8</sup>.

Moving further down the timeline, we must remember the self-definition of “good school” given by the President of the Council Matteo Renzi when presenting his reforms in 2015, continuing on from those illustrated above<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, the latest news is that the current Meloni government (in office since 22 October 2022) has changed the name of the Ministry of Education to “Ministry of Education and Merit”, in line with the thoughts expressed in the “League Manifesto for the government of Italy”, which connects merit to the need for solidarity:

Moving away from the idea of “exam factories” towards a model of education that favours the individualised development of talent and skills and which “leaves nobody behind”<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding the Ministry's name, I think a brief parenthesis might be helpful as it allows us to consider both the long duration of the “Ministry of Public Education” and also the periods in which education has lost its “public” status. From the Cavourian “Ministry of Public Education of the Kingdom of Italy” of 1861 we have to wait until 1929 to see the first name change, to the “Ministry of National Education” which remained until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Badoglio Government (22 April until 8 June 1944). The title of Ministry of Public Education was reinstated with the Royal Decree No. 142 of 29 May 1944 and was maintained by the subsequent 1<sup>st</sup> Bonomi Government (18 June-10 December 1944), remaining unchanged until the Dini Government (17 January-17 May 1996). In the Prodi Government that followed (17 May 1996-21 October 1998), the name was changed to “Public education, universities, scientific and technological research”, becoming “Education, universities and research” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Berlusconi government (30 May 2001-27 April 2006).

<sup>8</sup> G. Vinciguerra, *Gelmini: “Ecco come introdurrò il merito”*. Interview with the Minister of Education given to the Director of «Tuttoscuola», 5 September 2009, <https://www.tuttoscuola.com/gelmini-ecco-come-introduurr-il-merito/> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Law No. 107 of 13 July 2015 and subsequent implementing decrees; the education minister was Stefania Giannini (22 February 2014-12 December 2016).

<sup>10</sup> See G. Valditara, A. Amadori, *È l'Italia che vogliamo. Il manifesto della Lega per governare il Paese*, Milano, Piemme, 2022 (chapter entitled: *Progetti concreti per un Paese che rinasce*).

Following the loss of the accent on the public nature of education<sup>11</sup> (which had been approved for 130 years in total), the last government of the Republic recently changed the name to “Ministry of Education and Merit” (Decree Law No. 173 of 11 November 2022 introducing urgent provisions on the reallocation of ministerial powers).

The sole exception to the terminological dyads examined so far, which contrast different visions of the school (collaboration/competition, inclusion/merit and so on) is represented by a particular definition: the “classist school”. This is a term that appeared in the Sixties and Seventies, in close connection with Marxist interpretations of society, as it identifies a relationship in which one social class is subordinate to another. It carries with it the idea of an opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and is complementary to the “bourgeois school”<sup>12</sup>.

Lorenzo Milani (in 1967) also defined it with this terse indictment:

We have read the law and the plans for the new school. We are happy with most of the things it says. And then there is the fact that the new middle school exists, it is the same for all, it is compulsory and is not popular with the right. That's a good thing. It's just sad to know it's in your hands. Are you going to make it *classist* like the other one?<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note the reply given by the new minister Giuseppe Valditara, in one of his first interviews, to the question «Why did you change the Ministry's name to include the noun “merit”?»:

Because today, schools are *classist*. Schools aren't places of equality and don't help pupils to fulfil their potential and build a satisfactory adult life. [...] As Ernesto Galli Della Loggia wrote in the *Corriere*, «it is not a school of equality because it is not a school of merit». This awareness gives rise to the challenge of merit, which gives substance to the word “education”<sup>14</sup>.

This is the most recent act in the chronology of the neoliberal wave, which not only introduces new terms into the narrative of education, but reinterprets and changes the meaning of the traditional terms. What we are witnessing is the removal of one of the symbolic words of progressive education and the pedagogy of emancipation and its replacement in a world of different meaning, in a complex discursive process that allows the new education of merit to artificially place itself inside and not outside the Italian educational tradition. The term “class” is taken away from its link to socio-economic

<sup>11</sup> The loss of this linguistic indicator is very important and obviously not accidental, as neoliberalism brings with it a devaluation of the character of the public asset of education: see M. Baltodano, *Neoliberalism and the demise of public education: the corporatization of schools of education*, «International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education», vol. 25, n. 4, 2012, pp. 487-507.

<sup>12</sup> See Google Books Ngram Viewer, <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>. Search using the following parameters: Data set “Italian (2019)”, period “1950-2019”, terms “bourgeois school, class school” (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>13</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> G. Fregonara, Valditara: “La scuola di oggi è classista. Alleanza per il merito con studenti e insegnanti”, «Corriere della Sera», 31 October 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22\\_ottobre\\_31/valditara-ministro-istruzione-scuola-oggi-classista-f6bdd48-5874-11ed-9e79-0ca6cc80307a.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22_ottobre_31/valditara-ministro-istruzione-scuola-oggi-classista-f6bdd48-5874-11ed-9e79-0ca6cc80307a.shtml); last access: 30.01.2023.



condition, just as in parallel with merit, it is given an individual meaning linked to capacities and motivation, separated from any ties to the family and social context. This is not merely a rejection of the lessons of emancipatory education but also of all the solid sociological theory – from Bell and Gintis to Passeron and Bourdieu, with its fundamental concept of cultural capital<sup>15</sup> – which has clearly shown the decisive role played by learning environments compared to individual characteristics, without failing to underline the difficulty that schools have in compensating for the socio-economic and cultural differences of the family<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. *The world of education, between indifference and resistance*

The communicative process, which I have described so far in summary terms, is located in particular in the world of digital communication, which is characterised by a progressive disintermediation between scientific culture and popular culture which culminates in the current condition of the “post truth era”<sup>17</sup>. This means that despite the huge increase in the ease of access to culture that has taken place in just a few years, scientific literature is barely understood and re-elaborated by the general public. We are witnessing a proliferation of simplifications and approximations, alternative visions and conspiracy theories, whose great pervasiveness and diffusion were seen during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is easy to see how the process of branding and mediatisation of the narrative on education finds fertile ground in this new and unprecedented digital context, giving space for politics to establish a direct link with public opinion on an issue that apart from a brief period in the 1970s has never fired the debate in the political or the cultural arena. This is where Silvio Berlusconi’s “three I” (English, computer science and enterprise) and Matteo Renzi’s “good school” find common ground. In both cases, skipping over any mediation by experts, advertising slogans are used to define the validity, acceptability and desirability of the proposal.

It is no coincidence that those who have resisted this vision of education have tried to use the same communication tools, but without much success. There has been talk of “sheriff principals”, “chicken coop classes” or “INVALSI state scorecarding”. It is worth considering this last issue for a moment, as INVALSI, has become a symbol for the hostility of the whole educational community – students, teachers and unions – towards the neoliberal reforms.

<sup>15</sup> P. Bourdieu. *The forms of capital*, in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986, pp. 241-258.

<sup>16</sup> By way of example, see: J. Vegard and T.B. Strømme, *Advantages of upper-class backgrounds: Forms of capital, school cultures and educational performance*, «The Sociological Review», vol. 70, n. 6, 2022, pp. 1199-1219.

<sup>17</sup> R. Keyes, *The post-truth era: Dishonesty and deception in contemporary life*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2004.

The world of education has in general been extremely wary of all forms of standardised assessment, unlike a significant part of Italy's experimental pedagogy community, which since the Seventies and Eighties has allowed pupils to take part in basic comparative studies, from TIMMS to TALIS, from PIRLS to PISA (in particular we could mention the commitment of Benedetto Vertecchi and his school). As for the INVALSI national assessments themselves, which began in the 2005-2006 school year, they would not have attracted so much hostility had certain characteristics of these tests not made them so very different from the reference models used internationally. It is necessary to start with the consideration that these standardised assessments were intended as tools designed to improve the quality of learning, with the aim of providing – to political decision-makers in particular – measures to assess the overall performance of schools in order to support the strategic actions of government. At the same time, they represent a form of “public accountability” that gives society as broad and objective a picture as possible of how public funds are used, particularly at times of reform<sup>18</sup>.

However, concerns began to emerge from the moment the training courses on the INVALSI data were first rolled out for teaching staff, starting with the advice given to school principals on how to compare a school against others in the local area, within a competitive framework. This method of using the INVALSI data is based on increasingly detailed statistics, measurements and numerical evaluation of the teacher and pupil performance. The result is that schools are included in performance rankings, and this has taken the assessments away from the initial national objective and closer to a metric that measures quality at local level, school by school and class by class<sup>19</sup>.

During the years we are now discussing, the Agnelli Foundation launched the *Eduscopio* project<sup>20</sup>, which publishes the rankings of school achievements in an increasingly transparent and open way. The rankings are calculated retroactively based on the subsequent university results gained by the students (obviously without considering their social and cultural backgrounds, thus by attributing merit to the best results based on a combination of just two factors: the efforts of the students and those of the teachers)<sup>21</sup>.

The ministerial procedure for appointing the INVALSI president and board members has been a further area for criticism, as the assessment systems are set up to be independent administrative authorities and as such they should have «ownership of the power to

<sup>18</sup> See E. Hutt and M.S. Polikoff, *Toward a framework for public accountability in education reform*, «Educational Researcher», vol. 49, n. 7, 2020, pp. 503-511.

<sup>19</sup> On this effect of neoliberal policies, in particular the pressures exerted on individual teachers, see D. Attick, *Homo Economicus at School: Neoliberal Education and Teacher as Economic Being*, «Educational Studies», vol. 53, n. 1, 2017, pp. 37-48.

<sup>20</sup> The *Eduscopio* project. *Confronto, scelgo, studio* was launched in 2014, <https://www.eduscopio.it> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>21</sup> On this subject, researchers are either highly in favour or heavily critical: see for example M. Bordignon, P. Carapella, G. Turati, *Information and quality of public services: The case of the Eduscopio internet portal of the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation*, «Stato e Mercato», n. 1, 2021, pp. 117-139; P. Landri, *To resist, or to align? The enactment of data-based school governance in Italy*, «Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability», n. 33, 2021, pp. 563-580; M. Pitzalis, *Le domande inevase sul mercato scolastico e il “buono scuola”*, «Scuola democratica», vol. 9, n. 3, 2018, pp. 631-636.

appoint their management bodies [...], accentuating their detachment from political power»<sup>22</sup>. Not only that: over time the arrows launched by the teachers' unions, lecturers' associations and most of all by the students, have focused on additional aspects which are giving more weight to the idea that this is not about having strategic comprehensive assessment systems, but about systems of individual assessment and control for both teachers and pupils.

It must be remembered that the state exams have been significantly reformed, with the new obligation to take part in the INVALSI assessments introduced from the 2007-2008 school year (the introduction of the national test in the final exam for the third year of middle school)<sup>23</sup>. This mandatory participation is still a requirement for admission to the final exams. Between 2010 and 2017 it was included in the grade average and thus in the determination of the final mark<sup>24</sup>. The score on the INVALSI assessment has been converted into a 1-10 grade, using a standard conversion table which is the same for all Italian schools<sup>25</sup>. As required by Presidential Decree 122 of 2009 «the final assessment of the examination includes the result of the national written exam» and «the final grade comprises the average 1-10 grade obtained in each test and in the overall assessment, by rounding up to the higher number by a fraction equal to or higher than 0.5»<sup>26</sup>.

Even for the secondary school-leaving examinations, the INVALSI tests have been a mandatory requirement for admission since 2013; this was introduced on a trial basis but it is left to the schools to decide whether to use the results in assessing the students. The plans to include the INVALSI result as part of the school-leaving diploma, in the same way as for the final year of middle school, have been announced several times but always accompanied by strikes and protests. After the 2015 exams, pupils started using *social media* to create humorous memes about the new INVALSI assessments. To the question Q1 «Think about what studying means to you. For me studying is like...», the answers soon went viral: «opening the kitchen cupboard and not finding the Nutella», «renal colic», «Chinese water torture», «having a cold shower in Norway», «not having a social life», «combing a raccoon»<sup>27</sup>.

It is all too easy to dismiss these comments as “absurd” or “amusing”, “typical kids’ stuff” but in reality they are just one of the many examples of opposition and resistance, even boycotting, displayed towards the ministerial reforms over a very long period, as the

<sup>22</sup> L. Orlando, *Genesi delle autorità amministrative indipendenti: natura e funzioni principali*, «Il Diritto Amministrativo», vol. 14, n. 12, December 2022.

<sup>23</sup> See INVALSI, *Il Decennale delle Prove INVALSI. Esiti, strumenti e riflessioni verso il Sistema Nazionale di Valutazione* (Rome, 4-5 December 2014), [https://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/doc\\_eventi/12-2014/4/Documento\\_DecennaleProveINVALSI.pdf](https://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/doc_eventi/12-2014/4/Documento_DecennaleProveINVALSI.pdf) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>24</sup> MIUR Press Office, *Scuola, esame terza media al via per quasi 580mila studenti. Più rigore nell'ammissione. Lode per meritevoli*, Roma, Press Release, 14 June 2010, <https://www.istruzione.it/archivio/web/ministero/cs140610.html> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>25</sup> INVALSI, *Griglia per l'attribuzione del voto della prova nazionale*, [https://www.invalsi.it/snpvn2013/documenti/pn2011/Griglia-Correzione\\_PN1011.pdf](https://www.invalsi.it/snpvn2013/documenti/pn2011/Griglia-Correzione_PN1011.pdf) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>26</sup> Presidential Decree No. 122 of 22/06/09 concerning the assessment of students, Art. 3, paragraphs 4 and 6, and subsequent ministerial circulars.

<sup>27</sup> V. Roscioni, *Test Invalsi 2015: le risposte più divertenti*, 12 May 2015, <https://www.studenti.it/test-invalsi-superiori-2015-foto-risposte-divertenti.html> (last access: 30.01.2023).

tone and purpose of the reforms date back to the tenure of Letizia Moratti (2<sup>nd</sup> Berlusconi government, 11 June-23 April 2005).

The object of the criticisms is the assessment, calculated according to a standardised national table, which means that a not inconsiderable part of the final assessment is left to the teachers (of Italian, Maths and English); this runs counter to the very principle of assessment, which by its nature should be contextualised and individualised.

The opinion of Giorgio Israel, an eminent and influential academic, is incisive and clearly delineates the crucial question posed by the INVALSI assessments:

What is the function of the INVALSI assessment? An attempt to provide – using a variety of qualitative tools – a picture of the state of Italy’s education system that might constitute a valid tool for its improvement? If this is the function of the INVALSI, there is nothing to object to. Actually, we can only look favourably on this type of activity, which can take various forms [...]. On the other hand, if the intention is to gradually replace the teacher’s role as an assessor of pupils – which in my view is an absolutely essential one – for reasons which are at the very least questionable, as we have seen, and by only using tests, and if the aim is to assess teachers and schools with those tests, then no, we really do not agree<sup>28</sup>.

But the criticism does not stop there, as there are other “perverse” effects created by a quantitative assessment being converted into a 1-10 grade:

Instead of simply trying to assess the achievements resulting from ordinary teaching, they bring in a test [...] which has two effects. The first is to disrupt the result of the exam: it’s as though a chemist who is asked to determine the components in a compound stirs the mixture not with a neutral stirring stick, but with one imbued with a reagent. The second effect is even worse: it stimulates teachers and students to teach and study a new subject, the INVALSI tests.

As we can see, these are not extremist reactions, disorderly reactions to the advent of “the new”, nor dogged adversity to ministerial reasoning. Instead, this is an articulate and precise statement of reasoned arguments that dismantle the argument that these assessments are objective and have nothing to do with preconceived ideologies. The lesson of Israel is all the more interesting because it allows a better evaluation of the strong criticisms coming from certain circles of the educational community, which are well-represented and summed up in a mural documenting the latest clash between teachers and the government (17 November 2022): «Giving a scorecard isn’t assessment. No INVALSI»<sup>29</sup>.

This is the reaction to another cause of friction with the world of education, in addition to all those mentioned above: the issuing to schools of codes to match the assessments with poor results with the students who completed them: these pupils are then labelled as “vulnerable students” and identified by name<sup>30</sup>. This is not the place

<sup>28</sup> G. Israel, Speech at the Convention *In classe ho un bambino che...* (Florence, 6 February 2015), *Dibattito a due voci sul tema: Sono utili le prove Invalsi?*, <https://youtu.be/7ZVmqGA AVC8> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>29</sup> See <https://comune-info.net/la-schedatura-degli-studenti-fragili> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>30</sup> Roars (Return On Academic Research and School), *Schedatura di Stato INVALSI: nomi e cognomi degli studenti ‘disagiati’*. E adesso?, 15 November 2022, <https://www.roars.it/online/schedatura-di-stato-invalsi-nomi->

to further investigate the condemnation of “scorecarding”, considered by the president of the INVALSI assessments, Prof. Roberto Ricci, as «another interpretation of things that favour obscurantism»<sup>31</sup>. However, it is worth noting that as we have seen, this is just the latest episode in a series, all of which are aimed at changing the international system of comparative assessments which provide data that are regularly aggregated and anonymous.

At this point we cannot say that the forms of rebellion mentioned here, concentrating on just a few exemplary cases, are merely the preserve of a small part of the education community. There is no doubt that the repeated calls to boycott the INVALSI assessments were supported by a minority of teachers and students. However, it would be wrong to think that these are only extremist movements, as the crude neoliberal invites us to think, relegating them to the ranks of those who do not understand innovation or reforms. In reality, much of the education community (perhaps in silence and resignation) agrees with the reasons for such resistance, even if they dislike some of its methods.

The long but necessary premise of historical contextualisation now gives us a better and deeper understanding of the teachers' stories, just three of which are given here as examples. The words of primary school teacher Danilo Serafini (who began teaching in 1983) are emblematic<sup>32</sup>. When asked about the usefulness of the INVALSI assessments, he replies:

I hope they won't take my pension away now! I can't deny that I've called them “the Invalid assessments” [It's a play on words: Invalsi / Invalid; N.d.A.] more than once, because [...] I think it's crazy to assess [pupils] after doing something they aren't used to doing. [...] that's not meant as a criticism of how the INVALSI assessments are structured because there are some excellent ideas. Maybe it's the teachers' fault, maybe the ministerial plans are to blame, maybe it's whoever else's fault, I don't know, but it's clear that [...] the test given to the children has absolutely nothing to do with how they work day to day.

When asked about the areas in need of urgent reform to improve education, the primary school teacher Maria Grazia (who started teaching in 1972) questions the practical utility of national assessments:

e-cognomi-degli-studenti-disagiati-e-adesso (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>31</sup> V. Santarpia, *Invalsi, scoppia il caso del 'bollino di fragilità' agli studenti*. Ricci: “Solo uno strumento per distribuire i fondi”, «Corriere della Sera», 15 November 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22\\_novembre\\_15/invalsi-scoppia-caso-bollino-fragilita-studenti-ricci-solo-strumento-distribuire-fondi-fcbf8720-64b6-11ed-afef-649581263307.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/scuola/medie/22_novembre_15/invalsi-scoppia-caso-bollino-fragilita-studenti-ricci-solo-strumento-distribuire-fondi-fcbf8720-64b6-11ed-afef-649581263307.shtml) (last access: 30.01.2023). See also the reply from ROARS, *Invalsi conferma la schedatura di massa degli studenti fragili. Unbeknown to parents*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.roars.it/online/invalsi-conferma-la-schedatura-di-massa-degli-studenti-fragili-a-insaputa-dei-genitori> (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>32</sup> Interview given by Daria Isolani to Danilo Serafini (elementary school teacher since 1983) on 18 January 2020, available online at <https://youtu.be/ZN143580IG0> (as of minute 33:31) (last access: 30.01.2023). See the comment card by Monica Dati, *Avevo imparato a leggere prima di andare alle elementari grazie ad Alberto Manzi: i ricordi del maestro Serafini*, «Memorie Educative in Video», DOI: 10.53221/628, published on: 26.10.2021, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/avevo-imparato-leggere-prima-di-andare-alle-elementari> (last access: 30.01.2023).

Who is in charge of teaching? just the poor teachers, left to themselves? teaching hasn't been given due recognition for many years now. Now we have the new INVALSI assessment system, but that's something else, it's out of context, it's a different thing. I think a lot of attention is needed [...]. I think it's up to the Minister to recognise the value of teaching<sup>33</sup>.

Other testimonies reveal some ambivalence, such as the primary school teacher Maria Galatolo (a primary school teacher since 1972), although she starts from a position of opposition to assessing [pupils] with grades and scores:

Personally I'm against grading, but on the other hand I was also against the summary opinion "good", "satisfactory", "excellent" because to me those are just labels given on the basis of personal opinion because it's not true there are really objective tests<sup>34</sup>.

However,

I tend to disagree with this kind of label. I am more in favour of a global judgement than one based on a report card [...] where a global opinion is given on all the various aspects of a child's personality. But [...] now we have the famous INVALSI tests and I have to say, while I'm opposed to them, I can tell you something positive: the last INVALSI tests I held with a fourth-year primary class, I did them in the second year. My class managed to beat the national average so even though I'm against this type of grade, but...

#### 4. *Epilogue*

Taken together, the testimonies of teachers, the statements made by students, the strikes and declarations made by teaching unions over a period of more than twenty years, are a tangible sign of an education system that despite having a number of different currents within it, does not want to be seen as an organisation, nor as part of a public administration to be guided towards destinations it does not want.

We have seen that there is a vibrant and well-documented dialectic between national (and ministerial) power and local institutions and also between the mass media and school culture. There is, in essence, a strong disconnect between the action of a government that sees the school as a dependent entity which can be shaped to its will (with constant changes between the administration in office and the next one) and the school which, as the study of the history of education has clearly shown us, expresses its own specific,

<sup>33</sup> Interview by Caterina Rinaldi with Maria Grazia (a primary school teacher since 1972), given on 29 March 2014 and available online at <https://youtu.be/jB29eWxlewM> (from minute 26:39) (last access: 30.01.2023).

<sup>34</sup> Interview given by Maria Galatolo to the primary school teacher Manuela Nepi (primary school teacher since 1972) on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013, available online at <https://youtu.be/qq3rENHgShg> (starting at 16:12) (last access: 30.01.2023).

original and distinctive culture<sup>35</sup>. Teachers, in particular, cannot be relegated to the role of executors of reforms. They must be recognised as intellectual subjects of the learning they are committed to improving on a daily basis. In this sense, the reform of education, taking into account what its history tells us, necessarily means listening to what schools have to say<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> See D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, «Paedagogica Historica», 31, sup. 1, 1995, pp. 353-382.

<sup>36</sup> On these themes, for a broader historical excursus, starting from the Gentile Reformation, see G. Bandini, *The Italian debate about the role of teacher within teacher education, a long dialectic between two opposing concepts: educational intellectual or cultural employee*, in N. Mead (ed.), *Moral and Political Values in Teacher Education over Time. International Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2022, pp. 49-71.





# The Role of Secondary Grammar School Traditions in Hungary under Communism

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## 1. *Research design and position of the researcher*

The paper presents one of the school traditions which was a special day in a secondary grammar school. The initiators established it in the 1970s. Student Day played a key role in raising political awareness. The analysis of the history of schools in the communist period can significantly enrich the history of education. It is possible to reconstruct the inner world of school by analysing the documents and comparing them with the perspectives of the people who remember them. Alongside the official canon, we can discover motifs that took place only within the walls of individual schools or classrooms. But their impact and significance go far beyond the educational values and compulsory objectives of the time.

The paper aims are the following: a) to show living or transforming traditions which, in a hidden form, were able to strengthen an independent national consciousness alongside the obligatory Marxist-Leninist worldview; b) to give several examples about the democrat education and functioning of democratic student self-government; c) to compare of narratives and official canon of pedagogical history; d) to analyse the micro-historical level and underline special patterns.

School memory not only allows us to reconstruct the past but is also key to understanding what we know or believe about the past today. Among other things, they help us to understand the important context: what were the preconditions that made the “velvet revolutions” in the countries of Eastern Europe possible? The personal recollections of teachers and students help to reveal the feelings about schools that helped to define individual and collective identities. The so far unexplored documents provide evidence that, in addition to ideologically unified positions, there were significant differences of opinion among school actors. By recounting their lived experiences, the actors can open the ‘black box’ of the Hungarian school question<sup>1</sup>, and with their help, new social and cultural factors can be added to the official canon or allow it to be redefined<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 31, n. 1, 1995, pp. 353-382.

<sup>2</sup> J. Assmann, *A kulturális emlékezet. Írás, emlékezés és politikai identitás a korai magas kultúrában*, Budapest, Atlantisz Kiadó, 2013; K. Hörschmann, *The social consequences of transformation*, in M. Bradshaw, A. Stanning

The invention of tradition has contributed to the reinforcement of school identity (mythmaking)<sup>3</sup> but has also served as a hidden form of political education. Student traditions legitimised the institution and gave it prestige. The school yearbooks<sup>4</sup> and the memory of alumni associations allow us to define how we can look from the present to the past, and how we can reinterpret it or the future<sup>5</sup>.

The life history research<sup>6</sup>, the interview, is a renewed form of interpretative, qualitative research method, allowing the collector to construct and interpret the recollected social reality himself. The individual representations of teachers and students, their personal and group identities, we can reconstruct through the recollections<sup>7</sup>. It has particular importance in the states of Eastern Europe, where the transition between the pre-regime change (communist era, 1989) and the post-plural democracy is a sharp dividing line. School memory is not only a channel of the past, of the communist youth movement but also a key to understanding what we know or believe about the past today<sup>8</sup>.

The research methodology is qualitative, drawing on oral history and documentary analysis. Through a comparative analysis of documents from a secondary grammar school yearbooks, and the local press, and by comparing the opinions of teachers and former students who recall the events<sup>9</sup>, this case study reconstructs a student tradition that had (and still has) a significant impact on the development of young people's political and civic knowledge. The source material is relatively rich, which is because the school's administration has paid particular attention to research into school history for many years. There has been a remarkable amount of work on the history of the school's founding, its teachers, the impact of the First and Second World Wars and, more recently, the communist period.

The work on the student day was facilitated by the intellectual fatherhood of the school's former headmaster, who recalled in several interviews the script for the Student Day. The author's personal views are influenced by the fact that he himself was once a student at this secondary school. Thus, she herself was a witness and participant in the events of the former student days. Her own memories are inevitably part of the interpretation of the events, as she herself is one of the "invisible remembers".

(eds.), *East Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Harlow, Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2004, pp. 219-246.

<sup>3</sup> R. Sani, *The Invention of Tradition in the Minor Universities of United Italy: The Case of the Thirteenth-Century Origins of the Studium Maceratense*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. VII, n. 1, 2012, pp. 485-504.

<sup>4</sup> P. Dávila, L. M. Naya, J. Miguelena, *Yearbooks as a source in researching school practices in private religious schools*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XV, n. 2, 2020, pp. 219-240.

<sup>5</sup> É. Szabolcs, Deduktív (analitikus) jellegű kutatások, in I. Falus (ed.), *Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe*, Budapest, Műszaki Könyvkiadó, 2001, pp. 106-121.

<sup>6</sup> F. Schütze, *Biographieforschung und narratives Interview*, «Neue Praxis», n. 13, 1983, pp. 283-294.

<sup>7</sup> U. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> J. Mason, *Kvalitativ kutatás*, Budapest, Jászöveg Műhely, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Teacher's interviews (over 70-80 years) were recorded between 2014 and 2016. The interview with the former school headmaster was made in 2021 and 2022 in Cegléd (Hungary).

## 2. *Education and propaganda (historical context)*

The Soviet influence (Sovietisation) determined the history of Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War. The state of Hungary was identified with the Soviet communist model. It was established as a monolith, one-party regime with the leadership of the communists. In contrast to other Eastern European countries, Hungarian political terminology labelled this period as “socialism”. After the World War II, the Hungarian history had three sub-periods. Officially, we had a transitional period between 1944 and 1949, the establishment of the communist dictatorship between 1949 and 1956 (direct representation of Stalinism), and the third period was the Kádár era between 1956 and 1988-1989. The following year was a turning point, as, after the change of regime, a pluralistic democracy began<sup>10</sup>.

From 1945 to 1948, the multiparty system may have been in place for a short period. Already then, the abolition of the bourgeois and then the social-democratic parties had started. After 1945 the aristocrats, factory owners (who were alive and not emigrated), bourgeois intellectuals and wealthy peasants were relocated. Their places were taken by the young people of worker and peasant families. The aim was to create a new elite.

János Kádár, the head secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Party, began new politics in the 1960s and the system functioned as a soft dictatorship, later named “goulash communism” or “fridge-socialism”. During this period, the people had a better standard of living. The party-state achieved the elimination of poverty and income equality. Kádár made a compromise with the elite. His famous motto was: «Those who are not against us, are with us».

The Russian language became compulsory at all levels of education in 1949. The Russian teaching focused obviously on the political education of citizens. The goal of teachers was to cultivate a new type of people: They had to build a Soviet political system that represents «the future of all humankind, and the new and true human morality»<sup>11</sup>. According to the educational policy guidelines of Rákosi regime, it was necessary to enforce the Marxist and Leninist worldview in the curriculum and in the work of educators... «to get over the reactionary and idealistic attitudes and to fight against nationalism and cosmopolitanism»<sup>12</sup>. The Russian language played a mediating role in the unification of the “socialist camp”, it connected the Soviet Union with its “friendly socialist countries”.

The party has taken great care to educate young people about the worldview. It had two organisations: the Hungarian Pioneers' Association, based on the model of the Soviet pioneer movement, was a grouping of primary school pupils. The organisation for the over-14s was the Association of Working Youth, which was transformed after the 1956 revolution and continued to exist under the name of the Hungarian Young Communist League. Under socialism, many schoolchildren were members of this pioneering

<sup>10</sup> M. Bihari, *A szocialista állam*, «Rubicon», n. 8, 1996, pp. 4-5; I. Romsics, *A Short Story of Hungary*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> G. Ortutay, *Művelődés és politika*, Budapest, Hungária Könyvkiadó, 1949, pp. 291-292.

<sup>12</sup> S. Nagy, L. Horváth, *Nevelélmélet*, Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1976, pp. 88-89.

organisation (80%), in which communist ideological education played a decisive role. But it also aimed at sports and public education (drama festivals, theatre visits, camps), as well as technical education. Many motifs from the scout movement were used (patrols, flocks, troops, uniforms, camps, trials, etc.). However the pioneer movement's main task was to spread communist ideology. Lower school children were called little drummers. The pioneer movement aimed to educate its members to love and loyalty to the Fatherland and the Party, to proletarian internationalism. This aim was expressed mainly in the slogans of school celebrations, in the speeches and in the content of literary works and poems. Their slogan was: Forward! The pioneering movement also included military education in the programmes of Defence Days. It is important to underline that teachers were also required to function as pioneer leaders. The movement involved most primary school pupils, but this did not mean an exclusive ideological commitment. The movement took into account the age characteristics of students and their need for romanticism. The children valued leisure activities such as games and sports, and even religious education, which was not much talked about in public<sup>13</sup>.

The Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ)<sup>14</sup> was founded in 1957, following the break of the Hungarian Revolution 1956. It claimed to represent all the country's youth and to educate young people politically. The Young Communist League was the most important source of new members for the communist party. Its organizational framework paralleled that of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and included a congress, central committee, secretariat, and regional and local committees. It worked as a grassroots organisation. Its membership was open to youth from the ages of fourteen to twenty-six years. From the 1960s the mission of the organisation was to mobilise youth and integrate the new generations into society. Actions focused on providing a sense of community and an experience of activity. In the 1960s, the KISZ organised building camps for draining work. The young people worked in forestry and agriculture. On Saturdays, on so-called Communist Saturdays, schoolchildren helped with harvesting work. Spectacular competitions and games provided a sense of community togetherness. A prominent one was the competition «Who knows more about the Soviet Union»? The League was both a "voluntary", i.e., state-organised mass organisation and a training ground for the formation of a leadership. For the cadres, it functioned as a pre-school of the party. In the school, university and regional organisations it worked as a competitive platform for the functionaries.

In the 1980s, the League had about 800,000 members. Membership was common among students (96% at universities, 75% in high schools) but was lower among young people already working (31%). The high membership of the organisation is also justified by the fact that it was compulsory for university admission. (Only in exceptional cases was KISZ membership renounced.) The Hungarian Young Communist League organised a lot of cultural and sports activities for the young people<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> I. Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 363.

<sup>14</sup> KISZ is *Kommunista Ifjúsági Szervezet* in Hungarian language.

<sup>15</sup> *Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség (KISZ)*, «Magyar Haza», 20.02.2012, <https://magyarhaza.>

The Marxist-Leninist propaganda fundamentally determined the whole of cultural life, but the intellectuals (teachers) were searching for their own identity. Behind the scenes, many opportunities opened up to express their own convictions in the classroom. The teachers and former students (many of whom later became teachers) recalled the exciting and romantic events, camps and competitions offered by the youth movement. Even the former party members did not mention the importance of ideological education in their remembrances, but it is important to know that the constant presence of classroom decorations, coats of arms, flags and slogans had an involuntary influence on the young people. Every student of the communist era remembers the famous Leninist sentence that could be read in every Russian classroom: «To learn, to learn, to learn».

In the context of these changes, it is worth asking the following questions: How could teachers convey traditional and democratic values alongside official propaganda? What added pedagogical values could the youth movement transmit? How could teachers avoid the official propaganda?

### 3. *School rituals during the dictatorship*

The communist turn after 1945 only partially transformed the traditions. It added a significant political education element to youth life, with new celebrations and movement elements (e.g. Revolutionary Youth Days)<sup>16</sup>.

Rituals in class are recurring measures for organising teaching. As a rule, these rituals are determined and observed together by the teacher and the class. The repetitive aspect of rituals serves to structure the school routine and support established rules. Rituals structure the lessons and provide the pupils with security, orientation, and support. They positively affect the class community and can also strengthen the individual of children. In school pedagogy, the advantages and disadvantages of rituals are the subjects of debate, alongside the definitional diversity of rituals<sup>17</sup>. Meier emphasises among other things:

«Rituals are recurring, designed actions that take place in a familiar form and sequence of components. In many situations, our everyday life is characterised by actions that come close to rituals, even if they do not bear the distinctive character that is expected of rituals». In the spirit of this direction of definition, Meier continues: «Ritual lives from reality, repeatability, and forms of participation. It must be visible, audible, and experienceable, in other words, it must also be sensual. It needs special arrangements or even its own spaces (school chapel)»<sup>18</sup>.

In many cases, symbols, and procedures reminiscent of ecclesiastical practices were adopted. Rituals were created as a substitute for religion in a particular way in communist

[wordpress.com/2012/02/20/magyar-kommunista-ifjusagi-szovetseg-kisz/](https://wordpress.com/2012/02/20/magyar-kommunista-ifjusagi-szovetseg-kisz/) (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>16</sup> I. Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, cit., p. 364.

<sup>17</sup> E. Rauch, *Rituale in der Schulpädagogik? Ein Diskurs*, München/Ravensburg, Grin, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> R. Meier, *Rituale rund um den Körper*, «Grundschule», vol. XXVI, n. 5, 1993, pp. 28-30.

dictatorships. The celebrations were intended to convey the collective desire to the party, and solidarity with the government and its ideology. Even for children, criticism was not welcome. In dictatorships the rituals aimed to manipulate. This also applied to school education. Rituals were above all a means of covering up the dominant situation and educating people to be uncritical<sup>19</sup>.

Despite the dictatorship, schools retained many rituals and traditions closely linked to school life. On the one hand, they ensured the continuation of school traditions, and, on the other hand, they were closely linked to the framework of school life, providing a sense of permanence.

The schools regularly held the closing and opening ceremonies of the school year in Hungary. It also preserved one of the special and unique school celebrations: the farewell procession and serenade of twelfth-grade students (with a carry-on bag with a shoulder strap). On the last day, the graduates will march singing and ceremony through the school building, which is decorated with flowers by the lower classes. The bag on their shoulders symbolises the start of their journey to a new life. The scones, wine and coins in their bags are a symbolic help for them. During the farewell, the students sing *De Brevitate Vitae* (*Gaudeamus Igitur*).

Regarding the days of historical remembrance, the Arad Martyrs (Hungarian generals executed in 1849) were commemorated as always. Mostly, the school's name-giver was celebrated in the form of a competition or a wreath-laying ceremony. There was a long tradition of choir singing throughout the life of the school. Regular competitions for singing classes were organised from the early 1930s. The initiators were Zoltán Kodály and Lajos Bárdos the famous musicians. The secondary grammar schools followed this tradition today too. School life had and has always included Student Day<sup>20</sup>, class and staff excursions, and class and staff parties.

Many of the feasts have been heavily transformed by the revolutionary ideology of Marxism-Leninism. The communists gave special importance to the Revolutionary Youth Days. There is the Celebration of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution on 15 March, the Day of the Communist Revolution in 1919 on 21 March, and Celebrations of the liberation of the country on 4 April 1945. The celebration of the day of the Great October Socialist Revolution on 7 November was not part of the earlier tradition and thus served an explicitly ideological purpose. In all the countries of the Soviet bloc, the use of the Soviet flag and the organisation of celebrations of the October Revolution were compulsory at workplaces, schools, and towns. After the dogmatic period of the 1950s, the celebrations gradually lost their direct political character, and literature and the arts were given space and opportunities to perform the events in a more direct and enjoyable way<sup>21</sup>. It depended on the ingenuity, education, and ideological commitment of the

<sup>19</sup> C. Mohnhoff, *Rituale in der Grundschule. Eine ethnographische Fallstudie in einer jahrgangsübergreifenden Eingangsklasse*, Kassel, Universität Kassel – Zentrum für Lehrerbildung, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> This event, so-called "Reversed Day" (in Hungarian translation) was organised on 1<sup>st</sup> April (on Fool's Day). Although this day provides an opportunity for jokes, it is essentially a day when students take full control of the school in an organised way. It is a day of student self-management.

<sup>21</sup> B. Vincze, *Tánári életutak a 20. század második felében*, Budapest, Eötvös Kiadó, 2018, pp. 99-100. Ms.



organisers of the celebrations to put together high-quality and meaningful programmes. The revolutionary heroes became historical figures with human faces during school celebrations<sup>22</sup>.

Teachers could have responsibility for the future generation. They could transmit traditional cultural values without the communist ideology of the party. How was it possible? Through a conscious selection of literary works, poetry, theatre visits and exhibitions, they were able to shape tastes and transmit values by skillfully but intentionally avoiding the obligatory canon. The teachers were able to form the new generation for the new beginning. Teachers taught their students to read between the lines, understand metaphors and encourage critical thinking<sup>23</sup>. Although the professionalisation of teachers was broken after the Second World War in Hungary, we can see that professional identity formation is a dynamic process, different identities are integrated during the years of dictatorship and both the individual and the context are key factors in this process<sup>24</sup>.

Most teachers considered this, informal but very important form of education important in protecting their identity, based on previous teacher models. We can share the idea of Welmond, who presents:

«Teacher identity as dynamic and contested, shaped by, and constructed within potentially contradictory interests and ideologies, competing conceptions of rights and responsibilities of teachers, and differing ways of understanding success or effectiveness». In this sense, we can talk about certain “cultural schemas”: [...] «culturally specific, historically grounded, competing perspectives of teacher identity that are coherent and shared by certain communities of teachers»<sup>25</sup>.

Limited freedom in cultural life began in the sixties in Hungary. The controlled culture flourished in special ways. The political regime divided the cultural works into three categories, and the initials of the words were used to talk about the 3Ts (supported, tolerated, forbidden)<sup>26</sup>.

In the first category were the works of art that were supported, that is, works of art that represented the spirit of the party, the socialist realism. In the second category were the tolerated works, which were non-Marxist but not openly polemical. The forbidden works were those that were openly anti-systemic, and anti-Marxist. Culture was the medium

Mészáros recalled with pride how, as a literature teacher, she was able to incorporate authors and themes from outside the canon in a creative and taste-forming way in the organisation of school celebrations and communist youth events (e.g., the performance of works by Transylvanian poets, the Holocaust as a theme from the 1960s and 1970s).

<sup>22</sup> L. Somogyvári, *Lenin as a Child. Visual Propaganda and Pedagogy*, «Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia», XLII, 2019, pp. 29-42.

<sup>23</sup> I. Szabó, *A pártállam gyermekei. Tanulmányok a magyar politikai szocializációról*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> D. Beijard, P.C. Meijer, N. Verloop, *Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity*, «Teaching and Teacher Education», vol. XX, n. 2, 2004, pp. 107-128.

<sup>25</sup> M. Welmond, M. *Globalization viewed from the periphery: The dynamics of teacher identity in the Republic of Benin*, «Comparative Education Review», vol. XLVI, n. 1, 2002, pp. 37-65 (quotes taken from pp. 42-43).

<sup>26</sup> The Ts are *támogatott* (supported), *tűrt* (tolerated) and *tiltott* (forbidden) in the Hungarian language.

of protest, of critique, of enlightenment, of education (cabaret, alternative theatre, dance house movement)<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. *Student Day as the hidden form of exercising democracy under the communist dictatorship*

Education was highly ideologically politicised during the communist period in Hungary. The education of young people was also in the hands of the youth movement, and most school celebrations and rituals had to include the expected ideological content (pictures of Lenin, pictures of labour movement heroes, slogans, quotations, and flags). Reminiscences and practice show that behind the scenes it was possible to transmit non-ideological values. I would like to show an example that for many years has been a good example of how to prepare students for democracy in a hidden way. The local form of the student-teacher election can be seen as essentially a multi-party democratic election.

Dr. György Kürti was the initiator of the Student Day. He proposed to organise a special, so-called “Reserved Day” on which students lead the school. Dr. Kürti was a young teacher and studied as an excellent student in earlier years in the Kossuth Secondary Grammar School. He knew well the school traditions and teachers because his parents worked at school too.

The inhabitants of the city are immensely proud of this secondary grammar school. In 1899, the citizens of Cegléd founded the eighth-grade Gymnasium with their local resources. The two-storey Art Nouveau building, built according to the school type of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the time, was completed in 1903. It was the most modern two-storey house in a small rural town. The school's equipment included electric lighting and bell, flush toilets, a gym, and gymnastic equipment. The school was attended mainly by the children of the wealthy middle classes, who found the modern but demanding school a cultural challenge. Since 1920, the gymnasium still bears the name of Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the 1848-1849 revolution and freedom fights<sup>28</sup>.

Kürti worked from 1973 to 1996 as vice director and as director from 1996 to 2011 at school<sup>29</sup>. He began to research school history<sup>30</sup>. Among them, he is the founder of the Society for Old Students<sup>31</sup>.

A lot of schools have traditional student leadership on 1 April on Fools' Day. The form of School Day in Cegléd is a complex form of self-government and democratic voting process, which was a good example of civic education. Based on György Kürti's

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>28</sup> S. Göz Sándor, *A ceglédi Kossuth Gimnázium építése és működése az alapítástól 1904-ig*, Cegléd, Apáti Nyomda, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> E. Volter, *120 év – 120 diák – Dr. Kürti György, Ceglédi Panoráma*, 2019, <https://ceglédipanorama.hu/2019-09-19/120-ev-120-diak-dr-kurti-gyorgy/> (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.cklg.hu/?t=centenariumi\\_fuzetek](http://www.cklg.hu/?t=centenariumi_fuzetek) (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.oregdiak.cklg.hu/> (last access: 25.03.2023).

idea, together with some KISZ members, they worked out the scenario of the Student Day, which was later documented. After the first successes, student day became a permanent tradition and is organised every year. Students form counties instead of parties and hold campaign events with their supporters. Instead of using the word party, they have chosen county because in the party-state it would have been conspicuous that a school was functioning as a multi-party democracy. The election and the ritual of the Student Day are ruled by the Constitution<sup>32</sup>. The constitution regulates the elections, the pre-election, the campaign, the election of the school director, the functioning of the parliament, the functions, the duties of the constitutional court, the awards, and the order of inauguration. The constitution also lays down precise conditions for student elections and self-government:

§ 2 (1) The leading force of the Reversed Day is the community of students. Preferably, all lessons are taught by student teachers. If 80% of the lessons are not taught by student teachers, the Reverse Day shall not take place.

(2) The student teachers must, at least two days before the Reverse Day, agree with the teacher who will be holding the lesson the lesson. In classes where there is no student teacher, a regular class will be held<sup>33</sup>.

It is noteworthy that the constitution also defines the duties of students.

§ 17 every citizen must: participate in the lessons; respect the teacher, obey him/her, fulfil his/her wishes; keep the laws enacted by the Parliament and the Board of Governors; behave according to the generally accepted standards of social and ethical norms; and promote the success of the Day by his/her behaviour; to refrain from counter-campaigning<sup>34</sup>.

The students choose a name, a flag, badges, and a programme for their victory. The election is held in two rounds. In round 1, votes are counted for the counties. In round 2, voting takes place after a 15-minute show by the three student director candidates with the most votes. Voting will take place after the speech of the three candidates. All students and staff of the school may vote. Each voter may cast only one vote on a stamped ballot card. Voting is supervised by designated poll workers at the ballot boxes. The person with the most votes became the student leader. The second and third runners-up will be awarded the title of Deputy Director. In the event of a tie for first place, the vote shall be repeated on the next school day without any information on the result being published. During this period, there shall be a complete campaign silence shall be in force<sup>35</sup>.

The director is inaugurated at a school event, where he formally receives the keys to the school, hands out the ranks of his ministers, swears the school oath and takes responsibility for the day's events. Since 1974, the throne chair and treasure chest

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.cklg.hu/html\\_oldalak/tiny\\_files/pdf/a\\_cegledi\\_kossuth\\_lajos\\_gimnazium\\_forditott\\_napjanak\\_tarsadalmi\\_rendje\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cklg.hu/html_oldalak/tiny_files/pdf/a_cegledi_kossuth_lajos_gimnazium_forditott_napjanak_tarsadalmi_rendje_2013.pdf) (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

symbolized the regularity of the event, and they are still in use on each occasion<sup>36</sup>. The Student Day has retained its popularity in today's pluralist democracy. It has evolved a lot in terms of the delivery of speeches and campaigns. Today, candidates are all preparing video campaigns. The changes have prompted new and old students to organise an exhibition of relics of old students' days<sup>37</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, if we return to the original questions, we can conclude that most teachers were able to transmit traditional and democratic values alongside official propaganda. They found ways and contents to transmit messages that they considered important beyond ideology. Behind the classroom doors or even on joint excursions, there was the opportunity to shape students' attitudes and develop critical thinking. The student day is a good example of this, as evidenced by the fact that in many years no one has complained that the school violates the obligatory Marxist-Leninist ethos.

The Student Day presented in this study, which was essentially a grassroots initiative from the youth movement, highlighted the fact that informal education (despite its binding ideological boundaries) could take independent initiatives. The results show (the enduring success of Student Day, unchanged) that the pedagogical added value depended on the willingness and ability of teachers to transform and develop their pedagogical reasoning and practice. The teachers were able to reinterpret their own roles, acting as supporters and mentors, giving space to the students' activity.

The educators had to learn how they could avoid the propaganda. This learning process depended on personal skills, willingness, and courage. Presumably, committed party members communicated differently and expressed their relationship to reality. It is also not uninteresting to consider the phenomenon that current remembers are reluctant to talk about their past in the movement. Many do not mention that they were party members or leaders in the youth movement<sup>38</sup>.

Although reform pedagogy schools use similar models of student self-government, they cannot be considered direct models. The recallers instinctively create the scenario of the student day from their own ideas and suggestions. In this case, we are dealing with a lasting innovation that reformed student life, which in its nature is befitting the reform pedagogical movement. The innovators belong to the 'unknown heroes' of pedagogy<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Fordított nap a Ceglédi Kossuth Lajos Gimnáziumban, Ceglédi Városi Televízió, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh3zXj3aL3k> (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>37</sup> Fordított napi kiállítás a Ceglédi Kossuth Lajos Gimnáziumban, Ceglédi Városi Televízió, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brhl1wRQEY4> (last access: 25.03.2023).

<sup>38</sup> B. Vincze, *Tanári életutak a 20. század második felében*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>39</sup> I. Hansen-Schaberg, B. Schönicg, *Reformpädagogik. Geschichte und Rezeption*, Hohengehren, Schneider Verlag, 2007, pp. 1-13.

Regarding teacher professionalization, we can say that the changes in totalitarian or semi-totalitarian states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century usually led to the loss of the monopoly of professional (educational) institutions and teacher training<sup>40</sup>. Although the process of professionalization of teachers was interrupted by the socialist turn after 1945 in Hungary, the profession of secondary school teacher remained a possibility for social advancement<sup>41</sup>.

We can assume that teachers sought to compensate for the feeling of de-professionalization in their teaching activities. To preserve their identity, they felt it necessary to find affirmations that would strengthen their credibility.

In addition to the traditional, knowledge-conveying teacher image, a child-centred helping and supporting role has emerged and strengthened. Despite or in addition to the low esteem of teachers, they learned to be subordinate to the system as a coping life strategy and to use the superior position in their work (as knowledge mediators/educators) in a positive sense.

<sup>40</sup> K.H. Jarausch, *Higher Education and Social Change: Some Comparative Perspectives*, in K. Jarausch (ed.), *The Transformation of Higher Learning, 1860-1930. Expansion, Diversification, Social Opening and Professionalization in England, Germany, Russia and The United States*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1983, pp. 9-36; E. Freidson, *Professionalism. The Third Logic*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> M. Fónai, Á.R. Dusa, *A tanárok presztízsének és társadalmi státuszának változásai a kilencvenes és kétezres években*, «Iskolakultúra», vol. XVII, n. 6, 2014, pp. 41-49.









# **The School and Its Many Pasts**

## **IV: Individual Memories of School**

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani







# School Life and Teachers' Diaries. Echoes of the Gentile Reform in the *Archivio Didattico Lombardo Radice* Diaries: Educational Theories and Educational Practice

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## 1. *On the sources: a methodology premise*

The primary sources for this enquiry are the teachers' diaries contained in the *Archivio Didattico Lombardo Radice* at MuSEd<sup>1</sup> whose educational history research potential has already been amply documented by a large body of work<sup>2</sup>. Its objective is to enquire into certain aspects of the implementation of the 1923 Gentile Reform in rural primary schools. More specifically I have attempted to make use of teachers' diaries written from 1924 to 1936 in order to identify not only some of the educational practices adopted, but also critical issues and considerations raised by the teachers who were to apply these to the real school setting, in an attempt to examine the meeting points between educational theories, real school practice and those involved in teaching. The intention was thus not to examine a single, however small, source of information on the relationship between pedagogy theories and their application, highlighting the role of educational experience as a space in which these theories were thought out and honed, but also to stress the wealth of information provided by micro-history based, as in this case, on the use of individual diaries capable of offering the previously unseen insights sometimes missed by macro-history. The teachers' diaries are thus sources of the more innovative and revolutionary *School Memories* which, in the wake of the Annales school revolution,

<sup>1</sup> The acronym stands for *Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione Mauro Laeng*, held at Roma Tre University's Department of Educational Sciences. Set up in 1874 to create a place of support for classroom teaching, it is now a museum which collects and catalogues heterogeneous sources on the history of schooling and the history of education *tout court*, as well as studying and disseminating its research. See F. Borruso, *A Museum of Schools in the Capital Rome (1874-1938)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. II, n. 1, 2007, pp. 327-349; also, F. Borruso, L. Cantatore, C. Covato, *Il Museo della Scuola e dell'Educazione «Mauro Laeng»: storia, identità e percorsi archivistici*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa. Storia, memoria e patrimonio*, Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 130-137.

<sup>2</sup> J. Meda, D. Montino, R. Sani (edd.), *School exercise books. A Complex Source for a History of the Approach to Schooling and Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Macerata, Polistampa, 2010; D. Julia, *Riflessioni sulla recente storiografia dell'educazione in Europa: per una storia comparata delle culture scolastiche*, «Annali di Storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», n. 3, 1996, pp. 119-147.

sought to reconstruct traces of that ambitious ‘total’ or ‘fully-fledged history’ capable of shining the spotlight on people, themes and issues which had long been neglected and ignored<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, whilst these are inaccessible sources, both as teachers’ diaries and as autobiographical documents, it is essential to bear the subjectivity of individual memory in making sense of them<sup>4</sup>, given an institutional context capable of influencing individual accounts and limiting their authenticity – teachers’ diaries were, in fact, often subject to supervision by those above them in the school hierarchy. The diaries are, in any case, an important source for a whole series of reasons: because they were written by people with first-hand experience of the educational relationship, of everyday school life, and because they provide a multiplicity of information on the real educational context, the people involved in the educational relationship (teachers and pupils) and the institutional working mechanisms<sup>5</sup>.

The diaries studied here are part of *Archivio Didattico Lombardo Radice*, made up of 159 primary school exercise book collections also containing illustrations, photographs and childrens’ drawings from schools in Canton Ticino, Portomaggiore (Emilia), Montesca (Umbria) and Acitrezza (Sicily) – some of the few schools left to the Lombardo Radice archive as a result of his opposition to the regime<sup>6</sup> – dating to 1925 to 1937. The archive also contains 33 diaries written by teachers and head teachers containing school curricula, registers and a number of analytical reports on pupils, mostly in accordance with institutional obligations<sup>7</sup>. It is a veritable treasure trove of information on Italian schooling in these years, as Lombardo Radice himself called it in *Athena fanciulla*, and was initially kept at his Rome home and then at the *Museo Pedagogico* which he himself managed from 1936 to 1938, the year of his death<sup>8</sup>. School exercise books and teachers’ diaries which Lombardo Radice considered to be of great value in documenting the work done by *his* teachers, that is the followers of the *scuola serena* (serene school), which he himself had theorised and pushed for and to assess the outcomes of the Gentile Reform which he had had a hand in, drawing up the new primary school curricula at the invitation of then minister Giovanni Gentile<sup>9</sup>. They were outcomes that he wanted to enquire into

<sup>3</sup> See P. Burke *La rivoluzione annalistica. La scuola delle Annales (1929-1989)*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1992; F. Braudel, *Una lezione di storia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> See P. Lejeune, *Il patto autobiografico*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> On the importance of narrative pedagogy, see C. Covato (ed.), *Metamorfosi dell'identità. Per una storia delle pedagogie narrate*, Milano, Guerini scientifica, 2006. Once again on the historical importance of atypical sources in the micro-history perspective, see C. Ginzburg, *Rapporti di forza. Storia, retorica, prova*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> See G. Cives, *Attivismo e antifascismo in Giuseppe Lombardo Radice*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1983, pp. 97 ff.

<sup>7</sup> An exception is the diary of Rina Nigrisoli, a teacher who narrates a *scuola serena* experiment in Portomaggiore (Ferrara) from 1920 to 1924, given to the philosopher together with the children’s exercise books. This was a private diary written by Nigrisoli to document her teaching experiment. It was published in 2011. R. Nigrisoli, *La mia scuola*, edited and with an introduction by F. Borruso, Milano, Unicopli, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> See L. Cantatore, *Il MuSEd di Roma Tre fra passato e presente. Con inediti di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice e Mauro Laeng*, in A. Barausse et alii (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul patrimonio storico-educativo*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, pp. 247-269.

<sup>9</sup> A. Gaudio, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, il Mezzogiorno e la lotta contro l'analfabetismo*, «Pedagogia e Vita»,



precisely in school practice terms, which he saw as determinant in their ability to give him the non-abstract or ritualised solution-oriented “educational critique” he was looking for, based on concrete educational relationships and a critical rethinking of his educational action<sup>10</sup>. From this standpoint, educational action was to be based on individual experience, focusing on the experience of pupils, given the breadth of personalities that teachers came into contact with<sup>11</sup>, in the context of an educational relationship in which the teacher’s role was, however, pre-eminent all the same: «the human personality is, by definition, always pervasive and it would be strange to expect those who educate to disappear under the pretext of respect for pupil freedom»<sup>12</sup>. After *Lezioni di didattica* (1913) Lombardo Radice developed an even more complex conception of educational action which he no longer saw as simply to be passed down by teachers and internalised by pupils – «souls are not to be murdered!» he wrote in an activist pamphlet dating to 1913<sup>13</sup> – but rather with pupils taking an active and important part in identifying new issues and potential solutions. This notion was a world away from Gentile’s idealistic conception of the educational act as involving pupils’ presumed spiritual identification with their teachers, a stance which moved Lombardo Radice closer to the active learning method<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Primary school curricula in the 1923 reform

In the context of a school reform as essentially selective and elitist as Gentile’s, in which the central focus was the training of the school’s principal class within a markedly philosophical and historicist classical high school and involving a return to the great classics of humanist culture, Lombardo Radice’s «ultra-liberal»<sup>15</sup> curricula<sup>16</sup> stood out

n. 4, 2004, pp.62-74; M. D’Alessio, *A scuola fra casa e patria. Dialecto e cultura regionale nei libri di testo durante il fascismo*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> G. Lombardo-Radice, *Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, edited and with an introduction by L. Cantatore, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2022, pp. 113-141. See also G. Cives, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice: didattica e pedagogia della collaborazione*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1970.

<sup>11</sup> On the philosopher’s thinking, see G. Chiosso, *L’educazione nazionale da Giolitti al primo dopoguerra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1983; G.M. Bertin, *Pedagogia italiana del Novecento. Autori e prospettive: Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, Mario Casotti, Lamberto Borghi, Riccardo Bauer*, Milano, Mursia, 1989, pp. 13-46; I. Picco, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1961; E. Scaglia, *Una pedagogia dell’ascesa. Giuseppe Lombardo Radice e il suo tempo*, Roma, Studium, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *I piccoli “Fabre” di Portomaggiore. L’esperimento didattico di Rina Nigrisoli dal 1919 al 1925*, «L’Educazione Nazionale», n. 13, 1925, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *Come si uccidono le anime*, edited by L. Cantatore, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2020, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Giorgio Bini argues that calling Lombardo Radice an active learning pioneer is an overstatement because he did not share some of the movement’s founding principles, such as the psychological basis of teaching, openness to pedagogical science and democracy as the terrain on which to take on the school-society relationship. See G. Bini, *La pedagogia attivistica in Italia*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1971, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L’istruzione nell’Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Of the many books written about Lombardo Radice’s life and thought, see: L. Borghi, *Maestri e problemi*

for their ambition to imbue primary schooling with the “new” *scuola serena* spirit which he himself had theorised, as well as being one of the most active popularisers of school in public opinion. Lombardo Radice repeatedly criticised the school of his day, accusing it of dogmatism, superficiality, conformism, of being too distant from real life, «Jesuitic» in the sense that it educated pupils to be passive<sup>17</sup>, and his idea of *scuola serena* – defined by some as an attempt at an Active Learning idealist rereading<sup>18</sup> – was designed to transform this, from the starting point of a focus on teaching<sup>19</sup>, on individualism in educational action, on spontaneity and self-expression in children’s inner worlds as something positive worthy of protection, on the importance of learner experience, on the newly central importance of the school-life relationship.

The importance attached to the arts in the new primary school curriculum – viewed as indispensable in the development of both imagination and reasoning – was an innovative element, although it had already been adopted in a great many «new schools» in Europe and the United States. Singing in choirs, common practice in schools since the early years of primary school, gave way to music theory from nine years onwards. Reciting was still present but no longer as an exercise in rote learning. It was now to be a vehicle for the expression of children’s emotions. Drawing – in which any interference by the teacher was considered ill advised on the grounds that it destroyed children’s artistic and creative instincts «which were born of the needs of the soul»<sup>20</sup> – was viewed as an important way of developing their observation skills and spontaneity of expression and fostering an understanding of art. Teachers were advised to pair up drawing with Italian essay writing, turning the latter into an «illustrated handwritten composition» to be undertaken on an at least weekly basis. Existing rhetorical school composition styles were replaced with writing exercises founded on direct observation of the real world and teachers were advised to set pupils free composition tasks to leave room for their creative imaginations. Pre-set essay outlines were always to focus on close observation of a context or literary text analysis. Once again dictation, one of the most frequent exercises in late 19<sup>th</sup> century primary schools<sup>21</sup>, was to be replaced with «diaries of school life» designed to give children’s experiential lives free rein, without adult interference, and provide space for everyday school life experiences, both linguistic and iconographic. It was with a view to getting past the school textbooks then in use, which Lombardo Radice saw as vehicles for a knowledge «done by others» and thus already dead and buried, conflicting with the need for a living knowledge «in the making»<sup>22</sup>, that teachers were advised to read

*dell’educazione*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1987; T. Tomasi, *Idealismo e fascismo nella scuola italiana*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Lombardo Radice, *Come si uccidono le anime*, cit., p. 64 ff.

<sup>18</sup> See Bini, *La pedagogia attivistica in Italia*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> See L. Cantatore, *Una «paziente vigilanza sull’umanità in letargo». Giuseppe Lombardo Radice fra pedagogia e didattica*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *L’innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano dall’Unità al secondo dopoguerra*, Roma, Studium, 2022, pp. 227-244.

<sup>20</sup> Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica*, cit., p. 263.

<sup>21</sup> See G. Chiosso, *La vita scolastica in Italia tra l’Unità e la Riforma Gentile*, in Ascenzi, Sani (edd.), *L’innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano dall’Unità al secondo dopoguerra*, cit., p. 22-23.

<sup>22</sup> Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica*, cit., p. 130.

the great classics of the past with their pupils, people such as Virgil, Hesiod, Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Giovanni Pascoli, Alessandro Manzoni, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Giosuè Carducci<sup>23</sup>.

One of his more innovative ideas was the importance he attached to dialect, which he viewed as children's emotional mother tongue and thus the language of popular traditions, which he called «the spiritual treasure trove of every family»<sup>24</sup>, to the extent that, in areas speaking other languages the pupils' mother tongue was to be taught alongside Italian, in supplementary hours. This focus on native language was linked to literacy, understood as cutting across both high and low culture which, if severed, risks culminating in an excess of intellectualism in the former and a stifling of the latter with an absence of spiritual tension. Thus, for Lombardo Radice, dialect bridged the gap between the two, as a gateway to high culture and the national language, just as regional culture was a step in the direction of the higher patriotic ideal, with both being expressions of that ancient, stratified wisdom, which was a people's roots, its oldest culture and identity heritage.

Lombardo Radice's history curricula shone the spotlight on recent history, with a particular focus on the Risorgimento and the Great War, stressing the heroism of children's forebears to inculcate feelings of belonging and a desire to emulate them, although, for Ostenc, «this nationalism was unfortunately more a consequence of the use Lombardo Radice's curricula were put to than their real intention»<sup>25</sup>. The histories of other countries were almost entirely left out of these curricula on the grounds that the priority was to «nurture Italianness», as decreed in official pronouncements. Science subjects were of marginal importance, according to the idealistic tradition that downgraded them in favour of hygiene, law, economics and women's work, which were taught in year five. Physical education focused on team games and recreational activities and occupations that were designed to make school relevant to children's real lives. Lastly, mandatory Catholic religion classes<sup>26</sup> – a choice which was opposed by some on the left as well as the liberal right<sup>27</sup> – of use to Mussolini to seal his subsequent 1929 Lateran Pacts with the Catholic Church, were justified by Gentile as «morals in action», capable of introducing children lacking in the capacity for philosophical critical thinking to that mythical thought which is the root of human discourse and religious sentiment<sup>28</sup>.

These were educational ideals which were to be very soon forgotten, after Gentile's resignation from his ministerial post, after Mussolini had set in motion the Fascistisation of schools, distorting the reforms and turning the authoritarian schools envisaged by Gentile into authoritarian Fascist schools. It was a fascistisation process that worked on three levels, according to Charnitzky: regulating the behaviour of teachers and university

<sup>23</sup> See M. Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1981, pp. 76-77.

<sup>24</sup> Lombardo Radice, *Lezioni di didattica*, cit.; E. De Fort, *La scuola elementare dall'Unità alla caduta del fascismo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, cit., p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> G. Canestri, G. Ricuperati, *La scuola in Italia dalla legge Casati a oggi*, Torino, Loescher, 1976, p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> G. Ricuperati, *Il problema della scuola da Salvemini a Gramsci*, «Rivista Storica Italiana», n. 4, 1968, pp. 23.

<sup>28</sup> The criticism really flooded in; see L. Ambrosoli, *Libertà e religione nella riforma Gentile*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1980; L. Borghi, *Educazione e autorità nell'Italia moderna*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1951.

professors, integrating pupils into the Fascist youth organisations and giving an ideological slant to school curricula<sup>29</sup>. The primary school curricula themselves were very soon made difficult to put into practice by the rampant spread of a Fascist rhetoric that Gentile did nothing to stop and which had no disciplinary boundaries. Thus children's inner lives with all their psychological, emotional and sentimental tensions, and Lombardo Radice's enchanted and poetic world rarely came to fruition in school exercise books which were, for the most part, little more than regime propaganda tools. The reform remained, all the same, the face of Italian schooling and managerial class formation for quite some time.

### 3. *Village teachers*

However, despite the progressive erosion of school freedom under the Fascist regime, small but significant glimpses of educational innovation do come through from a reading of the teachers' diaries of these years. These are reminders of the subversive role individuals can play within even authoritarian institutions and the underground, but in any case influential, generativity of the libertarian ideology expressed in Lombardo Radice's curricula.

In the first place, what emerges from the diaries is the inspections carried out in the classrooms by headteachers, which were sanctioned by the reform both on the grounds of educational autonomy and for state spending limitation purposes. I am speaking above all of the 17 teachers' diaries collected by headteacher Bruno Lunedei from a group of rural schools in Morciano di Romagna, a small town in the Tuscan-Romagna Apennines in the 1924-27 academic years. The headteacher oversaw the implementation of the curricula, carefully reading the teachers' diaries, putting forward education suggestions and also underlining and commenting on errors. The headteacher's role was cultural guidance. This was clearly sanctioned by the law but conflicted with the sensibilities of certain teachers and is also revealing of the emergence of a more authoritarian institutional climate than had existed in the recent past. Teacher Adele Gasparri, in this case, courageously noted down in her diary an argument with her headteacher, judging it intrusive and overly critical of her work. The episode is probably evidence of the social difficulties experienced by teachers – amply confirmed by studies<sup>30</sup> – who were not always welcomed by rural communities, who found the presence of an educated woman in their midst unacceptable, or by headteachers who were reluctant to acknowledge women's intellectual independence.

<sup>29</sup> J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1994, pp. 291 ff.

<sup>30</sup> On the female teachers' story, see C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996; A. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento. Tra Narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019; S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, in S. Soldani, G. Turi (edd.), *Fare gli italiani*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1993, pp. 67-130. See my own *Maestri e maestre a Roma capitale*, in C. Covato, M.I. Venzo (edd.), *Scuola e itinerari formativi dallo Stato pontificio a Roma Capitale. L'istruzione secondaria*, Milano, Unicopli, 2010, pp. 267-285.

The first section of all the teachers' diaries describes the school context of these years, highlighting the dire state of schooling: a lack of school furniture and educational equipment; makeshift, cold and inhospitable classrooms, not only when they were flooded as a result of rain, as described by Elena Mambelli, but also in winter and autumn when the only heat available was dependent on the wood children managed to hunt down along the walk to school, as Linda Bernardi recounts. Further problems were bumpy roads to schools outside town centres exposing children – almost always without shoes as these were kept for feast days – to dangers. Truancy rates were also high with children being kept back for child labour and, where girls were concerned, as a result of the hostility shown by parents to educating them, a frequent problem, as Anita Brunelli recounted. Teachers' threats to call in parents or report them to the authorities for truancy – mentioned frequently in the diaries – seem to have had little impact on family decisions, not only because this was sometimes dictated by poverty but primarily because parents were aware of the limited propensity of the teachers to do anything to rectify the situation. Of the female teachers, only Giuseppina Tosi, with her strong sense of her own social role as «apostle for good», visited her pupils at home, like the male teachers, to encourage them to attend more regularly. Rosina Arcangeli is the only teacher to have brought in the local authorities at the beginning of the school year, successfully, only to see pupil numbers dwindle once again over the course of the year. However, few teachers succeeded in making meaningful contact with pupils' families, frequently considered neglectful of their children with complaints by teachers of limited pupil hygiene and families' reluctance to buy school books being frequent in a great many rural school diaries. The growing importance of schooling in communities does come across from the diaries, however, with end-of-school-year parties involving the whole village to teachers' sense of themselves as full-blown «village teachers» playing a supporting role in their communities. This support extended beyond the strictly educational sphere and focused primarily on the acquisition of new modern lifestyles and mindsets. In this respect the efforts of some teachers to inform families of the risks to children's health tied to habits such as giving them wine instead of water, the need to learn and follow essential hygiene rules to prevent illness and the importance of sending children of both genders to school are interesting. The diaries contain only one case of a teacher – whose curricula and request that certain local blackshirts supervise children's journeys back home after school to stop them wasting time in street games would suggest she had Fascist sympathies – who pressured parents to sign their children up to the Balilla youth groups. This was not taken up by rural communities and it is clear that financial reasons were not the only explanation for this. Let us look at an example of a story from below which gives us the chance to bring in a perhaps useful element of appraisal regarding the issue of the degree to which schools took Fascist ideology on board and, through this, the attitudes of communities themselves. A number of scholars have argued that schools resisted the appeal of Fascism<sup>31</sup>, while others have argued to the contrary, but these studies reveal the

<sup>31</sup> Ostenc, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, cit., p. 273.

picture to have been a much more composite one than was previously thought, precisely because «the personalisms and localisms of Italian society left their mark on it»<sup>32</sup>.

#### 4. *Glimpses into a teaching hovering between tradition and innovation*

There is a range of information regarding the contents of the reform to be found in the diaries held at *Archivio Didattico Lombardo Radice*.

As far as «school life diaries» are concerned we have just one case of a teacher writing one from the rural schools of Morciano di Romagna in the years 1924 to 1927, while these played a pre-eminent role within certain “new school” educational experiments documented in the archive and consisting of a conscious decision to experiment. This difference may be indicative of the innovative nature of the proposed reforms or of the limited nature of state school teachers’ preparedness regarding it.

The central importance accorded children’s linguistic output that emerges both from the attention paid to writing the diaries and to the “school diary project” was short-lived, because the progressive Fascistising of schooling, with its patriotic and propaganda contents, eroded individual freedom of thought<sup>33</sup>.

Dialect promotion is similarly not generally present in these diaries. In the rural schools of Morciano di Romagna, only two newly appointed young teachers, Ester Zinaghi and Assunta Raffaelli, out of a total of 17, equipped their pupils with dialect dictionaries, collected small class libraries and set up quiet and comfortable reading corners. These two teachers stand out from the others for the idealistic force of their commitment and they probably also benefited from some recent training. It seems likely that, for older teachers, the new reform curricula meant reworking their existing practices and all the extra work that comes along with it. One teacher, for example, asserts her desire not to scale back dictation from her classroom teaching in favour of free composition, despite the new curricula. It is an understandable reluctance if we remember that 19<sup>th</sup> century teaching methods were still in use in the 1920s, however patchily, and whilst dictation was criticised by both positivists and idealists, it was still held to be the most effective literacy method and was based on memorising grammar rules and a large number of words which were to be chanted out loud<sup>34</sup>.

As we know, the promotion of dialect was to last just a few educationally experimental years and was only put into practice in some schools because, from 1929 onwards, with the adoption of the *Testo Unico di Stato* textbooks, linguistic nationalism was to culminate

<sup>32</sup> Galfré, *Tutti a scuola*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> See M.C. Morandini, *Metodi e pratiche d'insegnamento della lettura e della scrittura in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, in Ascenzi, Sani (edd.), *L'innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano dall'unità al secondo dopoguerra*, cit., pp. 41-57.



in a struggle against everything alien to it, to local and regional variations and dialect with the struggle against illiteracy being seen as a struggle against the use of dialect<sup>35</sup>.

From Anna Tintori, on the other hand, we learn of the challenges she encountered experimenting with children's artistic dimensions in her classroom. She noted that this was by no means easy to put into practice in rural schools, in the face of overt parental opposition, with the latter seeing drawing, singing and physical education as a waste of time, especially in view of the limited number of hours pupils spent at school. Only Rina Ottaviani succeeded in bringing in drama, staging Virginia Tedeschi Treves's *Piccoli Eroi*, but drawing and singing were rarely mentioned.

Teachers seem to have had more success with free composition, and the diaries contain teacher's thinking on this, as well as on outline-based composition, after initiating certain discussions in the classroom in the days before such work was set. Lino Boschetto, who taught at a primary school on Lido di Venezia and Malamocco (a Lido village) in the 1936-37 school year, told of his success with illustrated composition, in the light of a technique honed over time and based not only on frequent conversations in class for the purposes of what he called «orientation», and which were primarily designed to accord importance to the thoughts of the students themselves, but also of an outline which was to be seen as the most generic and unlimiting possible.

Alongside an increase in writing practice focusing on observing the children's environment and experiences, the practice of reading texts we might call literary classics out loud is also worthy of mention. Almost all teachers mention it, in accordance with the reform. A further practice which comes out of the diaries is walks in the outdoors for educational purposes, observing nature, conducting geography lessons and also recreational activities. Just a few teachers also conducted outdoor drawing lessons and recreational and manual tasks promoting cooperation between pupils, class solidarity and group work. Mutual teaching is also mentioned by many teachers, less in view of large class sizes than of the fact that these contained multiple year groups of different ages. In a context of complete absence of educational instruments in this group of rural schools, one event of interest is the construction of a Montessori-inspired mobile alphabet made together with the students of the young teacher Esther Zinaghi, mentioned above, whose passion for teaching shines through.

Maths teaching, on the other hand, would seem to have focused mostly on mental calculations via speed races practised by almost all teachers and practical measurement tasks such as land measurement and counting numbers of oranges harvested. Clearly, then, maths studies were always bound up with considerations of immediate usefulness to the everyday rural context. It is, above all, from Rina Ottaviani, that we learn of her practice of reading highly patriotic and nationalist texts out loud, together with the discipline problems she encountered and her recourse to exemplary punishments, considerations which give us an insight into the advent of regime propaganda even in the very early 1920s, although the scale of this was still limited.

<sup>35</sup> See T. De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1974, pp. 34-35.



In conclusion, it would seem to be possible to argue that the insights into living communities provided by this specific source have revealed that even in the rural schools, in an admittedly hesitant and tentative way, a certain educational renewal was underway, one hovering between innovation and tradition. Despite being silenced and repressed at length, by the regime's propaganda, ideas inspired by the liberal ideals circulating in these years did emerge. They were innovative ideas and practices, however, which flowed like a karstic underground river ready to come to the surface after World War Two, having been enriched in the meantime by new ideal aspirations designed to bring a new democratic school to fruition.

# Albino Bernardini and the Representation of Italian School

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Among the authors who collaborated to build and modify the collective representation of the Italian school in the sixties and seventies, Albino Bernardini was undoubtedly one of the most important and fortunate<sup>1</sup>. The Sardinian teacher published successful school memoirs, which influenced the diffusion of a new representation of the education system, its protagonists, its problems, but also the solutions to overcome its injustices. Beyond the mere reconstruction of the author's pedagogical ideas and the inspirations that determined their elaboration, this contribution aims to deepen the main features of the scholastic representation proposed by Bernardini, with particular attention to the works *Un anno a Pietralata* [A Year in Pietralata] (1968), *Le bacchette di Lula* [The Canes of Lula] (1969), *La scuola nemica* [The Enemy School] (1973), *La supplente* [The Substitute Teacher] (1975). The spreading of Bernardini's work will then be explored, highlighting the multiple directions of its diffusion.

## 1. *The "Red" Teacher*

Research has already studied the life and pedagogical vision of Albino Bernardini<sup>2</sup>. He was born on 18 October 1917 in Siniscola, a village in the province of Nuoro. After completing elementary school, he moved to Chiavari, in Liguria, where he studied at

<sup>1</sup> On the role and use of school autobiographies as sources in historical educational research see: A. Viñao, *Las autobiografías, memorias y diarios como fuente histórico-educativa: tipología y usos*, «Sarmiento», n. 3, 1999, pp. 223-253; J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> On the life and work of Albino Bernardini see: R. Rizzi, *La pedagogia popolare in Italia (1950-1990): Albino Bernardini*, «Educazione e scuola», n. 49, 1991, pp. 100-110; G. Guzzo, *Da Lula a Pietralata: le battaglie di Albino Bernardini per il rinnovamento democratico della scuola elementare*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2007; *Albino Bernardini: i novant'anni di un Maestro. Convegno di studi (Lula, 9-10 novembre 2007)*, Bitti, Comune di Lula, 2010; A. Bernardini, *Un secolo di memorie*, Patti, Kimerik, 2011; E. Zizioli, *Introduzione*, in A. Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, Roma, Edizioni conoscenza, 2019, pp. 7-34. The "Mauro Laeng" School and Education Museum of the Roma Tre University recently acquired the archival collection of the Sardinian teacher, now being cataloged.

*Scuola d'avviamento al lavoro*, a lower secondary school. Back in Sardinia, he continued his studies at the *Istituto magistrale* of Nuoro, a school to educate future primary school teachers. He dropped out of school to support his family financially and only obtained his qualification in 1940. A few months later he was drafted into, and participated in the Second World War, serving on the French Front, in Albania, Greece and Yugoslavia. He went to war filled with the belligerent rhetoric of the fascist regime, but he returned profoundly changed, with a revulsion towards the nationalism he had believed in and which had disappointed him. In 1944 he joined the PCI, Italian communist party, becoming secretary of the Siniscola section. He studied Gramscian texts and the Soviet educator Makarenko, his «true pedagogical love»<sup>3</sup>. In 1949 he attended the PCI's school in Bologna for six months. In these years he engaged in political militancy, also organizing a series of «strikes in reverse», which was the occupation of unused private land, for which he was imprisoned for a few months. In 1953, due to conflicts with the local communist leaders, he was dismissed from the party, leaving his responsibilities in the PCI. He decided to devote himself entirely to elementary school teaching, which he had started working in after the war. In the second half of the 1940s and then in the early 1950s he taught in various villages of Sardinia, mostly in the province of Nuoro.

In 1960 he moved to Rome with his wife and family. Bernardini was assigned to the elementary school of Pietralata, a poor suburb of the capital at that time. He immediately made contact with and joined the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* (Cooperative Education Movement), although he was critical of some decisions of the team's leadership. As soon as he arrived in Rome, he went to the headquarters of the journal «Riforma della Scuola» (School Reform), starting a fruitful collaboration. The magazine was the most important journal of Italian pedagogical Marxism<sup>4</sup>, constituting a lively environment of cultural elaboration and political criticism. Among the editorial staff of the «Riforma della Scuola» he met and established relationships with the main protagonists of that successful pedagogical period, such as Dina Bertoni Jovine, Mario Alighiero Manacorda, Lucio Lombardo Radice, Ada Marchesini Gobetti, Gianni Rodari and many others.

Bernardini's first article in the «Riforma della Scuola» was published in February 1961, four months after his arrival in Rome. In his first article called *La miseria della scuola* (The Misery of School)<sup>5</sup>, he shared his first impressions of the Pietralata school where he worked and also of the initiatives he proposed in the first two months of teaching there. These are brief anticipations of what he would write about in more detail seven years later in *Un anno a Pietralata*. In the following period he intensified his collaboration, publishing dozens of articles. He also became part of the editorial staff of the «Didattica della Riforma» (Didactic for Reform), the magazine's insert for teachers, which he helped to grow. Collaboration on the «Riforma della Scuola» was for Bernardini valuable training in which he practiced writing and structured his political and didactic ideas.

<sup>3</sup> A. Bernardini, *Viaggio nella scuola sovietica*, Trapani, Celebes Editore, 1976, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> On the Italian Marxist pedagogy of the second half of the Twentieth century see C. Covato, *L'itinerario pedagogico del marxismo italiano*, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> A. Bernardini, *Miseria della scuola*, «Riforma della scuola», vol. VII, n. 2, 1961, pp. 24-25.

Not surprisingly, Bernardini spoke of his arrival in Rome and his involvement with the Marxist pedagogical group as a second birth. Without them, he wrote, referring to intellectuals close to «Riforma della Scuola», «I don't know if I would ever have become a writer»<sup>6</sup>. The publication of his first school memoirs was due to Dina Bertoni Jovine, who invited him to write a book about his educational experiences, after the publishing house *La Nuova Italia* asked her for new works to be published in the series «Educatori antichi e moderni» (Ancient and Modern Educators). The Sardinian teacher accepted the proposal and, in a few months, finished *Un anno a Pietralata*, which found immediate success. Encouraged by this, the following year he published for the same publishing house *Le bacchette di Lula*, dedicated to his previous school experience in a small Sardinian village in the early fifties.

Four years later, Bernardini published a third book, *La scuola nemica* (1973), in which he did not retrace his school experiences, but reported on children and teenagers from the Nuoro area who, in interviews with him, crudely described the dramas and injustices of compulsory state school. A last educational memoir less well known than the previous ones, was *La supplente* (1975), where he recounted one of his last school experiences in a class in Bagni di Tivoli, a small town near Rome. After a long absence due to illness, he was assigned to a class, which was taught by a substitute teacher who had set the didactic work in a directive, classist, and oppressive way. Initially Bernardini found it very difficult to deconstruct this system, because most of the children and parents seemed to accept it, while also fearing the Sardinian teacher's innovations. Over the months Bernardini managed to change the climate of the group, obtaining excellent results.

After the publication of these four school memoirs, Bernardini continued to write various essays and books. In 1975 he published, with the pedagogists Alberto Granese and Tonino Mameli of the University of Cagliari, a manual entitled *Diventare maestri* (Becoming Elementary Teachers). After a two-week stay in Russia, in 1977, he published *Viaggio nella scuola sovietica* (Journey to Soviet School), in which he described the conditions of Communist education. In these years he also intensified his collaboration with various magazines, mostly devoted to educational issues. From the 1980s he was involved in children's literature, writing numerous stories. His contribution to education was acknowledged by the attribution of an honorary degree conferred by the University of Cagliari in 2005. Bernardini died in 2015.

## 2. *The Enemy School*

In his four school memoirs published between 1968 and 1975, Bernardini, while working within different contexts (Pietralata, Bagno di Tivoli and various schools in the province of Nuoro), represents common features of a single subject: the Italian school, with its problems and its contradictions.

<sup>6</sup> Id., *Un secolo di memorie*, cit., p. 117.

A first element to consider in the memoirs of the Sardinian teacher is the “scenography”. In his realistic representations, Bernardini dwells on the poverty, filth and dilapidation of state schools. In Lula there is not a single school building, but the classrooms are distributed in various houses in the village, mostly unsuitable for teaching work. Bernardini defines his classroom as a “stable”: there was no floor, only beaten earth, no window and the little light which filtered through was from the broken glass of the door, often left open, even in winter, to improve the brightness of the classroom. However, the desks at the back were always covered in semi-darkness. The roof, made of reeds and stones, let the water and the winter cold through. Not surprisingly, after a storm, the roof was blown off and the Mayor procured a new classroom for Bernardini’s pupils. His class moved into a room below the apartment of a particularly noisy family, dealing with a disabled child. In addition to the screams, the work of the class was often interrupted by the liquid excrement that dripped from the cracks in the ceiling. The first impression of the Pietralata school is analogous: it is described as «sleazy and dirty like a prison»<sup>7</sup>. The building was insufficient to accommodate the student population, so some pupils were forced to attend school in the afternoon, to the disappointment of their parents. In Lula and Pietralata the Sardinian teacher had to make a collection among already poor families to buy school supplies.

Bernardini describes a school that seems committed to excluding those who most needed to be educated. Teachers do not help pupils in particular need, they punish and discriminate against those who have poor results, they forget the cultural disadvantages of many children who live in an object poverty. The school is pervaded by a widespread classism which, with the excuse of merit, rewards and supports rich children, while penalizing the poor ones. This is a discrimination that, in some cases, could be seen from the very disposition of the class. The substitute teacher of Bagni di Tivoli, for example, had divided the pupils into three groups: that of “criminals”, of “females”, and of «beautiful, clean and tidy children»<sup>8</sup>. In *La scuola nemica*, the various witnesses agreed in denouncing the tendency of teachers to penalize and exclude children from poor families<sup>9</sup>.

In his books, Bernardini writes of a boring school, where the teachers do nothing to arouse the interest of the pupils but base their education on the repetition of rules and formulas. They seem unable to mobilize the intelligence of the students and are hostile to the cultures they belong to. The school is represented as a «prison»<sup>10</sup>, isolated from the world, from the real life of the children and from all those experiences that could have interested them. The method used to perpetuate this system was rigorous authoritarianism, where the teachers speak and command, while the children must be

<sup>7</sup> Id., *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Id., *La supplente*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1975, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> A series of examples brought by the pupils interviewed confirms this impression. Among others, a boy from Bitti recounted that once, the Director surprised a student eating a banana during a break, scolded him saying: «You don’t even have to go to study, and now come with the banana: and then they say that there is misery... you have to go feed the pigs» Id., *La scuola nemica*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2004, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 121.

«quiet and good»<sup>11</sup>. This school model was mostly pursued through intimidation and violence, the greatest common denominator. In his books, the Sardinian teacher describes in detail the punishment and torture perpetuated in schools.

The case of Lula is emblematic. The author talks of a colleague, called “Ballena”, who adopts extreme punishment: in addition to locking up the students in dark classrooms for hours<sup>12</sup>, she organizes singular “macabre processions”: the “culprit”, punished perhaps for not having withheld his needs or for having disobeyed, was tied with his hands behind his back to a broomstick and forced to walk the streets of the town with his classmates who had to rail against him<sup>13</sup>. A primitive rite that found a sort of legitimization in its public performance. Such humiliating practices did not find opposition from peers or parents, who seemed to accept and respect such practices and punishment.

The justification of violence was consolidated and internalized in various forms. In Lula, for example, there was a singular tradition: at the beginning of the year the children made canes and gave them to the teachers who were supposed to use them on them in case they misbehaved. When, during the presentation of the canes, Bernardini confesses that he has no intention of using them, pupils were scandalized: «But if he doesn't hit us – said little Pasquale in amazement – what kind of teacher are you then?»<sup>14</sup>. In *La scuola nemica* Bernardini collects numerous testimonies of the violence still widespread in the early seventies in the schools of the provinces of Nuoro. Pupils tell of teachers who beat them with whips or with a carpet beater<sup>15</sup>, ridiculed the pupils by requiring them to parade through the classes with donkey ears<sup>16</sup>, and excluding the mothers of the poorest children from the school plays. However, these punishments generated an equally violent reaction from some pupils, who beat up the teachers, stole from them and threatened them with a knife<sup>17</sup>. Also in Bagni di Tivoli, Bernardini collects the testimonies of children who told of various punishments, including the habit of some teachers to kick, punch and «pull ears and hair»<sup>18</sup>.

### 3. *A New Teacher Icon*

Bernardini not only represents the injustices of School, but in his books he promotes a new way of teaching, indicating his experience, his results, his way of teaching and being as a new and revolutionary model. Bernardini is seen as a teacher who fights early school leaving, also taking an interest in «those who don't go to school». He seeks out children

<sup>11</sup> Id., *Le bacchette di Lula*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Bernardini, *La scuola nemica*, cit., pp. 223-224, 234-241, 304.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 295, 297.

<sup>18</sup> Bernardini, *La supplente*, cit., p. 6.

who have dropped out of education at home or in the workplace, to persuade them to go back to school. He opposes the suspension of pupils, then a widespread «educational» means, convinced that it was a «senseless» practice, a «contradiction», «a deprivation of the right to know and learn»<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, Bernardini prefers not to fail his students<sup>20</sup>, convinced that blocking their education would only have negative consequences<sup>21</sup>.

Bernardini does everything to make the school attractive: inspired by the pedagogy of activism, he overturns traditionalist and mnemonic teaching, focuses on the interests of the pupils, organizes activities related to their experiences and current events. He prefers outdoor lessons, manages trips and excursions, has naturalistic research carried out in the field, invites workers, trade unionists, mayors, and the film director Comencini to meet his pupils<sup>22</sup>. The work is set up with the brainstorming method: the class is divided into «collectives» which regulate themselves and organize the work. The problems are discussed, and the teacher asks the pupils to find solutions. He condemns those who force children to only listen, without ever letting them intervene to express opinions and interests. In short, he fights against the passive and disinterested «school for puppets»<sup>23</sup>.

He aimed to make his children «directly responsible»<sup>24</sup>. In this regard, the use of the «billboard of rules» is very significant, where not only did the pupils write down the main rules of the class that they developed autonomously, but they also had to mark the cases in which they did not respect them<sup>25</sup>; education through collaboration. Bernardini then proposes a series of group work such as reading the newspapers, drafting a class journal, conducting inquiries on current issues and creating billboards. His action is not limited to just «teaching concepts», but is conducted according to an «ideal content»<sup>26</sup>, aimed at saving students from ignorance, superstition, social degradation, and distortions due to the cultures they belong to. He is a teacher who believes in his pupils and trusts in their redemption through school: «You are good to me» he said to the pupils of Lulu as he broke their canes. «What is most striking in Bernardini – observed Elena Zizioli – was the innervation of the teaching methods of civil values, managing to give us back a model of a complete teacher: militancy not separated from continuous and constant didactic research»<sup>27</sup>.

Bernardini was convinced of the need to dialogue with families, especially the poor ones. He organizes assemblies well before the 1974 law, introduces collegial bodies<sup>28</sup>, visits parents, tries to involve them in and explain the reasons and methods of his didactics. His action is seen as an integral vocation, called to expand beyond the school

<sup>19</sup> Id., *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Bernardini spoke of failing as a «primordial scholastic taboo»: Id., *La supplente*, cit., p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Id., *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 160; Id., *Un secolo di memorie*, cit., pp. 185-187.

<sup>22</sup> Bernardini, *La supplente*, cit., pp. 94-104.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, cit., p. 141.

<sup>24</sup> Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> Id., *La supplente*, cit., pp. 90-93.

<sup>26</sup> Id., *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Zizioli, *Introduzione*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., pp. 56-62; Id., *Le bacchette di Lulu*, cit., pp. 149-161; Id., *La supplente*, cit., pp. 19-23.



walls: in the central square of Lula he is “among the people” and discusses education and school, questions the violent methods of teachers and parents, organizes an assembly on the principles of activism. He portrays himself as a “red Socrates”, a true organic intellectual who defends and spreads his ideas by immersing himself in the social context. Bernardini is also a «troublemaker»<sup>29</sup> trade unionist, who goes to complain to those who administer the school and claims adequate spaces and materials. To quote Rodari, «school commitment, social commitment, political commitment are all one for him»<sup>30</sup>.

Bernardini represents himself as an antagonistic teacher, whose behaviour generates hatred and opposition in the schools and in the realities in which he teaches. If for many colleagues the problem of school is rude pupils or parents who do not take care of their children, Bernardini's opponents are his own colleagues, the «ministerial teachers»<sup>31</sup>, mostly unmotivated, who opt for «positions of convenience or renounce», the moralistic and violent teachers. More generally, the rest of the school staff also seem to oppose Bernardini's changes and battles: janitors, lackeys and spies<sup>32</sup>, school directors who are bureaucrats with no perception of school problems<sup>33</sup>, school inspectors uninterested in teaching or school injustices, but supine to pressure policies.

The Sardinian teacher portrays himself as a «lone hero», one of the few exceptions in a school that does not work. But there is no narcissism or triumphalism or idealistic self-aggrandizement in his character description. Bernardini «doesn't want to embellish anything»<sup>34</sup>, not even himself. In his books he remembers moments of discouragement, expresses his doubts, does not hide the difficulties and various mistakes. In the early days in Pietralata, for example, he had serious difficulty maintaining order in the class, and while theorizing that he excluded violence, he said that he had sedated the children's conflicts by force, even threatening to throw a pupil «out of the window»<sup>35</sup>. Also in the other school memoirs, Bernardini describes himself as an impulsive man who sometimes loses his patience, shouts, and threatens. Among other episodes, the clash with the priest of Lula stands out, thrown out of the classroom during the hour of religion because he had started a homily against the communists<sup>36</sup>. Bernardini reflects and in some cases criticizes his pedagogical errors, with the aim of representing the difficulties and risks of educational work. Among these is the limited effectiveness of his intervention.

In his books, his commitment brings good results, but partial, and in any case always temporary. The feeling is that the «old school» prevails over the attempts of the teacher. When Bernardini left Pietralata after a year, a new teacher arrived in his class. Listless and disinterested in the fate of the pupils, he had put aside Bernardini's method, preferring authoritarian and discriminatory teaching. Some of his pupils who had made

<sup>29</sup> G. Rodari, *Prefazione*, in *Le bacchette di Lula*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 174.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*, *La supplente*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-122; Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., pp. 104-108.

<sup>34</sup> G. Rodari, *Scuola e civiltà*, in Bernardini, *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*, *Le bacchette di Lula*, cit., p. 117.

great progress are rejected, others drop out of school. All of Bernardini's results seemed cancelled. In Lula he was dismissed by the Inspector and the experience of a different school remained only a memory. *La supplente* also has a bitter ending: after the successes built with patience and work, the arrival of his students in secondary school was traumatic. The lessons were boring, traditionalist and strictly authoritarian. Domenico, one of the children he had managed to save, was rejected and decided not to complete his studies.

In short, Bernardini represents his school as an exception in an educational system that is still mostly old, hostile, and unjust. However, he was convinced that his work was not useless. In the final pages of *Un anno a Pietralata*, thinking of his former students, he wrote with optimism that he had the profound «conviction that not everything, despite the difficult life of the village in which time has immersed them, can be forgotten»<sup>37</sup>.

#### 4. *Spreading of Bernardini's Memoirs*

The ideas and «scholastic images» transmitted in the Sardinian teacher's four books had various levels of dissemination. The first is represented by editorial circulation. The diffusion of Bernardini's works was initially favoured by links with the Marxist pedagogical group which had a certain influence in Italian culture of the time. Except *La scuola nemica*, the books were then introduced and presented by Gianni Rodari, a respected writer and journalist.

However, as written by the Sardinian teacher himself, the real success of his first work and of the subsequent books came above all thanks to television and then cinematographic transposition of *Un anno a Pietralata*, which inspired Vittorio De Seta in the creation of *Diario di un maestro* [Diary of an Elementary School Teacher]<sup>38</sup>. Thanks to De Seta,

<sup>37</sup> Id., *Un anno a Pietralata*, cit., p. 174.

<sup>38</sup> On the work of De Seta and on the series inspired by Bernardini's book, see: V. De Seta, *Film per la TV: diario di un maestro. Appunti del servizio stampa n. 52*, Roma, RAI– Radiotelevisione italiana, 1972; G.P. Cresci (ed.), *Diario di un maestro in TV. Una esperienza per chi insegna oggi*, Torino, EDA, 1973; A. Rais (ed.), *Il cinema di Vittorio De Seta*, Catania, Maimone, 1995; S. Toffetti (ed.), *Il maestro impaziente*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2012; Laura, Luisa e Morando Morandini (edd.), *Il Morandini 2015: dizionario dei film e delle serie televisive*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 2014, p. 414; D. Felini, *Una proposta pedagogica sullo schermo. La scuola in due produzioni televisive di Vittorio De Seta (1970-1979)*, «Orientamenti Pedagogici», n. 2, April-May-June 2015, pp. 273-291; A. Debè, *Constructing Memory: School in Italy in the 1970s as Narrated in the TV Drama "Diario di un Maestro"*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (eds.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 231-244; P. Nappi, *L'avventura del reale: il cinema di Vittorio De Seta, con un ricordo di Raffaele La Capria*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2015; F. Fiumara, *A Light in the Classroom: Vittorio De Seta's "Diario di un maestro" and the Bringing of Experiential Education into Italian Living Rooms*, «MLN», n. 134, 2019, pp. 303-317; A. Debè, *Costruire la memoria: la scuola italiana degli anni Settanta nello sceneggiato televisivo "Diario di un maestro"*, in P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri. Memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando Editore, 2019, pp. 77-98; Ead., *Vittorio De Seta e le sue immagini di scuola: una rappresentazione mediatica della didattica italiana degli anni Settanta*, in *La responsabilità della pedagogia nelle trasformazioni dei rapporti sociali. Storia, linee di ricerca e prospettive*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2021, pp. 762-769.

the “ant” became an «elephant»<sup>39</sup>, and Bernardini, until then mostly unknown, was transformed into a national pedagogical icon. The television drama was broadcast in four episodes on RAI 1 (the most important channel of Italian state television) in 1973. It was followed by around 12 million viewers, arousing lively debate. As indicated by Anna Debè this transposition was undoubtedly a «filtered transition»<sup>40</sup>, but above all it was not smooth. This is a significant case, which well represents the difficulties and problems that can arise in the transition from a written source to a cinematographic one.

Vittorio De Seta had intended to make a film about school since the 1950s. Well before shooting the film *Banditi ad Orgosolo* (Bandits in Orgosolo) with which he won a prize at the Venice Film Festival, he read and appreciated *Il diario di una maestrina* (Diary of a Teacher) by Maria Giacobbe, to the point of asking her, as revealed by the research by Piera Caocci presented in this same volume, to make a film about her school diary, although nothing came of it. According to De Seta’s story, in April 1969 Ugo Pirro advised him to read *Un anno a Pietralata*. The film director was delighted. He proposed a film inspired by the book to RAI and two months later he signed a contract with state television which committed him to writing the screenplay. In the meantime, he contacted Bernardini who enthusiastically accepted the proposal that his book be made into a film, and they wrote the first screenplay together. De Seta then independently continued his research, deepened the pedagogy of activism and, in search of a teacher who could interpret Bernardini, met various avant-garde teachers (Mario Lodi, Francesco Tonucci, Alberto Manzi, Fiorenzo Alfieri and Sandro Lagomarsini), although he later opted for an actor (Bruno Cirino). Gradually De Seta changed his mind and understood that a screenplay which faithfully reflected the plot of the book risked representing an artificial class eventually setting aside Bernardini’s memoir<sup>41</sup>. That of the Sardinian teacher – he wrote – «was a lived experience. My film must be the same. I feel that the only way to achieve it is to “live” film from life, an authentic pedagogical experience»<sup>42</sup>. Filming began only two years later, in April 1971, and followed a looser script. This too, during filming, was forgotten, indeed «self-sabotaged»<sup>43</sup>: the plot was mostly constructed and improvised day by day, also conditioned by the pupils – actors who became real «authors»<sup>44</sup>. «The third screenplay was conceived during filming. The fourth, the definitive one, will come out of the editing»<sup>45</sup> and was concluded in October 1972. *Diario di un maestro* therefore does not present itself as a reduction of *Un anno a Pietralata*, but a «reinvention which, starting from an idea and from a precise starting point, then found its own autonomy and creative originality as it developed»<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Rodari, *Un maestro militante*, in A. Bernardini, *La supplente*, cit., p. IX.

<sup>40</sup> Debè, *Costruire la memoria: la scuola italiana degli anni Settanta nello sceneggiato televisivo “Diario di un maestro”*, cit., p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> Cresci, *Diario di un maestro in TV. Una esperienza per chi insegna oggi*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> V. De Seta, *Quattro anni di lavoro*, in Toffetti (ed.), *Il maestro impaziente*, cit., p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> E. Morreale, *Diario di un maestro, quarant’anni dopo*, in Toffetti (ed.), *Il maestro impaziente*, cit., p. 126.

<sup>44</sup> Cresci, *Diario di un maestro in TV. Una esperienza per chi insegna oggi*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> De Seta, *Quattro anni di lavoro*, cit., p. 110.

<sup>46</sup> Cresci, *Diario di un maestro in TV. Una esperienza per chi insegna oggi*, cit., p. 25.

The four episodes were broadcast on RAI 1 between February and March 1973. When Bernardini watched the first episode he was furious: «there was not a single word – wrote Bernardini – that mentioned the fact that it had been taken from my book»<sup>47</sup>. It was a «first snub», with which began what Bernardini called a real «underground war» with the Sicilian director. Bernardini, thinking he was the victim of an injustice, wrote to the RAI offices, «threatening them – he said – that if they don't include my name, I'll have the episodes interrupted. Immediately, from the second episode, "Taken from the book of Albino Bernardini" appeared in the credits». At this point the author felt satisfied, but there would be other clashes with De Seta, for whom the Sardinian teacher did not forgive his ingratitude towards his book<sup>48</sup>.

However, De Seta's film played an important role in the promotion of Bernardini's memoirs. This simple credit created huge publicity for the Sardinian teacher, which benefited his entire career as a writer and his representation of the school. The book went through a series of reprints, in March 1980 an educational version was released for middle schools, and again in 2008 Mondadori edited an edition with commentary and exercises for secondary schools.

In addition to editorial circulation and television success, there is a third dimension through which Bernardini's memories spread and influenced the collective imagination. This is a less striking channel, but perhaps more effective, namely the thousands of meetings and conferences which, from the beginning of the seventies, saw Bernardini engaged in speaking tours talking about his works. The effect of De Seta's script can be seen also in this field. After the publication of the first books, Bernardini began to be called in some cultural circles and schools to talk about his experience, but the invitations multiplied exponentially after the second episode of *Diario di un maestro*. As soon as it ended, Bernardini himself said that he had received a call from the assessor for education of the municipality of Cortona who invited him to talk about the book and the film<sup>49</sup>. It was the first of many conferences and presentations, through which Bernardini visited hundreds of schools throughout Italy, meeting pupils and teachers to talk about school and its problems. He then gave an account of it in a book entitled *Un viaggio lungo trent'anni. Tra i bambini e i ragazzi italiani* [A Thirty-Year Journey. Among Italian Children and Young People] (1996)<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, from the end of the 1970s he began to include his address (Via de Fauni 51 in Bagno di Tivoli) in the introductions of his various books, asking his readers to comment on what they would read and he received more than 15.000 letters from students and readers, now preserved in the archive of the "Mario Laeng" Museum in Rome. Bernardini thus tried to make his books a working tool, capable of arousing questions and reflections, through a real educational relationship that he never gave up.

<sup>47</sup> A. Bernardini, *Inedito di Albino Bernardini*, in Guzzo, *Da Lula a Pietralata: le battaglie di Albino Bernardini per il rinnovamento democratico della scuola elementare*, cit., pp. 187-188.

<sup>48</sup> Id., *Un secolo di memorie*, cit., pp. 182-184.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>50</sup> A. Bernardini, *Un viaggio lungo trent'anni. Tra i bambini e i ragazzi italiani*, Cagliari, Edizioni Castello, 1996.

### *Conclusions*

From what emerged, Bernardini's contribution played a leading role in the broader phenomenon of deconstruction and reconstruction of the collective imagination of school on which a group of militant teachers and pedagogists worked since the 1960s, determined to profoundly renew the face of Italian state education. Bernardini spoke of his first book as an «instrument of struggle», with a «revolutionary character». His memoirs are not limited to pure reporting but are addressed to a clear political intent: revealing the misery of school, denouncing its social injustices, testifying to the possibility of a pedagogical revolution in institutions, promoting an idea of active education, free from the mechanisms of power that limited its potential and vitality. The forms of this commitment have had various phases: starting from real individual experience, Bernardini's memoirs have become "public memory" with his books, until they find an extraordinary diffusion with the film adaptation of De Seta. In a final phase, Bernardini dedicated himself to spreading his ideas through hundreds of meetings in Italian schools, aware that school changes and renews itself piece by piece.



# Teaching in Post World War Two Italy: Anachronism and Change in Autobiographical and Literary Narratives

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## 1. *World War Two: from hopes for social inclusion to resistance to change*

As is well known, the end of World War Two marked a watershed in the history of the Italian school system, involving its democratic reconfiguration after over twenty years of Fascism. In actual fact, several more years were to pass before the schooling and education principles set down in the new constitution that came into force in 1948, including compulsory schooling up to 14 years of age, were truly to come to pass<sup>1</sup>. With the unitary resistance phase which had brought democratic forces together for the constitutional project having rapidly faded, Italy slipped gradually into the 'leaden' 1950s which were, in schooling terms, too, a decade of «blocked schooling»<sup>2</sup> coinciding on the political plane with the Christian Democrat season<sup>3</sup>.

These were the years of reconstruction and initial economic consolidation in a nation which was still «primarily rural»<sup>4</sup>. A further survival was the «dual system whose purpose was reproducing the existing social class system and conserving the hegemony of the dominant social groups»<sup>5</sup>: one channel for the managerial classes (middle school and access to the high school) and one for the lower classes (professional training).

<sup>1</sup> R. Sani, *La scuola e l'università nell'Italia unita: da luoghi di formazione delle classi dirigenti a spazi e strumenti di democratizzazione e di promozione sociale delle classi subalterne*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Inclusione e promozione sociale nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità ad oggi*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2020, pp. 42-43. On this topic see also C.G. Lacaita, *La Costituente e i problemi della scuola*, in N. Raponi (ed.), *Scuola e Resistenza*, Parma, La Pilotta, 1978, pp. 303-315.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Baldacci, *La scuola al bivio. Mercato o democrazia?*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2019, pp. 163-167.

<sup>3</sup> Alcide De Gasperi remained prime minister of an essentially single-party DC government until his death in 1953. In fact, the alliance between the DC and the left-wing parties had already turned into "forced cohabitation" in 1946 and in 1947 this led to the expulsion of the Communists and Socialists from the nation's government at the time Italy joined NATO (See C. Spagnolo, *La stabilizzazione incompiuta. Il Piano Marshall in Italia, 1947-1952*, Roma, Carocci, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Baldacci, *La scuola al bivio*, cit., p. 166. On this subject see also M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Baldacci, *La scuola al bivio*, cit., p. 167.



Some further time had yet to pass, as we will see, before the advent of a new economic and political phase implementing the constitutional principle of schooling open to all, despite some limitations<sup>6</sup>.

As has rightly been noted,

in 1951 universal education had only reached 85% of 6-14 year olds with school attendance by 11 to 14 year olds (middle school with Latin and preparation for work) of around 30%. In some areas of the country even primary school attendance was still irregular with over 70% of children dropping out of school between year one and year five in some southern regions<sup>7</sup>.

In this respect, it is precisely some of the most lucid pages of post Second World War literature, for example those of writer Leonardo Sciascia, a primary school teacher in Sicily from 1949 to 1958, that can offer us some of the most vivid images of a southern Italy still marked by centuries-long backwardness, widespread illiteracy and generalised distrust of school<sup>8</sup>. A flesh and blood teacher, Mr. Laurana, appears in the novel *A ciascuno il suo* and Sciascia entrusts him with a very clear image:

He was very gentle, to the point of shyness, to the point of stammering: [...] An honest, meticulous, sad man, not very intelligent [but] not without a certain self-awareness, a covert presumption and vanity which derived from the environment of the school in which he felt, and was, so different from his colleagues and from the isolation which what we might call his erudition caused him [...] at the age of nearly forty he was still engaging in his mind in love stories and affairs with students and colleagues who either failed to notice or only just<sup>9</sup>.

It is partly this “social invisibility” of his that enables him to investigate the mysterious death of the pharmacist in the town the novel is set in and which costs him his life, as excessive curiosity in a world in which silence and connivance with the mafia are the only

<sup>6</sup> It would be very difficult in just a few lines to condense the experiences of the secular, Communist and democratic Catholic intellectuals who worked for democratic schooling principles right from the immediate post Second World War years. As far as the intellectuals revolving around the PCI are concerned, it is important to remember the relevant part played by the «Riforma della Scuola», journal founded in 1955 and to which thinkers and educationalists of the calibre of Mario Alighiero Manacorda, Dina Bertoni Jovine, Lucio Lombardo-Radice and Francesco Zappa – to cite just the most famous – contributed; on this journal, see P. Cardoni, «Riforma della Scuola»: appunti per un difficile bilancio, in A. Semeraro (ed.), *L'educazione dell'uomo completo. Scritti in onore di Mario Alighiero Manacorda*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2001, pp. 227-229. Once again as regards the post-war period the development of secular educational thinking via a group of intellectuals, Ernesto Codignola, Lamberto Borghi, Aldo Visalberghi, Raffaele Laporta and others revolving around a journal – «Scuola e Città» – and a publishing house – La Nuova Italia in Florence – should also be remembered; on this topic see F. Cambi, *La scuola di Firenze. Da Codignola a Laporta 1950-1975*, Napoli, Liguori, 1982; C. Betti, *Itinerari e proposte di rinnovamento pedagogico e culturale nel sistema formativo italiano del secondo dopoguerra: l'area laica*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *L'innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità al secondo dopoguerra*, Roma, Edizioni Studium, 2022, pp. 335-354.

<sup>7</sup> G. Chiosso, *Sviluppo e declino della scuola italiana*, in G. Acone, G. Bertagna, G. Chiosso (edd.), *Paideia e qualità della scuola*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> On this aspect see L. Cantatore, *La “poesia della scuola”. Miseria e nobiltà di maestre e maestri nella letteratura italiana fra Otto e Novecento*, in G. Marrone (ed.), *Maestre e maestri d'Italia in 150 di storia della scuola*, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2018, pp. 45-92.

<sup>9</sup> L. Sciascia, *A ciascuno il suo*, Milano, Edizioni Corriere della Sera, 2016, p. 48.

survival strategy can be fatal. It is an occasion to escape from the greyness of his life and, above all, a way of proving those calling him «idiot»<sup>10</sup>.

Sciascia thus paints a picture of a teacher with a «scholastic» but dignified culture, lacking in special qualities or originality but «not stupid, frustrated but not too much by his inability to take part in “high” culture and thus tending to shut himself up in his school studies. Practically and academically underappreciated, if not useless, these studies protect him from a difficult, frequently hostile world unwilling to acknowledge the importance of a dignified and uneasy, however secondary, role such as his»<sup>11</sup>.

A further visual angle of use in depicting these years of middle-of-the-road DC rule, including in the field of school policy, is representations of the lives of teachers<sup>12</sup>. From this point of view it can be said that while, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century teaching had been a way for women to «find a space for themselves in history»<sup>13</sup>, to play a «twofold social role, reflecting both class and gender, to the extent that this was considered fit for the lower and middle bourgeoisie»<sup>14</sup>. In the post Second World War era, and to some extent fostered by it, many women acquired the right to teach in secondary schools, partly on the grounds of an increase in school numbers due to a progressive growth in school attendance numbers.

As has, in fact, been stressed, after 1945 and right through the 1950s there was a great demand for education «including at a secondary level and recourse to selected access now felt like an anti-social utopia. The problem was thus no longer reducing but rather multiplying and qualifying teachers»<sup>15</sup>.

It is precisely in this context that the lower middle class situation gave us the work of Lalla Romano, *Un caso di coscienza*. Set in the 1950s, the novel tells of events that really happened in a girls' middle school in Milan, where Romano herself taught. The

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> P. Cardoni, *Insegnanti di carta. Professori e scuola nella letteratura*, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2008, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> In a way this seems little changed from the lives of women teachers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century depicted by Matilde Serao and also acutely described by Edmondo De Amicis (on this theme the following is a must: C. Covato, *Un'identità divisa. Diventare maestra in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Archivio Guido Izzi, 1996. I. Porciani, *Sparsa di tanti triboli: la carriera della maestra*, in Ead., *Le donne a scuola. L'educazione femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Firenze, Il Sedicesimo, 1987, pp. 170-190; S. Soldani, *Nascita della maestra elementare*, in S. Soldati, G. Turi (edd.), *Fare gli italiani. I. La nascita dello Stato nazionale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1993, 67-130. Ascenzi, *Drammi privati e pubbliche virtù. La maestra italiana dell'Ottocento tra narrazione letteraria e cronaca giornalistica*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> M. Morandi, *Scuola è un nome femminile. Riflessioni intorno alle scelte denominative delle scuole normali in età liberale*, in C. Ghizoni, S. Polenghi (edd.), *L'altra metà della scuola. Educazione e lavoro delle donne tra Otto e Novecento*, Torino, SEI, 2008, p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, S. Santamaita, *Il professore nella scuola italiana. Dall'Ottocento ad oggi*, Roma, Laterza, 2011, p. 103. As Marcello Dei stressed: «In the four decades from 1950 to 1990 the upper secondary school population increased exponentially. It doubled in the first decade, from 416.000 to 840.000 and then doubled again in the next decade. The pace then began to slow down in the 1970s and peaked in 1991-92 at over 2.8 million students. The following year the trend inverted and a slight reduction in numbers was recorded which is still under way» (M. Dei, *La scuola in Italia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1998, p. 93).

«conscience» is that of the writer herself, involved in a «case»<sup>16</sup> that obliged her to take a stand, against her nature – she who always suspended judgement<sup>17</sup> – on events unfolding around her, partly on the strength of a certain social conformism foisted on her in a hidebound and social-prejudice-packed environment. After an existential crisis causing her much suffering and rethinking and forcing her out of her shell, she decided to defend a school colleague of hers, considered heretical and criminal in the law courts because, as a Jehovah's Witness, she had rejected a blood transfusion prescribed for her son whose life was at risk. The school headmistress asked the writer to convince the teacher in question to hand in her resignation after she had been ostracised and judged by all her colleagues for her religious beliefs. Not only did Romano oppose this public lynching, however, but she also gave testimony to the law courts in her colleague's favour, enabling her to regain custody of her daughter who had, in the meantime, been taken away from her on precautionary grounds.

Beyond the story itself, the writer's intention is to portray a school context cut through with immobilism and social class prejudice, mirroring a society struggling to «defascistise» its governmental apparatus and dominant teaching mindset. In fact, the years of post-war reconstruction saw the first economic consolidation of a country which was still «predominantly rural»<sup>18</sup>, marked by a selective and discriminatory schooling process in which, as we have seen, school opportunities and access were not equal to all.

## 2. *A single middle school and a difficult school democratisation process*

At the end of the 1950s, Italy's economic and political framework changed profoundly, leading to a consequent transformation in the school-related political orientation. It was precisely the «economic boom» years of 1958 to 1962 that triggered the rapid social transformations which led to a rethinking of the role played by school in a mature capitalist nation.

A more advanced political equilibrium of this sort made the need to finally set in motion the constitutional provision raising the school leaving age to 14 possible for the first time.

The law that came into effect on 31 December 1962 (Law no. 1859) and set up the single middle school was the outcome of a difficult governmental compromise between the DC and PSI political parties, but was also the expression of a «bottom-up, reformist drive set in motion by the political-trade unionist battles fought by progressive forces

<sup>16</sup> L. Romano, *Un caso di coscienza*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1992, p. 8. See also C. Meta, *Un caso di coscienza*, «Banca dati delle opere letterarie e dei diari editi sulla scuola», DOI: 10.53167/1386, published on: 28.02.2022 <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/opere-letterarie/un-caso-di-coscienza> (last access: 27.09.2022).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Baldacci, *La scuola al bivio*, cit., p. 166.

(parties, trade unions, associations, movements) not without the support of a progressive faction within the Catholic world»<sup>19</sup>.

Without doubt the setting up of the single middle school was an unprecedented innovation whose intention, at least, was to break down the powerfully class-based framework that the Italian school system had inherited from Fascism. It should equally be highlighted that it was only partly a victory for the secular, democratic Catholic and Communist forces which had joined forces around the “Latin issue”, for example, for the creation of a finally democratic school system. The law required Latin to be taught in the second year as a “supplement” to Italian, before making it non-compulsory again in the third year. It remained a fundamental requirement for access to classical high schools until 1979, however.

It was precisely in the wake of the law coming into force that a phenomenon that has been the subject of a great deal of sociological enquiry occurred, in which part of the teaching body, especially teachers of lower middle-class origin, opposed the democratisation of access, ostensibly in the name of defending quality schooling, but actually out of fear of a potential loss of social prestige tied up with teachers’ social identity. Many social prejudices imbued with a myriad of forms of biological determinism and classist stereotypes still cut through the lion’s share of Italian school culture, and the pedagogical theories many teachers’ mindsets were still replete with testifying to «their inability to take on board the social changes under way»<sup>20</sup>. From this point of view, it is once again literature that is most capable of giving us a quasi “molecular” depiction<sup>21</sup> of the social and cultural climate of the day in a country now modernising in the wake of its recent industrialisation triggering a profound «anthropological shift», so majestically described by Pier Paolo Pasolini and generating a progressive secularisation in Italian mores functional to a new consumer society<sup>22</sup>.

A novel by writer Maria Corti *Il ballo dei sapienti* which came out precisely in the mid-1960s beautifully renders a picture of Milan undergoing full neo-capitalist expansion by means of events at *Ginnasio-Liceo Bonvesin della Riva*. The lives of its characters, described

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169. The process by means of which the single middle school law came to pass was a very long, drawn out and fraught one, interwoven with the birth of the first centre-left government which saw the Socialist party join the government. For an especially careful and detailed account of events see F. Borruso, *La riforma della scuola media unica* (1962). *Tra didattica e politica*, in Ascenzi, Sani (edd.), *L’innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano*, cit., pp. 461–478.

<sup>20</sup> C. Covato, *Itinerari e proposte di rinnovamento pedagogico e culturale nel sistema formativo italiano del secondo dopoguerra: l’area marxista*, in Ascenzi, Sani (edd.), *L’innovazione pedagogica e didattica nel sistema formativo italiano*, cit., p. 355.

<sup>21</sup> Here the reference is to the “molecular metaphor” used by Antonio Gramsci in *Quaderni del carcere* to allude to the constant shift from individual to collective considered intrinsically reciprocal. As regards the notion of «transformation» or «molecular change» used by Gramsci both in his *Quaderni* and his *Lettere*, see E. Forenza, *Molecolare*, in G. Liguori, P. Voza (edd.), *Dizionario gramsciano 1926–1937*, Roma, Carocci, 2009, pp. 551–555.

<sup>22</sup> See P. Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*, Milano, Garzanti, 1975.

with great realism by a literature teacher at the school for many years, are imbued with a sense of boredom and alienation from a rapidly changing context within which the teaching body in particular reveals feelings verging on frustration linked to a progressive loss of social and professional prestige, as in the case of Mr Lanfranchi unable to give «a mark of 5 out of 10 to a boy who writes subjects without verbs»<sup>23</sup> and feels all the futility of what was once seen as a mission, namely teaching the Italians how to use their language correctly.

Returning to the historical context once again, it is also important to remember that, when the centre left was at its apex and it was evident that a “minimalist” programme had won where the nation’s structural modernisation was concerned<sup>24</sup>, we can identify the first great watershed moment since the end of World War Two, one which was decisive also as regards the profound changes taking place in schooling, namely the 1968 student movement<sup>25</sup>. In Italy specifically, when top-down reformism had died out and, in the strictly school context, as we have seen, was not followed by a truly democratic widening out process as provided for by the law on the single middle school or equality of access to education, it was followed by reformism from below. In the wake of the shock wave generated by the school protest movement, which soon joined forces with the demands of the working class «hot autumn»<sup>26</sup>, this led in the early 1970s also on the schooling front, to the apex of what has been called the reform season. Just a few years witnessed the introduction of state nursery schooling in 1968, full time in 1971, the launching of the right to 150 hours training for workers in 1973 and then the *Decreti Delegati* in 1974 and Law 517/77 on planning and assessment, which abolished marking and set up a bulwark against primary school selection.

<sup>23</sup> M. Corti, *Il ballo dei sapienti*, Milano, Mondadori, 1966, p. 16. See also S. Di Biasio, *Il ballo dei sapienti*, «Banca dati delle opere letterarie e dei diari editi sulla scuola», DOI: 10.53167/561, published on: 19.10.2021 <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-collettiva/opere-letterarie/il-ballo-dei-sapienti> (last access: 27.09.2022).

<sup>24</sup> On the subject of judgements of the centre-left season: Y. Voulgaris, *L'Italia del centro-sinistra. 1960-1968*, Roma, Carocci, 1998 and G. Vacca, *L'Italia contesa. Comunisti e democristiani nel lungo dopoguerra. 1943-1978*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> More generally it should be noted that the 1968 protest movements with their well-known trans-national cultural dimension «the West's traditional geo-cultural politics (which fused with the Catholic tradition in Italy) of an essentially hierarchical sort, suffered a crisis of power» (M. Baldacci, *L'antitesi pedagogica del Sessantotto*, in *1968 e niente fu come prima*, Roma, Edizione Conoscenza, 2018, p. 67).

<sup>26</sup> A must on this subject is B. Trentin, *Autunno caldo. Il secondo biennio rosso (1968-1969)*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1999; see also S. Turone, *Storia del sindacato in Italia dal 1943 al crollo del comunismo*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 1976.

### 3. *The ebb years: from democratic schooling to the corporate school model*

By the end of the 1970s, the great forward movement of the previous period had come to an end. Open access schooling went from being the exception to the rule.

From then on, in fact, new problems came to the fore caused both by school's failures (which continued to record especially high levels of selection and expulsion from the school system) and by the gradual and constant decrease in the youth population<sup>27</sup>.

Above all, what emerged forcefully was the fact that the reform process of the 1960s and 70s had not truly succeeded in breaking up the class-based framework of Italian schooling, despite the adoption from 1975 onwards of «development plans» by which Italy began moving in the direction of the state school funding systems adopted in the most avant-garde nations<sup>28</sup>.

The age-old problem remained the north-south gap and consequent unequal redistribution of public spending in infrastructure and school building investments, as the condemnations that came in from borderline experiences such as Don Milani's *Scuola di Barbiana* and the radical practices deployed by Albino Bernardini, Mario Lodi and Don Roberto Sardelli, to use just a few of the most famous examples<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, whilst it was true that the demand for education had increased, even when this was not cancelled out by Italy's still very high school drop-out rates, it was still forced into the blind alley of training schools designed less as true bridge between education and work than to block social mobility.

The culmination of this was equally a change underway through the West. From the perspective of the overall framework in the early 1970s, moreover, the first signs of a significant economic crisis triggered by the oil price shock of 1973 were beginning to make themselves felt<sup>30</sup>. Dropping profits were followed by the advent of a radical restructuring of the accumulation process which ultimately, on the global scale, as Giovanni Arrighi has noted, brought an end to American capitalism's expansion phase based essentially on a growth in manufacturing<sup>31</sup>. This change in socio-political frameworks had serious

<sup>27</sup> Chiosso, *Paideia e qualità della scuola*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> On this subject: F. Harbison, C.A. Myers (edd.), *Education, Manpower, and Economic Growth: Strategies of Human Resource Development*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964.

<sup>29</sup> As is well known, the dominant feature of Don Milani's educational work was its return to evangelical equality values and a reimplementation of the social democracy demands set out in the Constitution (see Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967). On Albino Bernardini's experience as a primary teacher in a Rome suburb, see Id., *Un anno a Pietralata*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1968; as far as Don Sardelli and his work with the children of the slumdweller of Acquadotto Felice in Rome is concerned, see, lastly, R. Sardelli, M. Fiorucci, *Dalla parte degli ultimi*, Roma, Donzelli, 2020; Scuola 725, *Non tacere*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1971.

<sup>30</sup> See Baldacci, *La scuola al bivio*, cit., p. 171.

<sup>31</sup> See G. Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Time*, London, Verso Books, 2010.



school reform repercussions and left its mark on a schooling model functional on «market domination»<sup>32</sup>.

A careful examination of the “anthropological transformation” generated by these changes on teachers and students in the 1980s and 90s is once again to be garnered from a more recent literature. From their perspective as secondary school teachers, writers such as Paola Mastrocola and Margherita Oggero show a committed participation to the stories told, whilst also demonstrating an emotional gap from this world that is difficult to narrow. It is less a matter of taking the distance required for a literary rendering than of a decoupling of the aspects most internal to school debates to the extent of a total rejection of it «without, however, translating into a systematic criticism and even less a different perspective. It is as if the authors felt the need for a safety barrier, an alter ego»<sup>33</sup>.

In the case of Oggero's *La collega tatuata*, for example, her character nicknamed Profia attempts to find out who murdered a teacher in her school, almost as a way of escaping a school life seen as an ungratifying, even alienating place<sup>34</sup>. Mastrocola's *La gallina volante* also features a profoundly dissatisfied teacher whose sarcasm with his students conceals a total disillusionment regarding the school's educational potential and a desire to nurture interests outside the purely financial security reasons for his school work, completely free of the motivation and interest he finds in «succeeding in getting a hen to fly»<sup>35</sup>.

What comes across from the most recent literature set at school is, in general terms, the pursuit of an alternative, almost secret identity experienced by the author-teachers as a refuge from an absent sense of self-acceptance, of a specific professional dimension almost always felt to be stifling and constricting and, on the other, bound up with this what comes through is all the real frustration suffered for the loss of any remaining residue of professional social prestige, as has emerged from many recent enquiries.

The 2017 CNR report on internal migration focused entirely on analysing teachers and highlighted the link between lack of employment security, which is often discontinuous, and the frequent territorial mobility, primarily of female teachers employed in the various levels of the state school system (nursery, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary)<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> It was a paradigmatic shift which had significant repercussions in Europe from the starting point of the Delors Report on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century sponsored by UNESCO, which put forward an abstract compromise between social democratic and neoliberal ideals, human development and human capital production which fit perfectly into a neo-liberal framework. These same EU educational policies were in line with the new political-cultural climate: on one hand the White Paper written by Cresson (1995) shone a spotlight on the problem of bringing education up to date with the dynamics of a global economy based on knowledge and, on the other, the Lisbon Strategy (2000) indicated a series of EU educational milestones played out on the new paradigm of market efficiency and the importance of competition which was to be achieved within a decade, to make the European Union one of the world's most avant-garde economies (see Baldacci, *La scuola al bivio*, cit., pp. 174-176).

<sup>33</sup> Cardoni, *insegnanti di carta*, cit., p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> See M. Oggero, *La collega tatuata*, Milano, Mondadori, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> P. Mastrocola, *La gallina volante*, Milano, Guanda, 2000, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> See M. Colucci, S. Gallo (edd.), *Rapporto sulle migrazioni interne in Italia. In cattedra con la valigia. Gli insegnanti tra stabilizzazione e mobilità*, Roma, Donzelli, 2017. The latest conference of the *Società Italiana di Pedagogia* (SIPED), focusing specifically on school and teachers, also shone a spotlight on the close nexus in the



All this, above all as regards the current state of affairs in Italian schools, brings out all the situation's contradictions in terms of the failure to achieve equality of access for all, especially during the Covid 19 pandemic period<sup>37</sup>. Solutions may potentially be found from those proposed by research networks and institutions more sensitive to the issue of educational poverty, such as the *Patti educativi di comunità*, for example, bottom-up community educational agreements capable, in areas of greatest risk of social exclusion, of getting a multitude of stakeholders such as schools, local bodies and associations and cultural operators involved in combating school dropout rates<sup>38</sup>.

This, however, means reviving the truly democratic inspiration behind the Italian Constitution and, as we have seen, the episodes of greater school reforming spirit in the 1960s and 1970s, including the example of Antonio Gramsci who, in his *Quaderni del carcere*, spoke of the need for a «single intellectual and manual school [providing] initial, general humanistic and educational culture, which rightly combines training for manual skills (technical, industrial) and of the capacity for intellectual work»<sup>39</sup>, something which has never taken shape in Italy.

Italian education system between teachers' fragile professional and social identity and educational poverty and high drop-out rates with a severity concentrated in specific parts of the country and especially the south (M. Fiorucci, E. Zizioli (edd.), *La formazione degli insegnanti: problemi, prospettive e proposte per una scuola di qualità e aperta a tutti*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Save the Children has highlighted that official data now shows what many teachers have experienced in the first person over the last two years. The pandemic has generated a collapse in student learning, especially in lower and upper secondary school, in a learning context which was geographically patchy and incapable of offering equal opportunity to education even prior to the pandemic (see <https://www.savethechildren.it/impossibile2022-il-report.pdf>, last access: 02.12.2022).

<sup>38</sup> An enquiry carried out by the *Disuguaglianze e diversità* forum on the potential efficacy of the territorial educational agreements is also interesting in this regard. This promotes the idea, previously also argued by Don Milani as we have seen, that "those with fewer opportunities" should be offered more schooling and greater educational resources in an attempt to compensate for their initial disadvantage (see <https://www.forumdisuguaglianzediversita.org/patti-educativi-territoriali-e-percorsi-abilitanti-unindagine-esplorativa/>, Rapporto di ricerca dicembre, last access: 04.12.2022).

<sup>39</sup> A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, edited by V. Gerratana, Torino, Einaudi, 1975, p. 1531.



# Chronicles about School Life between Intimate Diaries and Educational Documentation

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## *Introduction*

Starting from the first half of the 1990s, in the wake of the reflection on school culture proposed by Dominique Julia, there has been an important renewal in the field of historical-educational research, as it is known. According to the French historian, school culture, that is, «the set of rules defining the knowledge to be taught and the behaviours to be inculcated and the educational practices, which are allowed by the recipients of the educational action for their correct transmission and assimilation»<sup>1</sup>, had to be considered as a historical object to be investigated and he assigned to the «history of school disciplines» a prominent role in the field of research areas as it was able to describe the dynamics taking place within a classroom.

This reflection decisively contributed to the paradigm shift in historical-educational research and marked the beginning of an ever-increasing commitment – by educational historians – towards the study of the historical evolution for school disciplines and educational practices related to them. In particular, we remember the studies by the historian André Chervel in France, who precisely specialized in the field of history of school disciplines<sup>2</sup> and the studies by Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon in Belgium, who highlighted the heuristic potential of historical research on school daily life, its space, time and actors<sup>3</sup>; in addition to this research, we can also mention the innovative lines of investigation proposed by the Iberian scientific community, in particular the ones by Agustín Escolano Benito and Antonio Viñao Frago<sup>4</sup>, which were devoted to material

<sup>1</sup> D. Julia, *La culture scolaire comme objet historique*, in A. Nóvoa, M. Depaepe, E. W. Johanningmeier (edd.), *The Colonial Experience in Education: Historical Issues and Perspectives*, Ghent, Universiteit Gent, 1995, pp. 353-382.

<sup>2</sup> A. Chervel, *Des disciplines scolaires à la culture scolaire*, in *Educational and Cultural Transmission: Historical Studies of Continuity and Change in Families, Schooling and Youth Cultures*, Ghent, Universiteit Gent, 1996, pp. 181-195; Id., *La culture scolaire. Une approche historique*, Paris, Belin, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> M. Depaepe, F. Simon, *Is There any Place for the History of 'Education' in the 'History of Education'? A Plea for the History of Everyday Educational Reality in- and outside Schools*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. XXXI, 1, 1995, pp. 9-16. We can also consider the research carried out by I. Grosvenor, M. Lawn, K. Rousmaniere (edd.), *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> The Iberian community has distinguished itself for the attention paid to new trend lines of educational historiography by proposing pioneering research on the history of school material culture. Please, see A. Viñao Frago, *Educación y Cultura. Por una historia de la cultura escolar: enfoques, cuestiones, fuentes*, in C.J. Almuíña

school culture. Viñao Frago introduced to the scientific community of educational historians the heuristic potential of what he defined as *memoria escolar*, «a part of the most general enculturation process, based on interpreting the state educational system as a tool for transmitting social memory in order to consolidate culture and identity»<sup>5</sup>. On the basis of these indications in recent years, educational historians have also begun to start up studies and research on “school memory”, interpreted as a real historiographical phenomenon<sup>6</sup>.

In particular, scholars firstly turned their attention towards individual school memory, made up by the self-representation of oneself, which was provided by former teachers and pupils and other protagonists in the school world within oral testimonies, diaries, autobiographies and memoirs in general. The so-called *egodocuments*<sup>7</sup> were widely used as sources in historical-educational research, as they were considered they were able to reconstruct school history starting from its protagonists’ real experiences rather than from legislative and institutional sources in an attempt to open up what was called the «black box of schooling»<sup>8</sup>.

Teachers and other protagonists in the school world have often felt the need to tell their stories<sup>9</sup>, to leave traces of their school life, the experiences with pupils and the personal educational experiments. This need to tell their stories has come down to us in different forms and ways, which do not only fall within individual school memory, but also within

Fernández (ed.), *Culturas y civilizaciones: III Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea*, Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, 1998, pp. 165-184; A. Escolano Benito (ed.), *La cultura material de la escuela: en el centenario de la Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios, 1907-2007*, Berlanga de Duero, CEINCE, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> J. Meda, *Memoria Magistra. La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in G. Zago, S. Polenghi, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memorie ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020, pp. 25-35. We can also see: A. Viñao, *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

<sup>6</sup> Please, see: C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017; J. Meda, M. Brunelli, L. Pomante (edd.), *Memories and Public Celebrations of Education in Contemporary Times*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. XIV, n. 1, 2019, pp. 9-394; P. Alfieri (ed.), *Immagini dei nostri maestri: memorie di scuola nel cinema e nella televisione dell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Armando, 2019; J. Meda, *I «luoghi della memoria scolastica» in Italia tra memoria e oblio: un primo approccio*, in A. Ascenzi, C. Covato, J. Meda (edd.), *La pratica educativa: storia, memoria e patrimonio. Atti del I Congresso nazionale della Società Italiana per lo studio del Patrimonio Storico-Educativo (Palma de Mallorca, 20- 23 novembre 2018)*, Macerata, eum, 2020, pp. 301-322.

<sup>7</sup> About the topic of egodocuments, please see: A. Viñao Frago, *Teachers' egodocuments as a source of classroom history. The case of autobiographies, memoirs and diaries*, in S. Braster, I. Grosvenor, M. del Mar Del Pozo Andrés (edd.), *The Black Box of Schooling: a Cultural History of the Classroom*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 141-157, but also Id., *La memoria escolar: restos y huellas, recuerdos y olvidos*, «Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche», n. 12, 2005, pp. 19-33.

<sup>8</sup> About this concept, please see: Braster, Grosvenor, Del Pozo Andrés (edd.), *The Black Box of Schooling*, cit., 2011. This expression was coined by Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon (1995), taking up the one already used by the sociologist Colin Lacey (1970) to direct the educational historians' attention to classrooms as places of «evaporated educational relationships», real black boxes of school culture, from which every single trace of – orthodox and revolutionary, licit and illicit – educational practices, which had been carried out there, was essential to try to recover. See Meda, *Memoria magistra*, in Polenghi, Zago, Agostinetto, *Memoria ed educazione*, cit., pp. 25-35 (in partic. p. 28).

Please see: D. Demetrio, *L'autobiografia come cura di sé*, Milano, Cortina, 2006.

the collective one, i.e. that type of memory consisting of multiple representations of school, teachers and school groups, which have been offered by the cultural industry and the world of information over time. Just to cite a few examples among the authors who decided to autobiographically tell the school world, we can mention Leonardo Sciascia, Maria Giacobbe, Lucio Mastronardi, Rosario Naccarato, but we can also think about Don Milani and the school of Barbiana<sup>10</sup>, Mario Lodi and his experiences narrated through the pages in *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho* and *Il paese sbagliato*<sup>11</sup>, but also Albino Bernardini<sup>12</sup>.

*Egodocuments* are often able to tell us stories, which are not only linked to big names in education, but also to those figures who have been considered less important for a long time, such as so many apparently anonymous teachers, who would rather deserve a particular attention for the fundamental impact, which the practice of their profession had on the life of people and communities where they acted.

Among the projects, which have also tried to give the right space to lesser-known names, we remember the *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione*, who was edited by Roberto Sani and Giorgio Chiosso<sup>13</sup> and was precisely born with the desire to add a further element to let us know and understand Italian school, educational and pedagogical history and preserve the memory of its protagonists, adults and especially «children»<sup>14</sup>, «whose activity and commitment, while being almost exclusively carried out in the local context at times, prove to be fundamental to understand the concrete training and cultural dynamics, which have marked the growth and the evolution of Italian society in the last two centuries»<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Please see L. Sciascia, *Le parrocchie di Regalpetra*, Bari, Laterza, 1963; M. Giacobbe, *Diario di una maestra*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1966; L. Mastronardi, *Il maestro di Vigevano*, Torino, Einaudi, 1962; Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa. Scuola di Barbiana*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967; F. Marinelli, *Diario di una maestra*, Milano, R. Archinto, 1988; R. Naccarato, *Le scuole rurali agli inizi del Novecento: S. Caterina di Aiello Calabro*, Cosenza, Klipper, 2008. About this topic, please see: R. Certini, *Bambini e scolari nelle memorie e nei diari di maestri e maestre: tra biografia e racconto*, in C. Covato, S. Ulivieri (edd.), *Itinerari nella storia dell'infanzia. Bambine e bambini, modelli pedagogici e stili educativi*, Milano, Unicopli, 2001, pp. 197-229.

<sup>11</sup> M. Lodi, *C'è speranza se questo accade al Vho*, Milano, Edizioni Avanti, 1963; M. Lodi, *Il paese sbagliato*, Torino, Einaudi, 1970.

<sup>12</sup> A. Bernardini, *Le bacchette di Lula*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1963.

<sup>13</sup> G. Chiosso, R. Sani, *Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione 1800-2000*, 2 voll., Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Chiosso, R. Sani, *Presentazione*, in Idd. (edd.), *DBE: Dizionario Biografico dell'Educazione*, 2 vols., Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, Vol. I, pp. VII-X.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

1. *Giovanni Lucaroni: chronicles about school life between intimate diary and administrative documentation*

Among the “little protagonists” in the educational world, it is also possible to include Giovanni Lucaroni<sup>16</sup>, a teacher coming from Marche region whose professional life was reconstructed thanks to the homonymous collection, which is preserved in the Centre for Documentation and Research in History of Textbooks & Children’s Literature of the University of Macerata<sup>17</sup> and was given by his granddaughter Maria Agostina Marzioli in 2012. This collection allowed us to dig into the life of the teacher who has been teaching in Mogliano, in the Macerata hinterland, for over forty years. So, it was possible to discover that his personal and professional events were intertwined with the national scenarios and that «active school» promoted by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice<sup>18</sup>, so much that numerous publications by Lucaroni about the adoption of new programs for primary school and also the importance of the dialect attracted the attention of the scholar from Catania<sup>19</sup>. In fact, the teacher Lucaroni had shown great enthusiasm towards the 1923

<sup>16</sup> J. Meda, *Giovanni Lucaroni*, in G. Chiosso, R. Sani (edd.), *DBE: Dizionario Biografico dell’Educazione*, 2 vols., Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2013, Vol. 2, pp. 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> About the Centre for the Documentation and Research on the history of textbooks and children’s literature at the University of Macerata and its documentary and bibliographic heritage, please see: M. Brunelli, *The «Centre for the documentation and research on the history of textbooks and children’s literature» in University of Macerata (Italy)*, «History of Education and Children’s Literature», vol. IV, n. 2, 2009, pp. 441-452; A. Ascenzi, E. Patrizi, *Inside School Lives: Historiographical Perspectives and Case Studies. Teachers’ Memories Preserved at the Centre for Documentation and Research on the History of Schoolbooks and Children’s Literature*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. 3, n. 1, 2016, pp. 343-362.

<sup>18</sup> About Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, please see: I. Picco, *Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1967; G. Cives, *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice: didattica e pedagogia della collaborazione*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1970. There are also some recent studies: L. Cantatore, *Vita mortis meditatio. Il breviario pedagogico di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice*, «I problemi della pedagogia», vol. LXVI, n. 1, 2020, pp. 107-124; Id. (ed.), *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice. Lezioni di didattica e ricordi di esperienza magistrale*, Roma, Edizioni Conoscenza, 2022; E. Scaglia (ed.), *Una pedagogia dell’ascesa. Giuseppe Lombardo Radice e il suo tempo*, Roma, Studium, 2021; G. D’Aprile, *Memorie di una inedita corrispondenza. Lettere di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Adolphe Ferrière*, Pisa, ETS, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Although personal archives are extremely important for historical-educational research, they are not always easy to be found, often because families do not keep those “old” documentary deposits and, if lucky, one has to rely on the sensitivity of those who decide to preserve and to give entire archives belonged to the protagonists of the past school to the institutions in charge. This is a fundamental documentary heritage for this research and, for this reason, it is advisable to launch specific awareness campaigns on the topic so as not to lose precious sources for historical-educational research forever. Among the researches which stand out because of their systematicity and completeness, we remember Mirella D’Ascenzo about Alberto Calderara (M. D’Ascenzo, *Alberto Calderara. Microstoria di una professione docente*, Bologna, CLUEB, 2011); Michela D’Alessio who carried out research on the Lucan educator Arturo Arcomano, using his private archive, but also school registers and chronicles about school life in order to reconstruct the history of the new school created in Basilicata in the 1950s (M. D’Alessio, *I diari e i quaderni scolastici quali fonti per lo studio delle pratiche educative del passato. L’esperimento didattico del maestro Arcomano nella «scuola nuova» di Basilicata a metà del Novecento*, in S. González, J. Meda, X. Motilla Salas, L. Pomante (edd.), *La Práctica Educativa. Historia, Memoria y Patrimonio*, Salamanca, FahrenHouse, 2018, pp. 1022-1033). We can also think about the rich material belonged to Maria Maltoni, whose collection – after a donation – is now preserved in the municipal library of Impruneta and, even, the reconstruction of Elvira Bono’s activity carried out by Maria Cristina Morandini, using handwritten

school programs and had been the author of numerous publications where he tried to make Lombardo Radice's "new school" known and understood.

The research on the teacher Lucaroni's biography was also carried out within the school archive at the "Giovanni XXIII" Institute of Mogliano where it was possible to consult all the class newspapers starting from his first teaching year in 1910 until 1956, when he was retired, and his personal file. This contribution intends to draw attention on the columns of the registers devoted to the chronicle about school life and the observation on pupils, which become a sort of space between intimate diary and administrative documentation – based on the use the teacher makes of them –, even if they do not fall within those sources, which we consider individual school memory. Therefore, it is believed that they can decisively contribute to reconstruct what really happened inside a classroom and which were the educational practices adopted and the teachers' opinions on different school aspects.

As it is known, under art. 27 of the ordinance of January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1924 – containing regulatory standards for the application of the Royal Decree no. 2185 of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1923 –, the teacher was required to fill in the class diary, the prospectus of pupils who were classified into groups according to their ability, the educational program, the final report and the school chronicle among the documents<sup>20</sup>.

Art. 27 indicated that news and data on the pupils' attendance, the teacher's absences and any "didactic handing-over" to the supply teacher, the state of teaching aids, the supplementary works, the visits, the trips, the school parties, the visits by superiors and the notable episodes of city life in relation to school had to be included in the school chronicle. Furthermore, the Ministry had published clarifications concerning the regulatory provisions in circular no. 7 of 1924<sup>21</sup>. About Art. 27, it was specified that the chronicle did not have to be a collection of compositions about the main events of school life during the year, but it had to be really a chronicle about school life «because it was lively, but sober and such that it could be re-read with utility and satisfaction even after years»<sup>22</sup>.

Moreover, in the circular, Minister Gentile hoped that collection of annual chronicles could have given valuable elements for reconstructing the events of educational activity in every Italian Municipality in the future; for this reason, he had foreseen that the chronicle files were kept in the school library<sup>23</sup>.

Regarding the meaning to be attributed to the "teacher's chronicle", Giuseppe Lombardo Radice had intervened in an exasperated tone – in an article published

and printed material concerning the procedures for employing and pursuing the career of the teaching staff, which is preserved in the Historical Archive at the Municipality of Turin (M.C. Morandini, *La maestra in Italia tra Otto e Novecento: il caso torinese di Elvira Bono*, «Rivista di storia dell'educazione», n. 1, 2018, pp. 173-190).

<sup>20</sup> *Ordinanza contenente le norme regolamentari per l'applicazione del Regio Decreto 1° ottobre 1923, n. 2185*, «Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», n. 3, 15 January 1924, pp. 53-64.

<sup>21</sup> *Circolare n. 7, Chiarimenti circa le norme regolamentari per l'applicazione del Regio Decreto 1° ottobre 1923, n. 2185*, «Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», n. 6, 5 February 1924, pp. 359-366.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.



in «L'Educazione Nazionale»<sup>24</sup> in March 1926 –: according to him, educators and headmasters went from obsession to obsession making the simplest things complicated. Among these obsessions, he also counted the chronicle. According to Lombardo Radice, there were even those who had become the inventors of modules for chronicles, diaries, skill groups, which he considered «a real offense to teachers and a great shame for the good name of the school»<sup>25</sup>. Lombardo Radice commented like this:

What is this teacher's chronicle? It is such a concise note about didactically interesting events of the school year in school or classroom. The teacher judges about the interest of things. A teaching staff reunion; an educational exhibition; a school party; the events of school attendance in relation to health conditions; the library purchases in relation to the program; the visits to museums; the workshops; the exploration trips into the countryside in relation to the program; the characteristic results of a new teaching experience; some memorable episodes of the internal school life and the relationships with families and so on.

According to Lombardo Radice, what counted was the fact of not making it an external obligation of daily teaching confessions, as the old diary was instead<sup>26</sup>, «a real mortification of the teacher»<sup>27</sup>, but it had to become a private teacher document.

Giovanni Lucaroni punctually filled in those columns in his school registers and the reading and the analysis of those pages are able to bring us back to his classroom and to help us to decipher the activity of that teacher who always questioned himself on poor class results or too undisciplined pupils and demonstrated a deep resilience in the face of difficulties. From his chronicle, it is possible to reconstruct so many aspects related to everyday school life and the material school life, but also the personal reflections on his pupils, the changed teacher-pupil relationship compared to the past and his role as a teacher. Those columns of the register represent a very important space from which personal confessions and ideas on topics such as the mixed classes, the obligation of a uniform and the Single State Textbook emerge. Furthermore, it is also possible through them to reconstruct many other aspects of school life in that period, when work came first for families and then class attendance.

For example, the teacher wrote on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1927:

<sup>24</sup> G. Lombardo Radice, *La cronaca della scuola*, «L'Educazione Nazionale», March 1926, pp. 26-27. With this letter, Lombardo Radice replies to Mr. A. Perfetti who had intervened in the Piacenza newspaper «La Libertà» on 15 January 1926.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> The regulation – approved by the Royal Decree of 6 April 1913 – concerning the juridical status of the teachers from primary schools, which were administered by School Boards, provided in art. 86 that the teacher had to keep a register in order, where he wrote down the pupils' absences and points of merit both for study and for conduct and in art. 87 the teacher's task of filling in the school diary in accordance with the instructions given to him by the competent authorities. Furthermore, art. 92 indicated that the teacher was required to hand out to the deputy inspector the registers, but also a detailed report about the teaching given, the pupils' attendance, their diligence and the profit obtained. The regulation concerning the juridical status of the teachers from primary schools, which were administered by Municipalities, provided for the same provisions in artt. 84-85-90 («Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», n. 137, 13 June 1913, pp. 3563-3679, in partic. pp. 3660-3661, 3673-3674).

<sup>27</sup> Lombardo Radice, *La cronaca della scuola*, cit., p. 27.

September, which has been consecrating to holidays, trips in the country, journeys and hunting for a long tradition, is not too propitious for a serene restart, especially for rural centres devoted to the grape harvest, which no pupil wants to sacrifice to school<sup>28</sup>.

In fact, pupils were often busy in farm work at the expense of their studies. We also find a reference to it in the register of the 1924/25 school year: in the school diary, Lucaroni judged the student Giuseppa Piccinini to be intelligent, but she did not probably study «for lack of time, because she needs to work at home. She could do much more; but she is assiduous and this is so»<sup>29</sup>.

Every year, the teacher was aware that it was necessary to wait for the end of the grape harvest to have all the students back in the classroom and, in his chronicle of September 1927, he commented how school was the last thought for parents, but also for municipal administration, despite the fact that times had changed, and he wrote:

I set to work with the good intention of still giving all that care I will be able to school in general and my class in particular<sup>30</sup>.

We read in the chronicle that September «uselessly runs away»<sup>31</sup> but, finally, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, Lucaroni took up the teaching of the fourth male class, made up of some third-class pupils to whom he had taught the previous year, some pupils coming from rural schools and remedial students. A few days later, he already defined them as «good guys, even if many of them are not adequately prepared for the fourth class and have only very little intelligence», but the teacher did not lose heart and, in fact, he commented: «We will see to love each other and to help us as much as possible»<sup>32</sup>.

In the chronicle, Lucaroni respected the provisions of the government regulation and, therefore, he reported news and information on his absences, visits, trips, school parties, but also visits by superiors and notable episodes of city life in relation to school. The teacher was punctual in describing the headmaster's visits, also indicating the topics dealt with and some «good and fatherly advice»<sup>33</sup> received.

However, Lucaroni also used those columns to open his heart about the aspects he did not like about school. For example, at the beginning of the 1928/29 school year, he had been in charge with a mixed fifth class, made up of 11 boys and 11 girls. He immediately compared them, highlighting the girls' superiority in language and reading against the boys' superiority in arithmetic. According to the teacher, this difference could be generalized for almost all the school groups. In fact, according to Lucaroni, the class

<sup>28</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola*, in Archive of the *Istituto comprensivo "Giovanni XXIII"* in Mogliano (hereinafter: ASICM), series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1927/28», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1927/28 school year.

<sup>29</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola*, in ASICM, series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1924/27», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1924/25 school year.

<sup>30</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola*, in ASICM, series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1927/28», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1927/28 school year.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

was quite homogeneous and with excellent attendance, despite it was the harvest season, even if he was convinced that he would have found it difficult to carry out scientific subjects for which «girls always have a certain revulsion, not being too suitable by their very nature»<sup>34</sup>, but he was ready to adapt the program according to their needs.

However, a few years later, Lucaroni expressed his opposition to mixed classes right within the chronicle of the 1932/33 school year. In fact, Lucaroni explained that he appreciated the advantages «which theoretically justify it from the point of view of a more male and less unilateral social education; but in practice I have not found it very useful, while I have always found enormous difficulties in adapting the program»<sup>35</sup>.

In the chronicle and the observation of school life during the 1933/34 school year, he reiterated his hostility towards mixed classes, especially the upper classes,

The much-praised advantages of promiscuous education have never convinced me, and in practice I have only found... obstacles, inconveniences and... damages. Not to mention that the program must undergo multiple adaptations, which are not so easy to be realized<sup>36</sup>.

In the chronicle, the teacher always devoted a lot of space to the observation of his class, which was described as slack and undisciplined most of the time, but he always proved to be determined and ready for new challenges. For example, in the school register of the 1933/34 school year<sup>37</sup>, Lucaroni, who was in charge with a third class, immediately defined it as «very undisciplined». The teacher's reaction was not to immediately consider the class «bad», because children of 8-9 years old could not be like this, but they were undisciplined as they were used to «chattering without purpose, leaving their seats without permission»<sup>38</sup> and being inattentive, as he wrote. In the face of this problem of discipline, Lucaroni was ready for a month of deep work in order to «seize their heads, wills, intelligences and – slowly, slowly – bend to... a lot of work, which the class requires for its demanding program»<sup>39</sup>.

Some of his positions on aspects of the internal school life, such as the obligation to wear a school apron, are also evident from the columns of the teacher Lucaroni's chronicle. He wrote in the chronicle of October 1932:

There are no funeral school aprons yet and school is joyful like a carpet of flowers! The eye sails there with pleasure. I try to read impressions and expressions in their eyes. I have reason to be satisfied with some smart faces<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 15 settembre 1932*, in ASICM, series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1932/33», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1932/33 school year.

<sup>36</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 12 settembre 1933*, in ASICM, series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1933/34», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1933/34 school year.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 22 settembre 1933*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1933/34 school year, cit.

<sup>40</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 16 settembre 1932*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1932/33 school year, cit.

But, on September 19<sup>th</sup>, the school image as a “carpet of flowers” disappeared for Lucaroni in order to be replaced by «the gloom of black sackclothes», which «has almost completely invaded the classroom»<sup>41</sup>. In 1931, Lucaroni’s aversion to school aprons is also evident in a publication of his where he commented: «Why those black sackclothes of penance? Whom do the young sparrows who are putting their wings and the skylarks who learn to weave their nests for hiding their happiness there mourn for?». In fact, according to him, «uniform is a law according to which you are no more than...*the one who has the duty to be*: a soldier who accepts with a smile on his lips and performs with devotion of sacrifice all the duties, which it symbolizes and combines»<sup>42</sup>.

Starting from the late 1920s, references to Duce and Fascism began to appear in the chronicle. In fact, school time was marked by Fascist anniversaries and the chronicle about school life is full of descriptions of these events.

As regards the anniversary of the March on Rome, Lucaroni indicated in the school register of the 1928/29 school year that pupils had written about it in the diary, after speaking about it together with the teacher, and this had been carried out on State order. Almost annoyed, Lucaroni commented: «We would have talked about it anyway, there is no doubt about it!»<sup>43</sup>.

Lucaroni also referred to State orders in the chronicle of September 1928, expressing a certain malaise for extra-curricular occupations, which could refer to the position he held as the president of the local organization Opera Nazionale Balilla in those years:

In my opinion, however, I have to confess that excessive extra-curricular occupations steal precious time from me both in terms of preparation and necessary rest – and this seriously worries me. It is bad that political authorities overemploy teachers in positions and jobs, which can dissuade or distract them from their work! Discipline imposes it on me and I obey: but I would be much happier if I could be entirely and only in charge with school. I want to hope that I will be soon freed from this excessive weight<sup>44</sup>.

The political chronicle has intensified starting from the mid-1930s. The image of a school at the service of the regime’s ideological propaganda emerges among the columns of Lucaroni’s registers; for example, on October 1936, on the occasion of the Anniversary for the great Fascist gathering, he described pupils, who quivered with enthusiasm, as

<sup>41</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 19 settembre 1932*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1932/33 school year, cit.

<sup>42</sup> G. Lucaroni, *A fior di labbro. Fantasie*, Montegiorgio, Tipografia Editrice Carlo Zizzini, 1931, pp. 145-146. For a deep examination on the topic of school uniforms, please see: I. Dussel, *Historicising Girls' Material Cultures in Schools: Revisiting Photographs of Girls in Uniforms*, «Women's History Review», vol. 29, n. 3, special issue, 2020, pp. 429-443; Ead., *School Uniforms and the Disciplining of Appearances: Towards a History of the Regulation of Bodies in Modern Educational Systems*, in T.S. Popkewitz, B.M. Franklin, M.A. Pereyra (edd.), *Cultural History and Education. Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling*, New York – London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2001, pp. 207-241; K. Stephenson, *A Cultural History of School Uniform*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2021.

<sup>43</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 5 novembre 1928*, in ASICM, series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1928/29», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1928/29 school year.

<sup>44</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del mese di settembre 1928*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1928/29 school year, cit.

The Duce, the omnipotent, the omnipresent, is for children and adults. Love for Him is able to perform any miracle. Well. Italian people have really merged into a single block, including these children, who move with their excitement for things so far from their evaluation!<sup>45</sup>

Lucaroni spoke about a «school which was never absent», when it dealt with the Duce<sup>46</sup> and, on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1936, he wrote that school lived on these dates to celebrate Fascism<sup>47</sup>.

However, there are some attacks and critical issues on choices, such as the adoption of the Single State Textbook. For example, he wrote in the school register of the 1932/33 school year:

Those State books will – unfortunately – come in a few days and I think about them with a weight... as if they fell on my stomach. What will I do with them, what will the guys do with 600 or more pages of treatises, which make up their primary school book? When will they decide to cut  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them?<sup>48</sup>

On other occasions, the teacher Lucaroni will return to attack the Single State Textbook – not only through the chronicle in the register, but also in some publications –, defining these books «stuffed, crammed, inadequate, voluminous and expensive, condemned for their disproportion since they first appeared and now officially decreed for rewriting them *ab imis*»<sup>49</sup> and demonstrating how he has not always hidden his own disagreement towards the choices of the Fascist government, despite a formal adherence to Fascism.

### Conclusions

Therefore, the chronicle about school life has proved to be an important source, which is able to give us valuable information for historical-educational research on what happened inside the classroom and the way the teacher Giovanni Lucaroni thought and acted. It is not a real intimate diary, but it is possible to define it as «a semi-public autobiographical space»<sup>50</sup>, re-using Quinto Antonelli's definition.

Despite an apparent political alienation – also due to numerous positions he held within Fascist organizations<sup>51</sup> –, it is believed that the deep analysis on the life of the

<sup>45</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 2 ottobre 1936*, in ASICM, series «Registri di classe», folder «Registri di classe 1936/37», Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1936/37 school year.

<sup>46</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 24 ottobre 1936*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1936/37 school year, cit.

<sup>47</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 28 ottobre 1936*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1936/37 school year, cit.

<sup>48</sup> *Cronaca ed osservazioni dell'insegnante sulla vita della scuola del 24 settembre 1932*, in Register of Giovanni Lucaroni for 1932/33 school year, cit.

<sup>49</sup> G. Lucaroni, *Premessa*, «Toga Praetexta», 1934, pp. 367-368.

<sup>50</sup> M.T. Segà, *Introduzione*, in Ead. (ed.), *La scuola fa la storia. Gli archivi scolastici per la ricerca e la didattica*, Portogruaro, Nuova dimensione, 2002, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, besides being a member of the Directory of the Fascio in Mogliano in 1924 and 1929 and

teacher Lucaroni – which was investigated through the lines of his school chronicles, but also using other sources, such as his personal archive – leads us to place him in that circle of teachers, who tried to demonstrate «a silent resistance against the regime»<sup>52</sup>.

Chronicles about school life represent an area to be still largely explored and it would be certainly interesting to start a large campaign of “excavations” within school archives by proceeding with a collection of the chronicles contained in the registers. There are still many school stories, which are preserved in school archives and can help us to add numerous details to educational historians’ research. Undoubtedly, these are sources, which are difficult to be found – also considering the difficulty of accessing school archives – but they are also not easy to be interpreted: it is obvious that we can wonder about how much chronicles are the result of a free reflection or a constraint imposed by the State. We can answer to this question through a close examination of the source considered and an intertwining of different types of sources, which allow us to reconstruct the teachers’ stories, such as the one by Giovanni Lucaroni, who was not only a teacher of a small village in the Macerata hinterland, but also «a clear writer about school matters and a technician inured to the school of experience»<sup>53</sup>, as Alfredo Saraz defined him.

an Extraordinary Commissar of the Fascio in Mogliano in June, July and August 1929, Giovanni Lucaroni founded the autonomous Balilla Group (1924-1928), he was the first president of the National Balilla Organization (from 1928 to 1930 and, then, in 1934 again) and a G.I.L. deputy commander from 28 October 1937. Lucaroni was also the Eighth Cohort B Commander and the Centuria Av. Commander, but he was also the first president of the National Afterwork Club (1927/28). Giovanni Lucaroni is also the author of the text *Sulle orme. “Ai Balilla”*, Montegiorgio, Tip. Editrice Carlo Zizzini, 1929, where there are examples of goodness, love, abnegation, constancy, heroism, sacrifice of adults and children. In fact, the names of those who have distinguished themselves in history are reported, such as Giotto and Donatello or Carlo Goldoni and Vittorio Alfieri, but also Massimo D’Azeglio, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Vittorio Emanuele III and Benito Mussolini and many others. There are also examples of young Balilla people who have distinguished themselves for exemplary feats, some of whom were even decorated with medals.

<sup>52</sup> About this topic, please see G. Chiosso, *Il fascismo e i maestri*, Milano, Mondadori, 2023. The relationship between the teacher Lucaroni and Fascism was deeply examined in: L. Paciaroni, *Il maestro di Mogliano. Vita e opera di Giovanni Lucaroni (1891-1980)*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Alfredo Saraz to Giovanni Lucaroni dated 25 March 1924, in Archive of the Centre for Documentation and Research in History of Textbooks & Children’s Literature of the the University of Macerata, fond «Giovanni Lucaroni», series «Recensioni e giudizi», document n. 48.





# The “Brilliant” School of Elena Ferrante

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## *Introduction*

In the intense picture painted of Italian society in *L'amica geniale* (henceforth: *My Brilliant Friend*), a literary landmark of recent times<sup>1</sup>, Elena Ferrante attributes a crucial role to education and culture. The story's two heroines, born and raised in a deprived quarter of Naples in the aftermath of World War II, find a place of commonality but also of division.

Both are outstandingly bright primary school students from deprived backgrounds and immediately forge a magnetic friendship which, despite their diverging destinies, will compel them forever to see themselves in each other. Lenù is given permission to try for the secondary school entrance exam, later attending the classical high school and eventually reaching the *Scuola Normale* in Pisa<sup>2</sup>, where she becomes part of the cultural elite while maintaining a contradictory bond with her city of origin. Lila, on the other hand, remains tenaciously bound to the streets of her childhood, personifying the obscure side of a childhood partly shared with her friend.

*My Brilliant Friend* has been translated into over 50 languages and is now one of the most popular texts in world literature, as it speaks a universal language<sup>3</sup>. Despite this, the book's poetics are still deeply rooted in postwar Italy, a period that from today's perspective appears to encapsulate the great hopes and disappointments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

By combining the verticality of historical events with the horizontality of ordinary lives, novels like that of Ferrante seem to give us a more direct, authentic insight into the past than books written by historians. This would indicate almost a mistrust of history, as if it were a subject dealing only with big events and important names, while at the same time favouring abstract categories and concepts<sup>4</sup>. Times have changed a great deal since the publication of Elsa Morante's *La storia* (The Story)<sup>5</sup>, a work that triggered heated

<sup>1</sup> See the bibliography in T. De Rogatis, *Elena Ferrante. Parole chiave*, Roma, Edizioni E/O, 2018, pp. 289-295.

<sup>2</sup> The *Scuola Normale Superiore* in Pisa is a leading institution in the Italian research system and a prestigious public university for higher education advanced studies.

<sup>3</sup> See V. Scarinci, *Chi sono i contemporanei di Elena Ferrante?*, «Doppiozero», 28 May 2017, <https://www.doppiozero.com/chi-sono-i-contemporanei-di-elena-ferrante> (last access: 04.03.2023); De Rogatis, *Parole chiave*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Loriga, *La piccola x. Dalla biografia alla storia*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> E. Morante, *La storia: romanzo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1974.

debate on precisely this issue<sup>6</sup>. Almost half a century later, in a historiographic context that has also changed a great deal, the popular appeal of Ferrante's work has aroused far less diffidence. Nobody seems to have any doubts that an ordinary individual – whoever they may be – can be a reliable historical witness. Enzo Traverso recently spoke of *La tirannide dell'Io* (The Tyranny of the Ego)<sup>7</sup>, alluding precisely to the importance of the individual dimension, both in the object and in the subject of historiographical work.

Then how can literature, which is so much more enjoyable to read, replace history? Although many people now believe that these subjects have permeable boundaries, their approaches are in fact very different. In this respect it may be useful to compare the two, given the role that narratives destined for a broad public can play in building a shared sense of history, albeit with the knowledge that nothing is so ambiguous as the relationship between history and literature. Furthermore, in recent years the great debate on “public history” has led us to question ourselves about narratives aimed at the general public, and the now ineluctable role they play in the building of a shared sense of history<sup>8</sup>. In the case of *My Brilliant Friend*, this urgency was renewed in the wake of the record audiences attracted by the televised drama broadcast on RAI 1 in November 2018, a screenplay that also remained absolutely faithful to the original story.

*My Brilliant Friend* is not an historical novel. Its aim is not to dramatise major events in history, nor is it questioning history, as Morante does at the start of each chapter. On the contrary, Ferrante's main intent is to tell the lives of two women, through the mirror of the (highly conflicted) friendship that has bound them since infancy. All she is interested in is Lila and Lenù. Yet, the story of the two women inevitably evokes the context in which they grew up, even if it is relegated to a «sketchily-defined background»<sup>9</sup>.

The story reads as a journey fraught with difficulty and hardship, fluctuating between success and defeat, the old and new generations, and thus remains eternally suspended between two periods: past and present. *My Brilliant Friend* refers to history indirectly, but the narrative device on which the novel is based is expressly tied into the work of the historian. It is Lenù, by now an established author, who decides to reconstruct the story of her own life, of Lila and of their friendship, by using as a source that unreliable, subjective method: memory. The decision not to address the question of History directly translates into a clever game of transparencies, in the knowledge that the setting for the rewriting of “History” and of “stories” is always the balcony of the present day<sup>10</sup>. Telling the story of the two women, just as «writing the history of the twentieth century»,

<sup>6</sup> A. Borghesi, *L'anno della Storia 1974-1975. Il dibattito politico e culturale sul romanzo di Elsa Morante. Cronaca e Antologia della critica*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2018, p. 18; see also G. Turi, *Libri e lettori nell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Carocci, 2018, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> E. Traverso, *La tirannide dell'Io. Scrivere il passato in prima persona*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> See the multi-author discussion edited by T. Bertilotti, *Pratica storiografica e altre narrazioni del passato*, «Contemporanea», n. 4, 2018, pp. 603-32.

<sup>9</sup> E. Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, Roma, Edizioni E/O, 2016, p. 274; includes interviews and letters with and by the writer between 1991-2016.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 366-67; on the complexity of historical time, see R. Koselleck, *Futuro passato. Per una semantica dei tempi storici*, Genova, Marietti, 1986; F. Hartog, *Regimi di storicità. Presentismo ed esperienze del tempo*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2007.

becomes in the words of Enzo Traverso «an exercise in walking the tightrope» between history and memory<sup>11</sup>.

So the story begins at the end, in 2010, when the fate of our two heroines, now well into their sixties, reaches a definitive crossroads. Lenù's decision is a kind of revenge against her friend, whose surprising talents of intelligence, inventiveness and indeed genius she so admires – to the extent that Lenù suspects it was actually her friend who had the real gift for writing. The division of roles is very clear: Lenù writes the novels and is the one who escapes the neighbourhood, while Lila is too busy living to write and stays where she is, facing her demons head-on. Their destinies are divergent, but complementary. Each thinks the other is her brilliant friend.

*My Brilliant Friend* has been inspiringly described as «the confessions of an Italian woman»<sup>12</sup>, – a story that describes – one hundred and fifty years after Nievo<sup>13</sup> – sixty years of the history of Italian womanhood. After all, women are owned by time – starting with the biological clock. In some way they also own time, having a special relationship with writing as a tool of self-analysis, which is why women are reliable witnesses of a history that goes beyond themselves.

The timeline of seventy years traced by the four volumes of *My Brilliant Friend* does not appear to be dictated directly by the twists and turns of the Republic's history – although there is a striking parallel between the existential plot and the evolution of the general context, the retreat and sense of defeat typical of old age and the emergence from the postwar period.

School and culture, to which language and writing are closely linked, are at the heart of these complex dialectics, which recall long-standing problems of Italy, themes on which historians have long reflected: the country's tormented national unity and the difficult dialectic between centre and periphery. From childhood, Lenù and Lila are fully aware that a lack of education and speaking in dialect are the immovable boundary markers of their neighbourhood's inferiority. They know that the game of their salvation will play out behind the desks at school. During their infancy and into adolescence, both girls associate the sought-after world of culture and education (Lenù defines it as her «true wealth»<sup>14</sup>) with riches and wellbeing, to the extent that in their minds, people gain wealth by writing. Part of our heroines' journey is thus reflected in the dynamics of school education, which in turn reflect Italy's path through the twentieth century, with all its light and shadows.

Culture and education enjoy widespread respect. Men and women, the decent and the dishonest and even the Solara family of the Camorra – who play a not insignificant role in the novel – hold Lenù in high regard: she goes to school, then publishes books and writes for newspapers (even if it is to denounce people like them). In the same way,

<sup>11</sup> E. Traverso, *Il secolo armato. Interpretare le violenze del Novecento*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2012 (French edition: 2011), p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> B. Manetti, *Confessioni di un'italiana*, «L'indice dei libri del mese», n. 12, 2014, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Ippolito Nievo was an Italian writer and patriot; his *Confessioni d'un italiano* (1867) is widely considered one of the most important novel about the Italian *Risorgimento*.

<sup>14</sup> E. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, Roma, Edizioni E/O, 2011, Volume 1, p. 255.

they also respect Lila, who is unable to continue her studies but possesses extraordinary talents.

Historiography has also shown that with the acceleration in social mobility during the Fifties and Sixties, even in the deprived South, school and study played an irreplaceable role, upholding the traditional social hierarchies while also reshaping them, offering an extraordinary tool for redemption within contexts fraught with difficulties and hardship – something that the definition of “golden age”, used for the first thirty years postwar, tends to gloss over<sup>15</sup>.

School and culture are an instrument of redemption all the more precious to women, given the unprecedented, rapid and thus traumatic process of emancipation during the Sixties and Seventies, the decade when Italy’s polemical modernisation was at its peak. For both Lila and Lenù, women in a hostile world that intends to give them nothing, knowledge and language are the keys to building their identities, and to freeing themselves – even merely loosening the grip – of the vice of the past. Both belong to the first generation of women who overcame a thousand problems in order to challenge male dominance and build their own lives. The neighbourhood in which our two heroines were born is emblematic of the obstacles they will encounter along their way. A microcosm of violence and barbarity, it is an abyss that could swallow them up at any time, because before being outside, it is inside.

It is significant that for both children, school – where girls traditionally excel, and this is also confirmed for other periods, by the few studies existing on this topic – is the first place in which they find an equality, a recognition and even an affection that they cannot find in the family. The teacher Oliviero goes out of her way for both girls and is what their real mothers cannot be for their daughters; in the same way, the female teachers at the grammar school look very different from the maternal model, a figure of which Lenù in particular is deeply ashamed.

What kind of school does Ferrante portray? The primary school is a traditional, selective and meritocratic institution, tempered by the protective figure of the teacher, Oliviero, even though her affection is proportionate to her pupils’ achievements. For the young Lenù, her first teacher is a goddess, in competition and synergy with her mother. Her teacher finds books for her, takes her on holiday to Ischia and will always see Lenù as her greatest professional achievement. But for those who cannot keep to the pace, the teacher is unhesitatingly ruthless, even with bright children like Enzo, or even the talented Lila, who betrays her gifts to abandon her studies, albeit reluctantly. The book is in fact dealing with a deeply classist institution that may facilitate those who have the means (like the pharmacist’s son, of unremarkable ability) but is not an easy journey even for the capable, deserving students cited in the Italian Constitution.

Ferrante devotes little space to the *scuola media* (middle school or lower secondary school), which before the 1962 reforms continued to stand as a barrier and which appears overall to be rather colourless. The *liceo* (grammar school) is more open, at least

<sup>15</sup> See M. Barbagli, D.I. Kertzer (edd.), *Storia della famiglia in Europa*, Vol. 3: *Il Novecento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005; M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L’istruzione nell’Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017.

superficially, but it is full of contradictions, which Ferrante illustrates in the figure of Miss Galiani. Although this teacher has an innovative, even unconventional approach to the curriculum, to the extent that she discusses current affairs and actively engages her students, she proves to be more middle-class and straight-laced than she might at first seem. The sentiment she ultimately shows towards Lenù, after having encouraged and praised her for years, is a mix of hostility and envy. The *Scuola Normale*, by contrast, is portrayed as the temple of conservation, classist and chauvinist even when it opens up to debate, to be exploited only as a social springboard.

The conflictual relationship between the Italian language and dialect – central to Ferrante's poetics – is redolent of the fatigue of a tough battle with an uncertain outcome. In *My Brilliant Friend*, dialect is neither consolatory nor protective. It is simply an uncomfortably tight garment that one would prefer to rip off. Italy's national language, and the increasingly sophisticated use that our heroines make of it as they progress out of infancy, are initiatory tools that testify how language can bring equality, and division. Not even the Italian spoken by the educated Neapolitans – such as Lenù's teachers, – is any more authentic<sup>16</sup>. It is also an expression, albeit from another viewpoint, of a process of construction of a language (and identity) that is anything but flat, beyond all stereotypes<sup>17</sup>.

Ferrante revives the question of language and adds originality by reading it from a gender perspective. In doing so, she reveals the male obsession with verbal supremacy, strikingly evident even among the non-parliamentary left-wing circles of the mid-1970s, and then the inevitable attempt to appropriate masculine models by entering into competition, but also the need to experiment with life by following other avenues.

Lenù places all her hopes for a better future on culture and education – but this is perhaps precisely the reason why she never fully shakes off the profound – «constitutional and ineradicable» sense of being an outsider<sup>18</sup>, – feeling ultimately rejected, as if she was something borrowed and never owned. In addition to her commitment to study, this is another reason why the young Lenù imposes on herself a strict discipline of reading, about all kinds of subjects but especially current affairs, both national and international, and politics.

However, it is the writing and its progressive refinement that allow Lenù to settle the score. Context is by no means secondary to this. The stage is set for a qualitative leap during the political and cultural breakdown of the 1970s, of which feminism would prove to be the overriding element. In Carla Lonzi's *Sputiamo su Hegel* (Let's Spit on Hegel)<sup>19</sup>, Lenù finds powerful answers, which change her view of the world and broaden her horizons in a sort of epistemological revolution that the historians of her generation, with the category of gender, have applied to the reinterpretation of the past. For Lenù, feminism is first and foremost a confirmation of the crucial importance and ambivalence of the body, which appears to be the main route to salvation, yet also the place of defeat.

<sup>16</sup> See De Rogatis, *Parole chiave*, cit., p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>18</sup> E. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, Roma, Edizioni E/O, 2012, vol. 2, pp. 316-317.

<sup>19</sup> C. Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, Roma, Editoriale grafica, 1970.

*My Brilliant Friend* is thus a representation of the past with a strong generational and gender imprint which, like all ex-post reinterpretations including historiography, is constructed in, and reflects, the present day. But unlike history, a novel is free to use pretence, which makes it not only more compelling but also, paradoxically, more authentic than reality itself.

In conclusion, the deep sense of failure with which the elderly Lila and Lenù look back on their childhood at the end of the novel, is linked to the end of the “short century”, which in Italy also swept away the first republic, taking with it all the women’s points of reference – starting with education and culture, which they both used at great cost to shape their identities, albeit in different ways. Moreover, in Italy the issue of schooling played an undeniably important political and social role until the 1980s, partly because of the public function attributed to culture.

On this point too, *My Brilliant Friend* does not stand alone. The decline of the model of education born from the Unity of Italy – the centralised state system seen as a favoured route towards nationalisation – has aroused no less apprehension and disorientation among the teaching profession. The past, whether demonised or looked at with regret, still weighs heavily on the public debate on the crisis in education. It is as if, by failing to recognise the world we are looking at, we are unable to imagine the future either<sup>20</sup>.

What about the historians in all this? Historians play a decisive role, which can only be that of rereading the past secularly, documents in hand, while fending off flawed perspectives, whether they be generational or political.

<sup>20</sup> On this point I refer to Galfré, *Tutti a scuola!*, cit., pp. 21 ss.

# Restless and Longlasting *Cuore*. Readings of a Classic between Text and Images

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## 1. *Libro Cuore*

*Libro Cuore* – as has been known for entire generations of Italians – is one of the most successful and widely read Italian children's classics<sup>1</sup>. Destined for immediate success right from its first publication on 15 October 1886, by Treves of Milan<sup>2</sup>, De Amicis's *Cuore* is still today reprinted in large copies in the children's book series of the most important Italian publishing houses. There is thus nothing strange about returning to look at De Amicis's best known work in an attempt to understand its continued popularity from the perspective of school memories passed down for over a century.

At the time *Cuore* was written, in Piedmont, like much of the rest of Italy in the late 1880s, the lower middle classes were facing the spectre of social degradation, the lower classes unemployment and overall impoverishment and the old landowning and moneyed aristocratic families had come out badly of the era's agriculture and banking upheavals. All this was a backdrop which led to a general fading of hopes for gradual and non-violent change in the establishment, economic life and social relations. The headlines of the main Turin newspapers show the climate generated in this transitional phase clearly, a process which was to end only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Piedmont, with the first industrialisation processes. And it was, once again, the press which considered the direction being taken by the working class movement, which was beginning to organise politically and in trade unions, in many of its editorials and debates, especially the «going to the people» by certain intellectuals, with De Amicis in the lead, and the condemnation and awareness-raising in the name of the humanitarian principles of brotherhood and social justice being trumpeted in newspapers and journals as well as novels and treatises. They are the same principles that this Oneglia-born writer inserts into Enrico Bottini's school diary, making *Cuore* «one of the most powerful *national cultural unification* tools (understood in the anthropological and psycho-sociological sense) in the name of the intellectual hegemony

\* Susanna Barsotti wrote sections 1, 2 and 3; Chiara Lepri sections 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>1</sup> See A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *Fra infanzia e scuola: Cuore (1886) di Edmondo De Amicis*, in *Storia e antologia della letteratura per l'infanzia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Vol. II, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> As Alberto Asor Rosa has noted, *Cuore* was published a grand total of forty times in its first year of publication and a million copies of it had been sold by 1923. See A. Asor Rosa, *La cultura*, in *Storia d'Italia*, Vol. IV, tomo 2, *Dall'Unità a oggi*, Torino, Einaudi, 1975.



of the northern bourgeoisie, or at least the part of it which adhered to enlightenment and cautious progress ideals»<sup>3</sup>. This is one of the cornerstones of De Amicis's work as it intersects with general plans to *civilise* the lower classes on the basis of the world vision and values inherent to the progressive bourgeoisie and its productive classes, who played such a centre-stage, driving force, role in the national political unification process. *Libro Cuore* thus succeeded in what was a fundamentally important enterprise for recently unified Italy: national unification via a literary work whose language and values made it accessible to all. The entirely original subject of the book was school. In his book De Amicis tackles the pedagogical issue facing the unification state and does so by letting his characters speak. In this sense the school framework and monthly accounts are two ways of recounting Italy's unification dream, putting together rich and poor, good and bad, bottom and top of the class.

## 2. *The "heart" school*

Enrico's school diary revolves around this paradigm and, in this way, De Amicis seeks to «demonstrate that, while the class differences remain, the children of this famous third year of primary school, as human beings and Italians, could in any case develop friendships, love and mutual respect»<sup>4</sup>, the very same relationships around which the future Italy could take shape. Education is thus the linchpin of De Amicis's message, together with schooling, teachers, state authority, citizenship education entrusted to the literacy process and civil coexistence within the context of social cohesion in difference. School acts as an ideological filter and ethical and civil integration driving force. It is the fulcrum of universal emancipation, cut through by events in children's and adults' lives. In *Cuore*, De Amicis focuses on school because in his vision it is this which is the driving force behind the nation's social and political emancipation and, at the same time, the tool best suited to moral and economic emancipation. Through Enrico Bottini's voice the writer recounts his own utopia in the school world, a world away from school as it really was, which De Amicis was all too familiar with and had described in *Romanzo di un maestro*<sup>5</sup>. His intention, however, was to outline a school model, however ideal and unlikely to come to fruition, as a guide in its pursuit. The narrative voice (only the monthly accounts are not his), as we have seen, is Enrico, an idealised late 19<sup>th</sup> century Turin boy:

[...] with his Frenchified Italian, his hyperbole, his over played instrumental tools, his taste for 'homemade' rhetoric and so on.

*Cuore's* school is to be everyman's school, which could be anywhere in Italy. It is true that it is in Turin, for no other reason than that a utopia such as this could only be the expression of a northern

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 928. The italics are original.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 930-931.

<sup>5</sup> See E. De Amicis, *Il Romanzo d'un Maestro*, edited by A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2021.

Enlightenment mindset. De Amicis's is a city school and could not be elsewhere because the city acts and must act as a constant educational stimulus: its monuments, its topography, its troop processions, the king, the Carnival, All Soul's Day, the market, its various artisan workshops, its shops, building firms and means of transport. The city is one of the cornerstones of De Amicis's school<sup>6</sup>.

De Amicis's school has a further two pillars: teacher and the family. His teacher, Perboni<sup>7</sup>, is a serious man who never laughs, never jokes. Without him school would be impossible. He is the author of the monthly reports in which he demonstrates all his knowledge. If the classroom can be seen as a container, the expression of a geographical confine, symbolically Italy itself, the teacher is its content, the substance of the educational experience. Via school, in the sharing of classroom life, a sort of embryonic nation, what pupils learn is that a civilised nation must have spaces and contexts in which all disparities can be cancelled out. Within the classroom space it is teachers who level out the differences, who eliminate all disparities in the name of a shared goal.

The family has a similarly fundamental role in *Cuore*, which – as Giovanni Genovesi has noted – «risks overshadowing the teacher's role, with the latter seeming to be the person who puts the family's, and above all the father's, will into practice»<sup>8</sup>. Alberto Bottini, Enrico's father, is the «father prototype supporter of the school [...]». He is always there, together with his son who tells him the salient events happening at school: meetings with Enrico's companions on the street, at school or at home, comments on class activities, conversations with the headmaster, visits to places in the city, visits to the former teacher»<sup>9</sup>.

The scaffolding around De Amicis's school is, however, rocked by an errant individual, Franti, one of Enrico's classmates, the rebel, the bully, as we would call him today. He leaves the scene too early for us to truly understand what his role in the novel might be. However, as Umberto Eco notes in his well-known *Elogio di Franti*, with his laugh, his sadistic poking fun, it is Franti who points an accusing finger at the paternalism of the post-unification classroom. Franti is to dystopia what Garrone is to utopia, school is a negative vision for the former and a place of dreams for the latter.

This is the basis of the idea of Franti as a metaphysical motif within *Cuore*'s make-believe sociology. Franti's laugh is destructive and is considered evil solely because Enrico identified Good with the existing order, which he himself profits from. But if Good is simply that which a society identifies as favourable, Evil will be solely that which conflicts with a society identified with Good, and Laughter, the tool the innovator uses to cast doubt on what a society considers to be Good, will take the shape of Evil, whilst in actual fact the person laughing – or scoffing – is none other than an exponent of a different but possible society<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> P. Boero, G. Genovesi, «*Cuore*». *De Amicis tra critica e utopia*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> On teachers and certain considerations on the subject of the portrayal of the teachers in *Cuore* see, amongst others, E. Catarsi, *I maestri e il "Cuore"*. *La figura del maestro elementare nella letteratura per l'infanzia tra Otto e Novecento*, Pisa, Del Cerro, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Boero, Genovesi, «*Cuore*». *De Amicis tra critica e utopia*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> U. Eco, *Elogio di Franti*, in E. De Amicis, *Cuore. Libro per i ragazzi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001, p. 362. The article was published for the first time in «Il Caffè», in 1962, and entitled *Franti o il Cuore*, and later with the

Franti, a despicable person in Enrico's eyes, is emblematic not simply of explicit diversity but also proof, as Franco Cambi has pointed out<sup>11</sup>, of a limit to De Amicis's vision, casting light on real tensions in Umberto-era society, a crack within «the simplified image of society and childhood which De Amicis constructs and puts forward as a mass society code of ethics»<sup>12</sup>. What De Amicis proposes, in fact, and what Franti risks jeopardising, is the idea of a school by, and for, everyone as a necessary element in emancipation for its secular nature and its attention to the school classroom, its relations with the family, its ability to impact on the social status quo. It is a school whose basis is relationships and feelings without neglecting education, a *heart* method which relates to the moral dimension of the educational process.

To channel his school *utopia*, De Amicis makes use of a narrative structure that is one of the most significant elements in *Cuore*, constructed around a harmonious rendering of three methods: Enrico's school diary, letters from his father, mother and sister, and the monthly stories of his teacher, Perboni. These are three intersecting parts whose convergence and coherence in content are the foundation stones of the book. Giuseppe Zaccaria<sup>13</sup> cites the scene of Enrico's mother's visit, with her son, to Crossi's mother, an episode commented by Enrico's mother, and echoed by his father in the letter entitled *La scuola* and whose ending is taken up by Enrico himself in his introduction to the first of his monthly tales, *Il piccolo patriota padovano*. It is a process which embodies a structural constant in the work in which the three registers cross reference each other.

The three cross-referencing texts are mutually intersecting and consolidate into a shifting, mutually reinforcing and nurturing whole. The structure of the text is thus dynamic, intensely dynamic, and this facilitates its reading and fills those «langours» which are deliberately placed centre stage in the operation<sup>14</sup>.

The characters in this universe are less full-blown characters than types, both good and bad, crucial to the development of the novel and its achievement of its objectives. Each of Enrico's classmates, and Enrico himself, are engaged in a self-improvement battle and this is possible only if they work together. De Amicis's school is a place in which individual wills are called on to converge on a single aim, in a constant process of reciprocal emulation under the wise guidance of their teacher. However, as Cambi has argued, *Cuore's* ideal type revolves around three key figures<sup>15</sup>. We have already spoken of Franti and the other two are Enrico and Garrone. There is a tangible resemblance between

title it is now known as, *Elogio di Franti*, in U. Eco, *Diario minimo*, Milano, Mondadori, 1963.

<sup>11</sup> See F. Cambi, *Collodi, De Amicis, Rodari. Tre immagini d'infanzia*, Bari, Dedalo, 1985. Certain important considerations on Franti are also to be found in D. Starnone, *Introduzione* a E. De Amicis, *Cuore*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1993, especially pp. XVIII ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> See G. Zaccaria, *Cuore di Edmondo De Amicis*, in A. Asor Rosa (ed.), *Letteratura italiana. L'età contemporanea. Le opere 1870-1900*, Vol. 13, Torino, Einaudi, 2007, pp. 560-562.

<sup>14</sup> F. Cambi, *Rileggendo «Cuore»: pedagogia civile e società postunitaria*, in F. Cambi, G. Cives, *Il bambino e la lettura. Testi scolastici e libri per l'infanzia*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 1996, p. 325. On the importance of *Cuore's* tripartite structure, see also F. Trequadrini, *Letteratura come rimpianto e come desiderio*, L'Aquila, Tracce, 1988.

<sup>15</sup> Cambi, *Collodi, De Amicis, Rodari*, cit.

them, an integration. The two classmates are emblematic of the conduct required of the sons of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie itself, bound up with solidarity, brotherly understanding and communication. They are direct embodiments of *heart*. Affectionate and generous, their behaviour is marked by a sense of equality and fraternity, with Enrico embodying an interclass and humanitarian dimension constantly reinforced in his letters to his parents, and Garrone embodying natural, steadfast justice as the criteria regulating their action. This latter, always described as good and with an adult sense of justice, can be considered emblematic of the ideal lower classes De Amicis has in mind: quiet, never seditious, responsible and aware of what is right, predisposed to working with others but with a firm sense of his own identity. Enrico, on the other hand, is paradigmatic of a progressive bourgeois consciousness which seeks to understand and take on board some of the values and virtues of the lower classes. He is also, and first and foremost, an ethical symbol. «The embodiment of a moral disposition which can only be built on ad hoc education of which family, school and friendships form part [...] and which look, on one hand, to justice and equality and, on the other, to compassion and emotional solidarity. In it, in fact, it is emotions [...] which are the roots and ‘proof’ of universality and the potential for a justice ethic»<sup>16</sup>.

Types not characters, then, because what De Amicis is interested in is laying the foundations for school, understanding the pillars it is built on, the norms and values interwoven into it and on which its purpose is built, embodied in the monthly stories. The sentimental and adventurous tone of the book is designed to appeal to both adult and young readers with the latter being who De Amicis relies on to get the book into the hands of parents and involve them in the titanic task of founding a true school.

### 3. *Italian heart*

A significant 2021 essay by Marcello Fois entitled *L'invenzione degli italiani*<sup>17</sup> attests to the restlessness and enduring quality referred to in the title of this work, underlining that De Amicis's book should perhaps be revived and reread today as an Italian literary classic whose primary aims were not literary, in Fois's view, but rather revolved around a specific ethical engagement, whose extension has come down to us. The fundamental importance of De Amicis's pedagogical tale, Fois argues, lies in its ability to formulate an essential structure by which we can portray and recount our national unification on the basis of solidarity. It is a structure based on education, empathy and love which, in these times of hatred, it is more important than ever to relearn. In *Cuore* De Amicis put forward a model of schooling based on real education for all and formulated an essential basis on which to portray and recount ourselves as Italians, whatever our differences. «De

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> M. Fois, *L'invenzione degli italiani. Dove ci porta "Cuore"*, Torino, Einaudi, 2021.

Amicis's impact on the national and folk imagination is [...], whether we are aware of it or not, still immense»<sup>18</sup>.

If, paraphrasing Italo Calvino, «a classic is a book which never stops saying what it has to say»<sup>19</sup>, then it may be important to reread *Cuore* and ensure it is read by children, but below the surface of its sometimes rhetorical tone, «as an outline of “how we were” and, to an even greater extent, “where we come from”»<sup>20</sup>, both historically and psychologically. Studies around De Amicis's work and his idea of schooling carried out since the 1980s have demonstrated the work's interpretative richness and also, at the same time, shone a spotlight on a new way of rethinking his work, from a political and no longer rhetorical perspective. The rhetoric is certainly there but it revolves around a desire for persuasion regarding the creation of an educational project in which it was school that was centre stage.

#### 4. *Illustration and visual memory in Cuore*

*Cuore* has thus contributed to the formation of a school memory which coincides, of course, with the vision of its author, but as an «ultra-successful and ultra-controversial» book<sup>21</sup> which is now almost a hundred and forty years old and has survived the various political and cultural climates that school has lived through and won itself a nucleus of interest in the critical debate.

For the purposes of rethinking this path, we have chosen to enquire into the role played by the novel's illustrations in consolidating the notion of schooling<sup>22</sup> as espoused by De Amicis. It is also the work's iconographical apparatus – to all intents and purposes a meta-text, in fact – that enables us to observe diachronically not solely changes in Italy's educational demands but also the novel's impact on the image of school held by generations of Italians for more than a century.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century children's literature featured a close bond between words and images: books for children and young people are characterised by a polyphonic dimension capable of communicating an ideological continuity between words and images, breathing life into a shared and unified project. *Cuore* fits fully into this paradigm: whilst the three illustrators Treves used aligned to De Amicis's message, what they did first and foremost was to set in motion a dialogue designed to interpret the work in accordance with their own stylistic and expressive contributions. These survived for over fifty years. It was only from the mid-1940s onwards that *Cuore* illustrations multiplied in the new editions, which have continued to come out right up to our own times, in a fascinating journey

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> I. Calvino, *Perché leggere i classici*, Milano, Mondadori, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Cambi, *Rileggendo «Cuore»*, cit., p. 338.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>22</sup> For an in-depth study into the relationship between educational memory and image, see E. Collelledmont, *La memoria visual de la escuela*, «Educatio Siglo XXI», vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 133-156.

in which the novel's illustrators initially fell into line with the author's intentions before evolving into criticism, even satire, on the novel.

### 5. *A path through Cuore's iconography*

The first edition of *Cuore* was not illustrated. Paola Pallottino has noted that its figurative story is «one of the most significant in Italian illustration history»<sup>23</sup>. Treves published the 126<sup>th</sup> edition with 200 engravings, 194 of which were signed. Just five years later, in 1891, he announced a publication with illustrations by three “art masters” in «L'Illustrazione Italiana» which «followed the text word for word and illustrated every page», making for «the most attractive, most real, most interesting book and most widely patriotic book ever put in young people's hands»<sup>24</sup>.

These three illustrators certainly contributed to the book's great success «making the principal readings tangible but adding their own, and thus extending its values to those most congenial to the individual reader»<sup>25</sup>: Arnaldo Ferraguti, linked to the social protest movement, Enrico Nardi, with his light, ironic vein, and Giulio Aristide Sartorio, a Roman painter known for his friezes in the lower house at Montecitorio, all paid close attention to the publisher's instructions showing, for Faeti, «a perhaps sincere intention of rendering the reality of the lower classes clearly and honestly» without, however, freeing themselves of «their unconscious fear and hostility» which ultimately took precedence over all else<sup>26</sup>. But it was Ferraguti, whose childhood had been similar to Franti's (having been expelled from Bourbon-era school for drawing Garibaldi), who left the most pervasive mark on the image of De Amicis's school which has survived to our own day. His were the famous classroom illustrations in which we can make out a geographical map of unified Italy, the children and their desks. His was the iconic kiss on the mouth between Enrico's mother and a nursery school child. His is the image of Franti's expulsion from the school when he is thrown out by the headmaster<sup>27</sup>. The painter's illustrations enquire into the marginalised classes, the work of the lower classes, emigration and the schooling process and highlight class conflict<sup>28</sup>, thus throwing light on the social ferment of the years in which *Cuore* was written but also underlining the languors inherent to the work itself, from the starting point of its title.

<sup>23</sup> P. Pallottino, *Lacrime e veleni. Un secolo di illustrazioni per “Cuore”*, in M. Ricciardi, L. Tamburini (edd.), *Cent'anni di “Cuore”. Contributi per la rilettura del libro*, Torino, Umberto Allemandi & C., 1986, p. 171.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>26</sup> A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure. Gli illustratori italiani dei libri per l'infanzia*, Roma, Donzelli, 2011, p. 114.

<sup>27</sup> On the subject of the Franti drawn by Ferraguti, Antonio Faeti notes that «with a quasi-clinical lucidity he used his artist's pencil to show a strange smile replete with all the physical otherness which, in the illustrations of the day, were characteristic of the inmates of Salpêtrière or delinquents in Lombroso's work» (Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., p. 112).

<sup>28</sup> Pallottino, *Lacrime e veleni*, cit., p. 176.

The interpretations of this artistic trio remained unchallenged until 1946, with the exception of 12 colour illustrations by Ticino painter Luigi Rossi in the 1920s when Treves's publishing monopoly ended and the Garzanti edition came out with cartoon drawings by Bruno Angoletta. In 1947, once again for Garzanti, an edition illustrated by Giorgio Tabet came out, with the latter's talent stifled by the hagiographic aura given the work by its previous illustrators. This was the advent of a trend destined to continue: the incessant republications of *Cuore* which followed surged, after a new Garzanti illustrated by Frigerio and Rizzato to mark the fiftieth anniversary of De Amicis's death (1958) led to a varied sequence of editions and illustrators taking their own style and poetics to a strong adherence to by then consolidated *clichés*. «The categorical De Amicis labels»<sup>29</sup> still predominate regardless of a school that was becoming universal in precisely those years, but which remained a place in which «present, past and future clashed head on, where the demands of modernisation and planning logics, together with the dissemination of new mindsets, encountered the resistance of rooted traditions»<sup>30</sup>. This emerges clearly from later editions of *Cuore* whose semantics were triggered by a methodologically dialectic use of the verbal and iconographical codes taken together, precisely where images favour and stimulate the decodification processes not only of the novel's meanings but also of the subliminal messages of an educational character that it expresses<sup>31</sup>.

## 6. Two comparison frameworks and two exceptions

Monica Galfré observed that «in the 1950s and 60s there was Mastronardi's view of the situation, the teacher humiliated by a hardworking and vicious society which pushes him to the margins, that of Mario Lodi, the Po plains countryside teacher who manages to carve out space for experimentation [...], and there is Don Milani, who [...] taught the power of the alphabet to the poor, laying bare the class-based scales suffocating Italian schools and souls prior to the protest movements»<sup>32</sup>.

The equal middle school was set up in 1962; Einaudi published Gianni Rodari's *Favole al telefono* with illustrations by Bruno Munari; an article came out in «Il Caffè» destined to establish a *before* and *after* in the critical history of *Cuore*, namely Eco's *Franti o il Cuore*, now better known as *Elogio di Franti* referred to above, which laid bare the

<sup>29</sup> Faeti, *Guardare le figure*, cit., p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to those mentioned in the text, the following are some of the best known editions: 1963, Fabbri: ill. G. Bartoli; 1964, Garzanti: ill. A. Bioletto; 1965, Mondadori: ill. E. Bertello; 1965, IEI: ill. V. Accornero; 1965, Capitol: ill. R. Sgrilli; 1966, Paoline: ill. C. Ruffinelli; 1968, Malipiero: ill. G. Castellani; 1969, La Scuola: ill. C. Solarino; 1973, Salani: ill. G. Montelli; 1978, Rizzoli reuses Ferraguti, Nardi, Sartorio; 1981, Mondadori: ill. G.L. Coppola; 1985, Mondadori: G. Bertello; 1988, Piccoli: G. Festino; 1990, Paoline: ill. A. Cesselon; 1992, SEI: ill. S. Lobalzo; 1994, Mondadori: S. Alcorn; 1998, Mursia: S. Bernasetti and T. Ornito; 2001, Mondadori: ill. D. Toffolo; 2001, Giunti: G. Gallizia; 2005, Fabbri: D. Fabbri; 2011, Raffaello: ill. A. Rossi; 2011, DeAgostini: ill. M. Longo; 2020, Mondadori: ill. E. Stoirich.

<sup>32</sup> M. Galfré, *Tutti a scuola! L'istruzione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Roma, Carocci, 2017, p. 192.



novel's rhetorical and lower middle class contents, its cruelty, class-based and conformist vision and paternalist overtones. Despite this «peak of rejection»<sup>33</sup> that the ideological and cultural renewal the work had already been subject to even prior to 1968, with its new educational models and the birth of a freer civil and social consciousness, despite the stylistic fresh air being breathed into the sector (think of the influence of US comics) its illustrators ultimately continued with their «calligraphic reconstructions» or «supine enlargements»<sup>34</sup> of now anachronistic situations and sentiments.

There are two comparison frameworks capable of confirming this trend in particular: depictions of Franti, specifically, and of the classroom. The former because Franti is a linchpin figure around whom the most heated debate around those praising and those deprecating the work revolve and which is thus crucial to the reception of the work. The latter because it is the representation of the classroom which visual pedagogy draws on most, together with the images it fosters: the itself theatrical class setting generates an extraordinarily evocative and incisive drama<sup>35</sup> and *Cuore's* illustrations over time, at the end of the Ferraguti-Nardi-Sartorio season, made a world which is generally closed to the outside world visible externally, too, one which is also replete with the evocations and expectations of the collective imagination of yesterday and today. Lastly, these two comparison frameworks act as a *litmus test* because they cut through all the various editions one-dimensionally with a first exception, the edition illustrated by Costantini.

In 1977, not long after the *Decreti Delegati* Law, the mass schooling system was restructured around law no. 517. The year special needs classes were abolished, Flavio Costantini, a painter with a long-standing interest in social history, illustrated the Strenna Olivetti edition of the novel by turning the dominant system on its head and giving readers what Pallottino calls the «iconographical equivalent» of *Elogio di Franti*. What emerges in his work, in fact, is an evident criticism of a school institution in which «everyday invisible violence is played out»<sup>36</sup> while gnarled human figures, many buildings and few children, in the name of the denial of childhood, alternate in full-page plate geometries. The dead teacher has Matilde Serao's face, anatomical hearts are visible on the walls and stationers sell Attilio Mussino's *Pinocchio* and Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*. And what is Franti's place? He is shoeless, with his arms outstretched and an embittered expression on his face. It is not clear where he is going, but he is moving robot-like along the facade of a building whose windows are barred. Could this be the prison he is destined for after his argument with Stardi? This disquieting image echoes Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), a fundamentally important work which was making waves at the time, laying bare the repressive devices inherent in educational practice and its institutions.

Costantini's vision remained a one-off for some time. In the 1980s, in the wake of Comencini's 1984 TV broadcast, *Cuore's* iconography underwent a further involution: the illustrators of the day still preferred the «heart line», with Franti continuing to be

<sup>33</sup> Cambi, *Collodi, De Amicis, Rodari*, cit. 82.

<sup>34</sup> P. Pallottino, *Lacrime e veleni. Flavio Costantini e l'illustrazione di Cuore*, in *Viaggio intorno a Cuore*, Genova, Tormena, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> R. Farné, *Pedagogia visuale*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2021, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Pallottino, *Lacrime e veleni*, cit., p. 178.

marked out by his scornful expressions and clothing, while the Baretti classmates, much more realistically drawn in colour, were timidly transgressive, staring out of the classroom window in boredom, like the pupils of *Cipi* and teacher Mario Lodi.

It was not until 2001 that *Cuore* was turned on its head with the dazzling and irreverent illustrations of Alberto Rebori and Federico Maggioni published by Corraini, a Mantua publishing house with a long-standing interest in art. What is striking about this version? In contrast with the fixity of the original text, it stands out like a distorting mirror with an irreverent depiction of the book's characters and events. Thus, if «every era has found what it “needed” in *Cuore* and cut loose what it considered jetsam»<sup>37</sup>, this demonstrates the usefulness of continuing to read a novel which our studies show to have been an undeniable historical source and, at the same time, must inevitably come across as anachronistic to 21<sup>st</sup> century readers.

By choosing parody did the two artists deliberately adopt «the laughter, irony, scorn, devil may care, mimicry and ridicule»<sup>38</sup> typical of Franti himself? A provocative, systematic visual deconstruction in which Rebori placed feral hallucinatory figures at the desks and Maggioni shows a confused Franti, almost a sketch of a prison lifer, and then a collection of organs sticking out of a thorax (*Franti il disordine interiore*, we read: in English, *Franti, the inner disorder*), is indicative of a changed cultural climate and idea of school – of autonomy – which, its difficulties notwithstanding, takes new educational criticisms on board and demands that the “Frantis” we have always had be accepted. *W la diversità* (*Long live diversity*, in English) is a heartfelt exclamation visible in an eloquent illustration of Maggioni's.

In the context of the indirect memory of school generated by *Cuore*'s iconography characterised by a hypnotic compulsion for repetition, Rebori and Maggioni revisited a myth by acting on the visual image it continues to feed into. It is this illustration turned into a tool for criticism, revisionism and analysis of the most famous and long-lived literary work on schooling in Italy, one which takes back its historical quality but which continues to prompt wide-ranging thinking on the image of school both past and present and on themes and problems in today's school. This majestic dialogue between the two artists thus opens up not only to the subtle interplay of the new children's editions<sup>39</sup>, which give them the necessary contact with one of the classics of Italian literature, but also to the various iconographic reinterpretations that make this classic (like all other classics) a restless object of undoubted value, but also accessible to rereadings revolving around the symbolic linchpin which school represents.

<sup>37</sup> Genovesi, Boero, “*Cuore*”, cit., p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Eco, *Elogio di Franti*, cit., p. 363.

<sup>39</sup> See M. Boscherini, *Vi racconto Cuore*, ill. di G. Orecchia, Milano, Mondadori, 2007; M. Attanasio, *Dall'Atlante agli Appennini*, ill. by F. Chiacchio, Roma, Orecchio Acerbo, 2011; R. Piumini, *Cuore*, ill. by F. Mancini, Trieste, Edizioni EL, 2017; S. Bordiglioni, *Cuore*, ill. by A. Ruta, Trieste, Edizioni EL, 2018. For a more indepth study see L. Cantatore, *Le riscritture dei classici nella letteratura per l'infanzia*, in S. Barsotti, L. Cantatore (edd.), *Letteratura per l'infanzia. Forme, temi e simboli del contemporaneo*, Roma, Carocci, 2019.

# Here Starts “Penelope’s Web”. Education and Social Prejudices as Seen in Women-Teachers’ Diaries in Greece (1800-1920)

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## 1. *Women and Education as seen in Diaries of female-Schoolteachers*

Diaries reflected the female writers’ true feelings, ambitions, desires, and problems. Moreover, the study of the above personal journals of the past enable historians explore the female model of the time when the diary was kept. Additionally, diaries help researchers explore the existing social nuances of the period and they answer the question why girls’ schooling was not set as first priority in many countries in southern Europe, including Greece. Moreover, the personal journals constitute an invaluable source of information for female education as well as for women schoolteachers’ vocational studies.

In Greece, at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Eleni Boukouvala was one of the first women-inspectors of girls’ elementary schools along with another teacher named Elpiniki Karakousi<sup>1</sup>. Boukouvala and Karakousi inspected female elementary schools for only one year, 1898-1899<sup>2</sup>. Their term was not completed as their post depended on state funding that was eventually cut because of money shortage<sup>3</sup>. The two female inspectors worked with zeal and commitment in order to carry out their task<sup>4</sup>. Their assignment was difficult due to many reasons as inequality dominated in women-inspectors positions contrasted to male inspectors who were more privileged. For example, the women-inspectors earned less money than their male peers while another case of disparity lay on the fact that they often had to work under the direction of men deputy-inspectors who were often under-

<sup>1</sup> Elpiniki Karakousi pursued studies of a higher level in Germany. See more in: P. Thanailaki, *Breaking Social Barriers: Florentia Fountoukli (1869-1915)*, «BSHM Bulletin: Journal of the British Society for the History of Mathematics», vol. 25, n. 1, 2010, pp. 32-38.

<sup>2</sup> P. Paschalidis, *San paramythi. 12+1. Histories gyro apo ti Demotiki mas Ekpaideusi. Ektheseis ton epitheoriton tou 1883 kai ekpaideutikes metarrythmiseis sto teleftaio tetarto tou 19ou aiona*, Post Graduate Thesis, Department of Philosophy and Pedagogy (Supervisor: S. Ziogou-Karastergiou), Thessaloniki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2012, pp. 101-102.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Karakousi taught the subject of Pedagogy in the *Arsakeion*’ Normal School. She was also director of *Vamvakaris Parthenagogeion* in Piraeus. Later, she relocated to Mytilini where she offered her services to the local girls’ school. See: K. Parren, *He despoinis Elpiniki Karakousi en Mytilini*, «Ephemeris ton Kyrion», n. 589, 3 October 1899.

qualified compared to their female peers because many of them did not possess even the necessary experience of having served in a schoolmaster's position before<sup>5</sup>. However, the fully qualified female inspectors were often passed over for promotion in favour of men. Due to the fact that there were not enough men-inspectors to inspect girls' schools, the state hired women-inspectors with casual employment contracts for the purpose. The above women-educators had to obtain proof of academic knowledge from a European Higher Institution, or University, documenting that they had pursued studies in pedagogy and literature. Despite their high qualifications, the female-inspectors were evaluated as «second class» inspectors in their ranking as they did not possess a permanent position while their salaries depended on state funding<sup>6</sup>.

Boukouvala's account of facts bore the characteristics of a personal journal. She wrote about her personal experience and feelings when touring Greece as an inspector. On the first lines of her account of facts, she praised her home country for its beautiful landscapes that she saw when visiting many regions in order to perform her inspection task. She also referred to her firm belief that female schooling in Greece had made much progress at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century because many girls' schools had been set up all over the country. Additionally, the Greek people – particularly in the urban areas – were more open to new challenges in terms of their daughters' education. However, she noted that there still existed a lot of social prejudices for women-teachers especially in the rural areas of the country as in the countryside the peasants considered girls' schooling a taboo, labelling the literate women as «too independent» and «loose», a notion that dominated throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. Thus, illiteracy and ignorance still prevailed in the villages that were closed communities. Another reason was the financial inability of the local people to afford school expenses<sup>8</sup>. The women-teachers, particularly those appointed to small distant villages, encountered the above-mentioned dominating biased notions and entanglements while most of the times they were thought of being accountable for all blames and scandals occurring in the small place where they taught. Moreover, the peasants were unwilling to place themselves in the teachers' shoes and see their embarrassing situation. Boukouvala wrote about the bitter tears that the young teachers shed being entangled in social prejudices and having to live in harsh living conditions. She metaphorically expressed it in the phrase: «their bread was saturated with their tears» in order to denote that the women-teachers were poor and they had to work under adverse circumstances as the ones mentioned above. However, the young teachers had to survive and eke out a living because most of the times they had to fend not only for themselves but also to financially support their families as they were the sole bread

<sup>5</sup> E. Georgiadou, *Gynaikeia Erga (E): Kathigitriai pedagogikis, mathimatikon kai philologias*, «Ephemeris ton Kyron», n. 699, 17 March 1902.

<sup>6</sup> [Greek Government Law], *Nomos VTMT: Peri tis stichiodous I dimotikis ekpedeuseos*, «Ephemeris tis Kyverniseos», n. 37, 5 October 1895.

<sup>7</sup> E. Boukouvala, *Anamniseis ek tis Epitheoriseos sxoleion thileon-He thesis tis didaskalissis*, «Epetiris tis Dimotikis Ekpaideuseos», Athens, Anestis Konstantinidis, 1902, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> P. Thanailaki, *Gender Inequalities in Rural European Communities during 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> century: A Historical Perspective*, Cham, Springer, 2018, p. 23.

winners. The situation was similar to men-teachers financially-speaking but not in equal social terms as in the Greek rural areas their male peers were greatly respected while in the urban regions things were much easier for both men and women-schoolteachers, Boukouvala remarked<sup>9</sup>.

In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Greek society, the unmarried schoolteachers were socially marginalized while they did not feel free to enjoy privacy. That was the case especially applied to those of young women-teachers appointed to teach in a village school in the countryside. Boukouvala referred to this ailing situation as the young female schoolteachers, upon their appointment, realized that their behaviour, their acquaintances, their hair style, the cloths they wore as well as everything on them or about them, was much gossiped and heavily criticized by local people. The social rules preached a strict code of conduct according to which it was not accepted for a woman-teacher to take a walk – for instance – out in the street in order to breathe fresh air after a tiring day in her stuffy classroom. So much worse was the fact of being seen talking to a man. It is true that life in the rural areas for all women was harsh. Thus, the prejudiced illiterate peasants imposed a certain mode of behaviour and female schoolteachers were not the exception to the rule<sup>10</sup>. In this context, they were always under the vigilant eye of their fellow-villagers while the rumour about them spread very quickly being a «whispering one» at the beginning while later it turned out to be a public outcry in case she was considered by the locals that she was «loose», and not taking into consideration the social rules<sup>11</sup>. But above all, the most embarrassing situation was the sexual harassment or assaults they often received by the «womanisers», or the «Don Juans» of the village as such incidents were often referred in her accounts of facts, too<sup>12</sup>.

Boukouvala also noted that the teacher's first days at school were easy because the local people viewed her as the woman who would carry to them the torch of culture and literacy. But later things became difficult. She observed: «Here comes the young woman's frustration over the insufficient training that she had received». So, the first pleasant and comfortable days in her new professional life seemed to belong to the past as the poor teacher soon realized that her professional training was too theoretical and lacking in practical training, also not reflecting the real conditions of the classroom<sup>13</sup>. The problem was not only the schoolteacher's frustration over her inadequate professional training but also the element that she was hindered in her teaching task by other social abnormalities and constraints. One of them was the pupils' irregularity of school attendance. The girls did not attend classes on a regular basis being held back by their mothers who asked them either to babysit at home, or to replace them in the house chores when they were off to labour in the fields with their husbands. Often the young pupils had to herd the domestic animals of the family. Boukouvala wrote: «Here starts "Penelope's web"»<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Boukouvala, *Anamniseis ek tis Epitheoriseos sxoleion thileon*, cit., p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

implying that what the teacher had taught during the pupils' regular attendance was lost later afterwards because of their constant absences, and upon the girls' return to school, the poor teacher had to start it over again. But it was not only this obstacle that teachers faced as they had also to show to the inspector that they had a neat and tidy classroom, full of pupils. However, apart from the above difficulties, the teachers were assessed for their teaching performance and they were evaluated according to their pupils' low or high level of academic knowledge, and to their overall school achievement as well. The fact that the pupils skipped classes counted negative as literally there were no students in the class! Very often teachers used to go from door to door pleading the parents of the absent girls to let them get back to school because their absence counted against their teaching ability, and the skipping of classes slowed down the girls' school performance because they appeared having gaps in their knowledge<sup>15</sup>.

Indicative of the social biases, ignorance, and the intellectual darkness prevailing in the Greek countryside especially in girls' schooling, is the following example that further illustrates the above ailing situation. From Boukouvala's first-hand account of facts we learn that in a village school on an island of the Ionian Sea, there were enrolled more than one hundred male pupils. Recently it had been set up another separate school for girls. To her surprise, the establishment of the above school was considered by the villagers as a «deadly insult» for their ethics. Because the peasants were not allowed to obstruct its setting-up, they decided not to send their daughters to school in order to cause the suspension of its operation. In fact, when Boukouvala visited it, she saw-to her surprise-that there were only seven female pupils attending the class. The above pupils were the daughters of the village doctor, the priest, and the daughters of a small number of families of similar social status<sup>16</sup>. But what shocked her most was the element that the above parents sent their daughters to school covertly following different routes each time and avoiding the main street as they feared lest they would incite their fellow-villagers' wrath, or that they would trigger their contempt, or that they would cause suspicions over their daughters' morality<sup>17</sup>. The school operation alarmed and incited the hostility of the vulgar illiterate peasants to such an extent that one day they lay in waiting and when the poor teacher went off to Corfu city, they broke into the door of her class destroying all her official records and tearing off her cloths. This unlucky incident took place in 1898. In this point Boukouvala expressed her frustration contending that since people behaved in such a way, no law regulating school attendance could be implemented no matter if it was mandatory, or not<sup>18</sup>.

In Boukouvala's personal accounts of facts it is also observed the complete ignorance of even the basic rules of personal hygiene in the rural areas. She wrote that not only did the girls ignore the basics of hygiene but that the teachers had also to face mothers' aggressiveness who blatantly asked her how she dared insult their daughters on the matter. In addition she noted that mothers appeared completely unwilling even to hear about

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.



it<sup>19</sup>. And it was not only mothers' reluctance as – apart from it – they were also opposed to the idea of having their daughters practice feminine arts such as sewing. The reason lay in the fact that they much preferred the embroidering of luxurious and fine pieces of craft that were «totally useless to rural households» according to the woman-inspector. Boukouvala added that the poor teachers also faced the parents' unwillingness to buy even the essential materials for the above crafts on the pretext that the girls practiced them at home. They argued that at school they had better learn practicing fine embroidering, alone. So, the schoolteachers had to cope with a lot of social biases and obstacles at large that hindered their teaching duties in many ways<sup>20</sup>. However, the above narrow-minded views did not apply to all cases, as in other areas of the country, the women-schoolteachers were successful in persuading their students to practice useful feminine crafts<sup>21</sup>. The inspector wondered to what degree it was feasible for an embarrassed schoolteacher to be diplomatic and to adjust her behaviour accordingly as she had to deal with so many different characters and so many multiple forms of petty-pride on the part of parents. At the same time, the village schoolteachers had to wisely manage the gendered biases that they personally faced. Boukouvala reached the conclusion that this uncomfortable situation stemmed from the element that the peasants had mistakenly perceived the teacher's behaviour, or because of the fact that they were rude as they were illiterate and ignorant<sup>22</sup>. No matter what the peasantry thought about the young innocent woman-schoolteacher of their village, and how much they valued her or not – as there were few cases that they did value her –, or by contrast, how bitterly they criticised her behaviour and her social conduct, the backwardness of the local people was always there to set the social boundaries and to hinder girls' progress. It is a fact that gendered prejudices and illiteracy made people narrow-minded and the above characteristics were the reasons for making them vindictive in case they judged that the schoolteacher exceeded the moral boundaries that their provincial society had set to them. In this case, the local authorities were ruthless in persecuting her<sup>23</sup>.

In order to defend the female schoolteachers' dignity and chastity, Boukouvala held the opinion that people had really to admit that there were very rare examples that «a true cause for discrediting the body has ever existed». Boukouvala also emphasised on the point that the female schoolteachers led an exemplary life in terms of virtuousness, and that was an asset which should be worth of parents' praise<sup>24</sup>. She also added that the young women-schoolteachers were exposed to many temptations and dangers at a very young age and that they received no moral support on the part of the state and on behalf of the local authorities. An example of honesty of a teacher is the following case. In Epirus, a school suspended its operation in the region of the Vlachs. The schoolteacher of the above school submitted her resignation despite the fact that the Greek Ministry of

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>21</sup> Paschalidis, *San paramythi. 12+1*, cit., p. 366.

<sup>22</sup> Boukouvala, *Anamniseis ek tis Epitheoriseos sxoleion thileon*, cit., p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.



Education intended to continue to pay her salaries. However, the young woman refused to receive them saying that it was a matter of pride for her. In order to earn her living, she tutored the girls of wealthy families of the area delivering them French lessons<sup>25</sup>. In a nutshell, Boukouvala in her personal chronicle, proposed two solutions for improving female schoolteachers' training and position: First, the young female teachers had to be provided with more Practicum classes so as their training be more applied. Second, they should be supplied with the essential administrative knowledge, as – for example – to learn how to write a report, and how to generally run a school<sup>26</sup>.

In the following paragraphs I will study the subjects and teaching hours pertaining to female education of the secondary tier as well as of the Normal school at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1893, the number of the teaching periods per week in the *Arsakeion* nine-grade school of secondary tier of female education indicated the following: The subject of the Greek language took up most of the teaching hours as it was supplied to female students for twelve teaching periods per week in grades A and B. In the other grades, it was taught for nine teaching periods – and more precisely – in grades C, D, E, F, G, H and I. By contrast, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Science had a poor representation in the school curriculum. More particularly, Arithmetic was taught for three teaching-periods per week in the first four grades that were A, B, C, D while in grades E, F, they dropped to two. In grades G and H, only one teaching-period was allotted in the school curriculum while in grade I it was not supplied at all. Chemistry was taught for two teaching-periods in grades H and I. In grades D, E, and F, Geometry was supplied to the girls for two teaching-periods, and for one teaching-hour in grades G and H. In the graduating grade I, the subject was not taught. The classes of Handicrafts were taught on an average of 3.6 teaching-hours per week, depending on the academic year, denoting the gendered aspect of the subject and the orientation of female education<sup>27</sup>. As for the two-grade Normal School curriculum of the *Philekpedeutiki Etairieia* of the same year, it indicated the following. The school also focused on the subject of the Greek language. The Arithmetic classes were taught for only one teaching-period in grade A, and also did Geometry. The training courses included classes of Didactic Exercises that were supplied to the students for two teaching-periods in grade A, and for twelve hours in grade B. Likewise, the subject of Pedagogy was taught for four teaching-periods in each grade<sup>28</sup>.

From the above data it is deduced that the higher level of female schooling encompassed an eleven-year cycle of studies. Moreover, women's education seemed to focus more on the Greek language and less on Arithmetic. In fact, only one teaching-period per week was devoted to the teaching of Arithmetic in the two-year cycle of studies of the Normal school. By contrast, the subject of Handicrafts took up a very significant space in both

<sup>25</sup>[Uncredited author], *To en Ioanninois Romoynikon sxoleion*, «Foni tis Hpeirou», vol. 12, n. 22, 1893, <https://www.vlachoi.net> (last access: 09.09.2022).

<sup>26</sup> Boukouvala, *Anamniseis ek tis Epitheoriseos sxoleion thileon*, cit., p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> [Greek Government Law: "Kanonistikou"], *Peri Orologion ke Analytikou Programmatos ton mathimaton ton pliron parthenagogeion ke ton didaskaleion ton thileon*, «Ephemeris tis Kyverniseos», n. 163, 21 August 1893.

<sup>28</sup> The *Philekpedeutiki Etairieia* operated the only accredited Normal School for female teachers in Greece during 19<sup>th</sup> century.

school curricula. In the secondary tier of girls' education alone, the number of the classes in the above subject amounted to thirty-six, in total. This data reinforce the view that much emphasis was given on feminine crafts-practicing in order to denote, once more, the gendered aspect of this subject. In the curriculum of the Normal School, the number of classes devoted to professional training should not be ignored as there were fourteen teaching-periods per week designed for the instruction of Didactic Exercises, and four classes for the subject of Pedagogy. What is noteworthy though is the absence of the teaching of the principles of Hygiene in the Normal School as only in the secondary tier of education it was instructed, and that was supplied for one teaching-period, alone. It is also unclear whether the future teachers received Practicum classes as an independent module, or the above subject was part of the course of the Didactic Exercises<sup>29</sup>. Also, little attention was paid to the subjects of Home Economy and Home Pedagogy. According to the curriculum of the above vocational school, the students did not receive any classes of Home Economy while in the secondary tier the female students were supplied with the above subject for one teaching-period per week. Moreover, two classes were supplied for Home Pedagogy – thus – making three the instruction of the teaching-periods in the above field altogether. In her concluding remarks Boukouvala pointed out that the female teachers' training was inadequate, and she blamed the Greek state<sup>30</sup>. Hence, Boukouvala was right – to some extent – in remarking the absence of an efficient number of Practicum classes as emphasis was given more on their theoretical education and less to applied knowledge.

## 2. *The Diary of the American missionary schoolteacher Frances Hill*

In Athens, upon the creation of the Greek state in 1831, the establishment of two missionary schools, one for boys and one for girls, was observed. They were set up by the American protestant missionary couple John and Frances Hill. The Hills' educational endeavour became the first organised attempt to operate private schools in Athens. The presence of missionary schools in Greece and the educational activities of the missionary wives rocked the waters and became the stimulus for female progress. Globally, the establishment of schools, the publishing of pamphlets and tracts as well as the delivering of sermons, became the most powerful weapons in the hands of the protestant missionaries for disseminating their Christian teaching<sup>31</sup>. Frances Hill ran her school in such a way so as her students would become virtuous and pious future mothers and spouses. However,

<sup>29</sup> In the five-grade curriculum of the Normal School of *Arsakeion* of the *Philekpedeutiki Etaireia*, in 1877, there is a reference to a subject entitled "Didactic Exercises with application to teaching". See S. Ziogou-Karastergiou, *He Mesi ekpaideusi ton koritsion stin Hellada (1830-1893)*, Athens, Historiko Archeio Hellinikis Neolaias, 1986, p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> The Normal School of the *Philekpedeutiki Etaireia* submitted the syllabus of its schools to the Greek Ministry of Education every academic year in order to approve it (*ibid.*, p. 150).

<sup>31</sup> Thanailaki, *Gender Inequalities*, cit., p. 88.

the missionaries were often accused of attempting conversion as their schools had gained a foothold in Greek education.

In this point we should consider the fact that the Hills had endured a very difficult time in Athens in 1842 because they were persecuted for religious conversion by the Greek authorities and by the Greek Orthodox Church. Due to the above persecution, they had to suspend the operation of their schools for a certain period of time and to travel abroad<sup>32</sup>. John and Frances Hill walked a very thin line in this case as they had to face their enemies in Athens again upon their return, and resume their educational attempt. At the same time, they had to write reports to their protestant society at home in order to enumerate funds. Therefore, they had to show that their educational endeavours were successful, and to also demonstrate their students' accomplishments because they needed the on-going financial support from the USA. This was the method followed by all missionaries around the world<sup>33</sup>. The above strategic method is further illustrated in an entry in Frances's diary, dated March 19<sup>th</sup> 1843. She wrote that the Hills' educational work met with no opposition on behalf of the Greek political and religious authorities and that day by day they seemed «to be gaining in respect» after their adventure and persecution that they had suffered<sup>34</sup>. In her effort to re-establish their schools Frances wrote that they had to show a low profile. «We must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves», she added<sup>35</sup>. Additionally, Frances and her husband organized a Sunday school that had two hundred children. They employed teachers for their new educational attempt. She held the opinion that the above effort would require much faith and patience in «sowing the seed», and for bearing fruitful results<sup>36</sup>. In the end of the school term, Frances mentioned that their pupils had learnt how to read while the Bible was the main textbook used in the class<sup>37</sup>. Years later, Frances sounded very happy with their new educational endeavours after their persecution. She remarked: «I cannot but feel that the effort to place a high standard of religious education before this people has been blessed»<sup>38</sup>. The Hills were the first educators that established a vocational school in the field of home crafts, «the school of industry». In this way the young women felt useful earning their living as – otherwise – they would feel humiliated because they would have to beg<sup>39</sup>. In her diary, Frances Hill sounded happy with her educational endeavour because she thought that she properly directed a big number of young and «tender minds» who in other respects

<sup>32</sup>Their persecution was given the name *Ta Hilleia* [The Hills' Issue] by the Greek press. See more in P. Thanailaki, *Ameriki kai Protestantismos. He Evaggeliki Aftokratoria kai oi oramatismoi ton Amerikanon missionarion gia tin Hellada to 19o aiona*, Athens, Kastaniotis, 2005, pp. 153-155.

<sup>33</sup>R. Wollons, *Writing Home to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions: Missionary Women Abroad Narrate Their Precarious Worlds, 1869-1915*, in C. Mayer, A. Arredondo (edd.), *Women, Power Relations, and Education in a Transnational World*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 101.

<sup>34</sup>Archeio Scholis Hill, *Diary of Frances Hill*, Athens, dated 19 March 1843.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 11 December 1842.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 February 1843.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 July 1843.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 7 July 1852.

<sup>39</sup>Thanailaki, *Ameriki kai Protestantismos*, cit., pp. 158-159.

they would have remained altogether without «spiritual culture»<sup>40</sup>. Frances sounded very happy and felt proud of the high level of the studies supplied in their school. To reinforce her argument she wrote that Mr. Kontogonis – one of the members of the school board of *Arsakeion* that rivalled their school – acknowledged the superiority of the Hill school<sup>41</sup>. Five years later her enthusiasm on the progress of the supplied education is expressed in her diary. She noted that their school was flourishing, «and may continue so as long as we like» with the «will of God»<sup>42</sup>. Frances had to show both to the missionary society in Athens and to their missionary society in the USA that they performed very well as the competition was strong not only with the *Arsakeion* school but also with the other missionary schools operating in Athens and in the Greek islands that were also managed by American missionaries of other protestant denominations. In 1857, Frances was fifty-eight years old<sup>43</sup>. She was a mature woman that had been living in Athens along with her husband for a long time. They focused their missionary educational attempts on the Kindergarten education and on the training of Kindergarten teachers. In May 1<sup>st</sup> 1858, she felt very happy with the progress of the infants of their schools that contained more than one hundred and fifty little children. They prepared all different lessons by themselves, and also the hymns and moral songs. She wrote: «I could not but think what an answer all this was to the assaults of our enemies»<sup>44</sup>. Since 1853, the Hills focused more on the education of the destitute children. In the same year, the *Philekpedeutiki Etaireia* owned its own school-building. It was then when Frances Hill established again her own *Parthenagogeion* after her friends' prompting and advice. The *Parthenagogeion* stepped up and re-gained its good old fame. The Kindergarten was also pioneering in its teaching methods. It encompassed education for both boys and girls being very successful as it is noted in her diary. The *Parthenagogeion* catered for the needs of those of girls who wished to pursue a higher level in academic knowledge. The supplied courses were the Greek, English and French languages, as well as arithmetic, geography, history (including religious history), and catechism, the latter being taught by an Orthodox priest. The female students also received classes of handicrafts, music, and painting. Frances directed the school of the destitute children in which they employed Greek teachers to teach the classes<sup>45</sup>. In her diary Frances Hill sounded very happy and she felt proud of the high level of studies that they supplied in their schools. In conclusion, what is seen in Frances' diary is her enthusiasm for their female school in Athens as they held a firm belief that Greek women should become educated so that they would break free from illiteracy and social prejudices. She also contended that the schooling that the girls received in the Hill school, would render them good spouses and mothers in line to the female mode shaped in the western world of the time, and in accord with the couple's religious beliefs.

<sup>40</sup> Archeio Scholis Hill, cit., 6 January 1856.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 September 1852.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 May 1857.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 July 1857.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 May 1858.

<sup>45</sup> Thanailaki, *Ameriki kai Protestantismos*, cit., pp. 149-150.

The present study is essentially a map of a yet uncharted territory regarding diaries and written reports of professional women in Greece such as teachers in girls' schools during 19<sup>th</sup> century. An attempt was made to explore their diaries and logs and to study them from a social as well as an educational perspective. In the above written accounts of facts the reader can see that there existed ignorance, illiteracy, social prejudices, gendered biases, and there were gaps in female teachers' training. In Boukouvala's personal journal, the reader can see the existing social misconceptions and prejudices that the Greek female schoolteachers faced especially those appointed to teach in small village schools. Their life and everyday routine were heavily criticised while they often met insurmountable difficulties in their teaching task. It can also be traced the teachers' embarrassment who-amid all the above frustrations – they had to cope with the inefficient training they had received in the vocational school. In the case of Frances Hill diary, an effort was made to show how the protestant American missionary schools operated in Greece. Educating the elite girls and instructing the underprivileged students a domestic craft, were the two axes on which the American missionary couple provided their Greek students with. Frances Hill often felt embarrassed as she and her husband faced persecutions by the Greek Orthodox Church and by the Greek state while they had to start their educational enterprises over again.

# Using School Memory to Get to Know “Frontier Realities”. Angelina Lo Dico: Teacher in the Land of Basilicata

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## *Introduction*

Sources of unquestionable value for a careful reconstruction of everyday school life are the life stories and memoirs of schoolteachers, the subjects of which have been edited by various scholars such as Michela D'Alessio and Alberto Barausse. These studies not only give due recognition to some little-known life stories, but also provide an opportunity to talk about the stories of teachers and schoolmistresses who helped to shape generations of pupils<sup>1</sup>.

It started with an analysis of the state of literacy in this mysterious land, full of history and traditions, a land that has suffered the scourge of illiteracy due to backward mentalities, a lack of space to create schools and, finally, a disregard for education itself, considered by many to be essentially “useless”. An insightful element was Giuseppe Zanardelli’s trip to the Land of Basilicata, during which he found that 80% of the Lucanian population was still illiterate.

In 1947, to combat the scourge of the lack of education, which was particularly high in the rural centers of southern Italy, the National Union for the Fight against Illiteracy (UNLA) was founded<sup>2</sup>.

Just before the unification of the country, this topic was also the subject of the demo-ethno-anthropological investigations of Ernesto De Martino<sup>3</sup>, which identified two classes of the “ignorant” as: the truly illiterate and the illiterate, individuals who possessed the means of reading but were unable to use written language to formulate messages.

<sup>1</sup> A. Barausse, T. de Freitas Ermel, V. Viola (edd.), *Prospettive incrociate sul patrimonio storico-educativo*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The National Union for the Fight against Illiteracy, founded in 1947, had Francesco Saverio Nitti as its first president; the national board include: Riccardo Bauer, Antonio Banfi, Adriano Olivetti, Vincenzo Arangio Ruiz, Corrado Alvaro, Guido Calogero.

<sup>3</sup> Ernesto De Martino was an Italian theorist of religions and southern ethnologist (Naples, 1908 – Rome, 1965). He is credited with a historicist interpretation of religious manifestations and some innovative research in the South based on participant observation and interdisciplinary teamwork.

It can be said that a real excursus on the Lucanian school plot was proposed by Governor Julius De Rolland who, after realizing the low school attendance, imposed school attendance, as he announced in his circular of 26 October 1861, which states:

From the age of six, no boy or girl may be absent from school for any length of time except in special circumstances. Parents will be invited by the School Committees to fulfil this obligation; if they fail to do so, they will be reprimanded the first time, and after a month they will have their names posted in the Church and in the Municipal House, and their names will be read to the people by the Parish Priest on the first Sunday of every month; fathers of families who neglect this duty will not be able to obtain help from the Public Benefit and will not be employed in public works or in any public office<sup>4</sup>.

Unfortunately, warnings were of little use, including the legislative measures of Ministers Michele Casati and Luigi Coppino in 1877, who tried to back up this deficiency. Non-compliance continued to be substantial, despite the application of severe sanctions.

In the meantime, our afflicted Mezzogiorno saw the state as the only one that could resolve the condition of civil backwardness in southern Italy. Saverio Nitti played an important role in this regard, he was a convinced, thoughtful and pragmatic reformism, respectful of the values of bourgeois society in which he fully recognized himself, albeit with a critical spirit<sup>5</sup>.

One must recognize in his thinking a clear progressive attitude, given the need for a change in mentality and cultural preparation that he made a clear reference to and that would have been successful for a society such as the southern one. In fact, to regenerate Southern Italy, it was also necessary to have a cultural growth that would “lead to class consciousness and political life”, in this way the peasant classes would grow politically through “a work of true pedagogical enlightenment”<sup>6</sup>.

The Zanardelli-Giolitti ministry also resumed this political strategy in 1902, marking a real changing process, called the “nationalization of childhood”<sup>7</sup>. Particularly through the teaching programs, a necessary patriotic spirit spread among many teachers, which lasted until the Great War (1915-1918).

Elements of patriotic impetus from the Risorgimento period were introduced into school curricula, there were traces of Moral and Civil Education, elements of the History of Ancient Rome. In short, the school became an instrument for transmitting love of country and behavioral ethics, all in line with the tendency to fascistise Italian schools<sup>8</sup>.

Childhood was involved in concrete activities, girls, for example in schools, prepared clothes for soldiers, many children “played at war” with home-made wooden or tin weapons and often sailed to school. In Southern Italy, however, there were still many problems that beset the people, so that Mussolini’s seizure of power in 1922 went almost unnoticed. In addition to an expansionist policy, the Duce extolled the unity of the

<sup>4</sup> ASP, fond “Prefettura” (1860-72), dossier 144.

<sup>5</sup> A. Acquarone, *L'Italia giolittiana*, Milano, il Mulino, 1988, p. 351.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. G. Gabrielli, *Educati alla guerra: nazionalizzazione e militarizzazione dell'infanzia nella prima metà del Novecento*, Milano, Ombre Corte, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> D. Miolla, *Voci dal Sud. Storia e storie (mai) dimenticate*, Pisticci, s.n., 2018, p. 115.



family, the proliferation of births and the undisputed value of rurality. Thus, numerous schools sprang up in the countryside and on farms, lessons were held in rooms offered by the farmers in which accommodation for the teachers was also included. Reading Centers also sprang up, small libraries travelling to help all those who, while working, wanted to continue studying and learning.

In particular, initiatives were taken in favor of working adults by the Central Committee for Popular Education at the Ministry of Public Education, the Committee against Illiteracy was born and coordinated its activities, which in a few years went from being experimental to being an obligatory step to oversee the obligation of education.

At that time in Lucania, and particularly in its hinterland, everything was lacking, including schools, she managed to teach her young and adult pupils the ABC. It must be added that the educational processes also encountered the drama of social upheavals such as transoceanic emigration<sup>9</sup>. The educational themes in Basilicata were strongly supported by the parliamentary groups. Basically, a lay, compulsory school and a vocational school were thought of, as Ascanio Branca proposed between 1882 and 1886, suggesting the formation of «normal female schools funded by the State» because of the important function of preparing future female teachers.

It was not until 1902 that the *Unione Magistrale* – a teachers' association – was formed and in 1912 the first congress dedicated to illiteracy in Basilicata was held, socialists took part, there was a real «battle against ignorance, in favor of literacy, secular schools and cultural emancipation in general»<sup>10</sup>.

In this work I will address the path that led to literacy in Italy, and in Basilicata in particular, through the various historical moments and the laws that made education possible starting from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the decisive contribution of the rural schools and the figure of Angelina Lo Dico, a Sicilian teacher originally from Marianopoli (Caltanissetta) who came to Tinchi di Pisticci in 1921 to teach and help needy local families.

### 1. *The greatest obstacles in the Land of Basilicata: illiteracy, schools and recruitment of teachers*

In the opinion of some scholars in the southern provinces, among the greatest obstacles to illiteracy was the shortage of teachers, even underpaid ones, the shortage of schools, because of the poverty of many municipalities it was difficult to build school buildings, or to pay rent for suitable premises where a school could be established. Finally, a shortcoming not to be underestimated was the poor attendance of the few schools, this was due to the fact that children were often sent out to work, paying no heed to

<sup>9</sup> T. Russo, *Culture e scuole in Basilicata nell'Ottocento*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1995, p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> D. Sacco, *Cattolici e socialisti nel Mezzogiorno. Il caso lucano 1885-1915*, Manduria, Lacaita, 1990, p. 112.

the disciplinary sanctions provided for in the Coppino Law of 1877, which not only upheld the obligation to attend, but also established a specific time of year for pupils who still had to work with their parents in the fields. In fact, considering that compulsory attendance, already established by the Casati Law in 1859, had not in fact been observed by many families who, out of necessity and custom, destined their offspring to work in the fields, the 1877 provisions placed greater constraints on local authorities to fulfil the obligation of the first three years, both for boys and for girls.

At this point, we come to the problems concerning the appointment of lay teachers and schoolmistresses, employed both by mountain communities and in rural schools, who were often not even paid, given the scarce resources. In this regard, reference is made to some testimonies of such teachers, the first is dated 4 September 1862, the teacher states that he was called «to exercise the grave office of teacher without being provided for it either with premises, furniture or even a salary»<sup>11</sup>.

Whereas, teacher Michele Belladonna from S. Chirico Raparo wrote on 24 November 1862 that the municipality in which he had been called to work as a teacher was perhaps «the most miserable one, I beg you for the second time to please include him in the number of the fifty poor municipalities, to whom the 20.000 lire allocated for public education are owed [...] it is also very painful to have borne for about eight months the arduous task of primary school teacher without even a penny»<sup>12</sup>.

In this situation, the municipalities tried to justify their lack of commitment by pointing out that the public school was poorly attended, even the mayor of Potenza wrote to the Prefect in a letter dated 18 January 1862 referring to this very problem, namely that

the school, which was opened with seventy pupils, has now been abandoned by the pupils themselves due to a lack of desire to learn or family demands. In the meantime, the teacher, despite being out of service, proclaims against the municipality to still have the monthly payment, declaring that he is not at all at fault<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. *The charisma of a young teacher*

Between 1920 and 1921, after a brief experience in a school in the province of Caltanissetta, as a primary school teacher, Angelina Lo Dico was appointed and appointed as a teacher in Basilicata in Tinchi-Caporotondo, a small hamlet of Pisticci in the single mixed school, as multi-grade schools were called at that time<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> See A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (edd.), *«Un'altra scuola... per un altro paese». Ottavio Gigli e l'Associazione nazionale per la fondazione di Asili rurali per l'infanzia tra lotta all'analfabetismo e Nation-building (1866-1873)*, Macerata, eum, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> ASP, fond "Prefettura" (1860-72), dossier 146.

<sup>13</sup> ASP, fond "Prefettura" (1860-72), dossier 144.

<sup>14</sup> The students, according to the Casati Law of 1859 and the subsequent Instructions for primary school teachers on how to carry out the programs, approved by Royal Decree of 15 September 1860, drafted by

The decision to leave Sicily and her loved ones was very painful. She arrived in Basilicata accompanied by her father and sister Rosina, and the first impact was so traumatic that her father was determined to bring her home, but the young teacher had made up her mind. Her arrival was a novelty for the locals, happy and probably a little incredulous to have a teacher to whom they could entrust the education of their children, they begged her to stay, promising to take care of them, and indeed they did. During the first months of her stay, the young woman was hosted at Teresa Panetta's home in Pisticci, and from here Angelina would set out every morning to reach her place of work, using makeshift means of transport as the connections between the town center and the surrounding areas were either non-existent or precarious. Even from the point of view of health care, there was little or no doctor in the village to provide basic care, the only hope was the hospital in the city of Matera, which was far away and difficult to reach, and this difficult situation led to frequent and dangerous epidemics.

The poor reality of the new location deeply affected the young woman, who saw only misery and illiteracy all around her, an area marked by malaria and tuberculosis, a particularly varied climate characterized by long periods of drought alternating with frequent rains that flooded the land and destroyed the crops, the only source of sustenance for the families. Certainly, it was not an ideal situation, but the woman wanted to carry out her task as a teacher to the end.

Again, in rural areas there were not many educational institutions and children grew up among the fields and roads.

The school building existed only on paper, but, it was all to be built, the woman did not give up even in the face of this and placed the multi-grade class assigned to it in a small farmhouse belonging to the family Laviola. In that small space, he worked and lived, a house-school where he gave lessons every morning, while in the long afternoons he spent his time helping adults and illiterate elderly people whom he taught to read and write.

Hers was very hard work, but she was helped and sustained by a strong faith in God and the conviction that she wanted to help the weakest. For these reasons, when she realized that many children lived in hamlets rather far from the school, she worked to start more multi-grade classes and from time to time gave lessons in the open countryside to the many children of seasonal labourers from Lecce engaged in tobacco cultivation.

These events clearly demonstrate her charity-filled spirit, remember when she offered her home and care to a young Lecce reaper suffering from a very high fever. To a colleague who pointed out her imprudence, she replied: «But wasn't there Jesus in that sick young

Angelo Fava, were placed in uniform classes in terms of cultural knowledge, not rigidly constituted based on age. The only constraint in this regard was the attainment of 6 years to be enrolled in the first grade. In the same classroom there could thus be children of different ages with the risk of disparities in psychological and physical development. This also had repercussions on the furnishings of the classroom and the spatial arrangement of the pupils. Class I therefore did not indicate, as is the case today, the classroom attended by 6-year-olds, but the place where the schoolchildren arrived, lacking all knowledge. In the same classroom, however, several classes could coexist, for example the lower and upper I, children at their first teaching experience, together with peers already minimally literate, or repeaters.

man?», similarly, she wanted to take in an abandoned girl suffering from consumption in her home, she did not think much of it, she cured her by also contracting the disease. Because of this, she was forced to return to Sicily. Angelina Lo Dico always acted with great goodness, the same goodness that led her to also help women with housework, using her free time, visiting needy families was an obligation from which she never shirked. This commitment of hers knew no bounds, she entertained in homes, played with children, and often offered to be their godmother, practically became everyone's godmother.

Essentially, Angelina's little house had become a point of reference and aggregation for school, social and religious gatherings.

The tireless activity of helping the needy after eleven years in the Pisticci's area was fatal for Angelina. She fell ill with tuberculosis after taking in a young woman suffering from consumption and was forced to leave Tinchi and return to Marianopoli where she died, in a reputation for holiness, on the night between 4 and 5 November 1932, as she had predicted while clutching the Crucifix in her hands.

At her death, many lay and religious people spoke words of thanks and compassion for Angelina Lo Dico, in which regard we recall those of Father Luciano Vullo, on the day of her funeral. The priest wished to dedicate words of affection to her, emphasizing her goodness of spirit and her closeness to the poor: «The most ardent desire of her heart and the ideal of her good soul was to leave the world and become a nun. She could not fulfil her fervent wish. A thousand obstacles prevented, and she was never of the world. Body and soul, she consecrated to God»<sup>15</sup>.

### 3.1 *The Search: records speak*

After Lo Dico's sudden death, the Tinchi community was orphaned of a dear person, a woman who had dedicated much of her life to her neighbours, to those in need. Defined as a «teacher who was inculpable in every respect. She enjoyed the esteem of families and maintained excellent relations with school and political authorities as well as with colleagues. She displayed a praiseworthy religious fervor and used this to instill good feelings in the rural population, which she proclaimed in the little church, which she had built near the school, with the collaboration of these good villagers»<sup>16</sup>.

A reading of the registers found in the Tinchi school where Angelina taught has revealed some interesting facts about her teaching, centred on the experimental method fueled by the «lesson of things», in line with the programs of the well-known pedagogist Aristide Gabelli<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> D. Calabrese, A. Vullo (edd.), *Raccolta di testimonianze circa la vita e le virtù di Angela Maria Lucia Lo Dico da Marianopoli (1900-1932)*, Marianopoli, s.n., 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Archive of the *Istituto Comprensivo "P. Pio da Pietrelcina"* in Pisticci.

<sup>17</sup> T. Tomasi, *Società e scuola in Aristide Gabelli*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1965; D. De Salvo, *Il positivismo pedagogico di Aristide Gabelli*, Messina, Samperi, 2012.

Looking at the outside of the registers, they were very bare, brown in color with black binding. There were substantial differences between masters in relation to the order, some took perfect care of the calligraphy, others less so. The first pages were dedicated to the generalities of the pupils, in the arrangement of: Surname and First Name; Paternity; Maternity; Birth Place; Birth Date; Age; Family Conditions; Vaccination; Date and Presentation of Report Card. After the preliminary information, we moved on to the Educational Program per group of lessons to be carried out during the year, the extremely diverse subjects counted on very rich programs.

In the register, in addition to the subjects, there were various headings such as: "Miscellaneous Notions", which in turn was divided into sub-headings. The first entry was marked with the phrase "In Life", referring to that part of the syllabus that involved teaching the children about moral rules, i.e. how to communicate one's "Generalities", how to always do one's duty with love, how to behave respectfully towards everyone, and finally the importance of greetings.

The second entry in the register concerned "Manual Work", with precise distinctions between boys and girls. For the boys there were manual activities such as: fretwork on wood and the first notions of a trade, while for the girls it referred to domestic work such as: the use of the needle, thimble, scissors, threads. In addition, the first rudiments of embroidery were also taught: stitches, threads, napkin appliqués. Then, gardening was continued. The program was not completed when there was no garden for the exercises and families could not contribute to the purchase of the necessary.

With regard to the reference to religion, it was taught in all classes, while singing, drawing, fine writing, expressive reading and recitation were subjects that were taught from class III onwards. Turning to spelling lessons, there was only involvement in classes II and III; while Reading and written language exercises were to be taught in all classes, the same was true for Arithmetic and Accounting.

A further point was reserved for Miscellaneous Notions and Fascist Culture, from class I up to class III, and for History and Fascist Culture from class IV onwards.

For Geography there was involvement from class III onwards, for Notions of Law and Economics only class V, for Physical Education from class III onwards. Finally, only for women in all classes were there lessons called Housework and Manuals, alongside Hygiene and Personal Care.

In addition to each month's syllabus, the registers contained the director's notes mainly concerning the teacher's observation of the progress of the syllabus. A small space on the left was used by the teacher to note the general progress of the pupil<sup>18</sup>.

Finally, in the last part of the register there was a space for final evaluations, personal notes, such as recommendations to parents about cleanliness and the obligation to make all boys and girls wear the uniform-apron. Referring precisely to the case of poor boys and girls, the teacher noted the pain of many destitute mothers who could not provide a uniform for their sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup> Archive of the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua in Pisticci, Registers of attendance of the T.O.F. of Pisticci, year 1927.

### 3.2 *The religious commitment of Angelina Lo Dico*

Despite the difficult and precarious situation in the area, what aroused the greatest bitterness in Angelina, apart from the lack of a proper school building where she could put her charisms and work to good use, was the lack of a place of worship.

Over time, she matured the decision to donate a small church to Tinchì and its inhabitants, and so she managed to set up a temporary chapel at a stable on an old abandoned farm until she was given a small piece of land by two local families where she built the chapel of Christ the King, completed in 1929.

For the building of the chapel, all the inhabitants of the small village offered a considerable contribution and all kinds of help, with the proceeds from the collections and the sale of fruit, eggs, vegetables, and wheat that Angelina herself went to glean during the summer. The little schoolchildren carried bricks and sand in the mornings, so in a short time the little church of Christ the King became a reality. Angelina's happiness was so great that in the school register on the morning of 25 April she wrote:

This day will be memorable for the children of this school. At last, the long-awaited chapel is no longer a dream but sweet reality. Everyone is happy. You can see the joy that beats in their hearts as they see the crowning of their works, now carrying a large stone on their shoulders every morning, now coming to class with their sweaty, red, happy faces and holding a bunch of ears of corn from the school sale<sup>19</sup>.

The church dedicated to Christ the King was opened for worship on Palm Sunday 1929 with a solemn and long procession through the nearby countryside amidst singing and prayers. The feast ended with the offering of lunch to the poor. Its activity was frenetic and tireless, it knew no pauses or rests.

Every eve of a religious feast day, she would walk to Serricchio, Canala and other local hamlets to announce the arrival of the feast to the peasants. This untiring and continuous activity as a teacher, nurse and missionary never made Angelina forget her religious commitment, as she belonged to a third religious order, committing herself to follow a rule drawn up and approved by the Holy See.

### *Conclusions*

The merits of teacher Angelina Lo Dico and her teaching can be traced back precisely to a determining factor such as her ability to know how to create bonds built with patience, without delegation, so that everyone remains themselves, doing their part, seeking and offering greater strength through the relationships they establish.

We can state how far-sighted and innovative the figure of Angelina Lo Dico was in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when poverty (understood in the broadest sense of the

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

term) was rampant in homes, schools, and in the thoughts of ordinary people. Within this framework she was the promoter of the educating community, a community where the concept of solidarity is flanked, to the point of integrating it, with that of participation. In fact, there is no true solidarity if there is no knowledge and gratitude, and a relationship of reciprocity is not created. Solidarity is not to be given or offered to someone who is or feels excluded, limited, but is rather a recognizing oneself in someone, giving him or her dignity. A fundamental aspect of which teacher Lo Dico was a forerunner is the teaching method that is now called: outdoor education. Being in the open air, together with their peers, enhances the social skills of boys and girls who, placed in a context other than the classroom, are encouraged to relate to themselves and others in a different way. In addition, some activities raise awareness of the issues of respect for the environment, self-perception in the world and the health of body and mind.

In 1992, the New Horizons Association of Marconia instituted a literary competition named after her and launched a popular petition, obtaining the naming of the hospital. Research carried out by a Lucanian professor has made this extraordinary figure known in the hope of making him known to future generations, to keep his memory alive, but especially to convey the educational passion that animated her, the same passion that every teacher should feel within himself because "a teacher is the one who can change the face of the world".





# Teachers in Transit: Memories of Doings and Knowledge from a Transnational Viewpoint (1882-1914)

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## *Introduction*

Between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable number of immigrants of all ages, migrated to Brazil from the Italian peninsula; most of the families, which were many, occupied colonies, becoming small landowners, especially in Rio Grande do Sul. In the case of São Paulo, where they settled in a larger proportion, they inhabited urban areas as workers, business owners and other different professions, and/or rural areas through a partnership system or even with the acquisition of small properties.

The migratory flow in Brazil brought about several changes, among which is the establishment of schools characterized as ethnic due to the language used and the ways in which they operated routinely. The purpose of this text is to understand this movement, as well as the knowledge and memories involving practices constructed by teachers who e/immigrated from Italy and worked in schools, many of which had ethnic marks. Some of these teachers also took on the role of consular agents. In their luggage, a diversity of cultural practices was transported and confronted with the various ways of living in the places where they settled.

By means of contributions from the History of Education and Cultural History, we conduct a historical document analysis based on an empirical corpus composed of laws, photographs, newspapers, notebooks, books, in addition to interviews, letters and reports, herein understood as documentary sources of public writing with relevant personal marks, as they bring a set of requests, demands, desires and aspirations of the teachers, as well as reports on the relationships established by inspectors and consuls with the places and with the protagonists of the school world that they represented.

Analyzing migratory processes and the history of education, the perspective of thinking about a transnational history allows for a reflection on life journeys involving contexts of the Italian peninsula and Brazil, with our attention always turned to what produces

and constitutes spaces, institutions and national traditions that have been modified over time<sup>1</sup>. As stated by Weinstein

transnational studies generally recognize the persistence of the nation as a main sphere of politics, economy and culture. On the one hand, this allows greater attention to processes, to networks and to phenomena of all kinds that cross the nation's borders without entailing homogenization; on the other hand, the transnational character allows us to go beyond the identification of particularities or specificities in a national context<sup>2</sup>.

With regard to the matter of the analytical game of scales, we consider with Werner and Zimmermann that the «notion of scale, in this case, does not refer to the micro or the macro, but to the different spaces in which the constitutive interactions of the analyzed process are inscribed»<sup>3</sup>. We consider that the emigrant constitutes the first experiences in the territory of the “Motherland”, a space in which they learn values, habits, customs, religious and cultural traditions that produce a way of being in the world. When one crosses borders, new ways of living and coexisting are confronted in the “Destination Homeland”. Through difference, they establish negotiations, conflicts, tensions and the reinvention of traditions in cultural dynamics that are reconfigured in time and space.

Thus, we connect historical contexts beyond national borders, so we analyze the flow from Italy to Brazil, and in two locations – Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo. The practices and ways in which they left marks in the school process can be understood by crossing documents between the Italian and Brazilian contexts, allowing an in-depth analysis of the ways of doing school, by investigating the factors, mechanisms and dynamics through which ministerial dispositions were appropriated and converted into pedagogical practices. Therefore, an analysis that looks at the history of education, transnationally, between Brazil and Italy, from the presence of subjects who acted as teachers. In this sense, the «idea of transnationality would thus reflect the postcolonial perception that identities are not fixed, that is, centered, for instance, on a nationality»<sup>4</sup>.

It is about taking migratory processes as flows that interconnect national borders, reflecting on the movement of ideas, knowledge, technologies and ways of living that intersect, connect, relate and change, about understanding the complexity of local and national histories, without ignoring them, but taking them as context. Such relationships comprehended in the educational field are important, as they allow a close look at that which is singular, but also at common and similar configurations. Both male and female

<sup>1</sup> I. Tyrrell, *What is transnational history?*, 2007, available at: <https://iantyrrell.wordpress.com/what-is-transnational-history/> (last access: 10.12.2022).

<sup>2</sup> B. Weinstein, *Pensando a história fora da nação: a historiografia da América Latina e o viés transnacional*, «Revista eletrônica da ANPHILAC», n. 14, January-June 2013, pp. 9-36 (in particular, p. 23). ANPHILAC is the *Associação Nacional de Pesquisadores e Professores de História das Américas* (National Association of Researchers and Teachers of American History).

<sup>3</sup> M. Werner, B. Zimmermann, *Pensar a história cruzada: entre empiria e reflexividade*, «Textos de história», v. 11, n. 1/2, 2003, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> W. F. F. Lowande, *A história transnacional e a superação da metanarrativa da modernização*, «Revista de Teoria da História», vol. 20, n. 2, 2018, pp. 219-245, available at: <https://revistas.ufg.br/teoria/article/view/56515https://revistas.ufg.br/teoria/article/view/56515> (last access: Dec 10, 2022), pp. 225 and 226.

teachers inserted in the places they inhabited, in the sociability networks they formed, and in the educational processes that constituted said networks through the dynamics of cultural practices.

Studies such as those by Luchese<sup>5</sup>, Rech<sup>6</sup> and Castro<sup>7</sup> focus on the school process among immigrants in different regions of Rio Grande do Sul and show the ways in which different subjects, individually or collectively, as a private or associative initiative, promoted the opening and maintenance of schools. On the other hand, the studies by Panizzolo<sup>8</sup>, Mimesse<sup>9</sup>, Franchini<sup>10</sup> and Correa<sup>11</sup>, for instance, deal with the context of the Italian school in São Paulo and its multiple forms of organization.

From previous studies<sup>12</sup>, we know that initiatives for the organization of schools among immigrants and their descendants occurred due to the absence of a public school system in Brazil, especially in Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo. They were alternatives created by the need that families of immigrants and descendants had when settling in colonies, or even, at times, in urban areas. Some initiatives, however, were supported by other agents, such as priests or consuls, with the latter being a result of Italian policies that, in a way, sought to assist the emigrants.

<sup>5</sup> T.Â. Luchese, *Processo escolar entre imigrantes no Rio Grande do Sul (1875-1930)*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> G.L. Rech, *Escolas étnicas italianas em Porto Alegre/RS (1877-1938). A formação de uma rede escolar e o fascismo*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> R.B. Castro, “*Una Società senza scuola è come un corpo senz'anima*”: *As escolas italianas vinculadas às sociedades de mútuo socorro em Pelotas/RS (1872-1938)*, Thesis on Education, Graduate Education Program, Universidade Federal de Pelotas, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> C. Panizzolo, *O processo escolar entre italianos e seus descendentes: a escola italiana em São Paulo (fins do século XIX e início do século XX)*, Report submitted to FAPESP, *Bolsa de Pesquisa no Exterior* (Research Abroad Scholarship) – BPE, 2018. Also, C. Panizzolo, *O processo escolar entre italianos e seus descendentes: a escola italiana em São Paulo, no século XIX e início do século XX*, in T.Â. Luchese (ed.), *Escolarização, culturas e instituições; escolas étnicas italianas em terras brasileiras*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> E. Mimesse, *A educação e os imigrantes italianos: da escola de primeiras letras ao grupo escolar*, São Paulo, Iglu, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> F. Franchini, *Entre Vargas e Mussolini: a nacionalização do Instituto Médio Ítalo-Brasileiro Dante Alighieri*, Master's in Education, Universidade de São Paulo, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> R.L.T. Corrêa, *Conviver e sobreviver: estratégias educativas de imigrantes italianos (1880 a 1920)*, Thesis on Economic History, Universidade de São Paulo, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, T.Â. Luchese (ed.), *História da escola dos imigrantes italianos em terras brasileiras*, Caxias do Sul, RS, Educus, 2014; T.Â. Luchese, L. Kreutz (edd.), *Imigração e Educação no Brasil: histórias, práticas e processos escolares*, Santa Maria, Editora da UFSM, 2011; Eadd., *Educação e etnia: as efêmeras escolas étnico-comunitárias italianas pelo olhar dos consules e agentes consulares*, «História da Educação», vol. 14, n. 30, 2010, p. 227-258; T.Â. Luchese, *Em busca da Escola pública, tensionamentos, iniciativas e processo de escolarização na região colonial italiana Rio Grande do Sul Brasil*, «Cadernos de História de Educação», vol. 11, n. 2, 2012, p. 667-679; Ead., *Escolarização, culturas e instituições: escolas étnicas italianas em terras brasileiras*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2018; Ead., A. Barausse, R. Sani, A. Ascenzi (edd.), *Migrações e História da Educação. Saberes, práticas e instituições, um olhar transnacional*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2021; A. Barausse, T. Â. Luchese, *Education, ethnic identity, and memory in the Italian ethnic schools of South Rio Grande (1875-1902)*, «Paedagogica Historica», vol. 54, n. 6, 2018, pp. 720-735; Idd., *Nationalism and Schooling: Between Italianity and Brazility. Dispute in Education of Italian Gaucho People (RS, 1930-1945)*, «History of Education and Childrens' Literature», vol. XII, n. 2, 2017, pp. 443-475; G. L. Rech, T. Â. Luchese, *Escolas Italianas no Rio Grande do Sul: Pesquisa e Documentos*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2018.

The alternatives mobilized for the organization and the derived school typologies, widely called Italian ethnic schools or Italian schools, certainly bring together a diversity of ways and forms of organizing this school/class. Community Italian schools, because they result from the action of several families in favor of the initiative; private Italian school, Italian parochial school, in the case of those linked to the action of a local parish priest; Italian schools linked to Mutual Aid Associations; subsidized Italian schools, when the teacher received regular support from the Italian Government; these are some of the examples mapped in the cross-documentation between what was preserved in Brazil and Italy. The complexity of school processes and their cultures is a fruitful path for research. Analyzing the theme at different scales also allows us to understand nuances and hues that intertwine official prescriptions and local tactics in favor of schooling.

### 1. *The male/female teacher, between representations and connected stories*

The migration of teachers from Italy to Brazil, especially to Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo, did happen, but with a relatively small number of trained teachers. Most of those who came to work in the Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo contexts, whether in Italian or public schools, or in other educational instances, became teachers due to opportunities and/or choices to stay in the profession. A transnational attention is drawn to the object – teachers who immigrated, or immigrants who took on the role of teaching in the host land, lived in hybrid conditions, produced cultural transfers<sup>13</sup>, that is, a dynamic of resemantization of the culture lived in Italy to the new experiences in the Brazilian context.

In the case of Rio Grande do Sul, it is worth noting the initiative of mutual aid associations in the creation and maintenance of schools, as well as the Italian schools created in rural areas that had a local, more educated settler as their teacher<sup>14</sup>. The most recurrent way of maintaining learning as to reading, writing, doing math and, of course, in many cases, also praying, was the choice, from a group of families, of the one who was willing to teach. Becoming a teacher for the opportunity that arose, making oneself a teacher while living the experience of teaching. Ribeiro reinforces the need that rewarded the efforts of families to create schools:

The lack of a public school system capable of promoting the rural areas that were being colonized forced settlers to take other initiatives in the creation of schools. In many places in the RCI [Italian Colonial Region], schooling begins with isolated private schools, ruled by a more educated settler or one who had had some school experience in Italy<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> M. Espagne, *A noção de transferência cultural*, «Jangada», n. 9, January-June 2017, pp. 136-147.

<sup>14</sup> T.Â. Luchese, *Processo escolar entre imigrantes no Rio Grande do Sul (1875-1930)*, cit.

<sup>15</sup> L.B.M. Ribeiro, *Escolas italianas em zona rural do Rio Grande do Sul*, in C.P. Ribeiro, J.C. Pozenatto (edd.), *Cultura, imigração e memória: recursos e horizontes*, Caxias do Sul, Educus, 2004, p. 149.

In this sense, as Luchese<sup>16</sup> mentions, many of these initiatives were ephemeral. On the other hand, in the case of mutual aid associations, the maintenance of schools lasted a little longer. This is the case of the *Scuola "Vittorio Emanuele II"*<sup>17</sup>, to which Rech refers as an institution that maintained a school for a significant period (1877-1938).

In the case of São Paulo, Panizzolo<sup>18</sup> states that the first Italian school in the city of São Paulo was founded by teacher Francesco Pedatella in 1887. Until 1893, year when the «Fanfulla» magazine was created, there were 7 schools in the capital alone, and this figure rose to 26 by 1900<sup>19</sup>. According to Trento<sup>20</sup>, in the city of São Paulo, in 1908, there were 80 Italian schools, which represents a significant increase.

The education offered in São Paulo's Italian schools (as well as in Rio Grande do Sul) was called an elementary course and organized into two sections, with the lower one consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, and the upper one consisting of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades, as prescribed by Italian law. It is possible that the schools offered only the lower elementary course because most children studied up to the third grade and then entered the world of the adults, or rather, the world of work. This hypothesis finds support in the description provided by the three teachers appointed to compose the Commission responsible for writing the *Programmi per le scuole elementari italiane dello stato di S. Paulo* (Programs for the Italian elementary schools in the state of São Paulo), in 1904, since, according to them: «Families in general send their children to school until the third grade and, therefore, it is an end in itself. When a young person completes this grade, they must be, as much as possible, prepared to continue their education on their own»<sup>21</sup>.

*Collegio "Sempre Avanti Savoia!"*, founded by teacher Francesco Pedatella, operated in a building, or rather, in a two-story house specifically built for this purpose. It is, according to the image below, a large school, with big and tall windows, which probably ensured good ventilation and lighting, unlike many other schools that had a single room in a rented or leased space. Teacher Pedatella maintained the boarding school "*Sempre Avanti Savoia!*", as shown in Figure 1.

Pedatella's school was located on R. Da Consolação, 350, and was one of the oldest schools in the city of São Paulo. Teacher Francesco Pedatella directed the school in 1905 and was assisted by his daughters Assunta and Rafaella Pedatella. The school offered complete primary education and followed the school programs of the Italian government, in addition to having an evening course for adults, in which Portuguese was taught. According to Parlagreco<sup>22</sup>, the school had a rich academic heritage and was attended by

<sup>16</sup> T.Ä. Luchese, *Processo escolar entre imigrantes no Rio Grande do Sul (1875-1930)*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> G.L. Rech, *Escolas étnicas italianas em Porto Alegre/RS (1877-1938)*, cit.

<sup>18</sup> C. Panizzolo, *O processo escolar entre italianos e seus descendentes*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> «Fanfulla», 1906.

<sup>20</sup> A. Trento, *Do outro lado do Atlântico. Um século de imigração italiana no Brasil*, São Paulo, Edunesp, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Originally: «Le famiglie in generale mandano i loro figli alla scuola fino al compimento della terza classe e che perciò questa è fine a se stessa. Per cui il giovanetto, uscendo da questa classe, deve essere, per quanto è possibile, preparato a continuare da sé la propria educazione». F. Pedatella, *Relazione Scolastica, 1894-1895*, in Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Scuole, 1889-1910, folder 341, p. 2).

<sup>22</sup> C. Parlagreco, *Il Brasile e gli italiani*, Firenze, R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1906, pp. 796-810.



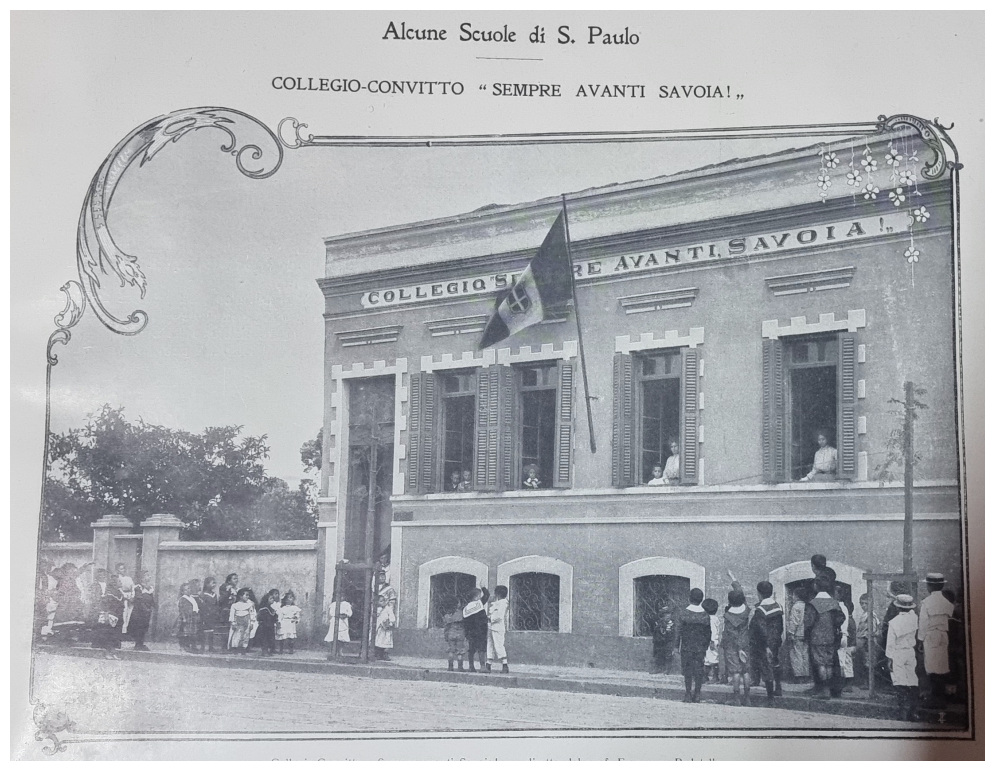


Fig. 1. *Collegio "Sempre Avanti Savoia!"*, directed by teacher Pedatella, São Paulo, 1906 (Parlagreco, cit., 1906, p. 803)

80 students of both sexes, divided into three classes. The library had about 300 books. Pedatella was recognized as the founder of 14 other schools, in addition to being invited to conferences, promoting commemorative parties, marches, gymnastics competitions, awards... For his intense activity, he had been proclaimed "benefactor of instruction". It is also worth highlighting the action of this teacher in promoting teacher associations. São Paulo had two associations: *Società Protettrice delle Scuole Italiane* and *Federazione delle Scuole Italiane*, the latter being chaired by teacher Francesco Pedatella, with 35 associated schools. Pedatella's schools were made known in different ways, especially through the press. Besides advertisement in newspapers, it is important to mention that the school relied on publicity and promotion also through the distribution of leaflets. Teacher Pedatella opened other branches in Vila Mariana, Bom Retiro, Santa Rosa, Cambucy and Barra Funda. He was a leader who played an important role in the context of Italian schools. With regard to teaching, the school's<sup>23</sup> weekly schedule consisted of a distribution of activities for each of the classes, as transcribed below:

<sup>23</sup> F. Pedatella, *Relazione Scolastica*, 1890, in Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Scuole, 1889-1910, folder 341.



Table 1. Weekly schedule of the *Collegio "Sempre Avanti Savoia!"* (Pedatella, *Relazione scolastica*, cit., 1890)

SCHOOL PROGRAM			
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade
MONDAY	MONDAY	MONDAY	MONDAY
Simultaneous reading and writing exercises. Objective teaching. The parts of the human body and poems from memory.	Reading exercises focused on the terms and words read. Writing by imitation, the parts of the human body. Grammar.	Proper reading and explanation, that is, with correct accentuation of prepositions and periods.	Reading and explanation of things read. Grammar and essay writing. Arithmetic. Decimal metric system.
TUESDAY	TUESDAY	TUESDAY	TUESDAY
Simultaneous reading and writing. Stories addressed in Greek, Hebrew, and Roman History.	Stories from Greek, Roman and Hebrew History. Writing by imitation. Poems from memory. Analyses.	Writing. Reading. Geography and History of Italy.	Geography and history of Italy. Calligraphy and sensory reading.
WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Writing numbers up to 100. Mental addition and subtraction. Reading. Recitation of poems from memory.	The first four operations with mental calculation exercises from 1 to 9, and, in writing, up to 1000. Intuitive concept and writing of ordinary fractions.	Grammar and arithmetic. Exercises on the four operations with decimal numbers taught in practice. Conversion of ordinary fractions into decimals. Grammar analysis.	Problems. Morality. Etiquette. Memory exercises. Freehand drawing of geometric figures and definition of the most important square and rectangle measurement rules.
FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY
Simultaneous reading and writing exercises. Objective teaching. Names and qualities of objects found at school and the main ones found at home.	Exercises. Poems from memory. Writing by imitation. Natural phenomena.	Roman History. Reading. Objective teaching; measuring temperature checked with a thermometer.	Physics and Natural History with practical demonstrations. History of Rome.
SATURDAY	SATURDAY	SATURDAY	SATURDAY
Writing numbers. Objective teaching, the parts of the human body, domestic animals. Division of time: hours, days, weeks, months and year.	Reading. Mental calculation exercise. Poems from memory. Etiquette. Problem.	Grammar. Poems from memory. Moral problem and Etiquette.	Grammar and analysis. Arithmetic. Metric measurements of length, surface, volume, capacity and weight, with relative exercises. Gymnastics and military exercises.
<p>Time Daytime – 09:00 to 15:00 Evening – 19:00 to 21:00</p> <p>São Paulo, 7 February 1890 The principal, Francesco Pedatella</p>			

The table is organized for the four grades of elementary school, with the contents divided throughout the week. There were no classes on Thursdays, as per the document. The proposed teaching content was: Grammar (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Reading (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Literature (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Arithmetic (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Geometry (4<sup>th</sup> grade), History (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Geography (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Various notions (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Calligraphy (4<sup>th</sup> grade) and Gymnastics (4<sup>th</sup> grade). The Program share some similarities with the one approved in 1901 by the São Paulo Association of Italian Teachers, as addressed above.

It is worth mentioning the use of the simultaneous method by teacher Pedatella, which shows up-to-dateness for the pedagogical debate at the time. The method was introduced in Italy and Brazil during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and children, by means of it, while identifying the alphabetic code, also learned to read and write, as long as they had a book in common. A facilitator for the execution of the method was serial teaching and the availability of books, which, in addition to guiding the teaching of reading, also helped the learning of writing.

Besides teaching reading and writing using the simultaneous method, Pedatella adopted the intuitive method, for the following reasons: «I remain faithful to the use of the intuitive method that I spread and applied not only in language teaching, but in all other disciplines, considering it as the only one (so far) to make the subjects taught retain in the intelligence of children»<sup>24</sup>. Once again, the teacher proved that he followed *pari passu* the methodological discussions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The intuitive method, supported by the concrete, rational and active teaching tripod, aimed to enhance children and prepare them for the construction of knowledge, through observation and work. The explanations about the method given by Valdemarin (2004) in this regard are quite enlightening:

Observing means progressing from perception to idea, from the concrete to the abstract, from the senses to intelligence, from data to judgment. Working implies adopting a brilliant discovery credited to Fröbel, which consists of making teaching and education in childhood an opportunity to carry out concrete activities, similar to those of adult life. By combining observation and work in the same activity, the intuitive method aims to guide children's discovery so that observation generates reasoning, and work prepares future producers, making thinking and building inseparable things<sup>25</sup>.

In the intuitive method, it would be up to the teacher to propose school activities that would prepare the students' senses towards observing their work, their activity and the construction of meanings. The school constitutes, then, a privileged place for the stimulation and fixation of learning, through «systematized experiences that enable, continuously and gradually, the acquisition of words, expressions and symbols of complex ideas»<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> «È mantenuto fedele all'uso del metodo intuitivo che ho diffuso ed applicato non solo nell'insegnamento della lingua, quando su tutte le altre discipline, ritenendolo come l'unico mezzo (fin ora) a far ritenere nella intelligenza dei fanciulli le materie insegnate» (F. Pedatella, *Relazione scolastica, 1891-1893*, in Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Scuole, 1889-1910, folder 341).

<sup>25</sup> V.T. Valdemarin, *A centralidade do método de ensino na educação moderna*, in J.S. de Almeida (ed.), *Profissão Docente e Cultura Escolar*, São Paulo, Intersubjetiva, 2004, pp. 149-170.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Concerning *Collegio “Sempre Avanti Savoia!”*, we have knowledge of materials intended for schools to use, such as flags, shields, paintings of Natural History, Roman History, Modern History, images of the sovereigns of Italy, geographical charts of Italy, Europe and Africa, terrestrial globe, Pythagorean chart, among many others. These materials were fundamental for the implementation of the intuitive method, whose stages included one called “lesson of things”, in which children learned by studying the objects themselves, as well as engravings or drawings of them<sup>27</sup>.

Considering the operation of the school maintained by teacher Pedatella in São Paulo, we can have a glimpse of knowledge, practices and ways of organizing schooling. Pedatella’s leadership in São Paulo was evident. In the case of Rio Grande do Sul, through the compilation of references found in the memory collection of the *Arquivo Histórico Municipal João Spadari Adami* (AHMJSA) and the *Elementos Culturais da Imigração no Rio Grande do Sul* project, of the *Instituto de Memória Histórica e Cultural da Universidade de Caxias do Sul* (ECIRS/IMHC/UCS), we present a set of evidence that points to the constitution and representations about teaching in the so-called Italian schools in the Rio Grande do Sul context:

Table 2. Memories of the Italian school and the teachers’ work (extracts from interviews found in the memory database of AHMJSA and ECIRS/IMHC/UCS)

Name	Parents, date and place of birth	Profession	Narrated memory
Elvira Tonietto Mosele <sup>28</sup>	Daughter of immigrants Belvim Tonietto and Stella Maria Tonietto, June 20, 1920, Caxias do Sul	Housewife	Memory of her grandfather, in Linha Feijó [now Farroupilha] «He was a teacher there, he taught and did everything, because there was no priest back then, he did this and that, anything but saying mass, but he buried the dead, officiated weddings, baptized, the Passion Week [...] my father taught».
Graciema Patternoster Pieruccini <sup>29</sup>	Daughter of immigrants João Patternoster and Maria Sartori, 08/08/1892, Caxias do Sul	Housewife	«My father came from Europe, from Trento, Giacomo Patternoster was my grandfather, Caxias’s first teacher [...]. For reading, writing, doing math. Then, that teacher, Maria Translati too, who was a great teacher in Caxias do Sul, but she was Italian. [...] She was Italian. [...] Oh, the stone... we were told to draw numbers, write, we had dictations. There was this girl that used to stay really close to the teacher’s desk, whom she helped, so she dictated, and we wrote».

<sup>27</sup> On this matter, see C. Panizzolo, *João Köpke e a escola republicana: criador de leituras, escritor da modernidade*, Thesis on Education, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Elvira Tonietto Moselle. Interview from the Memory Database of the *Arquivo Histórico Municipal João Spadari Adami* (AHMJSA), conducted by Sonia Storch Fries and Susana Storch Grigoletto on 01.12.2005, FG646.

<sup>29</sup> Graciema Patternoster Pieruccini. Interview from the Memory Database of the AHMJSA, conducted by Edma Ribeiro Pacheco and Zenith Salvador on 02.04.1985, FG052.

Aparício Postali <sup>30</sup>	Son of Abel Postali and Maria Prezzi Postali, no date of birth informed, Caxias do Sul	Dentist and photographer	«I studied at my mother's school. She was a teacher [...]. So, we went to school, 30, 40 students or whatever. My mother was energetic, she was a tall lady, hair pulled back, in a bun, the conductor. Look, if you messed up, a quince stick would be striking your back! We left the rural school with my father, I was 11, 12 years old».
Verônica Candiago Bortolon <sup>31</sup>	Daughter of Francisco Candiago and Giovana Ruzzarin Candiago, 1915, Caxias do Sul	Teacher	«My maternal grandfather was an educated person, you know? He was a teacher. Back in Italy and when he came to Brazil, he was one of the first teachers in the neighborhood, in Sexta Légua, São Valentim. That church in São Valentim, Sexta Légua. Antônio Ruzzarin. [...] They had a school there and he taught. He was very fond of reading and writing. He was held in high esteem by the neighbors it seemed. There were few people who could read and write at that time. My mother always told me. Then, at night, the neighbors would come and say: – Antônio, write me a letter to send to Italy, to my parents, my siblings-in-law or whoever. He'd get all happy, poor guy. He really enjoyed writing. When there was a wedding, at that time, they used to write a short speech for the bride and groom. So, they would go there and ask: Antônio, write me a little speech [...]. It was a school run by the Italian government itself, he received all the material from Italy. He taught Italian».

Through the excerpts, we perceive important nuances to think about teaching and its representations. The use of school materials, such as books in Italian, are remembered. Learning in dialect and teaching practices, with many of them being repetitive and based on memorization. The memory of the teacher who taught reading, writing and counting. The number of students in classes, the various levels of students in the same classroom. Differently from that of Pedatella, individual teaching prevailed. The teacher as a reference for the community, supporting social and religious activities. The constitution of teaching with specific training in Italy was an exception. Most of those who acted as teachers did so from the opportunity that arose, from the need for someone to take on the role in a given community.

<sup>30</sup> Aparício Postali. Interview from the Memory Database of the AHMJSA, conducted by Maria Beatris Gil and Sonia Strochi Fries on 09.09.1998, FG291 and FG292.

<sup>31</sup> Veronica Candiago Bortolon. Interview from the Memory Database of the *Elementos Culturais da Imigração* (ECIRS), given to Liane Beatriz Moretto Ribeiro on 03.10.1985, transcribed by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando, Instituto de Memória Histórica e Cultural (IMHC), Universidade de Caxias do Sul (UCS).



Fig. 2. Teacher Lodovico Maestri's school, built in a joint effort by the community<sup>32</sup>

It is noticeable that the documentary records indicate that the first teachers in Italian schools were, for the most part, male teachers; however, in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, female teachers took over, many of them very young, who become teachers. It is also possible to observe that the teachers who worked in the first years in private or community ethnic schools sought further training and went after the roles of public teachers or teachers subsidized by the state government. In this case, an example of a teacher who remained in the role, but who went from being an Italian school teacher to a public teacher, was Lodovico Maestri. He started as a teacher in São Pedro, Linha Palmeiro in Bento Gonçalves, and then, in 1911, he transferred to Alfredo Chaves, in Linha Silva Jardim, which he mentioned belonging to the then district of Nova Bassano. There, he took over the direction of a public school. In the figure below, the image of the school where Teacher Lodovico worked, in a way which is very representative of what happened in so many other cases among teachers in the Gaucho Highlands.

The small school located next to the church, to the cemetery and to the community hall, in a rural area, is a common representation of communities in southern Brazil. The teacher taking on different roles in the community, as a catechist or supporting the vestrymen, would become a local leader. In 1925, during the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Italian immigration to Rio Grande do Sul, Maestri appears as a teacher in a school in Paraf<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> A.I. Battistel, *Retratos da Colônia*, Porto Alegre, Palotti, 2008, vol. 2, p. 575.

<sup>33</sup> B. Crocetta, *Un cinquantennio di vita coloniale. Cinquantenario della Colonizzazione nel Rio Grande del Sud: 1875-1925*, Porto Alegre, Posenato Arte & Cultura, 2000 (fac-símile 1925), pp. 357-462.

It is interesting to notice that teacher Lodovico Maestri was very active in matters involving the communities in which he lived, participating in different moments of the local sociocultural life. He was also a correspondent for newspapers such as Garibaldi's «Il Colono Italiano», and the publishing of articles produced by him was frequent. We draw attention to a piece of evidence that we selected and in which Maestri publishes that he received school material – books – from the Italian consulate, but did not sell them, since they were distributed free of charge, as one can read below:

For the pure truth. I hereby declare and attest, Lodovico Maestri, that, ever since I became a teacher, I have never sold books as school material provided by the Government of Italy. This statement of mine is intended to shut the mouth of any detractor who has the courage to utter such falsehood to Consular Officer, Mr. Dr. Gino C. Battocchio in Bento Gonçalves. Lodovico Maestri. Teacher<sup>34</sup>.

In another article signed by teacher Lodovico Maestri, he defended the school and, through a practical example, a conversation he had had with a settler, he explained, argued and showed the importance of school for girls, even if it was for them to be 'good mothers'. From the content, there is an evident indication of cultural practices and moral values belonging to a collective body, recorded by teacher Maestri's quill. The school was represented as a space for enlightenment, for dissemination of knowledge and for preparing children – boys and girls – to play their social roles. It is interesting to observe that teacher Maestri mentioned the religious aspect, beyond a certain "refinement" in the ways of being and acting, the social "etiquette". The school would contribute to that and support future mothers and fathers to be better equipped to teach their own children.

Another teacher, Camila Roncoroni, graduated in Italy, immigrated to Brazil, circulated through Rio Grande do Sul, between the Capital and the Gaucho Highlands when working at the school maintained by *Sociedade Princesa de Montenegro* in Porto Alegre, and found different material conditions to teach. Below is an image produced inside the classroom, which, in itself, is relatively unusual, but the intention seems to have been to show the organization and set of materials that were available. Wooden desks and the teacher's table, typical of the time, cabinets with teaching materials, walls with paintings of the king and queen<sup>35</sup>, the Italian flag, blackboard, abacus, murals, dishtowels and napkins with embroidery displayed in the back, on the left side. Therefore, the preparation of the environment for the production of the image is evident, as one can see in Figure 3.

On the desks, one can see some books and/or sheets. On the table, at the center of the image, a typewriter. On the blackboard, the record of the year 1903. The same page of the «Almanacco dell Fanfulla»<sup>36</sup> mentions that the school inspectors were Adelchi Colnaghi and Rev. Don Giovanni Riolo. And the following pages, presenting the other Italian

<sup>34</sup> «Il Colono Italiano. Organo degli interessi coloniali», vol. III, n. 27, 9 September 1911, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> From the image, the portraits depict Humberto I and Margherita, first king and queen of the unified Italy.

<sup>36</sup> «Almanacco del Fanfulla», 1905.





Fig. 3. Inside the *Società di Beneficenza ed Istruzione Principessa Elena di Montenegro's* classroom («Almanacco del Fanfulla», 1905, p. 54)

societies in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, such as Umberto I, indicate the operation of other schools.

It is interesting to note that, in the case of teacher Camila Roncoroni, she stayed in Brazil for more than three decades and taught in several municipalities, such as Pelotas, Silveira Martins, Gramado, Taquara, and in the vicinity of Barra do Ribeiro. From the Fiftieth Anniversary work, it is known that she returned in 1923 to her hometown, Milan<sup>37</sup>. Few of the teachers who worked in Italian schools took a journey such as that of teacher Camila Roncoroni, returning to Italy.

Working in the Gaucho Highlands, another example is teacher Pietro Ceconello. He taught in Caxias at an Italian school, and later, with a certain effort to master Portuguese, he passed a state examination and started to work as a teacher bound to the government of Rio Grande do Sul. Teachers from Italian schools, or immigrants who become teachers and take courses, prepare themselves, many even self-taught, dedicating time to their occupation, later as public teachers in Rio Grande do Sul – there are several cases that

<sup>37</sup> B. Crocetta, *Un cinquantennio di vita coloniale*, cit., p. 399.



we identified. In Bento Gonçalves, the case of the Italian teacher Angelo Roman Ross is known; he came to be the principal of the public Elementary School.

### *Conclusions*

In order for the understanding of the history of schooling among Italian immigrants in Brazil to gain greater complexity and be deepened, analyzing the role, the functions and who the teachers were is part of the process. The instability, temporariness, ephemerality of institutions marks most schools among Italian immigrants and descendants. It is important to realize that, of those who took on the role of teachers, most were schoolmasters. The teacher was central to the existence of the school, because where the teacher was, the school was. But it is certain that teaching actions were beyond the school:

the most educated in the community, and this condition, added to being “masters”, generated prestige, respect and community leadership. Many were the teachers who played, within the social environment in which they lived, a central role in religious, claiming and organizational matters, becoming representatives of that group, if not local leaders. These were the representations produced about being a teacher<sup>38</sup>.

In addition to being a schoolmaster, the teacher took on different social roles in the community, participating in religious celebrations, being the spokesperson for the families before local authorities, contributing to the catechism, to the local band or choir, contributing to local newspapers, that is, many male and female teachers had other work functions concurrently with teaching. In most cases, it is possible to identify that becoming a teacher was an artisanal, and sometimes improvised, function. One became a teacher through practice, through self-teaching.

Aside from the example presented herein – that of teacher Pedatella, who adopted simultaneous teaching –, individual teaching prevailed, which was based on memorization, emphasizing what was believed to be essential: reading, the main mathematical notions, and writing. Notions of history and geography, notions of civic life and the catechism were also worked on. These teachers played «[...] one of the traditional roles of a teacher, that which made them a spiritual agent, in the figure of a teacher, and a social guide, in the figure of a model personality within the community»<sup>39</sup>.

Many of the teachers had different parallel functions, such as those who were both teachers and farmers, or, as Libera Bigarella Cavagnoli recalled, when mentioning that her father, Benedito Bigarella, who «were a very good man, very educated, he was a teacher and later worked as a postmaster and a scribe». This is also the case of Giulio

<sup>38</sup> T.Â. Luchese, *Processo escolar entre imigrantes no Rio Grande do Sul (1875-1930)*, cit., p. 416.

<sup>39</sup> R. Fernandes, *Ofício de professor: o fim e o começo dos paradigmas*, in C.P. de Sousa, D.B. Catani (edd.), *Práticas educativas, culturas escolares e profissão docente*, São Paulo, Escrituras Editora, 1998, p. 1-20 (in particular, p. 03).

Lorenzoni, who went from being a teacher to holding other positions, including that of a post office assistant, and later a post office agent. Teachers transitioning to other jobs, most of which were better paid.

Another situation was that of those who worked as private teachers in their own homes, or those who became teachers subsidized by the Italian government or by the municipality or state itself. In some situations, it was possible to identify teachers who were subsidized and, by taking enhancement courses, adapted and were appointed public teachers, such as Pietro Ceconello and Lodovico Maestri, for instance.

In this movement between migrating and being a teacher, it is possible to perceive the cultural exchanges and the necessary adaptations, pedagogical creations produced inside the classrooms. There is, and within the limits of this text it was not possible to explore further, a growing presence of women working in teaching<sup>40</sup>. Many teachers, in their work, mobilized resources and were inventive, creating tactics to implement schooling and appropriation of knowledge, especially the learning of Portuguese, which the majority did not master. The male and female teachers who migrated gradually constituted themselves in the teaching profession. Most of them were lay people and became teachers out of necessity, with many having completed a few years of schooling, but they were bound to the community and recognized for the work done. Over the years, especially in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, municipalities began to offer enhancement courses and organize selection processes, though simplified. In any case, it is relevant to recognize that a teacher, either male or female, made the schooling of immigrants and descendants possible and, in most cases, passed on knowledge and made it hybrid, between what was learned in Italy and what was experienced in Brazil.

<sup>40</sup> It is worth remembering what Louro writes on the subject: «Women had, “by nature”, an inclination towards dealing with children, that they were the first and “natural educators”, so nothing more appropriate than entrusting them with the school education of the little ones. If a woman’s primary destiny was motherhood, it would suffice to think that teaching represented, in a way, “an extension of motherhood”, with each male or female student seen as a “spiritual” son or daughter. [...] To this end, it would be important for teaching to be also represented as an activity of love, devotion and donation» (G.L. Louro, *Mulheres na sala de aula*, in M. Del Priore (ed.). *Histórias das mulheres no Brasil*, São Paulo, Contexto, 2004, pp. 443-481, in particular p. 450).



# School Memories from Croatia: Autobiographies of Mijat Stojanović and Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac

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## *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

Autobiographies by Mijat Stojanović *Adventures and Misadventures of my Life (Sgode i nesgode moga života)*, published in 2015) and Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac *Youth Memories from Croatia (Jugenderinnerungen aus Kroatien)*, published for the first time in Leipzig in 1894) are exceptionally valuable historical sources since only few autobiographic records, diaries and memoirs from 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatia have been preserved. Research conducted thus far suggests that Stojanović was the only 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian teacher who wrote an autobiography, while his contemporary, writer and teacher Dragojla Jarnević (1812-1875) kept a diary for four decades<sup>2</sup>. Similar research has not yet been conducted on archival legacies of 20<sup>th</sup> century Croatian teachers<sup>3</sup>. The reason for this small number of preserved autobiographic records and diary entries of Croatian teachers dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century should be sought in their modest education, widespread illiteracy and a narrow circle of potential readers. Namely, in the late 1860s, approximately 85% of the Croatian population was illiterate (over half of the urban population was illiterate)<sup>4</sup>. Stojanović's and Tkalac's<sup>5</sup> individual school memories, as presented in their autobiographies, are an

<sup>1</sup> This paper has been fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project "European Origins of Modern Croatia: Transfer of Ideas in Political and Cultural Fields in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries", IP-2018-01-2539.

<sup>2</sup> Her diary was published in its integral version for the first time in 2000. D. Jarnević, *Dnevnik*, edited by I. Lukšić, Karlovac, Matica hrvatska, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> In Italy, approximately 30 memoirs of elementary school teachers have been preserved dating from the period from 1861 to the 1970s. Cf. M.C. Morandini, *Telling a Story, Telling One's Own Story: Teacher's Diaries and Autobiographical Memories as Sources for a Collective History*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 115-127.

<sup>4</sup> D. Župan, *Kulturni i intelektualni razvoj u Hrvatskoj u "dugom" 19. stoljeću*, in V. Švoger, J. Turkalj (edd.), *Temelji moderne Hrvatske. Hrvatske zemlje u "dugom" 19. stoljeću*, Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 2016, pp. 273-308, especially p. 273.

<sup>5</sup> As forms of individual school memory, J. Meda and A. Viñao mention diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and personal recollections formulated in oral testimonies. Cf. J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristic Perspectives*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 1-9.

extremely important source on 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian school history since both authors pay great attention to describing their own formal and informal education while presenting their personal life paths and intellectual development<sup>6</sup>.

Our research into the aforementioned autobiographies departs from Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography as a «retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality». In the author's view, the main features of an autobiography are: a prose narrative; the theme is individual life and the story of one's own personality; the author, the narrator and the main character are one and the same; a retrospective point of view in narration<sup>7</sup>. Both Stojanović's and Tkalac's autobiographies have these characteristics. The authors reconstruct the past based on their memories and selected personal experiences that are a product of social relations. These are creative processes characteristic of autobiographic discourse. As is often the case with autobiographies, both authors critically and emotionally comment on various events in their private and public spheres<sup>8</sup>. In the selected autobiographies, narratives are based on facts. These texts could be classified as a subtype of autobiographies that Louis A. Renza calls the memoir mode of autobiographical writing<sup>9</sup>.

### *School Memories of Tkalac and Stojanović in their Autobiographies*

Politician and publicist Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac (1824-1912)<sup>10</sup> begins the reconstruction of his life with his earliest memories. The book describes the first twenty years of his life until he left Croatia to study abroad. His narration is strongly marked by (self-)irony, and the text could be read as a personal history of emotions<sup>11</sup>.

Tkalac was born into a wealthy family of lower nobility. He received his first education at home. His governess taught him Italian and French based on folk songs, opera arias and everyday conversation, but did not teach him to read, write or grammar. The boy's

<sup>6</sup> On informal education in Croatia see V. Švoger, *On the Role of Informal Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Croatia*, «Review of Croatian History», vol. 13, n. 1, 2017, pp. 79-102.

<sup>7</sup> Ph. Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Pact*, in Id., *On Autobiography*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 4-5, 12, quotation p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> M. Cuesta, *How to Interpret Autobiographies*, last updated 13.06.2011, [www.razonypalabra.org.mx](http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx) (last access: 31.01.2016); A. Cagnolati, J.L. Hernández Huerta, *School Memories in Women's Autobiographies (Italy, 1850-1915)*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit., pp. 99-113.

<sup>9</sup> L.A. Renza, *The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography*, «New Literary History», vol. 9, n. 1, 1977, pp. 2-26. The author also differentiates the «confessional» and narcissistic modes of autobiographical writing (*Ibid.*, pp. 9-19).

<sup>10</sup> On his life and work, cf. A. Feldman, *Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac. Europsko iskustvo hrvatskog liberala 1824-1912*, Zagreb, Izdanja Antibarbarus d.o.o., 2012.; M. Kolar, *Život i rad Imbre Ignjatijevića Tkalca*, in I.I. Tkalac, *Hrvatsko gospodarstvo polovicom XIX. stoljeća. Izvještaji carsko-kraljevskom ministarstvu u Beču*, edited by V. Stipetić, Zagreb, Dom i svijet; Ekonomski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2004, pp. 9-22.

<sup>11</sup> This paper uses the following edition of the book: *Uspomene iz Hrvatske (1749-1823. 1824-1843.)*, Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 1945.

memory was extraordinary and he learnt with ease, so that at the age of five he was fluent in Italian and French. He taught himself individual letters by writing them with a chalk on a wooden floor, and consequently held his pen as a piece of chalk throughout his life. Afterwards, a private teacher taught him to read, write and arithmetic<sup>12</sup>. Private teachers gave piano and singing lessons to Tkalac and his two younger sisters. The boy would eventually sing at public concerts in his hometown of Karlovac and write music for poems by J. W. Goethe and H. Heine. Another tutor taught him various painting techniques and encouraged the development of his taste for visual arts<sup>13</sup>. Count Đuro Drašković's library, which was almost exclusively stocked with books in German, delighted young Tkalac who decided to learn the language at an early age in order to be able to read these books. Unable to find a qualified teacher, his father first hired a German officer and then a German-speaking gardener. The boy perfected the language by reading the books from the Count's library<sup>14</sup>. Several years later Tkalac was equally enthusiastic about the Hirschfeld bookstore in Zagreb, well stocked with Croatian, German, and Italian titles. Since his first visit to the bookstore, Tkalac became a regular buyer of foreign books and journals, some of which were on the Austrian list of forbidden works, but were nevertheless smuggled by booksellers into the Habsburg Monarchy. Throughout his life, Tkalac remained fascinated with books and spent much time seeking and buying the best books wherever he travelled<sup>15</sup>.

By the time he began attending regular school at the age of eleven, Tkalac critically remarked that he was «spiritually left to himself and without any guidance whatsoever». By that time, he had already read many books in German, Italian and French – novels, poetry, history and geography books, travelogues and studies in natural sciences. Despite the boy's vast knowledge, the principal of the elementary school in Karlovac<sup>16</sup> would not allow him to immediately attend the second grade, due to his very bad handwriting. His Franciscan teachers were poorly educated, had no pedagogical training, and taught in German which students could not understand, so it could not be expected that they would learn much. The teachers' knowledge was very modest, consisting mainly of what was written in the textbooks. In class, they would read individual textbook paragraphs, paraphrase only the more difficult parts, and the students would mechanically memorise what the teacher read. In tests, the students had to reproduce the texts from the textbooks, possibly literally, while their understanding of the material was not checked. Elementary school pupils were taught catechism, Bible history, German grammar and

<sup>12</sup> Tkalac, *Uspomene iz Hrvatske*, cit., pp. 61-66.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 174-184, 302-303.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-158.

<sup>16</sup> The town of Karlovac was part of the Croatian-Slavonian Military Frontier, where German was the official language in military matters as well as in schools. The Military Frontier (German: *Militärgrenze*) was a border area of the Habsburg Monarchy formed as a defensive territory against the Ottomans during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the subsequent period, it was organised as a large Habsburg military province extending from the Adriatic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains. The Croatian-Slavonian Military Frontier was its westernmost part stretching along the present-day land border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This part of the Military Frontier was reincorporated into Croatia in 1881.

composition were introduced, reading, calligraphy and the basics of arithmetic. Their mother tongue was not then taught in Croatian schools but was gradually introduced starting in the revolutionary year 1848, after the Croatian Parliament in October 1847 replaced Latin with Croatian as the official language in education, the judiciary and public administration. Therefore, Tkalac critically recalls that the only thing he learnt in elementary school was to have beautiful handwriting<sup>17</sup>.

Tkalac's earliest memories of his classmates were not positive. Namely, he started attending classes during the midterm and was older than the other boys, who teased him because of it. Tkalac won their respect only after he defended himself in a fistfight and told them that they would not even have a place to go to school, were it not for his mother's uncle, who had donated money for the foundation of both the elementary school and the secondary school in Karlovac<sup>18</sup>.

The situation in the secondary school, which he attended from October 1837 onwards, was no better. During the school holidays, he read all the secondary school textbooks his parents had bought for his elder brother. He asked permission to take exams for the first two grades of the secondary school in order to enrol directly into the third grade, but was not allowed since school rules did not permit it. This was the reason that he, in his own words, «lost six invaluable years of life». However, he did not blame his teachers, because: «The little they knew was not their fault, but that of the government that based its power on the animalisation of the people and the ignorance of the so-called “educated classes”». Tkalac was very critical of the educational policies implemented by the governing circles in Vienna. He concisely summarised the main motto of such policies in an alleged statement that Emperor Francis I addressed to a delegation of teachers from the Ljubljana Lyceum during the 1821 Congress of the Holy Alliance held in Ljubljana: «I do not need learned, but loyal subjects». Tkalac's assessment of educational policies in the Habsburg Monarchy in the period prior to the March Revolution was satirical and critical: «According to this ‘gracious’ recipe, they trained the “limited subservient minds” and salvaged the honest subjects from even the least “learnedness”»<sup>19</sup>.

In secondary school, Tkalac studied Latin, Greek and Hungarian, and in addition he studied Czech, Polish and Russian on his own. Since he needed little time for homework and studying, he spent time walking, painting, playing, but mostly reading. He wanted to accomplish a «harmonious development of mind and heart» through reading and self-education. He read all the masterpieces of world literature, most of them in the original languages, some of them multiple times. He read Greek and Roman classics, important works in philology, history, archaeology and Bible history, geography, philosophy, politics and art history<sup>20</sup>. His extraordinary memory enabled him to remember what he had read almost word for word, although he remained critical of his own knowledge, evaluating it as unconnected and unusable for school. His vast knowledge surpassed that of his teachers. However, Tkalac self-critically observed that this had had a negative impact on

<sup>17</sup> Tkalac, *Uspomene iz Hrvatske*, cit., pp. 137-141, 145-148, 158.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-141.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-160, quotation pp. 159-160.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-170, 184-192, quotation p. 184.



the development of his personality, since he became (overly) self-conscious, conceited and sometimes insolent, he despised every authority and rebelled against the authority of teachers. He described the negative sides of self-education and the lack of incentives from school and teachers as follows: «School [...] did not contribute to the development of my spiritual and moral qualities at all. Without it, I would have been free from many moral faults I have possessed my entire life. Later, I could never get rid of the harmful sides of autodidacticism»<sup>21</sup>.

In elementary and secondary school, he was the best student in his class and knew much more than his peers and his teachers. He was therefore unpopular among his classmates and his teachers were afraid that his questions might put them in an embarrassing situation. In his autobiography, he wrote self-critically:

I was therefore far ahead of my schoolmates, but even more sadly, far ahead of my teachers. The pupil who would buy and read books which his teachers did not even know existed, had to – whether you like it or not – be both a nuisance and unpleasant; the teacher would always be afraid of being caught in his ignorance by the pupil, while the whole school would then maliciously laugh. Besides, a pupil like that would very quickly become aware of his superiority and would not develop any form of respect for his teacher, which is the basis for every discipline<sup>22</sup>.

In his autobiography, Tkalac comments on political, social, economic and cultural circumstances in Croatia in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as objectives and results of the Croatian national revival<sup>23</sup>. Although he sympathised with the work of the Croatian revivalists, he did not actively partake in the revival movement (the Illyrian movement) because he was repulsed by the harsh disputes (occasionally turning into armed conflicts) between members of the Illyrian movement – Illyrians – and their political rivals, the so-called Magyarons (Hungarophiles). He acknowledged the zealous patriotism that imbued Illyrian artistic creativity, especially in literature, which he indirectly evaluated in the following lines: «That what was said in praise of Hungarians could also be said of the Croatian educated classes: they took every book in Croatian as if it had been a literary masterpiece and encouraged young writers to work praising them benevolently and uncritically, pampering them and spoiling them in this way»<sup>24</sup>.

Mijat Stojanović (1818-1881)<sup>25</sup>, one of the most prominent Croatian educators and folk writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was born into a peasant family in the Slavonian Military Frontier. His parents were illiterate like the overwhelming majority of the Croatian peasantry in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mijat Stojanović's autobiography entitled

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-161, quotation p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>23</sup> V. Švoger, *Under the Crescent and the Star: The Illyrian Movement*, in N. Barić, Z. Radelić, G. Ravančić (edd.), *A History of the Croats. The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Zagreb, Croatian Institute of History, 2022, pp. 67-89.

<sup>24</sup> Tkalac, *Uspomene iz Hrvatske*, cit., pp. 192-212, quotation, pp. 207-208.

<sup>25</sup> On his life and public activity, cf. M. Ogrizović, *Likovi istaknutih pedagoga II. Ljudevit Modec, Mijat Stojanović, Stjepan Basariček*, Zagreb, Školske novine, 1980, pp. 85-141; V. Švoger, *Schule als Zeitungsthema im 19. Jahrhundert in Kroatien: am Beispiel des Lehrers Mijat Stojanović (1818-1881)*, «Review of Croatian History», vol. 18, n. 1, 2022, pp. 135-154, especially pp. 139-150.

*Adventures and Misadventures of my Life*<sup>26</sup> is a combination of memoir writing and diary entries in some of its parts. Like Tkalac, the author begins with his family's history providing many interesting data on Croatia's social, political and everyday life. The author reconstructs his life, focusing on his own intellectual, emotional and professional development.

Stojanović describes his first school experiences using picturesque words and in an emotionally charged manner. At the age of ten, he persuaded his father to enrol him in school. He attended a German village school. Fearing his strict teacher who responded to every wrong answer with the usual punishment of the time – beating pupils – the boy could not show the little knowledge he possessed: «This wrong opinion, I will say prejudice (that the pupil is not capable of learning, author's note) of my first teacher, and his even worse treatment of me, were the reason that even in my third grade I could not read, even less count and my handwriting was horrible». Consequently he sat in the so-called *eselbank* as the worst student in the class. In his autobiography, he does not blame the teacher, who worked «according to the inadequate, awkward and poor way of teaching at the time», but ascribed his poor results in school to his underdeveloped cognitive and emotional skills. After two years, his first teacher passed away. His new teacher managed to dispel the boy's excessive fear of authority and encourage him to study more and show his knowledge without fear. Consequently, young Stojanović became one of the best students in his class. His father would not allow him to pursue his education since he needed his help on the farm. However, the number of pupils in his local village school grew significantly and Stojanović soon found work as an assistant to his former teacher<sup>27</sup>.

Stojanović was very critical of the knowledge he acquired through self-education throughout his life. At the beginning of his career, «I was happy to teach and educate children, but I did not know much, save a bit of reading, writing and arithmetic»<sup>28</sup>. He reflected on the role of elementary schools in upbringing and education as well as cooperation between teachers and parents as a precondition for quality education. He expressed these thoughts in his autobiography as well as in the articles he published in various political newspapers and professional journals. In his autobiography, he writes about the role of elementary school in society and his endeavours to materialise it as follows:

I had to work hard both with teachers and students until everything again [...] went the proper way; along this way, the school accomplished its great task and its sublime purpose. To raise children, to make people out of them who use their reason properly, who think, speak and create in a morally sound way and who are good in the occupation they have in civil society. I faced many obstacles from parents too, who give little or no support to school in the domestic upbringing of their children, mostly out of ignorance and negligence; and from teachers as well, who are not committed and do not invest all the

<sup>26</sup> M. Stojanović, *Sgode i nesgode moga života*, in D. Župan, S. Andrić, D. Matanović (edd.), *Slavonski Brod, Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje*, Zagreb, Hrvatski školski Muzej, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51, quotations p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

powers of their mind and body in performing their sublime tasks, but rather teach as hired workers; and, finally, from learning youth neglected in such circumstances<sup>29</sup>.

His twelve articles entitled "Letters of an Old Teacher to His Young Companion", written in epistolary form in which an experienced teacher answers the questions of his young colleague, analyse the role of all the factors having an effect on the upbringing of children: parents, teacher/school, church, and nature. He believed that teachers have to work in concert with others, but also as a corrective, since they enter this process later than other mentioned factors. He analysed and presented the teacher's role in great detail and gave useful and practical advice to his younger colleagues. This advice was not only based on his twenty-five year teaching experience, but Stojanović quoted or paraphrased ideas of prominent European philosophers from antiquity to the modern age (Aristotle, Plato, Sophocles, Cato the Elder, G. W. Leibnitz, J. G. Herder, E. von Feuchtersleben, an Austrian physician, poet and philosopher engaged in the 1848 reforms of the educational system in the Habsburg Monarchy, and theologian and aestheticist J. G. M. Dursch)<sup>30</sup>.

In a series of articles entitled "Thoughts on Elementary Education and Elementary Schools", Stojanović analyses in detail the educational role of elementary schools, the highly responsible role of teachers in the education and upbringing of new generations, how to play this role and what obstacles teachers have to overcome in the process. In his view, «to be a teacher is the greatest honour a man can enjoy in this world». Furthermore, he analyses issues faced by the Croatian elementary school system at the level of organisation and implementation. He highlighted the need to found quality schools for teachers, increase teachers' wages, write quality textbooks in the national spirit and ensure decent pensions for teachers as prerequisites for improving the quality of education. In his view, all able children should regularly attend school from the age of six to twelve, and then continue repeating the material in Sunday schools for the next three or four years<sup>31</sup>. He believed that quality primary education could be ensured only through cooperation and synergy of all the factors influencing the functioning of elementary schools.

When Stojanović began to work as an assistant teacher, he was fully aware of his modest knowledge. For this reason, he invested great efforts in self-education, working at school during the day, studying and preparing classes at night. In his words: «Not a day passed without me reading, writing and studying. I studied natural sciences, geography, general and Croatian history and German grammar. I would often ponder over a book or a map deep into the night. It is hard work to be one's own teacher». He prepared for the prescribed professional exams on his own, which he managed to pass with success and gradually advance in his career from assistant teacher to district school inspector in 1871<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> *Pisma starog učitelja svomu mladomu drugu. Od M. St., učitelja*, «Narodne novine», vol. 24, from n. 95 (27 April 1858) to n. 110 (15 May 1858).

<sup>31</sup> M. Stojanović, *Misli o pučkoj prosvjeti i o pučkih učionah*, «Napredak», vol. 3, from n. 11 (1 March. 1862) to n. 21 (1 August 1862). Quotation, n. 11, p. 168.

<sup>32</sup> Stojanović, *Sgode i nesgode moga života*, cit., pp. 54-65, 79-118, quotation p. 65. Stojanović's professional path is shortly presented in: D. Župan, *Stojanovićeve 'Zgode i nezgode'*, in Stojanović, *Sgode i nesgode moga života*, cit., pp. XVIII-XXII.

In parallel with his professional development, he read Croatian and international literary works, professional literature and newspapers, wrote articles for domestic newspapers and journals on education science and politics, several school textbooks on various subjects, mostly based on Austrian and German templates, collected folk proverbs, poems and other material for his books intended for the broadest social classes. He was also very active in the struggle to improve Croatian teachers' professional training and status. He was one of the founders of the Croatian Educational and Literary Society in 1871, the most important professional society of Croatian teachers still operating today<sup>33</sup>.

### *Situation in the Croatian School System According to Other Sources*

The school system established during the reign of Maria Theresa underwent minor changes<sup>34</sup> and remained in force until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century failing to give a significant contribution to the rise of literacy in Croatia. During the 1830s, there were approximately 230 schools including those in the Military Frontier. In addition to a small number of schools, a major problem were poorly educated teachers and poor school attendance. Consequently, even those who attended elementary school, especially in rural areas, remained illiterate<sup>35</sup>. In an 1844 brochure dealing with the situation in elementary schools, prominent Croatian politician, writer and natural scientist Ljudevit Vukotinović (1813-1893) writes: «youngsters forget what they have learnt in a year or two. Once they leave school, they never think of a book again. They do not even have prayer books, because they are ashamed [...] to carry them to church»<sup>36</sup>.

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the revolutionary years of 1848-1849, various authors addressed the poor state of Croatian elementary schools in newspapers. A general assessment was that the main reasons for such a state of affairs were the small number of schools, too small and poorly equipped school buildings, poorly educated and poorly paid teachers who were therefore unmotivated, overcrowded classes, low-quality textbooks, lack of teaching aids, inadequate teaching methods and poor cooperation with parents who were reluctant to send their children to school, especially in rural areas, since they needed their help in farm work. The authors generally agreed on how the

<sup>33</sup> Cf. D. Župan, *Bibliografija radova Mijata Stojanovića*, in Stojanović, *Sgode i nesgode moga života*, cit., pp. 285-299. A list of newspapers and journals where Stojanović published his numerous articles, discussions, travelogues and poems between 1845 and 1881 is provided in: V. Brešić, *Čitanje časopisa. Uvod u studij hrvatske književne periodike 19. stoljeća*, Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 2005, pp. 46-47.

<sup>34</sup> For changes in Croatia's elementary school system and in secondary school education, the latter one lasting six years as of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, cf. I. Horbec, M. Matasović, V. Švoger (edd.), *Od protomodernizacije do modernizacije hrvatskog školstva*, knj. I., *Zakonodavni okvir*, Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2017. Last updated: 20.03.2017, <http://histedu.isp.hr/grada-za-povijest-skolstva/> (last access: 10.07.2022), pp. 23-26.

<sup>35</sup> I. Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Reforma obrazovnog sustava kao jedno od ključnih društvenih pitanja 19. stoljeća*, «Radovi – Zavod za hrvatsku povijest», vol. 39, 2007, pp. 57-95, especially pp. 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> Lj. Vukotinović, *Něšto u školah pučkih. Rěč u svoje vrěme*, Zagreb, Franjo Supan, c. kr. p. knjigotiskar i knjigotaržac, 1844, p. 29.

quality of elementary education in Croatia could be improved: teachers should be given better education and higher salaries for their work, new textbooks should be written in Croatian, new school buildings should be built and adequately equipped with teaching aids, and parents should be encouraged to send their children to school regularly. It was expected that the quality of the Croatian elementary school system would be improved through these measures<sup>37</sup>.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a gradual increase in the number of elementary schools and students in Croatia. According to official data from 1851 provided by the Land Government, there were 229 elementary schools in Croatia excluding the Military Frontier, which increased to 716 in 1878 and 1,185 in 1888 (with the incorporation of the Military Frontier). Gradually, the percentage of children who regularly attended school increased as well. In 1851, only 29.67% of the school-aged children attended school regularly, which rose to 67.82% in 1878, and in 1890, 68.5% of boys and 55.6% of girls attended classes regularly<sup>38</sup>.

Although these official data suggest there was significant improvement in the development of elementary education in Croatia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that the situation on the ground was somewhat different. In a text published in the education magazine «Napredak» (Progress) in the mid-1870s, county school inspector Ivan Filipović (1823-1895) confirms the evaluation of Croatia's education system made by Stojanović and Tkalac in their autobiographical notes. Filipović enumerates reasons for the poor state of the Croatian education system:

Deficient and irregular school attendance, insufficient supply of prescribed teaching material for the children, inadequate and incomplete teaching aids, large number of inadequate school buildings and furniture totally unsuitable. In Zagreb County, barely 30 percent of children eligible for school attend classes; and of these 30 percent barely one third attends school on a regular basis. In a number of schools with 80-100 children or more, I found 15-16; and was told that attendance is good if there are 30 present. In general, school attendance is so poor that it is a real horror; and all reports by teachers and more conscientious local school boards are completely in vain. Furthermore, children are very irregularly supplied with prescribed books, copybooks and notebooks<sup>39</sup>.

After the modernisation of *Gymnasien* and *Realschulen* in the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole, which took place in 1848-1849 and was a prerequisite for the reform of higher education that began simultaneously<sup>40</sup>, the quality of Croatian secondary school education improved significantly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Four-year lower *Gymnasien* were transformed into eight-year higher *Gymnasien*, new *Gymnasien*,

<sup>37</sup> V. Švoger, *Zeitungen. Plattform für Debatten über die Modernisierung des kroatischen Schulwesens im 19. Jahrhundert*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 12, n. 1, 2017, pp. 321-336.

<sup>38</sup> *Izvjėsće o stanju školstva u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji svršetkom školske godine 1877/8*. Zagreb, Kr. hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1879, pp. 15, 45; *Izvjėsće o stanju školstva u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji svršetkom školske godine 1889-90*. Zagreb, Kr. hrv.-slav.-dalm. zem. vlada, 1891, pp. 13, 56.

<sup>39</sup> I. Filipović, *Na obranu pučkog učiteljstva*, «Napredak», n. 12, 20 April 1876, p. 178.

<sup>40</sup> Ch. Aichner, *Die Universität Innsbruck in der Ära der Thun-Hohenstein'schen Reformen 1848-1860. Aufbruch in eine neue Zeit*, Wien-Köln-Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2018, pp. 74-110.

*Realschulen*, *Realgymnasien* and vocational schools were opened<sup>41</sup>. Apparently, the private experience of students did not correspond to the actual progress in the quality of teaching in Croatian secondary schools. In a 1907 article, prominent Croatian poet Antun Gustav Matoš (1873-1914) critically described secondary school education in 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatia based on his own experience:

I speak from my own experience, because I have, sadly, attended the best Croatian *Gymnasium* and am a graduate *in spe*, and am still considered to be immature by so many professors. Oh, when I just remember! Cramming, repeating by heart [...], sitting six hours a day in grey and stuffy holes [...], switching from dogmatics to geometry, from logarithms to history, from Hannibal to natural sciences, [...]. The Jesuit catechist almost killed my belief in deity, the cramming grammar teachers not only made classic languages repulsive to me, but also inculcating them upon us, prohibiting us from becoming imbued with classic ideas of patriotism and free Socratic discussions<sup>42</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

As first-rate “ego-documents”, the analysed autobiographies contain individual reflections on personal school experiences of two men who belonged to different social classes in 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatia. Their recollections contain very critical evaluations of the Croatian school system, which they consider unsatisfactory, while humorous (self)-criticism permeates their description of their participation in the educational process. The paper shows that other sources mainly confirm Stojanović’s and Tkalac’s assessment of the Croatian 19<sup>th</sup> century school system. Therefore, their individual memories can be interpreted as part of the collective memory of the Croatian 19<sup>th</sup> century school system.

<sup>41</sup> V. Švoger, Z. Novosel, *The Age of Neo-Absolutism*, in *A History of the Croats*, pp. 111-130, especially pp. 116-119.

<sup>42</sup> A.G. Matoš, *Gimnazijski naš sistem*, «Novosti», vol. 1, n. 45, 6 September 1907.

# A Common Narrative? Civics Teachers of the German Democratic Republic between Memory and Identity

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## *Introduction*

While the GDR has long since been consigned to history since its collapse over thirty years ago, the controversial debate about its past continues<sup>1</sup>. The subject *Staatsbürgerkunde* (civics and politics), which was intended to influence the political education of youth, represents such a section of controversial memories of the GDR. Especially in the initial years following the fall of communism, civics was often seen as an example of the authoritarian character of the GDR<sup>2</sup>. Even though various waves of remembrance have since led to a more complex assessment of the subject, its fundamentally negative public perception has remained. For civics teachers, this means that their life's work is still barely recognised. Against this background, it is assumed that civics teachers create counter-memories to influence collective memories of their controversial school past from within<sup>3</sup>.

While civics was initially regarded as a monolithic block in which teachers implemented the political guidelines in full, recent research has drawn attention to the different teaching patterns that have existed even in this strictly standardised subject<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, and because memories are always related to their speakers' present needs and past experiences, their memories are also expected to show differences as well as similarities<sup>5</sup>. The reciprocal relationships between memory and identity will be elaborated

<sup>1</sup> M. Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, München, C.H. Beck Verlag, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> T. Grammes *et alii* (edd.), *Staatsbürgerkunde in der DDR. Ein Dokumentenband*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera *et alii* (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, pp. 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> T. Grammes, *Staatsbürgerkunde zwischen Katechetik und Dialektik*, in Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg (ed.), *Freundschaft! Die Volksbildung der DDR in ausgewählten Kapiteln*, Berlin, BasisDruck, 1996, pp. 19-169.

<sup>5</sup> The memories of civics teachers were also studied once before in the 1990s, but the focus was more on their teaching-related memories and less on their previous biographical experiences, which are questioned here regarding their influence on their specific memories and teaching identities (*Ibid.*, pp. 56-169).



by analysing autobiographical life narratives. This paper analyses how their self-images as civics teachers are linked to their biographical experiences. These analyses also show how they model their relationship to the GDR, how they legitimise their former allegiance, and generally, how they narrate their school past.

The research corpus consists of five narrative interviews<sup>6</sup> conducted in 2019 with former civics teachers, who have in common that they have all voluntarily taught civics from the early days onwards and spent almost their entire professional lives in the GDR. These teachers had the greatest influence on the development of the subject in practice. Three of them taught at secondary, and two at upper secondary schools. Birth years between 1928 and 1938 are evenly distributed between the idealistic founding generation and the pragmatic generation<sup>7</sup>. Following these findings of GDR generational research, Neumann distinguishes between the idealistic teachers oriented to anti-fascist values who would have entered the teaching profession in the 1950s and the younger, much more pragmatic teachers born before 1950<sup>8</sup>.

The narrative interviews were opened with a slightly focused question: «Would you please tell me your story as a civics teacher?». In addition to the narrative interview method<sup>9</sup>, in which immanent follow-up questions only follow the impromptu narrative, questions were also asked about their teaching experiences in a second phase. This paper presents two cases that differ mostly in terms of their state relationship, professional self-image, and memories of the GDR school.

## 1. Theoretical background

Research on memory has promoted the insight that memories are based on the present position of their speakers. Therefore, the reconstruction of memories must begin with determining the discursive space from which the rules and patterns, possibilities and limits of their constitution emerge. In this context, previous research has drawn attention to the significant influence of contemporary delegitimising discourses on the memory of the GDR<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> F. Schütze, *Biographieforschung und narratives Interview*, «Neue Praxis», vol. 13, n. 3, 1983, pp. 283-293.

<sup>7</sup> T. Ahbe, R. Gries, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte als Generationengeschichte. Theoretische und methodologische Überlegungen am Beispiel DDR*, in A. Schüle et alii (edd.), *Die DDR aus generationengeschichtlicher Perspektive. Eine Inventur*, Leipzig, Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006, pp. 475-573.

<sup>8</sup> T. Neumann, *Die Lehrer sind natürlich insgesamt als Berufsstand in der DDR sehr stark angegriffen worden. Was Lehrerinnen und Lehrer heute mit der DDR-Schule verbindet*, in H.-E. Tenorth (ed.), *Kindheit, Jugend und Bildungsarbeit im Wandel. Ergebnisse der Transformationsforschung*, Weinheim/Basel, Beltz, 1997, pp. 397-410.

<sup>9</sup> F. Schütze, *Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews*, in F. Schütze et alii (edd.), *Sozialwissenschaftliche Prozessanalyse. Grundlagen der qualitativen Sozialforschung*, Opladen – Berlin – Toronto, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2016, pp. 75-117.

<sup>10</sup> H. Haag et alii (edd.), *Volkeigenes Erinnern. Die DDR im sozialen Gedächtnis*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2017.

Particularly affected by them were also the members of the GDR education system, who, especially in the initial period after the fall of communism, were not infrequently accused of uneducational motives or even indoctrinating practices. Even if the social memory of the GDR is now more differentiated, the former civics teachers responsible for the ideological core subject are certainly still under such pressure to justify themselves.

Reh has drawn attention to the discourse dependency, performativity, and reflexivity of the biographical constructions of East German teachers<sup>11</sup>. The discursive influence on their biographical drafts was said to go so far that they could only talk to a West German pedagogue about their past pedagogical practices in the form of «confessions» to counter the interactively generated pressure to justify themselves<sup>12</sup>.

In contrast, the narrative texts are examined concerning the present needs of their speakers *and* the patterns and themes of their lived experiences to ask about integrating biographical knowledge in the construction of their biographical self-images. Even though discourses shape their memories, we must consider that the discursive spaces that influence our self-narratives are neither uniform nor randomly distributed and relate to both our position in the social space and our former life experiences<sup>13</sup>. To trace the genesis of memories, the past experiences of their bearers must also be reconstructed<sup>14</sup>. Because biographical research can make these diverse connections between past, present, and future visible, it is particularly suitable for researching memories.

The reconstruction of the experienced past can provide information about why and how some people connect to those discourse fragments in the context of their self-presentation. Thus, the genesis of memories can be opened up both from present and past. According to the basic assumptions of biographical research, the life narratives are interpreted neither one-sidedly as direct representations of the past nor one-sidedly as representations of the present, but rather as socially constructed yet individual life realities in the form of communicatively generated biographies depicting connections between past, present and future.

<sup>11</sup> S. Reh, *Berufsbiographische Texte ostdeutscher Lehrer und Lehrerinnen als Bekenntnisse: Interpretationen und Überlegungen zur erziehungswissenschaftlichen Biographieforschung*, Bad Heilbrunn – Obb., Klinkhardt, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> B. Dausien, G. Kluchert, *Mein Bildungsgang. Biographische Muster der Selbstkonstruktion im historischen Vergleich. Beispiele und Argumente für eine historisch-empirische Forschungsperspektive*, «BIOS», vol. 29, n. 2, 2016, p. 224.

<sup>14</sup> G. Rosenthal, A. Worm, *Geschichtswissenschaft/Oral History und Biographieforschung*, in H. Lutz *et alii* (edd.), *Handbuch Biographieforschung*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2018, p. 155.

## 2. Case Study

### 2.1 Case reconstruction of Anna (1928): «I can't teach things today and live quite differently in reality»

The communication with Anna, born in Silesia in 1928, is characterised by the fact that she feels under particular pressure to justify herself. She counters this perceived pressure by depicting a life story in which war experiences in particular led to morality and loyalty to the GDR.

She narrates the story of a life after the Second World War that turned into an odyssey of expulsion. The turmoil of war hit her twice, as it meant losing her homeland and abandoning the studies she had just started. It was not possible to resume her studies because of her family's financial situation caused by the war. Because her father could not work after his return from captivity, she had to work as a secretary as a matter of necessity. After 1949 she returned to *Schwerin*, where she initially lived for a short time after her escape from Silesia and where most of her relatives lived. Since her parents stayed in *Schleswig-Holstein*, the family was divided into East and West from that point onwards.

Her first encounter with socialism is told as a scene of biographical importance, in which she experienced a change in her identity. Given her war experiences, she would have been open to the revolutionary idea of an alternative model of society in which the pursuit of power and money as the cause of war would have no meaning. As she was unsatisfied with her office job, she took an evening class to make her dream come true. Her desire to become a teacher goes back to her own female teacher, who became her role model as someone who could teach with authority without being authoritarian. She represents the myth of the natural teacher who is gifted in forming a good relationship with her students.

Shortly after completing her distance learning course, she was struck by another twist of fate. Her husband's serious illness forced her to leave her beloved *Schwerin* for *Thuringia* to be closer to his relatives. The situation in the young GDR at that time brought about a positive change. A dramatic teacher shortage gave her the opportunity to work as an entry-level teacher. While she was at least happy with establishing a secure existence, the separation from her parents living in West Germany remained a burden. The Berlin Wall was built just as she was visiting them with her daughters in 1961. The fact that she returned despite having the opportunity to stay in the West caused those around her to question her sanity. However, her material and spiritual ties enabled her to feel integrated.

The early death of her husband in 1966, leaving her alone with three daughters, made it necessary for her to qualify to teach higher classes. In this situation, the newly introduced subject of civics offered advancement opportunities. As well as the difficulties of maintaining contact with her parents across the borders, she experienced a crisis when the authorities refused her exit permit to attend her father's funeral. This episode of biographical importance provides an insight into her transformation of identity:

The year 1967 was very hard for me, but I accepted it, and I would never have wanted permission if it could only be obtained by devious means. In 1967 my father died, and I was unable to go to the funeral because as a civics teacher I could not get permission. I had to accept it, and I would have resisted trying to get permission by networking or by giving any specific reasons. I would have been reluctant to do so because then I would not have known how to face the students. So, you had to make sacrifices.

In this situation of an identity struggle in which her professional identity conflicts with her family identity, she decides to maintain her moral integrity by privately practising what she preaches as a teacher: to follow the decisions of the socialist party, even if that means giving up part of her identity. She rejects the alternative of «cheating for personal gain», arguing that civics cannot be taught without authenticity. The biographical action pattern of adapting to expectations ultimately comes down to the anticipated problems of maintaining different identities. In this situation, meeting one's own expectations as well as those of others will be difficult. Living with this pressure to fulfil both can make a person vulnerable («I would not have known how to face the students»). This pressure must therefore be met with a transformation of identity. Anna's change is ultimately that of someone who only works as a civics teacher to someone who *is* a civics teacher («When I taught civics, the students had to be able to determine that the teacher stood behind what he was telling me»).

This is a reminder that civics was also taught by authentic teachers who willingly accepted personal renunciations as their duty. Civics thus appears as a moral burden because lifestyle and politics always had to be reconciled. The forgotten dignity of the civics teachers can be emphasised here. Anna explains her ability to carry the burden again with her life story as a «war-torn-woman» whose life has become more and more an exercise in frugality, modesty and willingness to make sacrifices. She constructs herself as a «moral saint»<sup>15</sup>, who is capable of overcoming egoistic temptations, albeit feeling the sacrifice as such.

The global stylistic shape of the narration contains elements of Aristotle's tragedy, such as the effort to elicit pity by listing her deprivations as well as her self-construction as an ethically good character who has experienced a swing from fortune to misfortune through no fault of her own. Accordingly, she explains how teaching civics ultimately failed during the increasing instability of the GDR. Following her principles as a true socialist, she retired even before reunification, feeling that otherwise she would have been «kicked out» soon anyway. After reunification, she felt stigmatised because of her former position, although she still feels nothing to apologise for in terms of her self-perception as always being sincere. Ultimately the narrative pattern of the «war-torn-woman» serves as justification for her former work. After again summarising her difficult life situation in which she decided to remain loyal to the GDR, she formulated a long coda that can be sharpened into a question: Can one blame someone who was so affected by fate for accepting compromised happiness in the GDR, especially when one has given up so much for it?

<sup>15</sup> S. Wolf, *Moral Saints*, «The Journal of Philosophy», vol. 79, n. 8, 1982, pp. 419-439.

2.2 Case reconstruction of Werner (1938): «Under today's conditions of migration, German didactics have become obsolete»

Werner, also born in Silesia, was a highly honored teacher who considers himself to have taught successfully. After mentioning that today's Germany could not protect the cultural heritage embodied in the GDR school system, he proudly reports on his career path: After his graduation in 1959 he completed a postgraduate civics course in 1964 and thus became involved in teacher training. After mentioning his last achievement of becoming headmaster of an advanced polytechnical school in 1977 he announces a substantial change in his life, commenting that it will surprise me. In 1983 he was barred from his profession and sentenced to menial work as an unskilled production worker. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, he was officially rehabilitated as one of the few former civics teachers allowed to teach democratic political education in West Germany. How does he explain his downfall?

The answer takes us right back to his family history as relatives of an ethnic German minority living in Silesia up to their expulsion after the Second World War. The sense of *Deutschtum* he developed in this context is represented as the critical point in his relation to the socialist state. His reading of history starts with the referendum in Upper Silesia in 1921 concerning whether Silesia should continue to belong to Germany or join the newly founded Poland. The referendum caused several riots directly affecting his family. In this situation, his mother experienced how paramilitary groups in her father's hotel fought against the Polish insurgents with her ancestors. He tells the story as if he was there: «We had to defend our *Deutschtum* with weapons in hand». It shows how deeply the concepts of homeland ties and Germanness were embedded in their family tradition.

The socialisation conditions he experienced were determined by their self-positioning as Germans who were preserving their German culture even under the most demanding conditions. The influence of the idea of being German on his mother's thinking was such that he felt challenged to prove that she was not a convinced National Socialist. His mother, characterised as a resolute woman, appears as his role model. Because of the First World War she could not continue school and become a teacher as she wished. As a result, she transferred her preferences to her son, taking care of his intellectual development. His admiration of his mother and the German Empire (1871-1918) continues to this day:

Today I still have a few letters from her. In terms of spelling, she could compete with any German teacher today. She has hardly made a mistake, but they actually really learned something in the imperial school, especially to speak German properly, to talk German properly and write German properly even if you only went to school for seven years.

Because of his family history, he developed a special interest in history. By quoting his history teacher, he demonstrates how his words shaped his self-view of performance excellence: «Werner does an outstanding job in history class». After that, he moved towards an orientation of «being the best at what I do», which is expressed later in his decision to refuse the offer to study art, thinking he is not worthy of becoming an art

teacher. That only his «mummy» was able to convince him to accept the offer illustrates her influence on him.

In the 1950s, his relation to the socialist state would have been good. His nationalistic attitude made him believe in early reunification. Under the impression of GDR's golden age, in which the state offered opportunities for social advancement, integration would have been easy for him. His application for a postgraduate course in civics was primarily chosen as an opportunity for social advancement, even though he would have been intrinsically motivated as well.

In the story that follows, Werner portrays himself as a pedagogical hero who has always struggled to improve the standard of education as an important contribution to the building of the socialist state. Emphasising his special qualifications as one of the first subject teachers with additional studies in pedagogy, he recounts his path to becoming a pedagogical authority among practitioners. By claiming the design of civics as a scientific subject, in which students would have learned methods of scientific reasoning, he claims an understanding of the subject that would have been marginalised in practice. In contrast to his ideologically blinded colleagues, he portrays himself as a passionate didactician who, mainly for pragmatic reasons, would have devoted himself entirely to transmitting knowledge as his biographically developed passion.

Although he claims to have already incurred the displeasure of his ideologically blinded party colleagues with this scientific self-image, the problems of fitting in with the GDR state would not have fully arisen until the GDR's attitude towards the «German question» became an individual problem because of his mother's move to the West. He resisted the request to break off contact with her, which was demanded of him as a headmaster. By insisting on visiting his mother, he acted in this decision-making situation according to his socialisation-acquired understanding of home and nation, which outweighs his socialist ties. His disbarment shows how the confrontation between his traditional understanding of patriotism as related to the nation as a whole and the socialist understanding of patriotism, which had been subordinate to the socialist cause, led to a break with the state. So, he was barred from his profession after speaking during an informal discussion with delegates from another socialist country about his family history of expulsion from his traditional homeland, thereby addressing a taboo subject in the GDR, which was perceived as evidence of his reactionary attitude.

After his professional disbarment, he directly worked his way up the social hierarchy. The direct acceptance of his disbarment and the effortlessness in adapting to the new situation show that his actions were primarily guided towards a purpose. Just when he was considering applying for another postgraduate course to reclaim his lost status, the *Wende* unexpectedly began, after which he immediately demanded his rehabilitation as a teacher. He had no reservations about now teaching political education «on the other side of the divide». This shows that his actions were not swayed by ideological ties but rather by a strong sense of self-commitment, success orientation and, above all, a sense of duty to his home country.

Against this background of confrontation between nationalism and socialism, his loyalty to the GDR needs to be justified. He confronts this problem with an argumentation

that seems committed to preserving his biographical identity insofar as the connections between socialism and personally significant nationalism are elaborated here:

So, the civics classes were of quite a different level. I have to say that there were still people who acted as propagandists. I tried to be moderate. Of course, the goal of educating good socialists applied to everyone. By the way, to educate good patriots and internationalists in one. That demonstrates that the idea of being German was very strong. Nowadays, you would say, man, that is not possible. But that is something *Erich Honecker* also said in many of his speeches: the goal is to educate young citizens, who are good patriots, socialist patriots, and proletarian internationalists. That was the top priority, and to a certain extent you could identify with it quite closely. For me, that clearly meant that we are and will remain Germans and as Germans we want to make a good contribution. As a German state, maybe we can be a model for our beloved compatriots, and perhaps one day the whole of Germany will become socialist; that would be nice, such dreams we had.

He presents himself as a German who would have maintained his German identity even under the conditions of a socialist state. This self-image would have been in line with the official state doctrine of the GDR, as evidenced in the words of *Erich Honecker*. The way he saw it, the preservation of a German identity was not only legitimised by the state but also desirable. Accordingly, in contrast to today's misunderstandings, the pedagogical mission would have been not only to educate socialists but to educate patriots as well<sup>16</sup>. In the form of a generally accepted pedagogical motivation, this goal would have been broadly acceptable to him. In this respect, he presents himself as someone who primarily agreed with the GDR because of its compatibility with German Nationalism. That creates the impression that GDR education was not only about the education of a socialist personality. The message is that the German identity would not have to be given up in the GDR.

It should be noted here that this is precisely the reception the GDR state leadership had sought. This reception was to be evoked by the Nation's concept representing one of the legitimisation strategies of the GDR, which can be characterised as an appeal to national sentiment in an effort to combine national traditions and the socialist state<sup>17</sup>. This link between patriotism and internationalism was created for propaganda purposes and made it possible to maintain the self-image of acting German even in a socialist state. Within this framework, Werner presents an image of the GDR school as being in line with the German school tradition. For example, to emphasise the continuity of the GDR school with German traditions, he always refers to the «Advanced Polytechnical School» as «Gymnasium», even though this term was not used in the GDR.

That the ambiguities of his state relationship are not much discussed is due not only to the biographical requirement of identity continuity and the preservation of life

<sup>16</sup> The argumentation corresponds to the narrative pattern of the «confession», in which common negative ideas about GDR pedagogy are first (partially) admitted to successfully distance oneself from them on the basis of the authenticity thus gained (Reh, *Berufsbiographische Texte ostdeutscher Lehrer und Lehrerinnen als Bekenntnisse: Interpretationen und Überlegungen zur erziehungswissenschaftlichen Biographieforschung*, cit., p. 164).

<sup>17</sup> M. Lemke, *Nationalismus und Patriotismus in den frühen Jahren der DDR*, «Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte», vol. 50, 2000, pp. 11-19.



achievements. This also has to do with his present narrative standpoint on which basis the memories are organised: they are constructed against a perceived loss of German culture through migration. The topic of migration determines the communication before and after the official interview situation. In connection with the fundamental assumption that the East has better preserved the German Identity, nationalism and patriotism were projected onto the GDR, leading to a more positive memory, and reducing the socialist component. Against the fear of identity loss through migration, he interprets East Germany and the GDR as its predecessor state as «*Deutscher als Deutsch*»<sup>18</sup>. In this respect, he takes part in an identity discourse among politically right-wing East Germans: «It still works here [in East Germany], but *Frankfurt* is no longer a German city».

Thus, his memories are dominated by experiences that prove that the GDR preserved the German culture better than West Germany. Numerous stories from everyday school life are told based on the GDR's values, such as discipline, diligence, and a sense of duty. Parallels are drawn with the German Empire as the state that describes his ideal of a functioning society. His socialisation in a family committed to imperial traditions, in which a sense of duty was seen as a prerequisite to flourish socially, may have made it easy for him to support an authoritarian state like the GDR. But it is precisely by looking back at the impression of a perceived loss of culture that the assertion of a similarity between the German Empire and the GDR makes it possible to maintain his identity as a German who always thought and acted German.

### 2.3 Teachers' self-designs: Teaching as struggle for authenticity

When asked about their teaching experiences in civics, all teachers shared a story of change from a normal subject to a special problem subject that would have become more difficult to teach as the GDR descended into crisis. All teachers have attributed this turning point at the end of the 1970s to the fact that the students would have been more and more attracted by the material superiority of the class enemy they learned about from the West German media, or through encounters with their western relatives as more travel became possible. Since then, the students would have abandoned their reserved approach to asking critical questions. The episodes about how they dealt with these critical questions of students are particularly suitable for the analysis of their biographical structures of meaning, as is shown in this extract from Anna's interview:

*I: Do you have an example of such a problem?*

Yes, they came and said, oh what we saw in the department stores and what we experienced and what we got as presents and so [...] and then came the question, why not in our case (a little quieter) and this occurred even less in the upper classes at that time: it was more the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> classes that asked this question. And now you had to answer so that what you said was true and the students believed it.

<sup>18</sup> K. Heft, *Kindsmord in den Medien. Eine Diskursanalyse ost-westdeutscher Dominanzverhältnisse*, Opladen – Berlin – Toronto, Budrich Academic Press GmbH, 2020, p. 272.

*I: What did you answer?*

That was followed by the question: what do you prefer, to have this opportunity to buy everything but possibly not have the money and having to see it pass by? That is how it was at first, I guess. I can only guess, or we do not have it for now, but (knocks on the table), we have an apartment (knocks), we have jobs (knocks), we can pay the rent, we can buy bread (knocks), and in exchange for that we now have occasional banana shortages, so those were the first problems that arose.

In dealing with critical questions, Anna relied on the power of persuasion of an ever sincere socialist, who speaks authentically from her own perspective about the advantages of the GDR. Her belief in authenticity as a basic requirement for successfully teaching civics is demonstrated by the fact that she only gave an argument for the GDR that she truly believed in. Since only authentic testimonies are recognised as convincing, only those arguments that were once important for building up her loyalty to the GDR are given. The arguments mentioned are all related to the need for material security, which became biographically significant against the background of her life as a war-torn woman. The scenic language used draws attention to the fact that this seems to be the routine answer she also gave in class. And, quite interestingly, she does not regard her answer as indoctrination, although the suggestive question masked as a decision question is highly manipulative. Werner also grapples with the question of credibility, although his answer and self-image are somewhat different:

*I: You said that you wanted to solve problems, which sometimes required criticism. You have already mentioned it, but could you tell me again in more detail how you assessed your room for manoeuvre?*

Let me start with an example to show how I did it. There was once a song and a question from a student that I still remember: the party is always right, so then the question came up in class, you have to imagine it in the days of the GDR: is the party always right? And I gave this answer: the party is the party of the most progressive class in society, and its programme is based on scientificity. Party and scientificity are therefore connected, and science tells the truth. Can science be wrong? Yes, science can sometimes be wrong, but then it continues researching, and then it's right again, so in the end it comes to the truth. That's how it is. That's how the situation was handled, but of course not in the way a comrade in the district leadership would have welcomed it, but that was how you helped yourself. What else could I have said? Because history has shown clearly that the party made a mistake here and there. If I had said that, it would have gotten around immediately: Werner at the high school says the party makes mistakes. I would have been better off not going to school the next day. So you could combine it with science, which was, for example, a way to get out of an affair and avoid offending anyone so much that you put your existence at risk.

When asked about his room for manoeuvre, Werner mentions a professional crisis triggered by a student's question about whether the socialist party is always right as propagated. That is notable because the question directly casts doubt on the claim to the unrestricted validity of Marxism-Leninism. He responded to the provocative question instead of reprimanding the student for it. Instead of simply answering the question in the affirmative and conflicting with the reality in which the party naturally made mistakes, he argued that the socialist party, because of its scientific ideology, always arrives at the truth despite occasional mistakes. This was to somehow overcome the situation. Thus, he constructs himself as a successful teacher who has managed to skillfully extricate

himself from an unpleasant situation without completely abandoning the core of his actual identity. Even in such a problematic situation with limited options to take action, he would not have appeared as a propagandist engaging in cheap agitation but as a scientifically oriented teacher who had allowed even the most provocative student questions and insisted as much as possible on the scientific design of the subject. For all its distancing from ideological argumentation, the statement also contains the admission that an open expression of opinion would not have been possible under the conditions of the politicised subject. At least from a retrospective point of view, Werner does register having argued ideologically; but compared to Anna, the manipulation through the pseudo-logical connection of party and truth is much more subtle.

### *Conclusions*

The analysis shows that the status of a civics teacher cannot be taken as a label from which their commitment to the state and their integration mode can be adequately inferred. Even civics was not only taught by fully convinced socialists. The interviews suggest that the early teaching staff of the ideological core subject was also divided into genuine socialists and more pragmatic-patriotic teachers.

Anna represents the teachers who believed the anti-fascist founding myth primarily because of their wartime experiences and whose socialist convictions remain unbroken today, making their memories of the GDR exclusively positive. Werner's life narrative reflects the structural pattern of diminishing integration the more his socially acquired German Identity conflicted with the socialist state. However, since his memories are against the backdrop of a perceived loss of German culture, which would not have existed if the GDR had continued to exist, his memories today are also more positive than they might have been at an earlier point in time.

Their self-designs as teachers in the context of an interactively generated pressure to justify themselves reflect the basic patterns of their subject-related counter-memories between authenticity and scientificity. The secondary school teachers see themselves predominantly as authentic teachers, the upper secondary teachers as scientific teachers, emphasising that socialist personalities could only be formed through genuine conviction and not ideological argumentation. Thus, Anna's answer to the provocative student question corresponds to catechetical speech, and Werner's answer more to dialectical speech, described as basic communication patterns in civics<sup>19</sup>. These identities are justified in each case by life histories. That once again confirms previous research findings on the importance of authenticity for the actions of civics teachers<sup>20</sup>.

While Anna develops a counter-memory against the accusation of indoctrination by emphasising her authenticity, which she backs up with her willingness to give up part

<sup>19</sup> Grammes *et alii* (edd.), *Staatsbürgerkunde in der DDR. Ein Dokumentenband*, cit., p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Grammes, *Staatsbürgerkunde zwischen Katechetik und Dialektik*, cit., pp. 60-61.

of her identity, Werner creates a special counter-memory by justifying the GDR school system for its patriotic, educational mission, which would still be considered legitimate today. The emphasis on patriotic education simultaneously negates the intention of an exclusively socialist education in the GDR at the time. Under the impression that the GDR would not have been all about socialism, he does not emphasise the peculiarities of the socialist school but its similarities with the German school tradition. These memories are an expression of biographical work insofar as the patriotisation of the GDR is necessary to preserve his identity as someone who has always acted German-style. In this sense, the discourse on East Germany as being more German than German represents the starting point of his GDR memories. This illustrates that the present positions of narrators cannot be understood without reconstructing their pasts. Only against the background of his experienced past as an expellee, for whom German traditions have a special significance, does it become understandable why this strand of discourse about East Germany so strongly influences Werner's memoirs. In this respect, the analysis shows how closely the memories are linked to the identities of their speakers.

Ultimately, the teachers remember civics as a subject that virtually *demand*ed biographical work because it would have been associated with particular expectations that had to be reconciled with one's own identity. For Werner, this meant constantly working to reconcile the socialist educational mandate with his German identity, while Anna was ultimately left only with the sacrifice of her family identity to be able to teach civics in harmony with herself.

# Memories of Teachers and School Inspectors in Post-War Greece. Visions of the Past and Interpretations in the Present

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## *Introduction*

In our contribution we attempt to look into and reconstruct some aspects of the educational reality during the first postwar decade in Greece, drawing on the oral testimonies of members of the educational community.

This contribution presents and analyses the oral testimonies of five teachers that took their first steps as young teachers in the 1950s to rise in the educational hierarchy and serve as school officers a few years later<sup>1</sup>. All our informants were former male school officers for women did not have the right to claim such a position. Since the inception of the institution in the mid-nineteenth century, school officers were members of the educational staff assigned various administrative, instructional, educational and inspection duties<sup>2</sup>.

In the aftermath of World War II, Greece became the theatre of the first armed conflict of the Cold War which impacted seriously international affairs for the next decades<sup>3</sup>. The civil war that broke out between the Democratic Army of Greece (ΔΣΕ) and the National Army (ΕΣ) and lasted for more than three years (March 1946-October 1949) resulted in a social and political scene by far different to its prewar counterpart<sup>4</sup>. A large number of the members of the National Liberation Front (ΕΑΜ), which was the major resistance movement in Greece during the country's Occupation, served in the ranks of the Democratic Army of Greece. The Greek Communist Party which had the support of the socialist countries played the leading part in the National Liberation Front. The National Army, that is the governmental army, had the support of the King. It was also initially supported by the British and from 1947 on had the support of the USA. The

<sup>1</sup> Emergency Law 1112/46, *Regarding the Appointment of School Officers in Elementary Education*, Issue Α<sup>1</sup>, Government Gazette 105, 19.03.1946.

<sup>2</sup> D. Karakatsani, *Educational Theory and Teaching Practice in Post-War Greece*, Athens, Epikentro, 2012, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> M. Meletopoulos, *Ideology of the Right-Wing State 1949-1967*, Athens, Papazisis, 1993, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> D. Charalambis, *Army and the Political Power: The Structure of Power in Post-War Greece*, Athens, Exantas, 1985, p. 65.

Greek Civil War was fought in Northern Greece and as such it was primarily a war that took place in the countryside<sup>5</sup>.

### 1. *The historical context*

In the first postwar decade, the harsh socio-economic conditions meant that the country struggled to get reconstructed after a decade of warfare. The great intensity of the social relationships and the violence of social clash characterized this period<sup>6</sup>. An authoritarian and suppressive regime was put in place in Greece, which – contrary to what happened in other countries that had experienced similar conflicts in the twentieth century – developed and functioned in the context of a parliamentary democratic system. Yet, it was a democracy with limited personal rights<sup>7</sup>. The political and social conditions of the time left their indelible mark on the acute educational problem which manifested itself during this period. The educational system functioned in anomalous conditions and in certain areas its operation was suspended. At the same time, in conditions of political polarization, prosecutions of teachers, of primary school teachers, started (Ninth Resolution/1946)<sup>8</sup>.

As the Civil War cast its shadow on the postwar political life and amid fears of a coup which challenged the prewar social structures and the dominance of the middle-class, education as an internal reproduction mechanism of the social order took on strong nationalist directions. It projected the classic heritage and the nation's historical continuity as integral parts of the national unity and survival, stressed national integrity and identified it with the maintenance of the social order<sup>9</sup>. It further suggested a militant Christianity as a deterrent against the ideology of social emancipation, forging an ideological edifice which highlighted the idealized national superiority<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> M. Mazower (ed.), *After the War*, Athens, AlexandriaAthens, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> V. Kremidas, *Greece Between 1945 and 1967: The Historical Background: The Greek Society in the Early Post-War Period*, Athens, Sakis Karagiorgas Foundation, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> K. Tsoukalas, *State, Society and Labour in Post-War Greece*, Athens, Themelio, 1986, pp. 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> A. Dimaras, *War, Occupation, Civil War, 1940-1949*, in *History of the Greek Nation*, Athens Publishing, Athens, vol. 16, 2000, p. 548.

<sup>9</sup> P. Nikolopoulou, *Formation and Development of the Science of Pedagogy in Greece (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries): Athens University*, Thessaloniki, Kyriakidis, 2023, pp. 391-394.

<sup>10</sup> *Declaration of the Christian Association of Scientists*, Athens, s.n., 1946, pp. 203-204; C. Maczewski, *The Movement of Zoi in Greece: Contribution to the Problem of Tradition in the Eastern Church*, Athens, Armos, 2002, pp. 56, 135.

## 2. *School, education and teachers in the post-war period*

It was in the 1950s that the school of national-mindedness came to be at a time marked by the interplay of three factors; first, state violence which was inflicted consecutively, though in different forms, by the two traditional political parties at the time, the Liberals and the Populist Party, and aimed at the military, political and ideological defeat of the Left, aligned with the National Liberation Front; second, the projection and imposition of pro-bourgeois obsolete ideas about the nation and society together with an ever-increasing anti-communism and an increasingly selective educational system<sup>11</sup>.

In the political and educational environment of post-civil war Greece, school officers were an integral part of the educational hierarchy as they intervened between the teachers and the administration, and undertook the task of inspecting the former and securing their compliance to the objectives, content, forms and methods of instruction the state wished to offer its citizens. The school officer was responsible for evaluating and classifying teachers, taking into consideration not only their knowledge and their teaching methodology but also their commitment to the values of nation-mindedness, their obedience to hierarchy, their integrity and character, as well as their social relationships. In short, he monitored every aspect of their life, and this is why his role was crucial in controlling and disciplining them<sup>12</sup>. Since the school officers' role in the successful implementation of educational policy was indispensable, their selection was based on their acceptance of the dominant ideology and their ability to communicate it to the teachers' body. It was common knowledge among the teaching circles that candidates who did not meet the criterion of nation-mindedness did not qualify for a teaching post<sup>13</sup>.

## 3. *Research-memories and school teachers in postwar Greece*

We attempt to investigate how teachers selected to serve this very role in the post-civil war state form, maintain, employ and communicate the memory of the 1950s school; what they choose to recall and what they consign to oblivion. We further seek to explore how their memories interact with later representations of school life, impacting their interpretation of the events and re-signifying their past experiences according to the dictates of their present individual, social and national identity. Apart from the oral testimonies, our contribution draws on contemporary pedagogical journals, in an attempt to study how the image of the post-civil war school these journals suggest is at odds with the image constructed and reconstructed in the memories of our informants.

<sup>11</sup> C. Noutsos, *The Route of the Camel and the School. Educational Policy in Greece: 1944-1946*, Athens, Vivliorama, 2003, pp. 32-33, 82-83.

<sup>12</sup> D. Mariolis, *The School of Nation-Mindedness (1949-1974)*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Athens, Panteion University, 2022, p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Karakatsani, *Educational Theory and Teaching Practice in Post-War Greece*, cit., p. 289.



What these interviews primarily reveal is that the memory of the civil war era leaves out their personal feelings as well as the tensions and the conflicts that characterized this period. Although the majority of our informants comes from rural areas and despite the fact that the civil war in the countryside fed into the most harsh and bloody pages of Greek history, memories of atrocities are surprisingly absent from their descriptions. They are even hesitant to describe the civil war as such. They resort to generalisations that imply what they had been through, but they never articulate explicitly their experience. For example, the civil war is «the great misfortune, a difficult period even tragic», a period where «everyday affairs took a difficult turn. Things got worse and worse». They avoid mentioning the names of the civil war rivals as well as direct references to contemporary events and persons linked with the polarization of the Greek society.

All of them mention the chances and the opportunities they were deprived of due to the civil conflict. They stress their humble origins as they were the offspring of poor families. Their choice to pursue a teaching career was out of necessity as they lacked the financial means to pursue long university studies. However, they did not describe at length the survival problems, the depravities and the precariousness present at the time in the life of the majority of the population. Memories of their feelings towards the events are also missing. Nowhere in their discourse do they express fear for their life or for the lives of their beloved ones, disappointment or anger for not fulfilling their dreams. Never do they assign responsibility to either of the civil war rivals for the predicament they found themselves in. They attempt to present themselves as neutral and only implicitly, through the use of certain words, through some fractions of speech in their well-structured narrative, their alignment with the government is revealed.

Although the interviews were conducted in the early twenty-first century at a time when no longer did these school officers serve as professionals it is evident from their silences and from what they forget that they are well-aware that the civil war constitutes a traumatic memory since it changed the terms in which the Greek society came to understand itself. They know that there is not such a thing as a uniform narrative about the civil war widely accepted in Greek society; this is why they are very careful during the interview to express their feelings, especially when it comes to anything that could trigger off past passions. They are fully aware of the requirements they had to meet to be selected for the post of school officer as well as of the role they played in the post-civil war school. They are also aware of the opposition and the objections raised against the institution of the school officer by a large part of the educational community.

During their interviews they consign into oblivion parts of their lives and action linked with aspects of the post-civil war state which to date feed into disagreement and contention. They consciously choose to foreground parts of their life which they think contribute to the construction of a consensual collective memory in the context of which their choices and action could possibly be acceptable. They highlight the fact that they succeeded in the school officer contest, and they were selected among dozens of other candidates neither because of having any connections in the Ministry of Education nor because of favoritism. References to the objective and impartial way of their professional development, common to all the informants, show primarily their attempt to justify

their personal value. At the same time, whether consciously or not, through their silences and omissions, they depict a more democratic picture of the post-civil war state than the one the study of the archives allows us to draw. They avoid references to the certificate of political convictions which according to contemporary law was absolutely necessary for any appointment in the public sector.

The certificate stands as the most characteristic example of the constitutional dualism that characterized the regime of constitutional monarchy. The liberal constitution of 1952 regulated the relationships between the state and the nationally-minded citizens while a paraconstitution comprising urgent measures was at work for the non-nationally-minded. «Both the constitution and the paraconstitution were applied simultaneously and therefore the civil war survived at the institutional level for the next two and a half decades since the end of the armed conflict...»<sup>14</sup>. The memory of the defeated of the civil war, the persecutions, the redundancies, the suffering, the transfers across the country, the threats against the lives of hundreds of teachers<sup>15</sup> are tellingly absent from their descriptions of the period.

Notwithstanding the fact that protests against the unfair persecutions of teachers often featured in the early post-civil-war pedagogical journals<sup>16</sup> and the Greek Teachers' Union frequently made appeals to the government through the columns of its journal to compensate for the injustices some teachers had suffered<sup>17</sup>, this bleak reality is far from present in the discourse of the school officers interviewed.

In the rare instances that our informants make references to the social reality of persecution and exclusion experienced by a large part of the population, they do so presenting these cases as a rare example of deviating from the democratic function of the institutions or to present themselves as an exception to a rule which in any case is mentioned only fragmentarily, hastily and allusively. Their attitude towards the policy of persecution is not common in all instances and this is why their references range from complete silence to selective mention. One of the school officers supports that «when the colleague of any political leanings – not of a worldview – was careful, no distinction was made». This positive judgement of the democratic function of the institution is based on a carefully vague description of the terms which protected the teachers from persecution. Getting involved in public affairs and expressing in public their political views could result in discrimination against them and therefore had to be done “carefully” even when it concerned the legitimate political forces. Not only the public but also their private life was judged, not only their action but also their ideas. It was expected that their worldview should be aligned with the regime's ideology. At a time when the communist party was

<sup>14</sup> N. Alivizatos, *Emergencies and Political Freedom, 1946-1949*, in J.O. Iatrides (ed.), *Greece between 1940 and 1950. A Nation in Crisis*, Athens, Themelio, 1984, p. 393.

<sup>15</sup> C. Noutsos, *The School of Nation-Mindedness, (1945-1952)*, in C. Chatziiosif (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Greek History*, Athens, Vivliorama, 2009, pp. 113-117.

<sup>16</sup> «Free Greece», 08.09.1945: «Neo-Hellenic Education», n. 1, October 1945, p. 2; *The Social Issue*, «Neo-Hellenic Education», n. 10-11, July-August 1946, p. 8; *Whose Fault?*, «Neo-Hellenic Education», n. 12, September 1946, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> «The Teachers' Forum/Podium», n. 77, 30 May 1948, p. 1.

illegal, the support of ideas judged by school officers as communist could have serious repercussions for teachers which ranged from an unfavorable transfer to redundancy.

Another school officer mentions that in the region where he served «there were eleven teachers who had been laid off because of their political convictions» before he himself took office. This information is relayed without any details or even a comment. On the contrary, he lingered on analysing the steps he took to compensate a teacher, who had been made redundant, for the money the service withheld from him. He also related in detail how he was assigned the task – with a double-sealed envelope – to draw a report for a kindergarten teacher after a complaint had been filed against her on the grounds that a close relative was aligned with the left in the past. He visited her without notice so as to inspect her work. During inspection he was ensured that she did not engage in any political activity whatsoever; on the contrary, she was respectful of the formal regulations and applied them in her everyday teaching practice. He went on to write a report which allowed her to retain her post. His stance is presented as fair and friendly towards the teachers; yet even at the dawn of the twenty-first century, this school officer is far from condemning a practice that could lead to a teacher being thrown to the margins of social and economic life on the grounds of an anonymous complaint.

In certain cases, the school officers attempt to offset the suffering so as to downplay the fact that a large part of the educational body holds them responsible for the way the educational institution operated at the time, a fact they are well aware of. Whoever blames them as perpetrators, so goes their argument, they forget that when the political landscape changed, it was the school officers that were in turn victimized. They attempt to present the abolition of the institution of the school officer yet another form of persecution they suffered from. As one of them put it: «In other words, situations (politics) are as such; what can be done?». However, in their discourse, they omit to mention that the abolition of the school officer institution had been the repeated request of the General Assemblies of Teachers for almost five years (1976-1981)<sup>18</sup>.

Employing not only selective oblivion but also selective memory, school officers implicitly adopt an ideological stance towards what they experienced. It is a political stance presented as rather neutral. In the post-civil war school, «we did not dwell on politics and even so on party conflicts», they stress. School was a pocket of neutrality in a country torn apart from the civil war passions, a school like a beehive. «We focused only on the teaching methodology...Our students' parents had no idea what our political convictions were». Teachers offered the knowledge the state considered important for future citizens, instilling in their students the dominant ideology. They were civil servants and as such they did not gauge the directions the educational policy took and, in any case, they did not cast them into doubt. They condemn any different stance on the teachers' part. «It is unacceptable...».

All the school officers interviewed stress that they encountered difficulties, especially at the beginning of their career. As young teachers, they served in rural schools, mostly in

<sup>18</sup> P. Samios, *The School Officers in Primary Education (1834-1982)*, «Anti-notebooks of Education», n. 107, 2014, pp. 69-86.

schools at the frontier zone of Greece. They delineate the living conditions in the country's borders as extremely difficult and unsafe. Massive population transports either by the guerillas or the national army left schools without teaching staff and the countryside deserted. They were sent to work at schools which were still in operation. They describe crowded classrooms with no less than eighty students. They had difficulty in securing accommodation which meant that often the school premises served as their lodging as well, putting a campaign bed in the teacher's office. Food was secured from soups kitchens set up by the state, the municipalities or various charities. As they were assigned many duties, they had to work mornings and afternoons to the point of exhaustion. However, all of them state that they faced these dire conditions not only with patience but also with pleasure. This attitude, they argue, was linked with their firm belief that the teacher in the post-civil war Greece had a crucial mission to accomplish for the country's reconstruction. To them, the teaching profession is a social mission. They all stress that they were forced to abandon their dreams of pursuing a career in other fields which would secure them better remuneration and higher social prestige than the teaching profession seen as a mission on their part.

#### *4. Educational objectives and teachers' mission*

Their mission as they perceived it was linked with the country's reconstruction. They were called to instill in the young generation the ideals of national-mindedness which comprised devotion to homeland, Orthodox Christianity and family. In other words, devotion to the triptych of the Greek nationalism inscribed in the context of severe anti-communism. Education, as they argue, had to be first and foremost national education, to mold good citizens able to defend their country. One of them notes that immediately after his graduation from the Pedagogical Academy, he went on to work as a teacher in one of the fifty-two childtowns set up across Greece in the early 1950s<sup>19</sup>. The childtowns were institutions where the government transported and accommodated children from areas where the civil war was raging. He reproduces the formal discourse that the children's displacement from their home villages, which most often was against their and their parents' will, was meant for the protection of the children as «they ran the risk of being abducted from the other side (the guerillas)».

In a highly allusive discourse, he responds to the allegations of the Left that the purpose of the children's transport to the childtowns was mainly their indoctrination<sup>20</sup>. The operation of the childtowns served the instruction of inmates in the national ideals, so his argument runs. It was «an attempt to cultivate patriotism». He admits that at times the children's education, which he sees as «a duty towards the homeland», led to extremities which he does not dwell on. He goes on to argue that these instances do not reflect the

<sup>19</sup> The Royal Fund, *The First Congress of the Childtown Leaders*, March 1956, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Educational Centre Library "Ch. Florakis", AM 361704, AM 350495, AM 361214.

reality of the children's lives, they were "exceptions". Anti-communism underlies their interviews, yet it is not directly stated. Given that dozens of teachers' public speeches in the archives are imbued with extreme and blatant anticommunism, we contend that the careful formulations they resort to are related to the ways their memories are mediated by their contemporary reality. In their discourse, communists are designated as «the others, the foreigners' puppets, the Iron Curtain, a different world apart». As part of their national mission, they thought that they ought to contribute to the assimilation of the populations which, according to them, did not meet the criteria of national identity, that is the Slav-speaking and Muslim populations in Western Macedonia and Thrace respectively. The fact that they do not even make a passing reference to a case that made the headlines not only in Greece but also abroad aptly illustrates their attitude towards these populations – as a matter of fact two of our interviewees come from these areas and they also served there. Indeed, it was the first time ever that a woman was executed by the Greek national army.

It was a female teacher, Irine Gkini, a Slav-Macedonian and member of the Greek Communist Party who asserted the equal integration of Slav-Macedonians to the Greek state<sup>21</sup>. Yet, one of our interviewees praises the work of the female teachers who served in the Slav-speaking villages as a patriotic contribution which, given the ideology of nation-mindedness, sought to assimilate these populations into the dominant ideology and wipe out their special characteristics. The same applies to the teachers who served in Muslim villages.

Their action, as young teachers, went beyond the narrow limits of the classroom. In the post-civil war state intellectuals were called to undertake the task of instructing citizens into the ideals of nation-mindedness. Governments recognized the crucial ideological impact the teachers' body could have on the isolated agrarian populations, especially on those who were stricken by the battles of the civil war and lived in appalling conditions<sup>22</sup>.

School officers refer to the obligation they had at the beginning of their career to organize as young teachers a series of public speeches, according to the regulations and circulars sent to them, which aimed at raising the national-social awareness of the population in the areas they served. They saw it as an important duty and they accepted it delightedly. In a certain case one of them states that «... I did something bolder which I thought it was an accomplishment. Whenever I could, I would climb to the church pulpit». The connection of the school with the Church was really strong and instruction in practicing Christianity was one of the central principles that governed educational policy in post-civil war Greece<sup>23</sup>. According to the school officers, this connection should have been even stronger. Morning prayer, as they stress, was the order of the day. Students and teachers had to go to mass on Sundays and each Saturday the last session in the school timetable was reserved for the interpretation of the Bible. School officers

<sup>21</sup> <http://costaslapavitsas.blogspot.com/2014/05/blog-post.html?spref=tw> (last access: 18.02.2023).

<sup>22</sup> K.D.T., *The Teacher's Home*, «The Teacher's Forum/Podium», n. 51, 3 September 1947, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> A. Dimarias, V. Vassilou-Papageorgiou, *From Slate Pencils to Computers*, Athens, Metaichmio, 2008, p. 147; *Declaration of the Christian Association of Scientists*, cit., pp. 203-204.

considered religion to be strongly linked with their identity as teachers. In this respect, they identified with most of the teachers at the time.

The strong psychological and emotional identification with the Church and the development of strong spiritual bonds with it was the result of regularly repeated religious ceremonies which were the order of the day in the 1950s school<sup>24</sup>. School officers state that the Christian and patriotic principles weighed most in them when they compiled the teachers' assessment reports. The criteria of the assessment fall into five categories; their scientific integrity; classroom management skills; carrying out their duties conscientiously; their integrity and character; their social action. Therefore, assessment was not only about their teaching skills; it was also about controlling their behaviour and their overall social presence. Their promotion, increase in remuneration, transfer to a school they preferred were contingent on the school officers' reports. As teachers were obliged to live in their workplace and move only on permission granted by the school officer, it becomes clear that the power the school officer exerted on them was even greater. In this regard, one of our interviewees stated: «There is no division nor that it should be a division among public life, the life of a civil servant and private life. What a teacher is in his/her private life is of great importance».

### 5. *Female teachers and memories*

It was the female teachers that mostly experienced pressure as they were very young and had to live far from their families in an environment that kept a vigilant eye on them, ready to condemn every deviation from the dominant morals<sup>25</sup>. Female teachers occupied a lowly position at the time as they were not entitled to undertake administrative roles because of their gender. In this respect, our interviewees do not seem especially sensitive to the issues female teachers had to deal with. On the contrary, they attribute most of their problems to lack of zest and professional integrity. When asked about the problems female teachers faced due to their family obligations, one of our interviewees responds as follows: «Female teachers took advantage of their rights with regard to their school duties».

The school officer's visit to the school was often unwelcome and triggered feelings of anxiety and fear in the teachers; at times school officers were accused of being partial and unfair. Our interviewees referred at length to the reports they had to submit and the evaluation of the teachers under their jurisdiction. Unlike other issues, they were ready to refute the allegations levelled at them. They implicitly admit that there might have been instances of unjust and partial assessment but in line with their long-held

<sup>24</sup> A. Karakasidou, *Protocol and Spectacles: National Anniversaries in Northern Greece*, in M. Mazower (ed.), *After the War*, Alexandria, Athens, 2000, p. 251.

<sup>25</sup> V. Papageorgiou, *The One-Class Primary School*, «Neo-Hellenic Education», n. 14-15, February-March 1947, p. 68.

view they maintain that these were the exception. Similarly, they support that school officers who urged teachers to report their colleagues were also the exception. They deny having employed these practices. They further support that if teachers were educated and conscientious, there was no need to be apprehensive of the school officer's reports and that they themselves never had any concerns about the school officer's visit when they served as teachers. They advocate that the assessment is necessary for the smooth operation of the educational institution and the maintenance of high-quality studies. They stress that assessment is indispensable not to punish the indifferent teacher but to reward his/her conscientious counterpart. Lack of assessment, they argue, leads to downgrading all the teachers to the lowest level. They contend that the school in the 1950s was better as compared to contemporary school. «It is unfair to argue that the school in the 1950s was authoritarian. Nor that it was strict. The school needs a prestigious teacher, in the positive sense of authority. Authority is necessary for school. Prestige, morality, dignity».

### *Conclusions*

According to their statements, it is interesting to note that during their career they applied the principles of the New Education movement. As school officers, they argue, they urged the teachers to employ visual aids while teaching, to foster children's self-motivation and discovery-learning. They think that it was far from difficult to apply methods which placed the child at the centre of the learning process despite the fact that at the time the teacher's authority was unquestionable. They do not detect the contradiction and they continue to argue that the structure and the operation of the school in the 1950s should stand as a model to contemporary schools.

The study of the historical evidence does not allow agreement with this opinion. The collective memory of the school of the first post-civil war decade is different. The case of the school officers points out that memory is selective and at times resorts to oblivion. It is often the case that people do not wish to remember every part of their past. They choose to recall images and events on which their present identity is anchored. The past is revisited to be reconstructed drawing on present concerns. From this perspective, memory is a social construct linked with the identity of the social subjects and with the effects it has on identity formation. Regarding the discrepancy observed in the representations of the school in the early post-civil war era teachers and officers maintain, we contend that «the different approach to the past or the different perceptions of history secures the identity of its carriers while remembrance of a past event reflects the position an individual or a group occupies in a society»<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> M. Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, edited by A. Mantoglou, Athens, Papazisis, 2013, pp. 27-28.



# Daily Notes in Diaries: Traces of Teaching in Personal Archives (Porto Alegre/BR, 1995-2014)

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## 1. *A rare documentary type*

Every day she does everything always the same way...<sup>1</sup>

This text analyzes records in personal diaries written by Beatriz Daudt Fischer, a Brazilian professor, retired from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and from the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos. We analyzed nineteen diaries produced between 1995 and 2014. It is a rare documentary set, carefully kept and generously donated to the Archive of the School of Education/UFRGS, through which it is possible to recognize, by reading between the lines, different places occupied by Beatriz, throughout all these years. As the pages of these writing supports are perused, regularities are perceived, identified with the quotidian experience, hence a quick examination makes me think, as the composer Chico Buarque says, that «every day she does everything always the same way»; however, by investing in more refined examinations, I could perceive in these notes, which seem trivial, pieces of evidence, sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit, of the changes in her life paths, in different dimensions.

Beatriz was born in 1948 in Novo Hamburgo, a municipality in the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre, colonized by German immigrants. She studied Pedagogy at Unisinos, was a professor at the state education network, obtained a Master's Degree in Social Foundations of Education (Stanford University/USA), in 1980, and a PhD from PPGEDU/UFRGS, having defended her Thesis in 1999. With regard to teaching work in universities, she applied for UFRGS and was a professor associated with the School of Education between 1985 and 1995. Afterwards, she joined Unisinos and there she continued to teach in the Pedagogy Program and work in the Graduate Program in Education.

Some time ago, I encouraged her to donate her archives to the Archive of the School of Education. In 2019, she released her diaries, objects of this study. And it was in 2020, during difficult months of the Covid-19 pandemic, that Beatriz separated for donation other personal archives, representative of her teaching and research paths. In view of so

<sup>1</sup> Quote from the song *Cotidiano* by Chico Buarque, first recorded on his album *Construção* (1971).

many possibilities of research, I chose here to address the diaries, relying on the power and monumentality of this kind of memory notebooks, here understood according to the concept of educational heritage.

Beatriz is a keen keeper. And, thus, she did not discard her diaries, she did not erase her traces in time, on the contrary, she cared for them and for so many other papers, even when they had no more use value and handed them over to an institutional place that will continue the work of preservation. The diaries, at the time of donation, were in perfect condition, which indicates that they were taken care of.

In this study, I strove to focus on “what the diaries had to say to me”, at various times I was tempted to call Beatriz and ask questions about matters that meseemed enigmatic. I did not contact her. In a way, I faced the same dilemmas as she did when she investigated the personal archives of another professor: Nilce Lea<sup>2</sup>. In her words: «Should I immediately seek information through testimonies from her friends and family members? Or should I wait first for the results of my incursion looking into each page or scrap kept in this box?»<sup>3</sup>. However, she also provides an answer key, as a kind of orientation, which I follow in this study of her diaries:

From question to question, I find reasons to persist in this adventure, trying to structure a path that enables me to collect details, seek traces, perhaps mere secondary traces of a life, entangled in other lives<sup>4</sup>.

Aware of these sensitive implications involving immersion in the papers of people with whom we maintain bonds of affection, I decided to take the risks, and face them. In this field of conflicts, my personal interest in the opportunity of dealing with these personal writings – often difficult to access – ran deep.

## 2. *Diaries, what for?*

Before we get to the diaries themselves, we should reflect on their uses. After all, why do we make these records? Who currently uses them? What do we do with them when the year comes to an end? Commonly identified with the demands of work and study, in them we take note of appointments. Accordingly, they serve as facilitators of memory, because they enable us to remember, through the exercise of writing, what we should do. Hence, their use increased as society became more complex, with the development of cities and services, where the acceleration of time and the accumulation of professional, educational and personal tasks, associated with daily life, required that we take note of such tasks lest we risk forgetting them.

<sup>2</sup> B.D. Fischer, *As caixas de papel de Nilce Lea: memórias e escritas de uma simples professora?*, «História da Educação», vol. 9, n. 17, January-June 2005, pp. 69-80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

However, if we observe through the layers of time, we will see, according to Castillo Gomez<sup>5</sup>, that there is a genealogy that permeates the diaries, since the final centuries of the Middle Ages, when books of accounts and diaries began to be written. These writings, as well as the contemporary diaries in their different supports, make it possible to register experiences with open writings, fraught with varied notes, referring to the experiences lived.

Thus, it can be said that, as the twentieth century advanced, the use of diaries becomes increasingly common among women, as they occupied other professional and educational spaces, outside the household setting. Agendas also invaded the education of students, constituting artifacts of contemporary school culture, with their use being often encouraged so as to record important dates of the school calendar.

Such artifacts are understood as ego-documents, that is, even quick notes, usually of a professional nature, present autobiographical dimensions of the person who started to take notes so as not to forget. Cunha explains that, just as diaries, agendas are also written with a certain intimacy, both are “intimate archives”, textual devices, which acquire a certain confessional tone when organizing daily life through writing, despite the singularities of each writing support<sup>6</sup>. In this regard, Castillo Gomez explains that these personal writings are like attestations of the itineraries of certain subjects, saying that: «it is a matter of sources that historians cannot disregard in their work, unless they want to be accomplices of certain silences and omissions»<sup>7</sup>.

Understanding them beyond personal records, the exercise of scrutinizing agendas and diaries enables the recognition of generational representations, distinguishing characteristics of their owners, their ways of living, circulating discourses, among many other observable aspects. According to Cunha, «Exposing doubts, a *thousand nothings*, fragments of personal and family memory, working with this material makes it possible to give visibility to what was destined for silence and oblivion»<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, agendas of times of yore constitute a very attractive documentary type. This fascination also relates to the matter of their fleetingness. They retain use value, in theory, during the year for which they were edited. Evidently, as writing supports, they are often used for purposes other than that of everyday records. However, this is not the case with Beatriz, who was faithful to the protocols of the agendas, as there are few transgressions observed.

These reflections are relevant so, from now on, we focus on the diaries of a university professor, here taken as objects of study. From 1995 to 2014, Beatriz was concerned with producing several notes, most related to her professional teaching and research activities. These records will be analyzed below in the text.

<sup>5</sup> A. Castillo Gómez, *Cultura escrita y clases subalternas: una mirada española*, Oíartzun, Sendoa, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> M.T. Santos Cunha, *Diários íntimos de professoras: letras que duram*, in A.C. Venancio Mignot, M.H. Camara Bastos, M.T. Santos Cunha (edd.), *Refúgios do Eu: educação, história, escrita autobiográfica*, Florianópolis, Editora Mulheres, 2000, pp. 59-80.

<sup>7</sup> Castillo Gómez, *Cultura escrita y clases subalternas*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Santos Cunha, *Diários íntimos de professoras: letras que duram*, cit., p. 160.

### 3. *The diaries, by themselves*

Analysis of the set of documents shows that their dimensions are always the same, 17 cm wide and 23 cm high, in brochure format, comfortable to carry and handle. By examining these materials, it can be said that, in general, Beatriz followed the established protocols, but not totally. She often used the pages of birthdays, investments and schedule to record what she liked about the academic events she attended. However, she took note of appointments on the right fields of days, although she used the same spaces for other notes on subjects she considered important to remember. It is noted her concern to carefully fill in the addresses and phone numbers of her affection networks.

Regarding the customization of the covers of the diaries, those of 1995, 1996 and 1997 have a small golden rectangle, but only that of 1995 has the engraved name “Beatriz T.D. Fischer – Tita”. In those from 2000 to 2003, personal details are prominent. In 2000, she attached a kind of adhesive tape, with small drawings of fruits — something sweet. In 2001, she affixed a seal of the World Education Forum<sup>9</sup>, which took place in October of that year. In 2002 and 2003, Beatriz Fischer’s political affinities were shown on the covers of the diaries, because, in 2002, she pasted a political propaganda seal of the election of Tarso Genro as Governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as a member of the Workers’ Party<sup>10</sup>, along with another seal of the Internacional soccer team, alluding to the International Women’s Day with the words “For the colored woman, every day is Interna(c)tional”. Also in 2003, I was moved as I remembered the World Social Forum<sup>11</sup> that took place in Porto Alegre, since a seal of this great event adorns the cover of the diary.

### 4. *Traces of herself in the notes: the professor, the researcher*

Perhaps the aspects that appear most strongly in Beatriz’s notes are teaching and research, as they permeate all diaries, considering the greater objective of this writing

<sup>9</sup> In 2001, between October 24 and 27, Porto Alegre hosted the first World Education Forum (WEF), as one of the actions promoted by the World Social Forum (WSF). It convened more than 15.000 educators, students, researchers, activists from various social and popular forces and representatives of more than a hundred countries from all continents. This event was held again in Porto Alegre in 2003 and 2004 (<http://latinoamericana.wiki.br/verbetes/f/forum-mundial-de-educacao>; last access: 20.02.2023).

<sup>10</sup> Tarso Genro ran for governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as a member of the Workers’ Party, in the 2002 elections. However, Germano Rigotto (PMDB) had the majority of votes in the election.

<sup>11</sup> The World Social Forum (WSF) is an event that was constituted as an alternative space to the World Economic Forum, held annually in Davos (Switzerland). Therefore, it is a place of reflection and exchange of experiences about the social problems that affect humanity. It proposes the development of a solidarity-based globalization, which considers the major social issues amid sustainability agendas. Porto Alegre hosted the World Social Forum in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005 (<http://forumsocialportoalegre.org.br/forum-social-mundial/>; last access: 20.02.2023).

support, which is the annotation of daily professional appointments. However, there are differences in the records, considering the professional places she attended.

In the first diaries, between 1995 and 1997, we find the professor immersed in the preparation of her doctoral thesis, defended in 1999<sup>12</sup>, as she remembered at times to “study at home” (1995, 1996) and there are notes of her searches for documents for research, indications of readings, lectures she attended, and classes in the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

In addition, there are other pieces of evidence of the development of her research. She continued investing in visits to archives, writing the days of interviews with the teachers. In these first diaries, we see her intention to write down the days of defenses of doctoral theses of her fellow students at UFRGS, in some cases she took notes of the oral exam of the examination board. We are talking about a time when few university professors held PhD degrees; therefore, most of Beatriz’s contemporaries invested in their academic training concomitantly with the professional practice of teaching — just as she did.

In 1996, Beatriz entered a new professional phase; she started working as a professor at Unisinos, in the Graduate Program in Education. Thus, from 1997 onwards, she is increasingly more involved with Unisinos, starting to record the dates of meetings, report deliveries, jot down ideas from the institutional seminars in which she participated, in addition to vacation days and days in which she worked more and could, at another time, take some time off.

There is also the building of academic networks of which Beatriz would be part for many years. Thus, there are several references to the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research (ANPED), with indications of the dates of the annual assemblies and deadlines for submitting papers. There are references to the first meetings of the Rio Grande do Sul Association for the History of Education (ASPHE), an institution that gathers education historians and in whose creation Beatriz participated. In 1997, she made a record of the IV National Meeting of Oral History, in a period of affirmation of the methodology among historians. Participation in these events indicates the research movements of Beatriz Fischer, a pedagogue who was also interested in the thematic field of history of education, in dialogue with oral history.

Thus, year after year, the diaries show that her work responsibilities are accentuated. Regularly, she writes down her schedule containing: classes, trips to participate in scientific events; corrections of student papers; preparation of scientific articles; participation in examination boards; readings of theses and dissertations; advisory sessions for master’s dissertations and doctoral thesis, papers required for program completion, and undergraduate research; faculty meetings; research line meetings; selections for Master’s and Doctorate programs; submissions of projects to research support agencies; production of reports. On some holidays, she wrote that she should produce texts for certain events or correct student works. Below, I present some notes from 2000:

<sup>12</sup> The thesis entitled *Professors: stories and discourses of a present past*, defended at PPGEDU/UFRGS, in 1999, under advisory of Balduino Andreola.

Mar 5, 2000 – last deadline for ASPHE presentation

Apr 9 – Faculty meeting to debate questions: How to properly assess a class with 54 students?

Apr 11 – Faculty meeting on methodology: What material is needed for Social Studies methodology?

May 7 – Discussion on the pedagogical project of the Pedagogy Program<sup>13</sup>.

Her consolidated career as a researcher led to participation in other scientific societies, in addition to those already mentioned. Thus, she approaches the Brazilian Society of History of Education (SBHE) and starts to attend the Brazilian Congresses of History of Education (CBHE). It is also worth mentioning her involvement with the Brazilian Society for (Auto)Biographic Research (Biograph), whose meetings — International Congresses on (Auto)Biographic Research (CIPA) — Beatriz also attended.

Work-related demands seem to increase every year. Accordingly, in May 2003 she recorded a list of “tasks” she needed to tackle:

- rite and submit poster for international congress
- write full paper for ISCHE<sup>14</sup> May 15
- ASPHE – write paper May 5
- request CNPq scholar April 28
- write presentation Line: my contribution
- select text for ppg “Tuesdays”
- revise my lattes<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, in 2005, Beatriz wrote «examine journals to publish, what texts do I have? what texts do I need to write?». In 2006, I found the names of her PhD and Master’s advisees, along with the deadlines of their defenses.

And her memory notebooks contain the research projects she conducted at the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos. In 2004, there were two: “Pedagogical practice at the university: researching teaching trajectories” and “With the past ahead: school trajectories of yesterday’s students, today’s citizens”. In 2009, she wrote the name of another: “Stories of teachers in Novo Hamburgo and São Leopoldo (1930-2000): memories and archives”. In view of the subjects addressed, they all relate to the field of Education History and the professor is interested in researching teacher and student itineraries. From 2009 onwards, the introduction of the subject of school archives indicates another focus of attention, considering the discussions about school culture and educational heritage that gained traction in Education History.

It should be noted that, between 2010 and 2011, she took notes referring to the collection she organized: *Tempos de escola: memórias* (School times: memories)<sup>16</sup>. It is a set of three books with autobiographical texts, produced by teachers, mostly university professors, with a long career, many of whom recognized for their work in Education History. Thus, in 2010, she wrote the «list of authors in the collection, I sent an invitation

<sup>13</sup> Diary, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE), is an annual Congress that convenes researchers from different countries, being considered an event of high scientific relevance.

<sup>15</sup> Diary, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> B.D. Fischer (ed.), *Tempos de escola: memórias*, São Leopoldo, Oikos, 2012.

on 4 November, I sent a deadline extension on 23 December». In 2011, in some moments, she noted «remember the deadline of the School Times texts».

Moreover, I would like to say that Beatriz used to record in all semesters the date of the Pedagogy Program's graduation ceremony, which brings to mind her esteem for the students in these emblematic moments of graduation.

And, although her involvement with Unisinos occupies much space in her diaries, everything indicates that she did not abandon Faced/UFRGS, as she systematically wrote down several events that took place there and that she wanted to attend. In 2000, on May 30, she highlighted «Faced children's literature room 703». She registered the examination boards she participated in at PPGEDU/UFRGS and, in 2013, she wrote «on a Saturday – Gurias Faced!».

The professional dimensions, which translate into these numerous notes related to teaching and research, indicate the extent to which Beatriz was involved with her work. And these same notes, sometimes overlapping with others, make us think about the challenges of teaching in higher education, the accumulation of tasks, clearly perceivable in many pages, especially in recent years. These myriad demands exemplify the excess of work, as she needed to divide her time between teaching, advisory, research and other activities that required her participation in different contexts of the University.

### *5. Other traces of Beatriz, amid the diaries*

As I explored the diaries, I found other ways Beatriz expressed herself, in addition to teaching and research. Along with her professional appointments, these writing supports served to remind her, for example, of health care and home care. Beatriz is attentive to matters pertaining to her health; she systematically did not forget the dates of routine examinations and visits to doctors, dentist and nutritionist. She also worries about going to the hairdresser. These constitute self-care practices that increase over the years. In 1996, amid a list of tasks, she wrote «take diet more seriously, gymnastics as well». As time passed, she seemed to have found space in her life for walking and practicing pilates, as she wrote down these physical activities every day.

The faces of Beatriz, as the mother of Gustavo and Janaína and daughter of Bila, now a centenarian lady, also appear on the diaries. Among older records, references to her children are more constant, for example, she took note of a trip of Gustavo to Europe in 1995, and then we learn that he passed through several countries, because she wrote in the diary, daily, the places where he would be, as well as the flight schedules, on August 6, «departure Gu, SP, 10 p.m.», on August 22, «Rome», on August 24, «Venice» and on September 5, «depart from Paris at 11:30 am, arrive in London». That same year, she wrote on April 21, «holiday – go out with my dear daughter». Two years later, Janaina who would travel to Recife; Beatriz wrote down the name of the lodging hotel, and also the numbers of the room and the contact phone. In these diaries of the 1990s, her



children were adolescents, they needed more attention; perhaps, that is why they appear more in the notes of the mother.

Taking care of the household organization is also an indication of her concerns, as she wrote reminders for herself. Beatriz used to make to-do lists so as not to forget:

Tasks for 1995 – at home

- paint living room wall
- buy carpet
- old photo frames
- decide where to put crystal closet
- buy two ornamental chairs
- living room lights out of order – buy
- TV living room lamp
- organize drawers!<sup>17</sup>

Other diaries show that her concern with the organization of the household persists, and the dates of condominium meetings also appear, although all these are always in a much lower proportion than the professional notes.

As time goes by, the children become adults and, little by little, they are no longer as present in the memory notebooks; however, increasingly more care is required for her mother, “grandma Bila”, as Beatriz refers to her in several passages. Thus, on March 2, 2009, she notes «her mother’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday» and, from then on, year after year, she notes the date of her birthday, as in the 2013 diary: «grandma Bila, 94 years!». There are many notes involving her mother: starting in 2005, she often writes «Pick up mother in NH, take mother to NH» (Novo Hamburgo), in the same way she noted every time she took her mother to doctors. In the last diary, of 2014, another character appears in the life of Beatriz: puppy Picuxo — there are reminders to have the dog groomed and apply vermifuge.

However, the diaries contain more than just schedule for work, home care, family care, and health appointments. They also contain Beatriz’s expression of socialization, as she cultivates friendships wherever she goes; thus, she organizes social events with girlfriends from the city where she was born — the meetings with the “girls from Noia”<sup>18</sup>. There are also notes for parties, dinners with colleagues from Faced and Unisinos. Beatriz is attentive to her dear ones, as she carefully notes the dates of birthdays, so as not to forget.

I still want to examine what Beatriz chose to preface her diaries, that is, the reflections she chose as preamble, revealing her interests and her positions in relation to life. First, it should be said that these impact phrases were found in fourteen diaries; they are not found only in 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2001. As Beatriz is a scholar of the subject of memory, it is not surprising the number of musings on the subject, which are found in the diaries of 1996, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014.

Through literature and psychoanalysis, Beatriz exposes her understandings of the memory phenomenon, comprehended in its multiple temporal dimensions. She quotes

<sup>17</sup> Diary, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Beatriz’s reference to the city where she was born, Novo Hamburgo.

poet Mario Quintana: «The past is an invention of the present. That is why it is always so beautiful, even when it was a pity. Memory has a beautiful box of colored pencils»<sup>19</sup>. In this vein, she copied passages from Monteiro Lobato's *Memórias de Emília*, highlighting the character's line «my memories, Emília explained, are different from all others. I tell what happened and what shall happen»<sup>20</sup>. Following the paths of literature, she highlighted reflections of the writer Moacyr Scliar: «to some, even those that are not very old, the river of memory is a muddy watercourse that flows, slow and ominous, bringing debris, detritus, corpses, remains of this or that; to me, no: it is a vigorous stream of clear and fresh water»<sup>21</sup>. And words of Ferreira Gullar, taken from the «Folha de São Paulo» newspaper in 2011:

And I wonder what we are made of, whether of matter or of memory. But, you see, memory is not past? I tend to think, outside of apparent logic, that everything is present, everything lived, only that, in general, we are too busy with the now to realize it<sup>22</sup>.

From the field of Psychoanalysis, she reproduced Diana Corso's thought, saying that «when we arrive in the world, already awaiting for us are the stories of our parents and ancestors, their secrets and longings: we are open works, influenced by what is said about us, to us, and with us», taken from the «Zero Hora» newspaper<sup>23</sup>. And even in the last diary, of 2014, the topic appears in remarks by Eduardo Galeano<sup>24</sup> and Marta Medeiros, who says in a chronicle that «We have a splendid past ahead. For sailors with a desire for the wind, memory is a starting point»<sup>25</sup> and complements: «We have to narrate ourselves to others and to ourselves, in order to be understood. We are all writers, but some write and others do not, said José Saramago. Everything that seems invented flirts with the truth».

Therefore, when comparing all these thoughts, we realize, first, that the choices were not random, that she copied statements with which she identified. In common, the idea of thinking about memory in its inventive capacities, pervaded with subjectivities, as a kind of fabulation of the past, which materializes in the narrative. Also the principle that memory is a production in the present time, it indicating which memories we build about the past, but which also contemplates the perspective of the future.

However, these initial writings on the diaries are not just about memory. We found excerpts from Gaston Bachelard, Georges Duby, Patricia O'Brien, Edgar Morin, Michel Mafessoli, and Eric Hobsbawm, among others. From Bachelard, Beatriz highlights: «It always occurs like this: in the order of philosophy one can only persuade by suggesting fundamental dreams, one gives thought its avenues in dreams»<sup>26</sup>. From Duby, she quotes:

<sup>19</sup> Diary, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Diary, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Diary, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> F. Gullar, *Preconceito cultural*, «Folha de São Paulo», 04.12.2011.

<sup>23</sup> Diary, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> E. Galeano, *Palavras andantes*, Porto Alegre, L&PM, 1994, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> M. Medeiros, *Somos todos escritores*, «Zero Hora», 23 February 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Diary, 2005.

«Vestige of a dream is no less “real” than a step. I believe that the imagination has as much reality as the material»<sup>27</sup>. From O’Brien, there is a reflection on Foucault, when saying that the philosopher «Did not have a fixed theory or an immutable position with respect to which all things could be measured»<sup>28</sup>. In 2008, she quoted Morin<sup>29</sup>: «Life should not be prose made out of obligation. Life is living poetically in passion, in enthusiasm». And, in 2009, Mafessoli: «This is the rhythm of life. Seeing far, behind to see far ahead [and] telling and retelling to presentify the past. Every memory has something epic about it». I also highlight what she copied from Hobsbawm<sup>30</sup>: «Almost all young people grow up in a continuous present without any organic relationship with the public past of the time in which they live»<sup>31</sup>. In the last ones, once again there is reference to memory in dialogue with time.

The woman who writes this text is moved by the 2003 diary, which is opened with a phrase by Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, «Think with your head, walk with your own legs, listen to what your heart says» (1<sup>st</sup> January 2003), probably taken from his inaugural speech, in his first term as President of Brazil. Such passage written in the agenda indicates the professor’s political convictions and her hopes for a better country, with prospects for social justice. In this line of thought, we observe, in 2007, this phrase without indication of author: «Fighting for difference when equality standardizes. Fighting for equality when difference makes inferior (good)».

Finally, it is worth noting some phrases with a strong presence of the greater meanings of existence, as she says in 2006, «Honoring life!». Thus, referencing Rubem Alves, she writes: «The order of power is the order of love. Without love, power is stupid. Without power, love is weak, but when the two converge, joy ensues»<sup>32</sup>. From Guimarães Rosa comes the opening reflection of the 2004 diary: «The course of life wraps everything up. Life is like this: it warms and cools, it tightens and then it loosens, it pacifies and upsets, what it wants from us is courage». Proceeding, Oscar Wilde is featured in 2005, with the following words: «When a person looks at life from an artistic point of view, the brain becomes a heart». In 2011, there is an idea without author: «Happiness is like a butterfly, when you want to catch it, it flies away, but if you sit down without worry it can land on you». A very difficult task — perhaps impossible for me — is attempting any inference about the reasons for these choices for opening the diaries, without thinking about the person Beatriz. In any case, if we examine exclusively what she chose as introduction, as windows open for the new year, we see a woman who cultivates loves and joys, endowed with good humor, who recognizes life as “a gift”.

<sup>27</sup> Diary, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Diary, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> She writes that the phrase was taken from E. Morin, *Os sete saberes necessários à educação do futuro*, São Paulo, Cortez Editora, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Beatriz notes that the phrase appears in E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century: 1914-1991*, London, Abacus, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Diary, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Diary, 2003.

And, finally, I dedicate a few words to reflect on what Beatriz kept within the diaries. There is not a considerable amount of papers; perhaps, they have been taken away. Nevertheless, some have remained, and meseems they should not be ignored in this text. In the first diary of 1995, she kept a note with a reflection written for her, wishing a “happy 1995”, along with a poem about women, by Adelia Prado. Later that year, she kept a message entitled “Letter to God”, a reminder of the mass on the occasion of the graduation of Pedagogy students. Through this keepsake, we learn of the existence of these religious ceremonies in a public institution. In 1997, a picture of Father Reus<sup>33</sup>, with a prayer and a post-it note with a “prayer to St. Michael”. In the 2001 diary, there are several papers, one of which announces the VII ASPHE meeting, which we learn would hold discussions on the history of school institutions, literacy, memories and archives. She also printed and kept a long email from her son, of an intimate nature. In addition, there is another paper publicizing “20<sup>th</sup> century under discussion”, referring to a course given by Donaldo Schuller. She kept a paper with the schedules of a bus that made trips between Porto Alegre and Unisinos. The 2008 diary contained a Unisinos memo, a book return note from the University library, an announcement of the book *Histórias de vida e formação de professores* [Stories of life and teacher training]<sup>34</sup>, her University card, a sheet with names of candidates for the master’s degree and doctorate, and an annotation of a book called *A impostura do mestre* [The imposture of the schoolmaster], by Marcelo Ricardo Pereira. In 2010, there is a napkin decorated with images of France, a Unisinos advertisement and a sheet with the handwriting of Beatriz, reading «profile: production, publications, capacity for advisory, undergraduate and graduate teaching, expectation as to management», next to each category, a column for marking. Are these the requirements that were expected of a Unisinos professor? Also, there is a well-known chronicle by journalist Paulo Santana called *To Sirs, with Love*, published in the newspaper «Zero Hora». In 2012, there is a text entitled *Interdisciplinary Education*, by Renato Janine Ribeiro, taken from the «Folha de São Paulo» newspaper and a part of a schedule of History Teaching classes, probably for the Pedagogy program. And, emblematically, the last diary features a cartoon criticizing the low salary of teachers.

Examination of these memory notebooks enables us to get closer to their owner. Indications show that, in addition to professional duties, there was room in the diaries for other traces of their owner, expressed in her care for her health, household, and family. There was also room to express her convictions and sensitivities about various topics that mobilized her.

<sup>33</sup> João Batista Reus was a Teuto-Brazilian Jesuit priest who built his missionary trajectory in the city of São Leopoldo, near the Valley of River dos Sinos.

<sup>34</sup> I. Ferreira de Souza Bragança, *História de Vida e Formação de Professores: diálogos entre Brasil e Portugal*, Rio de Janeiro, EDUERJ, 2012.

## 6. *End of diaries?*

In concluding this text, I am struck by a feeling of gratitude towards the woman who allowed its realization. It is necessary to cultivate reverence for those who allow us to enter into their intimate writings in order to produce new knowledge through them.

When I decided to explore Beatriz's diaries, I took the risk of being allured by them<sup>35</sup>, of perhaps being unable to keep enough detachment to research them with some objectiveness. I made an attempt, in a markedly shifting terrain, due to the affective implications of the woman that writes here.

«Every day she does everything always the same way» seems to be a maxim that accompanies the production of our diaries, after all, in them the becoming of quotidian life materializes in words that systematically indicate our responsibilities, often associated with the demands of work. Thinking about Beatriz, how could she be a good professor and researcher without making use of diaries that worked as supports to memory? However, it can also be inferred that every day she did not do everything always the same way, because we are mutant beings, we transform and reinvent ourselves as time goes by. Peering into the pages of each diary enabled an exercise of perceiving the subtleties of the existence of this woman, professor, researcher, mother and daughter.

<sup>35</sup> Â. de Castro Gomes, *Nas malhas do feitiço: o historiador e o encanto dos arquivos privados*, «Estudos Históricos», vol. 11, n. 21, 1998, pp. 121-127.

# “With Faith and Knowledge, All Can Be Overcome”: Memories of an Orphanage and of Vocational Education for Abandoned Children (Porto Alegre/RS – 1947 to 1955)

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## *Introduction*

Sue Mckemmish, in 1996, published a paper titled *Proofs of me...*; the author states that, «at the time it was published, the paper opened new ways, as it explored the nature of personal archives and the social injunctions connected to the role they play in our ways of witnessing and memorializing not only individual lives but also the collective life [...]»<sup>1</sup>. These archives may produce other possibilities of analysis of a history in society.

In that way, the study I present allowed for the examination, through Mister José Clério Barbosa de Moraes's oral recollections and personal archives, of the practices instituted in an educational institution founded in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Pão dos Pobres* (Bread of the Poor) Orphanage. This documentation enabled us to understand the distinct dimensions that compose the school culture produced in this environment, which constitutes a corollary to understanding the schooling processes in other times.

The developed research is part of a broader project named “Instituições escolares na região metropolitana de Porto Alegre e Vale dos Sinos: acervos, memórias e cultura escolar – séc. XIX e XX” (Schooling institutions in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre and Vale dos Sinos: collections, memories and school culture – 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). This historiographic project aims to investigate different educational institutions, including spaces dedicated to fostering, namely orphanages, patronage institutions and schools. They are spaces dedicated to charity, usually funded by religious orders, which maintain a shelter space for “destitute” people, along with a professional educational institute.

The opportunity to access certain school archives, seldom seen and non-divulged in the academic context, led to a chain of reflections, which I have been producing since 2016, in regard to the studying of teaching institutions as research object in the History of Education area.

<sup>1</sup> S. Mckemmish, *Provas de mim...*, in L. Heymann, L. Nedel (edd.). *Pensar os arquivos: uma antologia*, Rio de Janeiro, FGV Editora, 2018, p. 18.

The interest for the *Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio* is based on the personal archive of an alumnus, as aforementioned, whose documents and individual memories are used to establish a relation between the institutional and social contexts in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The contact with Mister Barbosa's path, during the period he stayed in the institution analyzed in this study, enabled the historicization of his life in the Orphanage, nomenclature used at the time, whose lenses to look at the past were the experiences narrated in that space. The time frame, between 1947 and 1955, was chosen based on the time that Mister Barbosa stayed in the institution.

The study aims to analyze, within this eight-year time frame, the representations produced on an institution that has been working as children's shelter and school for orphans in the city of Porto Alegre since 1916; discuss the discursive constructions, pertaining to orphaned children's shelter spaces, conceived by the memories of a person who lived there during the 1940s; and understand the "daily practices"<sup>2</sup> of a religious institution that adds discipline and techniques with strictly defined times and spaces to a dynamic that combines education and work.

### 1. Contextualization

According to Desaulniers<sup>3</sup>, *Pão dos Pobres* was founded on the 15 August 1895 by Canon Marcelino de Souza Bittencourt, in the aim of giving alms and distributing Saint Anthony's bread for the people in need<sup>4</sup>. The orphanage, founded to shelter orphaned boys, was built only in 1916, two decades later. The following decades were characterized, in Brazil, by a very significant industrialization process; such changes brought along as consequence new social demands, mainly in the educational field.

Within an increasingly competitive society, it was essential for people to have a trade to face the difficulties of living in an industrial society that was already showing signs of growing social exclusion<sup>5</sup>. Within the religious field, the institutions, in the aim of keeping up with the times, undertook initiatives to qualify the people in society for

<sup>2</sup> M. Certeau, *A invenção do cotidiano: artes do fazer*, Petrópolis, Vozes, 2012, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> J. Desaulniers, *Formar cidadãos: uma proposta da escola católica*, «Veritas», vol. 42, n. 2, 1997, pp. 313-331.

<sup>4</sup> The essential stone was placed in 1904, and the Work was called *Abrigo das Famílias Pobres do Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio* (Shelter for Poor Families of Saint Anthony's Bread of the Poor). The institutionalization of schooling takes place in 1910 with the foundation of two schools, *Dom Sebastião*, for girls, and *Dom Feliciano*, for boys, in the aim of educating abandoned children. In 1911, the founder of the Work passed away, while it was in a full expansion process. At the time, no one willing to continue the Work was found. In 1915, by request of the Metropolitan Archbishop Dom João Becker, the Religious Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, or De La Salle Brothers, takes over; and the institution is opened on the 2 April 1916 (G. Staub, *Projetos de vida e emancipação: constituindo o ser-sujeito cidadão no Pão dos Pobres*, Master's Thesis, Graduate Program in Education, Porto Alegre, University of Vale Do Rio Dos Sinos, 2013, p. 59).

<sup>5</sup> Desaulniers, *Formar cidadãos*, cit., pp. 313-331.



this developmental context. Thus, catholic trade schools began to emerge, in the aim of preparing students to live in society, providing them with professional training and, more than that, training for life<sup>6</sup>. Such institutions started, then, to train new citizens according to precepts of the Catholic Church. I consider *Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio* to be a school that innovated within the educational field at the time, as it associated basic education to the learning of a trade. With this conception, a "new citizen" began to be shaped for a society undergoing organization.

## 2. Paths taken

Inspired by the studies of Gomes<sup>7</sup>, Heymann and Nedel<sup>8</sup> and Cunha<sup>9</sup>, I present the basis for documental analysis of personal archives used in this study. Grazziotin<sup>10</sup>, Alberti<sup>11</sup> and Thompson<sup>12</sup> are part of the theoretical framework regarding oral history.

The personal documents, "treasures" that were kept away for years, enable the construction of a path to understand the representations produced by Mister Barbosa about a shelter institution for abandoned minors. They are relics of an 83-year-old man, from a time described by him as "my jackpot".

<sup>6</sup> The history of social and assistance commitment of *Pão dos Pobres* as an institution began as counterpart to a bloody civil war, political in its nature, between the years of 1893 and 1895. Until shortly before, Brazil was governed by the imperialist regime, which had ruled the country since its discovery in 1500. In 1889, specifically, the republican regime was established. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, this passage was not pacific; under the argument that the new republic was exploiting the people of the state with heavy taxes over production goods made there, two expressive groups emerged, ideologically separated by distinct stances: the ones in favor of the government, and the revolutionary ones who defended the separation of the South of Brazil in wishes of creating an independent country. The battle, which occurred in 1893, was called Federalist Revolution, also known as War of Decapitation, and decimated over 10,000 people, leaving widows and their orphaned children abandoned to their own luck. Within this context, some initiatives were created in the aim of supporting the widows and protecting, educating and professionalizing the orphans. One of the few institutions to succeed in this undertaking, surviving to this day (2023), was *Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio*. *esent, narrate situations the new republic was expific, ot long y the request of the Archbishop esent, narrate situations* (A.D. Corpassi, *A preparação para captação de recursos à luz do novo mrosoc: um estudo de caso da Fundação Pão dos Pobres*, Capstone Project, Graduation Course, Porto Alegre, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Â. de Castro Gomes, *Nas malhas do feitiço: o historiador e o encanto dos arquivos privados*, «Estudos Históricos», vol. 11, n. 21, 1998, pp. 121-127.

<sup>8</sup> L. Heymann, L. Nedel, *Apresentação*, in L. Heymann, L. Nedel (edd.). *Pensar os arquivos: uma antologia*, Rio de Janeiro, FGV Editora, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> M.T. Cunha, *O historiador e suas fontes*, São Paulo, Autêntica, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> L.S. Grazziotin, *Memórias orais arquivadas: a escolarização de migrantes no meio rural da região nordeste do Rio Grande do Sul (1910 a 1940)*, in A. Ruggiero, L.O. Conedera (edd.), *Entre a Itália e o Brasil Meridional: história oral e narrativas de imigrantes*, Porto Alegre, Editora Fi, 2020; Ead., *Bom Jesus, tempo e memória: educação e gênero no contexto urbano (1913-1950)*, in *12º Encontro Sul-Rio-Grandense de Pesquisadores em História da Educação: História, Infância e. Educação*, Santa Maria: UNIFRA, 2006, pp. 1-17.

<sup>11</sup> V. Alberti, *História oral: a experiência do CPDOC*, Rio de Janeiro, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> P. Thompson, *A voz do passado: história oral*, Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1992.

According to Ângela de Castro Gomes, «the documentation of private archives would allow, finally and in a very particular way, for breathing life into history, filling it with men and not names [...] Men who have their life stories, their virtues and flaws and that reveal them precisely in this type of material»<sup>13</sup>. And she continues: «For the historian, it is a great opportunity. And I believe that, in order for it to be taken full advantage in terms of what it can provide, historians must equip themselves with the not-so-new procedures of criticism»<sup>14</sup>.

Oral memories breathed life into history and another possibility of looking at this “boys’ territory”, *Pão dos Pobres*. They were produced via interview, carried out by me and at Mister Barbosa’s house, along with his wife and daughter. It was these documents, up until recently regarded as ephemeral, trivial, not very trustworthy, that became the masterpiece of this study.

Examining these oral memories and personal artifacts, we are able to notice some “networks”, some affections that emerge from pictures that immediately bring back nostalgic memories. They are “structures of sociability”; they are the “age effects/sympathy”, present in life narratives<sup>15</sup>.

A report card, very shabby due to its age, brings on its pages the daily life of who lived in an orphanage and the achievements after leaving it. The report card, held on to by Mister Barbosa, is a space where time stopped; this is a print from 1953, the year he left the institution.

Printed on each yellowed page are diverse prayers, indulgences, fables and curiosities. In a section titled “notes and facts”, there are anecdotes in a jocular tone, as well as customs of the time, pictures of families doing charity and classes of graduates of that year, pictures of students from the institution in a sort of summer camp; pictures of former residents’ weddings and, on the last page, a list of names in a section titled “alms and donations”. The print at hand was trimestral; it is a sort of testimony of belonging for the boys who lived there, who left as adults, and that, “at the moment”, were part of a social space that once excluded them. It is also the “portrait” of the daily life of a society that was just taking its first steps towards a capitalism that would encompass, in the near future, every last bit of its life. This set of perceptions is enabled by the materiality of the Report Card analyzed.

Within his archive, hung on the wall of his house is a diploma of conclusion of professional training. In it, there is the slogan that inspires the title of this paper (*With Faith and Knowledge, All Can Be Overcome*) and the list of 22 children who lived there and who, according to Mister Barbosa’s narrative, left the institution when they turned 18 years old, with professional training: «I was trained to become a machinist [...] This is how I earned my money [...] It was my jackpot, that school» (Interview, 21.11.2021)<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> De Castro Gomes, *Nas malhas do feitiço*, cit., p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> J.-F. Sirinelli, *Os intelectuais*, in R. Rémond (edd.), *Por uma história política*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora FGV, 1996, pp. 231-270.

<sup>16</sup> Our translation. In the original: «Aprendi a profissão de Torneiro mecânico [...] Foi onde eu ganhei um dinheirinho [...] Foi minha Mega Sena, foi aquele colégio [...]».

«Many of these paper sheets, which at first would preserve other uses, when archived, acquire a new status, fulfilling immediate demands, in a sort of musealization»<sup>17</sup>. Nora<sup>18</sup> states that

the places of memory are the remains [...] the memory keeps through artifice and will a collectivity. Museums, archives, cemeteries and collections, parties, anniversaries, verbal processes, monuments, sanctuaries, associations are the aims, the testimonies of another time, of the illusions of eternity. [...] They are the rituals of a society with no rituals; ephemeral sacrednesses in a society that desacralizes.

Mister Barbosa builds, with the remains of other times, the testimony of certain collective practices, in a production of senses that allows us a small but clear glimpse onto the experiences, the paths taken individually: and, thus, an overview of Rio Grande do Sul society of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to this study, it is important to highlight other studies carried out on the institution known as *Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio*, whose focus is related, above all, to themes in the areas of Social Sciences and Psychology.

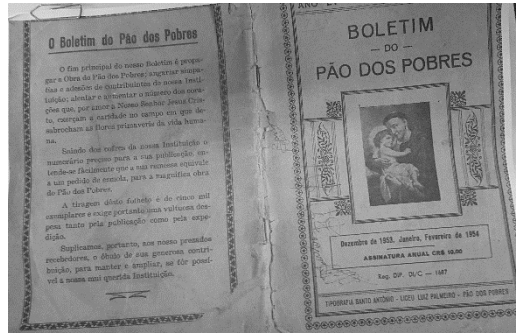


Fig. 1. Cover of the Report Card of *Pão dos Pobres*, 1953 (Mister Barbosa's personal archive, 2021)



Fig. 2. Diploma of Conclusion of Professional Training (Mister Barbosa's personal archive, 2021)

Table 1. Academic production about *Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio*

AUTHOR	TITLE	JOURNAL/ INSTITUTION	DATE
Julieta Beatriz Ramos Desaulniers	A dinâmica estrutural do campo Religioso: alguns dados empíricos (The structural dynamic of the Religious field: some empirical data)	«Veritas», vol. 41, n. 2	1996
Leandro R. Pinheiro	O Pão Dos Pobres e o Terceiro Setor ( <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> and the Third Sector)	«Veritas», vol. 43, special issue	1998
Ana Paula Brasil Vaz Madruga	Cidadania em construção: A proposta do Pão dos Pobres (Citizenship under construction: the proposal of <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> )	«Veritas», vol. 43, special issue	1998

<sup>17</sup> D.B. Almeida, *Percursos de um Arq-Vivo: entre arquivos e experiências em História da Educação*, Porto Alegre, Letra1, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> P. Nora, *Lês lieux de mémoire – I La republique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. VI.

Juliana Pedroso	Pão dos Pobres: um estudo para identificação de imagem ( <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> : a study for image identification)	Monography: specialization in Business/UFRGS	2009
Edna Das Graças Martins Pereira	Na Casa do Pão e do livro: a Contribuição da Psicanálise para compreender os meninos do Pão dos Pobres a caminho de uma educação cidadã (At the House of the Bread and the book: the Contribution of Psychoanalysis to understand the boys from <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> on the way to a citizen education)	Master's in Education PPGEdU/UNILASALE	2009
Giovana Mazzarolo Foppa	Adolescente egresso da FASE: Estudo de caso sobre o Programa RS socioeducativo (Teenager who exited the Social-Educational Service Foundation: A case study about the Social-Educational Program of Rio Grande do Sul)	Master's degree at the Graduate Program of Criminal Sciences/ PUCRS	2011
Gilmar Staub	Projetos de vida e emancipação: constituindo o ser-sujeito cidadão no Pão dos Pobres (Life projects and emancipation: constituting the being-subject citizen at <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> )	Master's in Education/ UNISINOS	2013
Eduardo Marinho	As fragilidades na gestão de organizações da sociedade civil: um estudo de caso comparativo entre a Fundação o Pão dos Pobres e a Associação São Francisco do bairro Ipiranga (The weaknesses in management of organizations in civil society: a comparative case study between <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> Foundation and <i>São Francisco</i> Association at Ipiranga neighborhood)	Capstone Project: major in Business/UFRGS	2014
Amanda Dom Cortopassi	A preparação para captação de recursos à luz do novo MROSC: um estudo de caso da Fundação Pão dos Pobres (The preparation to collect resources in face of the new Regulatory Framework of Civil Society Organizations: a case study about <i>Pão dos Pobres</i> )	Capstone Project: major in Business /UFRGS	2018

Out of the eight studies about *Pão dos Pobres*, the first ones, from the 1990s mostly, are within the areas of Business and Social Sciences; only two of them focus on Education. The studies identified make us think about the way the Institution was constituted and its management structure, besides there being a case study about some students – this study was developed within the Psychology area.

### 3. *Path, training, arrivals and departures*

Mister Barbosa says that he had no father or mother; he left the countryside when he was nine and illiterate. «I left, you must have noticed, the seventh of February of

1947, it is a sacred date for my life» (Interview 21.11.2021)<sup>19</sup>. He used to live with his grandmother in the rural area; he was taken to Porto Alegre by Mister Sebastião Velho, a family friend. He narrates his arrival and his first impressions in a calm way, making hand gestures and with much nostalgia, as expected.

I got there... cars, I only knew two, what is all this movement, I kept it for myself, right? Then, he [referring to the family friend that took him] took a cab and took me there, and then there is a gate, like, a big, green one, and there was a chapel here, and here is where the workshops started, and here there was the hall office, there, there was a brother sitting down, and there is where they received people. I had never been given a candy in my life. First thing he did was give me a candy (Interview 21.11.2021)<sup>20</sup>.

He recalls the first moment: «and that is when, ok, then he, Mister Sebastião, said, "here's the boy, here he is". He took me by the arm, left through that church» (Interview 21.11.2021)<sup>21</sup>. It seems like things would happen and, just like that, being there, "goodbye", they stayed there.

Regarding the order, the routine and the discipline to which the boys were submitted, Mister Barbosa recalls that the priests did not punish the children; they called their attention, but did not mistreat them. He talks about how he got a candy from a priest and that, when he was left at the orphanage, on his first day, he played soccer with the young boys.

Memories arise, as we all know, in a disordered manner; memory narratives, as we know, have this characteristic. Even though a word within a memory may seem paradoxical, the interlocutor is able to establish the intended relation. This is how it was, he continues:

leaving through the back of the church, [...] there is, was, a fig tree, like this, that covered a great part of the garden. And a hubbub of people that, my goodness! But what is that? Only with me, they did not speak, my head was in the clouds. I had never travelled by car... never had travelled... none of those things<sup>22</sup>.

At Mister Barbosa's living room, through my questions, there is, slowly, the return to the past, and the four listeners dive into another time. One cannot do without the past by

<sup>19</sup> Our translation. In the original: «Eu saí daqui, tu deve ter observado aí, o dia sete de fevereiro de 1947, é uma data sagrada pra minha vida».

<sup>20</sup> Our translation. In the original: «Cheguei lá...carros eu só conhecia dois, que é que o movimento, fiquei na minha, né? Aí, ele [se refere ao conhecido da família que o levou], pegou o táxi e me levou lá e dali tem um portão, assim, portão grande, verde e tinha uma capela aqui, e aqui começava as oficinas e aqui no começo tinha o escritório de entrada, ali, tinha um irmão sentado, ali que recebia as pessoas. Eu nunca tinha ganhado uma bala na vida. Primeira coisa que ele fez, me deu uma bala».

<sup>21</sup> Our translation. In the original: «e foi quando, tá, daí ele disse, seu Sebastião, disse, tá entregue o moço, tá entregue. Ele me pegou pelo braço, sai por aquela igreja».

<sup>22</sup> Our translation. In the original: «tu sai de trás da igreja, [...] tem, tinha uma figueira, assim, que cobria uma área grande do jardim. E uma algazarra de gente que nossa senhora! Mas o que que é isso? Só comigo, não falavam, eu tava em outro mundo. Nunca tinha andado de carro... nunca tinha andado... nada daquelas coisas».

exercising decision or intelligence; nor is it summoned by a simple act of will. The return to the past is not always a moment of freeing a memory, but an advent, a capture based on the present<sup>23</sup>. Maurice Halbwachs, with a similar perspective, states «memory is largely a reconstruction of the past with the help of data borrowed from the present, where the image of then is manifested, already very altered»<sup>24</sup>.

The reconstruction of the environment, the ways of schooling, the practices experienced in the daily life of the institution begin to take shape; the narrative brings to life, in a nostalgic, but firm, wistful and curiously thankful tone, curious elements, when we take “today” as reference.

First, everybody dressed the same, there was no distinction, there was time for everything. We would go to bed, get up at six, do our hygiene, go to the bathroom, wash ourselves, this and that, six thirty there was the mass, seven o'clock breakfast, and from seven to eight there was the cleaning. Some would clean the bathroom, others would clean the corridor, others would swipe the yard, others would clean the windows and doors, there was something for everybody to do. And it went on [...] after cleaning, we had class (Interview 21.11.2021)<sup>25</sup>.

In order to understand the daily life in this “orphanage”, I base it on the concept of “daily practices”, developed by Michel de Certeau<sup>26</sup>; he states: «practices are an art or ways of doing [...] they are a way of thinking combined with a way of acting, an art of combining, inextricable from an art of using».

Within the daily life of the school, distinct practices are part of the day-to-day; Mister Barbosa recalls: «our leisure activity was soccer, and on Sundays there was button soccer, but this one was hard to play because everybody wanted it. And there was chess, but very few played it»<sup>27</sup> (Interview 21.11.2021).

Information on the schooling process appears among the daily narratives. The classes were divided into two phases, the younger ones, until 13 years old; and the older ones, between 14 and 18, which were training to learn a trade. We contacted the institution and did not have access to documents concerning the curricular structure proposed at the time.

According to Madruga<sup>28</sup>, it is possible to infer, taking into consideration the time, that the principles of the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical, implemented by Pope Leo XII, were reinterpreted in a more radical way and verticalized by the pedagogy applied by the

<sup>23</sup> B. Sarlo, *Tempo passado: cultura da memória e guinada subjetiva*, São Paulo, Cia. das Letras, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> M. Halbwachs, *A memória coletiva*, São Paulo, Centauro, 2004, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> Our translation. In the original: «Primeiro lugar, todo mundo vestido igual, não tinha distinção de nada, horário pra tudo. Deitava, levantava seis horas, fazia a higienização, ali banheiro, se lava, isso e aquilo, seis e meia missa, sete horas o café, das sete e até como oito limpeza. Uns limpavam o banheiro, outros limpavam o corredor, outros varriam o pátio, outros limpavam vidro, tinha serviço para todo mundo. E foi indo [...] terminava a limpeza a aula».

<sup>26</sup> Certeau, *A invenção do cotidiano*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Our translation. In the original: «a recreação era futebol e nos domingos [...] tinha futebol de mesa, botão, mas era, esse era disputado. E tinha xadrez era muito pouquinhos que jogavam».

<sup>28</sup> A.P.B.V. Madruga, *Cidadania em construção: a proposta do Pão dos Pobres*, «Veritas», vol. 43, n. 5, 1998, pp. 15-19.



De La Salle Brothers, who took over *Pão dos Pobres*. The institutional foundations were adequate for the full development of a training that took place in a closed boarding school regime, aimed at poor orphans, using disciplinary religious modalities with practices and techniques regulated by previous and strictly-defined times and demarcated spaces.

With a strict routine, according to Mister Barbosa's recollections, there were numerous activities the boys did throughout the day – a set of devices guaranteed by the brothers' strict supervision.

### *Conclusions*

In the course of the investigation, evidence appears on the purposes for the creation of the Institution, which was founded, initially, due to a social problem in Porto Alegre. This situation was due to the exaggerate number of orphans because of the revolutions that exacerbated the abandonment situation, leaving an increasing number of children helpless on the streets. The *Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio* Institution, as well as many other orphanages at the time, was founded, thus, to minimize and try to solve this matter, taking these boys in. Based on the memories and documents analyzed, it is possible to identify rituals, times, spaces and daily practices that were part of the Institution.

Mister Barbosa's recollections are filled with nostalgia – «painted with colored pencils», as Mário Quintana<sup>29</sup> once said –, which is a common aspect of an interview event. From those, memories of sharing, trust, discipline and a "touch" of loneliness emerge. Matters related to learning a trade, work and training for life are the things that prevail throughout all the narrative that was produced. In the listened memories, there are representations of welcome, affection, with a gratitude tone for the learned trade. There are no complaints, bitterness or a narrative of abandonment, at least none that was verbalized.

Through the sources used in this paper, especially the oral memory, and equipped with my theoretical and methodological choices, I was able to filter, organize, compose and decompose a fragment, among so many that could have been chosen, regarding Mister Barbosa's life. Thompson<sup>30</sup> states that «oral history is a history built around people. It brings life into history itself and that expands its field of action». And she continues, «It accepts heroes who are not just among leaders, but among the unknown majority of people [...] oral history proposes a challenge to consecrated history myths [...] it offers the means for a radical transformation to the social meaning of history»<sup>31</sup>.

Memory is connected to an ambition, a pretention to be faithful to the past; and, in spite of the traps that the imaginary sets to memory, it is possible to state that it is a specific search for the "truth"; it is an exercise of looking at the past "thing"; and, in

<sup>29</sup> Poet born in Rio Grande do Sul; he lived between 1906 and 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *A voz do passado*, cit., p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*





Fig. 3. Picture with the family friends couple that came to visit him in 1949 (Mister Barbosa's personal archive, 2021)

the end, there is nothing better than the memory as testimony that something happened<sup>32</sup>.

For my part, as an interviewer and researcher, whose task is to problematize, what impacted me was the interviewee's constant tone of gratitude for the opportunity he had in life and the reverence for the institutional environment. I did not think to find such a condescending and nostalgic narrative, which minimized deeper difficulties, challenges and sadness. To some extent, I was prepared for what I understand, now, to be a stereotype of the memories about a total institution – in this case, the orphanage –, that is, a place of suffering, loneliness and abandonment. Nevertheless, the dimension of abandonment is there, in some way present when he comments on the visits he got over the nine years he was in the Institution. When he was showing me a picture, he pointed out to a couple and said, «They were the only ones, they went there two or three times. After that, Ilton Fernandes went there once, and, then, no one else. Not my sister, nor my

grandmother, uncles, aunts... no one»<sup>33</sup> (Interview 21.11.2021); the tone is, basically, one of observation.

I found, especially, a narrative about the recognition of the role of the orphanage in his life; about thankfulness for the future provided, and without which he would not have achieved the things he did; about admiration for the work and the way the priests conducted the routine of the children who lived there; and about pride, for the trust put in him when he was chosen to collect the donations for the congregation. Lastly, the ills that these institutions usually install in the memories of those who lived there were not identified at any moment.

<sup>32</sup> P. Ricœur, *A memória, a história, o esquecimento*, Campinas, Unicamp, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Our translation. In the original: «Eram os únicos, foram umas duas, duas ou três vezes e depois o Ilton Fernandes foi uma vez só e mais ninguém. Nem minha irmã, nem minha avó, nem meus tios, nem nada».

# Narrating the School of the Past and the Future. A Preliminary Analysis of the “Educational Memories on Video” (MEV) Database

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## 1. *Memories, stereotypes and school*

In everyday language, history and memory are often used interchangeably, whereas it is well known that these two forms of processing the past possess fundamental underlying differences. In essence, history constructs narratives based on information drawn from a number of sources, which are duly criticised, interwoven and contextualised. Memory, on the other hand, relies on an inherently subjective point of view and on collective representations – elements that are not necessarily substantiated or supported by sources. Memory thus sometimes tends to generalise or simplify a subject of study – the past – which is, in reality, highly complex. An accurate reconstruction of the past, beyond the nuances of the relationship between history and memory, which we will discuss later in this paper, must instead adopt a rigorous historical method.

Nevertheless, the confusion between history and memory is strongly reinforced in public discourse. Indeed, in public discourse, the task of interpreting and recounting the past is frequently entrusted mainly to memory, which is considered more empathetic and comprehensible than history, which is instead perceived as dry and impassive. Such an approach is, of course, scientifically inadequate, but nonetheless ends up being privileged over the historical method.

Judgements formulated in the public debate on phenomena that occurred in the past are thus often constructed on the basis of memory rather than historical analysis.

Memory is, however, conditioned by a number of factors of an individual and collective nature, including culture, the choice to remember or to forget, power, politics, religion, and even historiographical production itself.

«Official memory», recalls Giovanni De Luna, «is essentially “cultural” memory. Devoid of any “biological” points of reference, it can therefore only be created artificially, according to the principle that ‘the past does not establish itself naturally but is a cultural creation’, whereby those who construct memory deliberately choose which aspects of the past need to be brought to life in the present. The state, in particular, does so by using

a multitude of tools: history books, school textbooks, monuments, toponymy, public holidays and political rituals»<sup>1</sup>.

However, the influence of the imagination on conventional wisdom also plays an important role in the construction of individual and collective memory. In other words, a personal memory is conditioned as much by the imagination as by direct lived experience. For example, Italians' individual and collective memories of the "Swinging Sixties" of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are undoubtedly influenced by the complex collective imagination of the "economic miracle", mediated as is well known by cinema, fashion, memories, new means of transport, electrical appliances, etc.<sup>2</sup>.

In short, stereotypical readings of past phenomena, which populate the imagination in abundance, can therefore condition individual memories.

School memories are certainly no exception. Indeed, school, as a widely shared experience in the lives of so many people, is perhaps particularly susceptible to these influences, to the extent that it could even be read as a category of imagination in itself<sup>3</sup>. School memory understood as an evocation of a shared school of the past<sup>4</sup>. We shall discuss this in more detail later, however.

This contribution thus seeks to promote a reflection on stereotypical views of the school of the past and their interrelationship with memory. In particular, we will focus on certain features of the school of the past, including educational rigour and the selective nature of education, which are sometimes cast in conventional wisdom as indices of quality. Such indices of quality are, however, often supported more by memories alone than by scientific evidence.

In the following pages, I will therefore examine some recurring themes and opinions in the public debate on schooling and then try to match them, or at least compare them, with the memories and imagination that emerge from the testimonies of ordinary people collected in the "Educational Memories on Video" (MEV) database, hosted on the portal [www.memoriascolstica.it](http://www.memoriascolstica.it).

The paper will thus also be an opportunity to describe, albeit briefly, the MEV database, to the creation of which this author has contributed together with the University of Florence research unit (coordinated by Gianfranco Bandini) for the project "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)", coordinated at national level by Roberto Sani of the University of Macerata<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> G. De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un'Italia divisa*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> P. Gabrielli, *Anni di novità e di grandi cose. il boom economico fra tradizione e cambiamento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meda, *La memoria della scuola tra rappresentazione collettiva e uso pubblico del passato*, in S. Polenghi, G. Zago, L. Agostinetto (edd.), *Memoria ed educazione*, Lecce, PensaMultimedia, 2021, p. 30; A. B. Escolano, *Más allá del espacio del presente: la escuela como memoria*, «História da Educação», vol. XV, n. 33, 2011, pp. 10-30.

<sup>4</sup> J. Meda, A. Viñao, *School Memory: Historiographical Balance and Heuristics Perspectives*, in C. Yanes-Cabrera, J. Meda, A. Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, Cham, Springer, 2017, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> R. Sani, J. Meda, *School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation: an Innovative Research Project with a Strong International Focus*, «History of Education and Children's Literature», vol. 17, n. 1, 2022, pp. 9-26.

Lastly, I will attempt to offer some brief observations on the extent to which individual and collective memories of schooling may condition or have conditioned the choices of policy-makers on the future of education.

## 2. *The obsession with memory*

Memory has only recently become a topic of study in a historical-educational context, owing to the pioneering research conducted at the beginning of the millennium in Spain and Latin America, culminating in the key turning point of the Seville conference in 2015<sup>6</sup>, which also provided a solid foundation for the Italian line of research, now firmly established. There is no need here, however, to reiterate the stages of this historiographical development, on which timely and in-depth contributions can be found in this volume.

Among the various historiographical perspectives that memory has opened up in the field of education, I would like to recall here at least its contribution to the study of collective representations and the imagination (through, for example, research on film and literary production) and to the study of collective civic education processes (through research on public monuments, works of art, philately, honours, etc.). The study of memory, then, allows us to shed light on everyday school life and to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics within classrooms through the analysis of the school's "black box". These perspectives were investigated in detail and as a whole by the research groups involved in the project "School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)", in the context of which the publishing initiative that includes this paper was also initiated<sup>7</sup>.

In short, venturing into school memories means entering a field of research that is full of opportunities, but also pitfalls and challenges.

Memory is, in fact, a highly complex subject of study, which requires an endless bibliography spanning various disciplines: from history to philosophy, from neuroscience to linguistics, from psychology to ethology, from anthropology to sociology, and so on. These are, however, just a few examples of disciplines that reflect upon the vast, and by no means circumscribed, universe that is memory. Indeed, on the contrary, memory studies are currently being further expanded.

To use Patrizia Violi's incisive summary, our epoch is «obsessed and permeated by the thought of memory». Beyond the aspects investigated by cultural studies on memory and its relationship with history, in recent years, again in Violi's words, «the discourse on memory [has progressively grown], with an explosion of memory-related phenomena, which multiply in every field – from the proliferation of commemorations and remembrance days, to the incessant opening of new memorial museums, from

<sup>6</sup> Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories*, cit.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer to the page on the portal, where you will find the updated list of publications originating from the project <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/le-nostre-pubblicazioni> (last access: 10.03.2023).

the frequency with which artists work on the subject, down to the more frivolous [...] phenomenon of the nostalgia for the past that runs through much of our culture, from design objects to television series, – and leads us to think of an authentic cultural consumption of the past»<sup>8</sup>.

In short, the field of *memory studies* is currently being spurred on by stimuli that were, until recently, unheard of, and is undergoing continuous qualitative and quantitative evolution.

In this context, the relationship between history and memory – a relationship that, moreover, is already in constant evolution and the subject of much historiographical discussion in itself – has also become more dynamic. It would be impossible to recall these discussions in their entirety in these pages, but in essence, they have moved from an initial phase in which the dividing line between the two forms of processing the past was clear-cut, to a reading in which the boundaries between history and memory could be drawn less sharply<sup>9</sup>. As Marcello Flores has recently so lucidly pointed out, «today, the relationship with the past – of memory and history, often without the possibility of making a distinction between them – is an increasingly central element of public life, but in an intertwined, contradictory and confusing way»<sup>10</sup>.

In short, the growing need for a past expressed by our society – that obsession that we have already mentioned – has encouraged an osmosis between history and memory. However, this osmosis, to stay with the metaphor of liquids, has resulted in a solution that is completely unbalanced towards memory, which ostensibly, but only superficially, seems to be able to respond more effectively to the processing of the past.

Thus, with the complicity of the culture industry and the mainstream media, memory has provided a firm foothold for those interpretations of the past that have favoured a moral or political approach, without having to risk confronting the sources and reconstructing the causes of various phenomena. This use of memory serves the needs expressed by the dominant power of the day, but is far removed from seeking to understanding the phenomena and problems of the present and risks rendering the field of history entirely barren.

In reality, however, this prominence of memory also offers an opportunity to rise to a challenge and rethink ways of approaching history, i.e. the role of the historian. A history that does not renounce methodological rigour, but is able to confront the evolution of society. A history that is more sensitive to popular aspects, open to new technologies and, above all, attentive to the participatory processes of research and to public engagement – the real strength of memory<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> P. Violi, *I paesaggi della memoria. Il trauma, lo spazio, la storia*, Milano, Bompiani, 2014, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> B. Bonomo, *Voci della memoria. L'uso delle fonti orali nella ricerca storica*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, pp. 32-38; C. Pavone, *Prima lezione di storia contemporanea*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007; M. Halbwachs, *La memoria collettiva*, Milano, Unicopli, 2001, pp. 123-66.

<sup>10</sup> M. Flores, *Cattiva memoria. Perché è difficile fare i conti con la storia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2021, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> G. Bandini, *Tempi duri per la storia. Il contributo della Public History of Education alla consapevolezza delle nostre complesse identità*, in G. Bandini, S. Oliviero, M. Brunelli, P. Bianchini, F. Borruoso, *La Public History tra scuola, università e territorio. Una introduzione operativa*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2022, pp. 95-110.

The increasing focus on memory, however, as we have mentioned, also implies the growth of *memory studies*, and thus the emergence of new historiographical perspectives.

The “Educational Memories on Video” (MEV) database, as we shall see in shortly, was created precisely in an attempt to respond to the need to develop new approaches to making educational history and, at the same time, to offer a glimpse into those aspects of everyday school life that are difficult to detect with traditional sources.

### 3. *The “Educational Memories on Video” database*

The MEV database, an integral part of the *memoriascolastica.it* portal, currently contains almost 300 video interviews, including school and childhood memories of ordinary people, as well as workplace memories of teachers, educators, headteachers and educational directors<sup>12</sup>.

The video testimonies were produced by students, volunteers and researchers from the University of Florence and then uploaded to YouTube by the interviewers. The University’s research team then incorporated the testimonies into the *memoriascolastica.it* portal and catalogued and indexed them according to pre-established parameters, with the help of a software programme, *Mnemosine*, specially created (and patented) by the national research group coordinated by the University of Macerata<sup>13</sup>. Finally, each memory is accompanied by a descriptive sheet, also drafted by one of the team members. All the material is open source.

The interviews vary in length from 30 minutes to over two hours and average 50 to 60 minutes. The topics covered focus on everyday school life, material conditions and relationships between pupils, parents and teachers.

With regard to the quantitative distribution among the various types of video testimonies, out of all the resources, school and childhood memories currently represent the overwhelming majority compared to other categories. School testimonies covering the period from the 1960s to the 1980s are the most prevalent overall.

As for the geographical location of the eyewitnesses, i.e. their birthplace or place of residence, this is mainly concentrated in Tuscany (of which Florence is, indeed, the capital), with a few cases in other parts of Italy.

Among the many issues addressed by the eyewitnesses, it is worth mentioning at least three: the processes of modernisation in Italy that form the backdrop to school memories and the very perception of school; the considerable social recognition of the role of teachers that seems to populate the memories of many of the eyewitnesses; and the

<sup>12</sup> G. Bandini, S. Oliviero. *Memorie educative in video*, Vol. I, Firenze, Edizioni Forlilpsi, 2021; G. Bandini, S. Oliviero, *Memorie Educative in Video*, Vol. II, Firenze, Edizioni Forlilpsi, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> P. Alfieri, G. Bandini, A. Barausse, C. Covato, A. Debé, C. Ghizzoni, C. Lepri, L. Levantesi, J. Meda, C. Meta; M.C. Morandini, S. Oliviero, R. Sani, F. Targhetta, G. Zago, *Mnemosine. Historical Open Data Management Software*, 2021; Patent Number: D0000150490.

theme of punishment, often recalled as a natural and integral element of the curriculum, especially between the 1950s and 1970s. We shall return to this in a moment.

Of particular interest is the use of photographs taken from the interviewee's family album, or other objects kept by the eyewitness, as memory triggers; photos and objects filmed by the cameras and captured in the video testimony thus become further sources on which research paths could be built.

In terms of methodological aspects, it is worth highlighting the intergenerational relationship between interviewer and interviewee sparked in each video interview – a relationship that, beyond the content collected, has thus also taken on an educational value<sup>14</sup>.

Ultimately, the MEV database, as mentioned above, has therefore taken up the challenge of renewing approaches to, and languages of, history. Moreover, it has opened up new historiographical horizons by presenting previously unpublished school memories<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, MEV stems from a research project that emphasises, first and foremost, the aspect of engagement, which we have seen to be a highly sought-after and emerging social need. This active participation involves both the researcher and the non-academic public, who are free to access sources thanks to open-access digital technology. Moreover, the participatory approach is also evident from the active role attributed to the interviewers (and the eyewitnesses), who retain the intellectual property of their videos, which are uploaded to YouTube through their accounts. While this method of collecting and storing video interviews certainly does not fulfil all the requirements that the professional archiving of sources would entail, it is undoubtedly useful from a technical and manageability point of view, as well as being beneficial in terms of the interviewer's active participation in the research.

As mentioned above, the MEV project is undoubtedly helping to open the school's "black box", allowing us to take a closer look at some of the practices of everyday life that only memories can restore. In other words, the "Educational Memories on Video" database not only provides a consistent and continuously updated archive of individual memories, but also offers the opportunity to gain an overview of certain phenomena that defined many people's school experience.

Analysis of the sources stored in the MEV suggests various avenues of research that may contribute to supplementing the history of schooling, which is event-based or predominantly reconstructed from legislative sources.

In the following pages, however, we will focus on some reflections on the relationship between stereotypes and memories collected in the MEV and in particular, as Juri Meda has incisively observed, «to define how the present looks at the past and interprets or reinterprets it». «School memory», Meda continues, «does not interest us merely as a

<sup>14</sup> P. Clemente, *La postura del ricordante. Memorie, generazioni, storie della vita e un antropologo che si racconta*, «L'ospite ingrato», II, 1999, pp. 65-96, <https://www.ospiteingrato.unisi.it/la-postura-del-ricordantememorie-generazioni-storie-della-vita-e-un-antropologo-che-si-raccontapietro-clemente/> (last access: 10.03.2023); D. Demetrio, *Pedagogia della memoria. Per se stessi con gli altri*, Roma, Meltemi, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> G. Bandini, *Educational Memories and Public History: A Necessary Meeting*, in Yanes-Cabrera, Meda, Viñao (edd.), *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*, cit., pp. 143-156.



channel to access the schools of the past, but as a key to understanding what we know today or believe we know about schools of the past and how far what we know corresponds to reality, or whether our understanding is merely the result of prejudices and stereotypes that have become ingrained in the common sentiment, and difficult to uproot»<sup>16</sup>.

Let us try, then, to trace and examine some of these judgements and stereotypes in the individual memories collected in the MEV. In particular, we will refer to school and childhood memories.

#### 4. *School memories and conventional wisdom*

Among the topics covered by the video interviews collected in the MEV, there are of course certain topics that lend themselves best to this discussion on prejudices and conventional wisdom.

Take, for example, punishment, a practice mentioned in many of the testimonies and to describe which memories are essential<sup>17</sup>. Beyond the singularities and variety of the punishments recounted in the various interviews, which could therefore even be indexed according to their specificities, what interests us most is the way in which these practices – the punishments – are remembered by the eyewitnesses. In short, we are interested in better understanding the perceptions that the eyewitnesses have of school punishments.

It is, above all, immediately clear that the individual's recollection is conditioned by the social perception of the punishments, based, however, on the era in which they occurred. Conversely, detached observations are rare. Indeed, the eyewitnesses recount the punishments they experienced themselves, or were subjected to by other pupils, as a routine part of everyday school life. They do so without stigmatising the negative aspects, but rather, on the contrary, recognising (or in some cases even extolling) their pedagogical value.

Although punishment was banned, it seems to have been an integral part of curricular activities until well into the 1970s and does not, therefore, always appear to be distinguishable in the eyes of the eyewitness. One eyewitness, for example, recounts an incident during the late 1960s when, after a spelling mistake, his teacher forced him to rewrite the word correctly a thousand times. However, the witness, who was eight years old at the time, merely filled several pages of his notebook with the word "convicted", without counting the total. The teacher did do the maths, however, and upon ascertaining that the child had only partially completed the task, increased the number of lines from one thousand to two thousand. It can hardly be said that the teacher was sympathetic... Nonetheless, the eyewitness recalls this episode without ever describing it as a punishment,

<sup>16</sup> J. Meda, *Memoria magistra*, cit., p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> G. Bandini, V. Francis, *Corporal Punishment at School and in the Family: a Long Process for its Complete Elimination*, «Rivista italiana di educazione familiare», vol. 16, 2020, pp. 1-9.

but, on the contrary, recounts it only to exalt the great life lessons delivered by his beloved teacher, at the mention of whom he is moved to floods of tears<sup>18</sup>.

In cases where the most explicit punishments, i.e. corporal punishments, are recalled, we often hear episodes recounted with the same emotional participation with which the witnesses describe other school routines, without implying any judgement. Indeed, there are video testimonies in which the punishment incidents are even recounted with a certain glee. For example, one of the eyewitnesses describes with hilarity how, also in the late 1960s, the school caretaker tied him to his chair with a rope due to his misbehaviour...

All in all, what emerges from the video testimonies is that a certain strictness in teaching and educational methods was undoubtedly more than tolerated and judged by the eyewitnesses to be normal practice – or even appropriate, as a sign of the school's high standards<sup>19</sup>.

In the eyewitnesses' accounts, the dialectical relationship between the authoritarian methods of teachers and academic quality (and thus also the quality of the teachers themselves) seems almost to have become a category of their imagination. The teacher is the absolute protagonist of the educational and didactic processes, while the pupil is always a subordinate.

The undisputed authority of the teacher, gained through their authoritarianism, was also confirmed by the families. Indeed, recurrent reference is made in the interviews to an absolute trust in teachers and, above all, a widespread recognition of their authority. «As far as my parents were concerned, I was always wrong», says one eyewitness, yet the account does not appear at all resentful; rather, the judgement is largely positive, due to the unconditional respect their parents showed for the teachers. In short, there is hardly any critical assessment of the cultural, intellectual and social subordination that many people suffered at school up until the late 1970s. There are, moreover, no concerns about the behaviour of the parents.

Instead, a representation of school as ontologically strict, austere and selective dominates the interviews – a stereotype that is decidedly entrenched and difficult to uproot.

More generally, the video interviews reveal the conviction that schools of the past were better than schools of the present, precisely because they were stricter. So, they were better, because the teachers were firm and the pupils were also more studious.

This prejudice is so difficult to uproot that, to some degree, we can even find traces of it in a video testimony, also collected in the MEV, by Agostino Burberi, a pupil of Don Lorenzo Milani, who famously made the fight against class-based schooling his life's

<sup>18</sup> S. Oliviero, *1000 volte già. Memorie d'infanzia di Massimo Avanzati*, «Memorie Educative in Video», DOI: 10.53221/2073, Last updated: 31.12.2022, <https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-individuale/video-testimonianze/1000-volte-gia-memoria-di-infanzia-di-massimo-avanzati> (last access: 11.03.2023).

<sup>19</sup> L. Paciaroni, *Memorie di scuola. Contributo a una storia delle pratiche didattiche ed educative nelle scuole marchigiane attraverso le testimonianze di maestri e maestre (1945-1985)*, Macerata, eum, 2020; Chiara Martinelli, «Le querce non fanno limoni». *Mutamenti scolastici e sociali nelle testimonianze orali relative agli anni Cinquanta, Sessanta e Settanta*, «History of Education and Children's Literature», vol. 17, n. 1, 2022, pp. 517-536.

calling<sup>20</sup>. The memories of this eyewitness, which are worth examining in more detail, are consistent with those of others regarding the judgement of corporal punishment. The methods used by the Prior of Barbiana are, however, well known and widely discussed in the historiography<sup>21</sup>. There is, on the other hand, an interesting passage in which Burberi describes the studiousness of the pupils at the School of Barbiana in conducting their research in the classroom, comparing them, however, with pupils of today rather than the pupils of the time, as would perhaps have been more straightforward: «you young people of today», says Agostino, «believe everything they tell you on the internet and no longer understand what is the truth and what isn't the truth». In other words, young people of today are superficial. It is evident, however, that this is not an opinion that is actually reflected by Burberi and the other eyewitnesses interviewed, i.e. arising exclusively from the reflections of the eyewitnesses interviewed for the MEV database, but rather appear to be collective representations that have become crystallised.

### 5. *School memories and prejudices in the public debate*

On the other hand, this prejudice about the alleged superficiality of the pupils or young people of today compared to young people of the past, often finds its way into the public debate, due in part to the support of authoritative figures. In Italy, the statements of prominent intellectuals, such as Umberto Galimberti or Ernesto Galli della Loggia, on the limited knowledge of the youth of today and the relative responsibilities of schools are fairly well known<sup>22</sup>. Such statements are, however, based mainly on the collective imagination and personal memories rather than on specific studies.

Indeed, the public debate on schools in Italy in recent years has been fuelled by stereotyped judgements not infrequently built on individual and collective memories. These memories are themselves conditioned by pedagogical models that were prevalent in the past, most notably the Gentile model.

In 2021, for example, *Il danno scolastico. La scuola progressista come macchina della disuguaglianza* (Educational Damage. Progressive Schooling as a Machine of Inequality), a pamphlet co-written by two authors, received considerable media attention. The title already states beyond a shadow of a doubt the position of the authors, who are indeed quite well known for their stringent criticism of Italian state schooling<sup>23</sup>. The book makes

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Agostino Burberi, last updated: 24.11.2022, <https://youtu.be/Y3PeO2K1kGo> (last access: 10.03.2023).

<sup>21</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *Don Milani. Una lezione di utopia*, Pisa, Ets, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> P. Fasce, *Sul vanverismo pedagogico*, last updated: 03.12.2020, <https://www.educazioneaperta.it/sul-vanverismo-pedagogico.html> (last access: 11.02.2023); C. Raimo, *L'aula vuota di Ernesto Galli della Loggia è un libro pessimo sotto ogni punto di vista*, «Minima et Moralia», 12 June 2019, last updated: 12.06.2019, <https://www.minimaetmoralia.it/wp/altro/aula-vuota-ernesto-galli-della-loggia-un-libro-pessimo-punto-vista> (last access: 11.03.2023).

<sup>23</sup> L. Ricolfi, P. Mastrocola, *Il danno scolastico*, Milano, La Nave di Teseo, 2021.

abundant use of the authors' individual recollections, on which detractors' arguments about mass democratic schooling often rest, to argue for the irreplaceable excellence of the selective school: a serious, austere and therefore high-quality model. The method adopted in the book, in other words, places memory above history, and almost inevitably ends up making generalisations or judgements that are poorly supported by rigorous historical or scientific investigation. Ultimately, the incontrovertible thesis that arises from the memories of the two authors is that the schools of yesterday were better than the schools of today.

This idea of schools of the past has thus been re-emphasised by the media and seems to have conditioned the school memories of many ordinary eyewitnesses, or rather seems to have conditioned their reading of those school memories.

It is, however, an intertwining between a certain idea of schooling and the construction of collective memory, which is by no means confined to the work of Mastrocola and Ricolfi, but can be found, as we have seen, in numerous stances in the public debate and even in educational reform projects.

A case in point, which we would regard as emblematic, is the so-called *Buona Scuola* (Good School) reform project promoted by the Renzi government (during the 17<sup>th</sup> Legislature) between 2014 and 2015. Needless to say, we cannot dwell here on the political line of the Renzi government and its idea of schooling. Suffice it to say that the Good School reform project, and to some extent even the approved law (Law no. 107 of 2015), essentially insisted on a neoliberal school model<sup>24</sup>.

The Italian Prime Minister invested heavily in school reform, a reform that on several occasions – in line with his well-known communication style – he presented and publicly defended in person, bypassing the Minister of Education (Stefania Giannini), who almost always remained in the background.

Among the numerous occasions on which the Prime Minister presented the reform project, a famous video from 2015 is particularly relevant to the reflections we propose in this paper, in which we find various school stereotypes reflected in the collective memory and supported precisely by the individual memory of the Prime Minister himself<sup>25</sup>. In this video, Matteo Renzi explains his reform using a slate blackboard – an object that is in itself evocative, as it is imprinted in the school memories of Italians of all generations. Then, to describe the support that, in his view, the Good School reform would give to every teacher, the Prime Minister recalls his teacher and the prestige she enjoyed.

Today, teachers have lost some of the social authority they had in previous years. My teacher, Eda, in the small town where I grew up, used to enter the bar, enter the club, and was respected by everyone, just like the pharmacist, the marshal or the parish priest, because hers was a figure that had social prestige. Today, that social prestige has been lost. We, as new parents, are partly to blame, because when my father was called by a teacher to say that I had misbehaved, he blamed me; my generation of parents,

<sup>24</sup> S. Oliviero, *La scuola nella società delle gomitate (2010-2020)*, in S. Santamaita, *Storia della scuola. Dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, Milano-Torino, Pearson, 2021, pp. 228-270.

<sup>25</sup> *La Buona Scuola*, last updated: 13.05.2015, <https://youtu.be/yEM1Xnx4Uvs?t=352> (last access: 10.03.2023).

on the other hand, often blames the teachers. So the primary responsibility lies with us, the parents of the new generation. But let's be clear, there's also a share of responsibility that stems from the fact that when you ask pupils to boycott the INVALSI [Italian National Institute for Educational Evaluation] tests, or threaten to block the exams, you're not doing the school a service and you're not doing those pupils a service. That's why it's important to be able to intervene by giving teachers more money, not because social authority derives from this, but because it's a matter of justice.

Matteo Renzi's arguments, as previously mentioned, are thus clearly emblematic for the purposes of our discourse. Indeed, social recognition of teachers passes through the filter of individual memory. This recognition is in itself strongly intertwined with the collective social representation of schools, past and present, and their actors (teachers, pupils and parents), imprinted in the common sentiment. The individual and collective school memory, with its mechanisms, therefore also becomes a basis on which to plan reforms.

In conclusion, research on school memories opens up horizons to be explored and can provide support in understanding the conditioning of conventional wisdom on our memories and thus on our identities. It also provides support for a deeper understanding of the processes by which ideas on schooling take shape, sometimes determining choices that influence the future. Indeed, the collective school memory continuously reconstructs itself by proposing in the present a selection of memories of the past made by social groups and individuals to determine a precise cultural identity. School, as the undisputed protagonist in the life experience of many people in advanced societies, is undoubtedly an essential cog in this mechanism.



# Educational Policy in Greece and Educational Discourse throughout 1963-1965: Male and Female Student Memories

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## *Introduction*

In our research we examine social references and political considerations, as they are interpreted by social subjects, who in the specific period be1963-1965 were students at Greek universities. We attempt to explore specific cultural issues and how this youth culture integrates the interpretation of the political intentions of the Union Centre government, but also more broadly of right-wing (EPE) and left-wing (EDA) political plans. The specific content of the policy includes the successive electoral victories of the Union Centre, initially with 42% (November 1963) and 53% later on (February 1964)<sup>1</sup>.

During this period (1963-1965), unique political student movements are evolving, who join with other population groups in claiming rights by challenging conservative right-wing politicians<sup>2</sup>. Perceived as a development of political events, the youth movement represents a political reflection, focusing on the promotion of undemocratic conditions in the coordination of political actions for democracy, political ethics, and the mitigation of social inequalities, according to Donatella Dela Porta and Mario Tiani<sup>3</sup>. The important point is that these unique movement actions contain a corresponding scientific chapter, prefiguring alternatives for the democratic organisation of the State, rights to education, elimination of social inequalities, structures of opportunity in education, in a system of economic and political modernisation<sup>4</sup>. The youth expresses a

<sup>1</sup> G. Anastasiades, P. Petridis (edd.), *G. Papandreou. The Crisis of Institutions, Party Formations and Political Discourse*, Thessaloniki, University Studio Press, 1990; J. Meynaud, *Les Forces politiques en Grèce*, Paris, Lausanne, 1965; I. Nikolakopoulos, *Searching for the Centre: the Electoral Wanderings of a 15-Year Period (1946-1961)*, in G. Anastasiades, P. Petridis (edd.), *G. Papandreou. The Crisis of Institutions, Party Formations and Political Discourse*, cit., pp. 431-458.

<sup>2</sup> M. Cheze, *La France en Grèce. Etude de la politique culturelle française en territoire hellène du début des années 1930 à 1981*, Paris, Institute National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 2013; E. Giotopoulou-Sissilianou, *Education Matters*, Athens, Kedros, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Lazos, *Greek Student Movement 1821-1973*, Athens, Gnosi, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> G. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1964; D. Bell, *The Reforming of General Education*, New York, Doubleday Anchor, 1966.



new socio-political discourse rationalising expectations for individual goals, reinforcing the progressive narrative<sup>5</sup>, perhaps by writing all these political expectations to the government of the Union Centre and personally to Papandreou<sup>6</sup>.

The issue of education, which is promoted as a political demand of the Union Centre and the EDA<sup>7</sup>, is also synchronised with the research work of the Institutes and bodies<sup>8</sup> who consider that modernisation in economics and politics is directly linked to the strengthening of the right to education and the reduction of illiteracy<sup>9</sup>. Students reinforce the political argument for structures of opportunity for young men and women in privileged professional positions, by implicitly expressing a political reason for the presence of young people on the social and political scene and, simultaneously, the high educational capital, which seeks to be transformed into a high social status. Progress is interpreted in political terms as an option to overturn outdated political conservative correlations<sup>10</sup>. In essence, the different versions of political discourse that are emerging during this period (1963-1965) express broader views, selectively adapting the demands of the 1960s<sup>11</sup>, which are evolving at an international level, broadening prospects for the reduction of social exclusion, social inequalities, and authoritarian policies of governance<sup>12</sup>.

### 1. Methodology

The present study is based on a qualitative research (2021-2022) and intends to show up perceptions of Greek student in the tertiary education during the period 1963-1965 in Greece. Refers to interviews with three students from the natural sciences and two from the humanistic. The interviews were semi-structured and repeated several times, in several topics in order to approach issues on politic, education, culture, personal ambitions as well as identity issues.

We considered as important to address this particular group of students between 1963-1965, because this population was already limited during this period. Additionally,

<sup>5</sup> I. Papathanasiou (ed.), *The Lambrakis Youth in the 1960s: Archival Documentation and Autobiographical Testimonies*, Athens, IAEN-GGNG & EIE, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> R. Imvrioti, *The Youth's Accusations*, Athens, Diogenes, 1972; N. Demertzis, G. Stavrakakis (edd.), *Youth: The Imponderable Factor*, Athens, Polytropon, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> EDA (United Democratic Left), *Science and Scientists in Greece*, United Democratic Left, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> P. Bourdieu, L. Boltanski, *Le titre et le poste: rapports entre le système de production et le système de reproduction*, «Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales», vol. 1-2, 1975, pp. 95-107; R.B. Braithwaite, *Scientific Explanation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> H. Grau, *Greece: Urban Adult Education, 20 September 1964-19 May 1965*, Paris, UNESCO, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> J.S. Coleman, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, Washington, US Government Printing Office, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> T.H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, Oxford, Oxford University, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> D. Lockwood, *Social Integration and System Integration*, in G. K. Zollschan, W. Hirsch (edd.), *Explorations in Social Change*, London, Routledge, 1964; A. Maddison, A. Stavrianopoulos, B. Higgins, *Foreign Skills and Technical Assistance in Greek Development*, Paris, OECD, 1966.

the population had either decreased due to age or some individuals suffered from various diseases. Of course, this category also includes people who do not wish to address issues related to memories<sup>13</sup>.

From a group of 30 interested persons, 5 students (3 males and 2 females), were chosen for the interviews. The approach is that of a micro-history, following the narrations of a period which is not determined by a written history, but by the oral narration, focusing on the style of the discourse, the action of approving or disapproving, the emotions. It is important to know that the historical paradigm of that period is focusing on the memories<sup>14</sup>.

At the end, the interviews have transformed into narrations. The interviews are applied to depict the setting and provide interpretations of male and female university students' memories of that period.

Therefore, out of an expanded total of thirty individuals, the five repeated interviews, which resulted in narrative interviews, were deemed sufficient for our research, where elements of interpretation and conceptualisation of the social self were constantly added, which collectively ran an extended period beyond the defined 1963-1965. These individual interviews satisfy the demand for scientific framing and documentation, because in scientific terms they are the potential effective suitable material for the researcher to approach particular elements that evolve in a historical period. It is the micro-history that evolves through the narratives of social subjects who act as mediators of condensed meanings of an era that is not defined by written texts but by the spoken word with the immediacy of the narrative where, as researchers, we intervene only to clarify elements or to revert the discussion to the thematic units, which we consider original or in need of review. Regarding the characteristics of speech, we evaluated the style, the expressions of approval or disapproval as well as the emotions. It is important that during this time in Greece, the historical example focuses on memories. Thus, we ascertain that oral memory repositories are formed by different research groups, for researchers to have the speech of social subjects at their disposal, as they are the protagonists in historical events.

The present study refers to democratic perceptions and opinions of people, acting in a period, which allowed them to express their opinions and to value social processes. For the preparation of the interviews, the elaboration of the bibliography was helpful, both in methodological as well as theoretical issues, in history, sociology, politics in the specific period between 1963-1965. Moreover, the press and students' magazines were analysed to explain the hermeneutical context.

It is the democratic view of approaching the opinions of individuals who act in a period when they are indirectly given the right to express opinions and to conceptualise evolving situations. During the preparation of the interviews, the corresponding literature was studied, both in terms of the organisation of the combination of different methodological tools in research, as well as the theory of history, sociology, and politics

<sup>13</sup> T. Mulvihill, R. Swaminathan, *Critical Approaches to Life Writing Methods in Qualitative Research*, London, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> P. Leavy, *Oral History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

for this period. In addition, archival data were studied to identify specific operational issues of the universities in the period 1963-1965. The press of the time was also used, as were student magazines. This process was deemed necessary to organise the interviews for the categorisation of the main themes, which were gradually framed by questions.

The main categories are:

1. the values of the period 1963-1965
2. the youth culture
3. students
4. issues of social inequalities
5. the final evaluation of the facts.

Following the repeated individual sessions, where data had been recorded, we proceeded to *de novo* categorisation. This was extremely difficult, because all five individuals had strong narrative speech and constantly added data, thus, opening up new fields. Characteristically, the social subjects themselves studied letters and photographs in the time between the interviews, and all this personal material reinforced their memories. In some cases, while it seemed facilitative, it complicated the process of categorisation, because the patterns of speech, events, and situations became more and more complex.

## 2. Discussion

As we have already mentioned, the repeated interviews provided us with the opportunity to observe evolving conditions in historical time, while simultaneously social subjects drew from their memory events that constantly connected with others, enriching the historical narrative and the thematic analysis. Here lies the advantage of the method we used, which is a combination of different research tools for qualitative research. At the same time, social subjects retrieved memory elements, while we also augmented the material of the period, not only with their thematic discourse, but also with the accompanying material the subjects provided us, such as letters, photographs, newspaper clippings, etc. Different interviews could be considered to have worked in a research-action field<sup>15</sup>, because the protagonists of the interview were modifying elements, as were the researchers. This is a research interaction, which we believe that at a time when issues for oral memory management are opening up, combined with research, will contribute to new readings of historical periods. Something similar is currently developing in Greek literature, where the literary work incorporates archival data and oral memories of the events it deals with as a macro-level, the micro-level of the novel or essay.

<sup>15</sup> L. Gogou, E. Kalerante, *Research-Action in Sociological Refocusing on Symbolic Structures and Social Networks: From Conflicting Discourse on Knowledge to Social Change*, in L. Gogou, E. Kalerante, Th. Eleftherakis, G. Koustourakis, P. Giavrimis, S. Nikolaou (edd.), *Qualitative Methods in Education: Theoretical Considerations and Practical Applications*, Athens, Grigoris, 2020, pp. 321-347.

The interviewers gave particular interest to an individual evaluation of historical events, in particular to the Prime Minister, which was Papandreou. His characteristics, as a popular and democratic leader, stands in opposite to the “black past” of the conservative governments. To highlight are also the references to the lack of progress in Greece after the civil war of 1946-1949, between conservatives and leftists. His high electoral rate and the increased expectations that had been created had attributed special political characteristics, making Papandreou a charismatic leader in Max Weber’s terms. As we have already mentioned, during this period particular demands are being made, which seem to incorporate combined elements, such as democratisation of the political system, social political rights, including the reduction of social inequalities, social equality as regards gender, labour rights and the strengthening of the right to education<sup>16</sup>. In this context, right-wing politics and the demonisation of communists are questioned. Besides, the leftist trend of the EDA party also expresses this shift towards a different political direction<sup>17</sup>.

Papandreou was like a Lord. He inspired you be the first contact. People demonstrated in the streets, because of him. He represented alone the entire Union Center (party).

Papandreou was in the car, a convertible. He was fearless. The people (demonstrated) in the street, young, old man, all they called his name and they believed on it. We, the students were first of all.

We were tired to hear the word Communist. Every time the conservatives wanted to get elected something, to be deliberated from the communists. By Papandreou we forget that word.

I was member of the Left Organisation (the following organisation of the partisans during the WWII), but I demonstrated every time with the Union Center. We wanted him, even if he was not leftist or to say it better, he was against the Left. It was enough (for us) that he hated the conservatives.

Greece was always a poor country. When I went to Germany for a while, I realised how we were behind (of every progress). A country in the darkness. Meanwhile, leftists were still in exile. How could you speak about progress?

The comments by the interviewers focus on the status of young people. It seems, that they “discover” that they are young in that period between 1963-1965, because they fell to be protagonists. The university became center of producing ideas. G. Papandreou address to the students for the rebuilding of Greece. In Greece, too, the concept of youth culture is shaped with its particular imperatives on the role of young people in the development of democratic policies<sup>18</sup>. Indirectly, previous generations that are thought to have fostered intense political confrontations between nationalists and leftists are questioned. At the

<sup>16</sup> A. Kazamias, *Educational Reforms 1957-1977. Myths and Realities*, in A. Kazamias, M. Kassotakis (edd.), *Educational Reforms in Greece: Efforts, Deadlocks, Perspectives*, Rethymno, Faculty of Philosophy – University of Crete, 1986; E. Kalerante, *The Pedagogical Institute, The Novel Proposal of G. Papandreou’s Government. The Demands of “Closed” Groupings in an “Open” Education System*, in A. Rigos, S.I. Seferiadis, E. Hatzivasileiou (edd.), *The Brief Decade of ’60*, Athens, Kastaniotis, 2008, pp. 389-404.

<sup>17</sup> T. Trikkas, *ECN: 1951-1967. The New Face of the Left*, Athens, Themelio, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> C. Geertz, *Ideology as a Cultural System*, in D. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*, New York, Free Press, 1964.

same time, the “regime” of the right-wing government with the exclusion of communists, imprisonments, exiles, dissidents is projected, as well as the paper of social convictions regarding the assumption of professional positions in the public sector, but also for the attribution of rights in wider areas.

The whole day of protests, we were in our Departments. From there, we started everything. We wrote, we removed posters. More and more, came people. The Departments opened up.

I never felt young. Always, I learned something for home. My mother was excited, because I was a student. My father said to me, to get not crazy. I said I go to protests, without any excuse. I heard every time in the speeches of Papandreou, the phrase young. The same sentence, that I heard by the Left Organisation.

I jumped and said that I am young and can change the world. Since then, I said I study to get a profession. Not in the public sector, because (as communist) was not allowed.

I was a vital person. I believed that by Papandreou, I will not marry son after my study. We invested a lot by him. Later, all this ended by the junta, the dictatorship.

The interviewers emphasize the attribute of been student, as well as the correlation between the scientists/science and to the organisation of the state, or even more to the cultural changes. The structural scientific discourse emerges within this dynamic discourse produced by the university youth. Their positions are expressed by the dynamic youth of the “elite” who have high educational capital and who claim a position in a political system that “moves” in traditional terms<sup>19</sup>. The theme of modernisation is associated with political rationalism, political liberalism, and political ethics, which reject existing right-wing politics in humanist terms as well. This is an important finding in our research, because their political discourse and their ritualistic action in the terms of E. Durkheim create a social field, which political deregulation is considered the result of the lack of a scientific perspective. At this level, political exclusions, as well as the wider issues of social inequalities are understood and interpreted also at the level of scientific political discourse.

For us, women, it was important to be in the university, of course in departments frequented by women. Some female students studied in the department of mathematics. I always wondered about the relationships with the male students. Later, she emigrated to Switzerland.

I worked in many jobs. I was not a bourgeois student. It's not accidentally that they call me worker. Always my hands were a little dirty. When I heard from Papandreou that science will be everywhere, I began to believe, that the black period of the conservatives was finished, as well as their privileges. I couldn't see any more priests and political layers. My best friend was in the Pedagogical Institute. He told me about the educational projects. The vision of the popular language, the *Demotike*, the kids in the school desks, the end of poverty. In the University, I was one of them, with shoes full of holes. Nobody gave any attention to that. In this situation was me and some others.

When I heard the speech of Papandreou in the University, I saw myself as a scientist in the public sector, without been necessary to belong in a conservative family.

<sup>19</sup> K. Panteloglou, *The Restless Youth of the '60s, the Type of Social Vanguard*, Athens, private edition, 2002.

Their discourse shows up issues of social classes, but even of social sex. It is not accidentally, that in that period in the discourse of social sex are involved women left organizations but also bourgeois with the scope of acquire high hierarchy positions. The scientific political analysis examines issues of social research, which are framed by political discourse, in order to highlight and strengthen the need for policy change, but also the consequences of political “fixations” and obsessions on the right-wing “political correctness”. Even people belonging to the upper classes, mainly women, express this intentionality with their high educational capital to join professional roles of increased social prestige<sup>20</sup>. The clientelist system is also directly disapproved – that is, the citizens’ desire to be recruited in the public sector through the political interventions of government officials. The demand for meritocracy is embodied in the expanded demand for political liberalism, modernisation<sup>21</sup> of economic rational development by strengthening the primary and secondary sectors of production within an expanding confidence in the Union Centre Party to “eliminate” the “lawless” policy that prevailed<sup>22</sup>.

Poverty, everywhere poverty. We, the children from the country, suffered a lot. In Athens the situation was better for some people in particular for those working in the public sector. The goal was a post in the public sector. The flower shops near the parliament worked very well.

Many flower bucket, addressed to the parliamentary members with the intention to earn a post in public sector. I believed that Papandreou would put an end to that. In Christmas, when I returned to my village, realised the poverty and the analphabetism. Everybody, who want to write a letter, I wrote it for him, or had a request, or to order something, I did it for him. The wind of change arrived even in the village. Everybody had expectations.

A lot of brochures were available by the women of the Department. I was in the chemical department, and I am luffing now because of the bullying. I heard a lot of comments. In 64 I was almost ready to abandon the study. Papandreou saved me. I don't know, I get angry and thought, I could make it.

We considered, by the interviewers, as necessary to focus on the education discourse, in order to correlate them with the other themes. Here lies the methodological advantage, because we can follow previous observations and to increase the reflections and to show up how education determines other issues. The issue of civic literacy is highlighted as a dominant element in the reform of society. Literacy is associated with the modernisation of economic and political structures towards rational choices of development and the involvement of social subjects as citizens in the system. Indirectly, the abolition of the privileges of the upper social classes is highlighted in terms of the structures of opportunity they had in the system and especially in their involvement in the right-wing political system with their participation in strategic positions in institutions, the public sector, political institutions and institutions for the exercise of «legitimate violence»<sup>23</sup>. In this

<sup>20</sup> I. Lambiri, *Social Change in a Greek Country Town*, Athens, Centre of Economic Research, 1965.

<sup>21</sup> G. Langrod, *Réorganisation de la fonction publique en Grèce*, Paris, OECD, 1965; L. Lindberg, *Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1963.

<sup>22</sup> M. Dobb, *Economic Growth and Underdeveloped Countries*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1963.

<sup>23</sup> T.B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1965; T.H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1964; A. Marwick, *The Sixties*:

context, the argument for the loss of rights of illiterates in understanding socio-political conditions and in creating opportunities within the system is strengthened. In social and political terms, it emerges that with illiteracy, the manipulation of a large number of citizens, mainly citizens of the province, is strengthened<sup>24</sup>.

University professors, in particular those conservatives, they started to get gray hair. In the exams they were the most tolerant. The scope was not the failure. The Secretary of the ministry came to the chemistry labor to discuss with us. Among the representative of the students were even member of the Parliament of PASOK and the Leftists. I remember the way how the present our demands. It was this enthusiasm to speak intensive and very much in order to influence.

My sister visited the youngest class of the Gymnasium, when we heard about the popular language (*demotike*), we screamed loud in the balcony, *Demotike*. Moreover, as they said in Gymnasium to use the written form in *demotike*. By the student elections, some of us we said, no more illiterate.

Like a joke the conservatives were mocking us and said philosophy will be spoken in the language of the Shepard's.

In the Philosophical department book changes or the use of *demotike* in conferences were forbidden. I remembered, we follow some conferences, organized by philologist. I Was in the Philosophical department of Athens, nothing like that of Thessaloniki.

In the final meeting, after the five settings, the emphasis was a holistic evaluation, so that the period of 1963-1965 could be connected with the previous period, the following dictatorship and the present day. It was crucial, because the goal was a new approchement of several issues and to close a period with those, which through their memories, opened us new perceptions and new interpretations. In this final phase of the interviews, following the completion of a long period of contacts, we felt that we had to address this interconnection of past, present, and future, while being aware of the project's difficulty, because we wanted to avoid unambiguous political references to parties of choice. Accordingly, the discussion focused on socio-political considerations with an emphasis on the fields that had already been considered in previous interviews. The first comparative view, with the dictatorship that followed, yielded evidence for the undoing of expectations, the end of an act, the weakening of an undertaking towards change. As it seems, the "concept of change" was strongly promoted as a policy of the period 1963-1965 and less as a policy of the later period 1981-1985, when PASOK came to power, expressing the applied socialist perspective<sup>25</sup>. The important elements that emerge show that the progress over these years does not express the demands of the period and, in fact, consider that social inequalities remain, political modernisation has not been achieved despite the promotion of democratic principles, and what they are

*Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958-c.1974*, London, Bloomsbury Reader, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> A. Vrychea, K. Gavroglou, *Attempts to Reform Higher Education 1911-1981*, Thessaloniki, Contemporary Issues, 1982.

<sup>25</sup> A. Meloni, *1961-1981. The Facts and the Faces*, Athens, Livani, 2002.



particularly concerned about is the “young category” – in fact, the youth –, referring to a “lost generation”.

If you asked me to say only one word, I would say hope, that something will change in our lives. The conservatives after 1961 were unbearable. Education was for a few, girls out of questions.

1967. Comes the end, the dictatorship. Everything went back. Fear again and again!

I have memories. Many times, I think, that we lived a short two-year period, others lived in 1968. Unfortunately, came the dictatorship.

As an educator, I see that many demands from today, we put them also in that time. Poor boys, out of school, as a kind of school student outflow. Life has still the same goals.

Issues of social inequality are still demands. Some headway was made, but [...] I don't know, perhaps the crisis period has further reinforced inequalities. I am not optimistic.

My generation was building a future – we had hope. I remember some demonstrations where people applauded us. They saw something to us... we were injustice with the young. There is no future for me, but I doubt there is for them either.

### *Conclusions*

It seems that the period 1963-1965 created high expectations to the transition to a new aera of democratic and political and economic progress<sup>26</sup>. In these expectations the main medium of transformation was the education and the social subjects, i.e. the students, maximise an expectation for social mobility. They consider that the scientific discourse could reverse conservative policies and could end the civil war ambience, and the still existing confrontation between right and left political parties. The new generation of students, appreciate the distinction to take a leading position in the production of a political discourse about equality and humanism. The emotional projections increase the connection with the political paradigm and the role of young people in the society.

Their memories of the past highlight all these elements, which they would like to forget, to eliminate.

They emphasize not only to the political antagonism, but also analphabetism, which they consider as a necessary process to progress, political and democratic ideas, but even individual ambitions, opportunities, and professional skills. For the students, the notions of the end of an epoch, build the begin of a new one. For the left and central political movements these notions express the progressive ideas, in particular from Europe and the USA. The memories of the interviewers rebuild, reconstruct a period, which they lived as students, and the expressed ideas, desires, but even more the satisfaction, that they were protagonists, parts of an elite social movement, been students of high tertiary universities,

<sup>26</sup> E. Kalerante, *Educational Culture and Socio-Political Discourse: “The Short History of Educational Policy 1963-1965 in the Great History of the 1960’s”*, Athens, 24 Grammata, 2021.

and with this role could create, shape a biography, which involved an ethic and values of a *conditio humana*<sup>27</sup>.

Greek students in that period are not isolated, but are in contact with the international culture and the circulation of ideas. The relationship of youth with social movements is strongly highlighted<sup>28</sup>, which are manifested internationally, but also more widely the political concern, which is also developing within Greece in Universities, Institutes and educational institutions<sup>29</sup>. This is a fertile stage, where the concept of progress of economic and political modernisation is linked to education<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, inequality in educational opportunities is conceptualised as regression in multiple political and social fields. The “short” two years were comprehensive in dense political and social messages, which formed wider convergences with the legalisation of rationalism as a result of scientific investigation of dysfunctional sectors, politics, economy and education in Greece<sup>31</sup>.

This progress is interrupted by conservative political forces latest by the dictatorship between 1967-1974, which mirrors the disappointment, the return to previous conservative models and the deregulation. As shown by our interviews, for the social subjects dictatorship was perceived as a return to more intense far-right politics than the 1950-1962 period. Especially for the youth, the triptych of fatherland, religion, and family formed a conservative coherent framework, where all political intentions for democracy and political humanism were negated. The seven-year dictatorship is interpreted as a period of “conservative regression”, which, especially regarding this generation, cancelled out structures of opportunity, mainly for the underprivileged social classes, who once again, and perhaps more intensely, saw themselves being evaluated with obsolete political criteria through the ranking of right or left. This classification model incorporated corresponding interpretations for the stereotypical roles of men and women, for the stereotypical approach to education. It is no coincidence that research was disconnected from theory and political application, so that the political content of nationalism enriched with religious dogmatic discourse negated political democratic principles and the progressive youth culture.

Later, after the end of dictatorship in 1974, will follow a new period of expectations and hope, which according to the interviewers is different from the period of 1963-1965, and is partly recognizable in the first governance of PASOK, the socialist party of A. Papandreou, between 1981-1985. The period after the dictatorship, as presented by the interviewees, was technically divided into two sub-periods, one until 1981 and the other from 1981 to 1985. The end of the dictatorship found the social subjects of our research in professional positions, which did not correspond to their educational capital.

<sup>27</sup> Ch. Wulf, *Einfuehrung in die Anthropologie der Erziehung*, Weinheim und Basel, Beltz, 2001; Greek transl. by G. Tzartzas, *Anthropology of Education, Homo Humanus Novus*, Athens, IWN, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> C. Tilly, *Social Movements 1768-2004*, Athens, Savala, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> National Centre for Social Research, *Twenty-five Years of Operation*, Athens, EKKE, 1986.

<sup>30</sup> C. Moustaka, *Attitude, Sociometric Status and Ability in Greek Schools*, Athens, Social Sciences Centre, 1967.

<sup>31</sup> Ch. Iordanoglou, *The Greek Economy after 1950*, Athens, Bank of Greece, 2020; P. Kazakos, *Between State and Market: Economy and Economic Policy in Post-War Greece 1944-2000*, Athens, Patakis, 2001.

Some were forced to quit their studies. The outcome of dictatorship on a personal level, as is already recorded, had negated any form of opportunity structure for integration into the system in more democratic terms<sup>32</sup>. They certainly had a positive attitude towards the new condition that emerged following the dictatorship. However, expectations were limited because they saw similar policies evolving and the only functional opening was the intervention of International Organisations with the promotion of a general mobility towards the democratisation of political issues<sup>33</sup>. On the contrary, the period 1981-1985 rekindled expectations and desires for the new generation. The reference to socialism and the new social projects strengthened references to social equality, the dynamics of the middle class, the undoing of clientelist policies, etc. The broader issues raised are the strengthening of education and the confidence that this increased perspective for education will contribute to social mobility by reducing social inequalities, at a time when social-mindedness is also being abolished. The periods from 1985 until today are not further analysed. What is highlighted is the more difficult environment of the “crises” by emphasizing the social exclusion and marginalisation of young people. In comparison to the period 1963-1965 it is referred to as regression – the progress of technology is not evaluated, nor is emphasis placed on elements of political democracy, because the condensed incomplete content of opportunities for young people is prioritised. Summarising our approach, which is essentially the subjects’ biographical analysis, we focus on the increased expectations of the 1963-1965 generation and the exclusions of today’s young people, where the interviewees believe that, in a period of increased wealth of multiple privileges, young people live with limited rights, without a welfare state, without structures, «manipulated by those who control them, even by their own parents».

<sup>32</sup> R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, New York, Free Press, 1963.

<sup>33</sup> J.E. Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece: History and Power, 1950-1974*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2009; UNESCO, *Alphabétisation, 1965-1967*, Paris, UNESCO, 1968; G. Papadopoulos, *Education 1960-1990 the OECD perspective*, Paris, OECD, 1994.



## ABSTRACTS



# Abstracts of the contributions to the 1<sup>st</sup> volume

## *The School and Its Many Pasts: The Different Types of School Memory*

edited by Lucia Paciaroni

### ***The Future of Memory: Initial Steps in a Research Career and Emerging Historiographical Perspectives***

Cristina Yanes-Cabrera  
University of Sevilla (Spain)

The study of school memory requires two elements: first, knowing the types of conditioning factors that influence the approach to any research; and second, knowing how to orient yourself in the study of school memory, and review what has been studied and worked on the subject. To this end, it is inevitable to ask questions and try to find answers.

This article primarily targets newcomers to school memory research, aiming to analyze key aspects that should be considered when undertaking this type of study. It explores the importance of differentiating and connecting memory and history, discusses the reasons for studying school memory, highlights the precautions involved in such research, and presents notable collective works in the field. Finally, and as a conclusion, it offers new historiographical perspectives that will allow us to continue shaping the study of school memory.

Keywords: school memory; historical-educational research; historiographical perspectives.

### ***Images of the Changing School in Luigi Comencini's Television Documentary "I bambini e noi" (1970)***

Davide Allegra  
University of Bari "Aldo Moro" (Italy)

On the background of the industrial Turin of the early 1970s as it emerges from a selection of representations offered by movies and songs, the essay aims at reconstructing some features of the school renewal taking place at the time in the city, through the television documentary *I bambini e noi* directed by Luigi Comencini in 1970. The last episode of the documentary, entitled *Qualcosa di nuovo*, registers the encounter between the emerging proposal of the *animazione teatrale* and the pedagogical innovation of the *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa* and it shows the first full-time primary school experiments carried out in some of the working-class districts of Turin, thus anticipating and creating the conditions for the approval of Law no. 820 of 1971.

Keywords: *Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*; full-time primary school; theatre; television; Turin.



***The Infant School on Set. The Film “Chiedo asilo” by Marco Ferreri and the Educational Imaginary in 1970s Italy***

Elisa Mazzella

Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan (Italy)

This study will examine the film *Chiedo asilo* (Seeking Asylum) directed by Marco Ferreri in 1979, and its contribution to the representation and construction of the collective mindset in 1970s Italy. This analysis will cover teaching methods, and the representation of the figure of the teacher and of the class. The film seems to challenge the inessential trappings of school, family, and other traditional institutions of the day. The eccentric approach of the young male teacher thus becomes an expression of, and vehicle for, innovative and unconventional educational methods in sharp contrast with traditional educational approaches, inspired by ideals of freedom, the importance of cultivating children's imagination, and the need to ground teaching in the encounter with the real world.

Keywords: collective school memory; history of schooling; infant school; teacher; 1970s.

***Pupils and Teachers at School: Memories and Social Imagination through Cinema***

Dalila Forni

Link University (Italy)

The present contribution aims to offer an analysis of school representations in the second half of the twentieth century cinema. Cinema is one of the main tools that work in the construction of our socially shared imaginary as it transmits perceptions and canons related to school dynamics, habits, pedagogical values. Through the selection and analysis of some international cinematographic works, the contribution intends to develop a preliminary investigation on the construction of the characters of pupils and teachers in films produced in the second half of the twentieth century, tracing recurrent lines and relevant traits. The study will also favour a gender perspective, so as to highlight differences and common features between the socially shared image of male and female students or educative figures.

Keywords: cinema; students; childhood; school; gender.

***Between School Memory and Visual Culture: the Photo Albums of the Porta Romana Art Institute in Florence (1939-1962)***

Chiara Naldi

University of Florence (Italy)

The School of Photography at the Porta Romana Art Institute in Florence was opened in 1937, for educational purposes but also with the aim of providing advertising and propaganda material for the Fascist regime. The Institute now holds a valuable photographic collection, most notably a series of 17 albums containing photographs of *laboratory artefacts*, *pupils at work*, and *national exhibitions in which the Institute played a leading role* in the 1930s. Although the photographic production preserved in the albums was produced mainly for educational and documentary purposes, the development of a visual culture pertaining to the photographic culture of the time is evident. This photographic heritage of the Florentine Art Institute is one in which school memory, documentation and visual culture intertwine, yielding unexpected results.

Keywords: school memory; photography school; photographic archive; art institute; Florence.

***School Life Representation in the Photographic Images of the Dossier Series “Biblioteca di Lavoro” by Mario Lodi***

Silvia Pacelli, Valentina Valecchi

Roma Tre University (Italy)

The purpose of this essay is to offer an historiographical analysis of the photographic documentation in the dossier series *Biblioteca di Lavoro* and examine the way school is depicted in it. *Biblioteca di Lavoro* was an innovative editorial project directed by Mario Lodi between 1971 and 1979. The experiences recorded in its 130 dossiers reflect the pedagogical vision developing in Italy in the late 1960s, inspired by Célestin Freinet's ideas, and the teaching methods of the Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa. The photographs are valuable testimony to an anti-authoritarian school movement and reveal the democratic and renewed idea of school of those years.

Keywords: *Biblioteca di Lavoro*; school memory; visual memory; photography; Mario Lodi.

***Representing the Institutions between 1968 and Coming-of-Age Novels: the "Educational Video Memories" Database***

Chiara Martinelli

University of Florence (Italy)

This paper aims to investigate the reception of literature for children, and specifically of the coming-of-age novel, through the use of oral sources. For this purpose, the "Educational memories in video" database will be used, established by the University of Florence as part of the PRIN project. Through their analysis, the period of sixty-eight emerges, compared to the other decades, in terms of a different use and memory of reading; moreover, within that period, a clear gender demarcation is evident. Unlike men, who cite childhood and adolescent reading as a tool for escape into other worlds, for women coming-of-age novels assumed a transformative importance and questioned the traditional female paradigms.

Keywords: oral history; coming-of-age novel; gender history; memory; Italy.

***The Construction of an "Archive of Memory". School Memory through the Voice of Its Protagonists in 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Molise***

Rossella Andreassi, Valeria Viola

University of Molise (Italy)

This contribution intends to present the project for the construction of an "Archive of Memory", conducted by the work group of the Ce.S.I.S. and MuSEP of the University of Molise. The editorial project that analyse the development of schooling processes carried out in some areas of southern Italy in the period between the 1930 and the 80s of the twentieth century, has increasingly represented a fertile ground to deepen the issues raised by the use of oral sources; these require a particular procedure of construction in order to add elements as impartial as possible in the process of defining the school memory. The research stems from the heuristic contribution offered by studies aimed at enhancing the forms of memory that, in addition to the collective and public dimension, includes the subjective one, expressed through the ego-documents.

Keywords: school memory; oral sources; history of education.

***The School of "Fascism in Crisis" through the Memories of Pupils of the Time***

Francesco Bellacci

University of Florence (Italy)

In the historical-educational field, the study of school memories is now a consolidated trend thanks to which it is possible to shed light on a series of dynamics that have remained in the shadows in

the political-legislative reconstructions of the school of the past and partly also in the reconstructions that are more attentive to social history. The study of video testimonies on school and childhood memories between the 30s and 40s, collected between 2019 and 2022 for the PRIN project “School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation (Italy, 1861-2001)”, no doubt making a valuable contribution by providing unedited insights. We are interested in investigating the school memories surrounding some of the years of the Fascist dictatorship, to better understand the totalitarian dynamics in schools.

Keywords: fascism; memory; education; school; students.

***Learning Memory. The Impact of the Racial Laws on Three Roman High Schools: between Oblivion and Remembrance***

Tommaso Petrucciani

University of Macerata (Italy)

Following the establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day in Italy, memory has become a teaching subject in Italian schools. As the impact of the racial laws on education was commemorated, the school itself became an object of remembrance, in the context of a policy that allegedly sought to “not forget” the past as the generation of witnesses gave way to younger ones. This contribution discusses the case of three high schools in Rome (“Visconti”, “Tasso” and “Giulio Cesare”) that were strongly affected by the racial laws, and where the memory of the expulsion of Jewish students and teachers has become part of the schools’ identity. I will also describe the processes that – before the emergence of this *duty of remembrance* – led to a state of oblivion of those events on an individual, collective and public level.

Keywords: Holocaust remembrance day; politics of remembrance; racial laws; school oblivion; Italy.

***Rebuilding and Enhance Memory. The Activity of the Lower School “G. Perotti” of Turin***

Rocco Labriola

Lucanian Deputation of Homeland History (Italy)

The lower school “G. Perotti” in Turin has for some years been embarking on a process aimed at reconstructing and enhancing its nearly century-old history with a series of activities still in progress. This plan includes the publication of two volumes on the historical and pedagogical events of the school, the inauguration and reorganization of the archive, the establishment of a museum.

Keywords: school; school naming; museum; Turin.

***The Collodi School. Educational Atmospheres in the Work of Carlo Lorenzini***

Teresa Gargano, Simone di Biasio

Roma Tre University (Italy)

This work presents a reading of the work of Carlo Collodi from the perspective of his depiction of the era’s schools and the theories then governing education. The author of Pinocchio, a writer of a great many readers for young students, is thus revealed to have also been a sophisticated educationalist as he ventured into the heart of the Umberto era’s schooling policies. Via an analysis of his main works, especially the various Giannettinis, my aim is to provide insights into the school classrooms of an Italy which was, in the late 1800s, struggling to free itself of illiteracy and also of a children’s literature whose educational orientation was moralising. What emerges is the pre-eminence of attempts to modernise alluding to the advent of new media as educational aids.

Keywords: Carlo Collodi; Pinocchio; Giannettino; school; education; children’s literature.

***The Palidoro Children's House diaries of Irene Bernasconi (1915-1916)***

Martine Gilsoul

Roma Tre University (Italy)

After attending the Montessori course organised by the Società Umanitaria (1914-1915), Irene Bernasconi (1886-1970) began to work in one of the first Montessori Children's Houses in the Agro Romano, opened at the behest of Alessandro Marcucci, director of the Ente Scuole per i contadini (Schools for Farmers). This contribution presents the characteristics of two of her diaries: the Diary of the Children's House of Palidoro and a private diary. They provide insight into the daily life of the teacher and the many challenges she faced, along with the transformation of her pupils. Her teaching activity was innovative: she added activities not foreseen by Montessori. Through an approach inspired by micro-history, an unpublished chapter of the reception of the Montessori method in Italy unfolds.

Keywords: Irene Bernasconi; diary; pre-school; Montessori method; Agro Romano.

***"She Told Me to Read, Always Read". Itineraries of Reading Education through the Oral Testimonies of Teachers and Students of Yesterday***

Monica Dati

University of Florence (Italy)

The paper aims to trace, thanks to the video-testimonies contained in the "Memoria scolastica" web portal ([www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it)), a specific path dedicated to reading education: through the point of view of teachers and students this work wants to explore some important aspects such as instrumental learning, its teaching and its promotion, also making a quick reference to the debate on the textbook, and more generally to the history of the school and some of the problems that have affected the whole of our country, such as illiteracy. A first step to highlight the importance of oral sources in creating a reflection on reading, its multiple educational values with reference to one of the main contexts in which it is practiced, that of school.

Keywords: reading; reading history; digital history; oral history; school memories.

***The "Diario di una maestrina" of Maria Giacobbe and the Sardinian School***

Piera Caocci

University of "Gabriele d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara (Italy)

This essay aims to report on the contribution of the *Diary of a teacher*, an ego-document about the initial phase of teaching in poor, rural territories in North Sardinia, by the Sardinian writer Maria Giacobbe, whose well-known diary has helped us to better understand her social commitment and underline crucial aspects of her pedagogical method. Giacobbe taught during the postwar period, and she saw the situation of extreme poverty and illiteracy first-hand. Furthermore, in many Sardinian counties educational instruction had little value. Giacobbe created a harmonious, dynamic dialogue with her pupils, considering them worthy of care and attention, something which was unheard of in an educational culture based on rote learning and strict and often humiliating punishment.

Keywords: history of education; ego-document; teaching memory; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***Formation and Transformation. Memories around Early Childhood Educational Services in an "Educationally Poor" Context***

Maura Tripi

University of Catania (Italy)

The paper presents some findings from a research focused on public 0-3 educational services in Palermo and Catania (Italy). These services are characterised by low provision, lacks and limits compared to the law standards. Nevertheless, in this Southern Italian context, the pedagogical perspective may outline an alternative narrative to the dominant collective imaginary of a Southern “educationally poor” context, documenting a still relatively unknown historical process related to 0-3 services. Emerging from an interpretative perspective, two significant counter-narratives exemplify how nidi can be considered democratic levers, involved into transformative processes and emancipatory paths. Finally, a critical dimension suggests pedagogical research as a tool to actively enhance the recognition and legitimization of knowledge grounded in practice, activism and experience.

Keywords: ECE services; counter-narratives; professional development; critical poverty knowledge; community.

***School Architecture and Furniture in Italy, 1950-1970. Forms and Spaces of a Collective Memory***

Giulia Cappelletti

Roma Tre University (Italy)

The aim of this paper is to investigate the contribution of artists, architects, designers and entrepreneurs to the definition and diffusion of the “physical” representation of school and its features, through a selection of case studies. The purpose to circumscribe this research to a historical period comprising the end of World War Two and the 1970s takes into account the lively circulation of artistic and design objects for school, frequently designed and produced in conjunction with the building of schools themselves and in line with the tastes and aesthetics of these years, and their links with historical-political events. The research also aims to frame the active contribution of these authors to the evolution of the socio-cultural and socio-pedagogical discourse over on the school at large.

Keywords: school furniture; visual arts; school buildings; collective memory; visual memory.

***Plaques and Statues as School Memories. The Case of the Monumental Tributes to Giovanni Cena***

Valentino Minuto

University of Macerata (Italy)

This contribution is aimed at highlighting the historiographic significance of the monumental memorialization of school personalities. Epigraphic and sculptural works dedicated to characters of the school past are not only commemorative media; plaques and statues also fulfil an educational function, celebrating the values that school must pass on to the new generations. Therefore, monumental sources can be used to reconstruct the ideal representation of the role assigned to school by the ruling classes. But the reasons behind the choice of installing plaques and statues do not only regard the promotion of a civil pedagogy. Monuments are also the expression of a self-celebratory strategy implemented by the constituted authorities to legitimate themselves as the guardians of a dignified school past. The fruitfulness of monumental sources for the history of school memory is supported by illustrating a case study: the monumental tributes to the educational philanthropist Giovanni Cena from 1918 to 1927.

Keywords: school memory; monumental sources; official school imaginary; political use of memory; Giovanni Cena.

***Child-care institutions. Memories between Public Celebrations and Collective Representations***

Sofia Montecchiani

University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara (Italy)

Between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries many Italian structures dedicated to the assistance of abandoned and orphaned children were closed or converted, but their work was not promptly replaced with adequate compensatory measures. In the collective memory, they are often remembered as gloomy places, a perception that does not do justice to their complex social and pedagogical role taken on over time. This meaning is often taken into account instead in public and official celebrations, or in the museums' exhibitions. Therefore, a deep hiatus emerges between public and collective memory in reference to this type of childcare institutions that it is worth investigating with a necessary extension of the sources, in order to understand and light up their real charitable and educational value.

Keywords: child-care institutions; abandoned children; public memory; Italy; 19<sup>th</sup> century; 21<sup>st</sup> century.

***The "Raggio di Sole" Open-Air School and Its Directors in Collective and Public Memory***

Giulia Fasan

University of Padua (Italy)

This paper aims to reconstruct how the "Raggio di Sole" school and after-school centre – established in Padua (north-eastern Italy) in 1905 and 1907 – and its directors were represented in public and collective memory, with particular reference to the figure of Alessandro Randi (1858-1944), president of the association that established it. Randi's commitment to education and public health led to the "Raggio di Sole" and, by extension, Padua's local authority, becoming an important model, an example of best practice that was followed and studied not only in Italy but also abroad. The aim here is to retrace the historical, pedagogical and cultural dimensions of memory and legacy regarding the "Raggio di Sole" school in Padua and its directors.

Keywords: open-air school; collective school memory; public school memory; Alessandro Randi; pedagogical positivism.

***Villa Emma in Nonantola, between History and Public Memory***

Silvia Panzetta

University of Bologna (Italy)

Nonantola is a town located between Modena and Bologna which has a rich medieval history thanks to the Benedictine Abbey founded by Lombard duke Anseldo. During the twentieth century Nonantola was the scene of very important educational experiences and among these it is of fundamental interest the rescue of seventy-three Jewish youths and their teachers that arrived at Villa Emma in July 1942 and in April 1943. This group, that was in severe danger after the Armistice of September 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, was saved thanks to the actions of some teachers of the local seminary, the rector of the seminary, a local doctor, many families and an organization from Modena that had already expatriated in Switzerland British officers that had escaped from the prison camps in Modena and Carpi. On the basis of the existing bibliography and recent new research we will investigate further this event, known mainly at a local level, to place it into the larger history and memory of the educators and teachers that contributed to saving the Jews from extermination. The experience was characterized by forms of active pedagogy linked with other educators that, at the time, were very advanced, like don Zeno Saltini, which were realized in the area of Nonantola after WWII. Don Zeno Saltini also offered hospitality to children from Southern Italy and the affair was noted as "Trains of happiness". On the basis of new archival and printed sources, already found and reworked in terms of historical narration, it is proposed to examine

the forms of public memory with epigraphs, tombstones and other, present in the area of Nonantola, to honor the history and collective memory in these complex political, historical and educative events that characterized Nonantola during and after the Second World War, thanks to the bright personalities of don Arrigo Beccari, monsignor Ottaviano Pelati and Ida Nascimbeni.

Keywords: Villa Emma; Nonantola; Jews; epigraphs; collective memory; public memory.

***Public School Memory between Centralist Policies and Local Instances. Giulitta Ferraris Well-Deserving of Education and the Termoli “Gesù e Maria” Boarding School in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century***

Annarita Pilla

University of Molise (Italy)

This contribution intends to examine the field of merit awarded to teachers by the Ministry of Education in the first decade of the Twentieth century. The contribution is part of the broader framework of the research conducted by the Molise-Basilicata research unit for the creation of the Honours Database. The honours to school staff can be considered as forms of the school's public memory policies introduced by the liberal elite. Specifically, the paper wants to focus on the merit conferred in 1910 on Sister Giulitta Ferraris, teacher and headmistress of the «Jesus and Mary» Orphanage-Education Centre in Termoli. To this end, the case study analyses the specificity and relevance that the “Gesù e Maria” Institute had in the Molise region, whose history and fortune continued until the early 2000s, contributing to the education of many in the area. The attention of our research group has focused not only on honours in general, but also on identifying the names of the various well-wishers by reconstructing their profiles from a professional point of view, which are gradually being entered into database on the «Memoria Scolastica Pubblica» website. From a methodological point of view, we made use of sources that are completely unused in the panorama of school history studies.

Keywords: public school memory; honours; medals; education.



# Abstracts of the contributions to the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume

## *The School and Its Many Pasts: Official and Public Memories of School*

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani

### ***School Memories and Travelling Iconic Images of Education in the Nineteenth Century***

María del Mar del Pozo Andrés

University of Alcalá (Spain)

This essay – delivered as one of the keynote lectures of the International Conference “The School and Its Many Pasts: School Memories between Social Perception and Collective Representation” – attempts to draw the attention of historians of education to a little-known primary source, the prints or engravings depicting schools of the past. Throughout the chapter I will demonstrate that these objects were the material medium through which school images travelled around the world, even many years after the invention of photography. My claims are based on the study of some cases of Nineteenth century travelling images that crossed time and space, became iconic images of the school, and probably contributed to the construction of a transnational collective memory of education.

Keywords: engravings; school memories; travelling images; iconic images; 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **SECTION *The Official Memory of School and Education***

#### ***The International University Games of 1933. The Fascist Regime and the Issue of Commemorative Stamps as a Memory Policy for a “Glorious” Italian University Tradition***

Luigi Aurelio Pomante

University of Macerata (Italy)

From 1<sup>st</sup> to 10 September 1933, Turin hosted the International University Games whose organisation, for Italy, was entrusted to the Fascist University Groups. This event, like many others that were held one after another during the 1930s, was part of the regime’s declared attempt to “build”, also artificially, a very specific image of Italian universities through a series of official representations and/or public commemorations promoted by the ministry on the basis of a specific memory policy. To highlight the importance of the Turin event, a set of four stamps was issued. The stamps were of different colours but showed the same iconography. Authorised by Royal Decree No. 945 dated 13 July, it was issued on 16 August 1933 and remained in circulation for four months, until 31 December of the same

year. Designed by Amedeo Pesci, the series represented a clear and transparent example of instrumental propaganda. The event celebrated, in fact, beyond its sports value, was part of that university «invention of tradition» promoted by Mussolini and slavishly implemented by the Fascist leadership throughout the Fascist period with the aim of rebuilding the “glorious” Italian university traditions, whether real or assumed. Hence the «cult of the origins», which ended up by being officiated everywhere and, in particular, during the most significant student events. No collective event of Fascism, therefore, was able to escape this inspiring logic. Even the Turin University Games and the related historical Carousel of Italian Universities, which had the task of promoting the event and recovering and celebrating the memory of a renowned cultural past, reflected the will to exhume and exalt the university tradition of the Peninsula, especially the medieval or early renaissance one to make it a pivotal and essential element in strengthening the national identity.

Keywords: public memory; invention of tradition; history of university; fascist propaganda; fascism; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***“Educational Italianness”. National Stereotypes and Pedagogical Localism in the Centenary Celebrations of Italian and Foreign Educationalists between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries***

Juri Meda

University of Macerata (Italy)

The centenaries of the birth and death of some of the greatest Italian and foreign educators between the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s offer the opportunity to affirm the concept of “educational italianness”. Our young nation – in search of illustrious antecedents and its own cultural traditions – is committed to defining the uncertain boundaries of its national identity also in the pedagogical field. But what are the characteristics of this “educational italianness”? Using the speeches written for official celebrations, the contents of celebratory epigraphs, occasional flyers and other unpublished sources, this work will attempt to analyse this concept, highlighting how it is not substantiated by scientific evidence but rather by nationalistic stereotypes, which, however, had an easy grip on public opinion and quickly become part of the common sense. The official celebrations of Italian Aporti and Thuringian Fröbel, in addition to highlighting the differences between the pedagogical methods of these two bearers of kindergartens, for example, pointed out that the former was a Catholic and the latter a Protestant. There were several attempts to reconstruct the ancient Italian origins of the Pestalozzi family, almost as if the pedagogical greatness of the Swiss educator – who was one of the first to establish the concept of the “modern school” – could be based on a genealogical and hereditary basis. Even humanist Vittorino da Feltre was used as reference to make him the illustrious patriarch of entire generations of teachers to whom the task of “making Italians” was entrusted and continued to be entrusted. Therefore, it turns out that the “educational italianness” is not based on specific pedagogical characteristics, but on a cultural archetype that is functional to re-signifying the past and creating a solid cultural tradition to limit the dependence of our educators and teachers from foreign pedagogical thought and especially from the German one, which had always exerted a strong influence. In this context, it is also possible to identify another concept: that of the “small pedagogical homelands” that competed – according to the best localist tradition – on the topic of the origins of some illustrious thinkers and pedagogues, as if it were impossible to disregard the environmental data and the geographical context to explain their greatness. The historical dispute between Aporti’s birthplace (San Martino dell’Argine) and the city where he built his first kindergartens (Cremona), for example, was triggered by the centenaries of his birth and death. Xenomania and xenophobia thus alternate fiercely in these celebrations, which reveal their dependence on the collective imaginary, which grew over time within a given community rather than on actual historical reality.

Keywords: public memory; school; pedagogy; Italy; 19<sup>th</sup> century; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***School Architecture as Public School Memory: the Portuguese Case of “Plano dos Centenários”***

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Polytechnic of Guarda (Portugal)

With this paper we aimed to find in what ways school buildings may crystallize a memory that underlies educational practices. For nearly 30 years (1940-1969) a single architectural blueprint was replicated throughout Portugal, giving birth to hundreds of school buildings that would preserve political memory as well as school memory. Using bibliographic research we analyze in what way memory from these places may elevate each building to a teaching memorial. Nowadays, these schools from *Plano dos Centenários* (Centenarians Plan) evoke officially to all those who attended them a shared felling of belonging to a certain community in a certain place and time.

Keywords: school memory; architecture; *Plano dos Centenários*.

***Memory and Celebration of the “Heroic Youth”. The Youth Organisations of the Mussolini Regime, School and the Creation of the “New Fascist Man”***

Roberto Sani

University of Macerata (Italy)

In 1932, the Central Presidency of the Opera Nazionale Balilla published the Heroic Youth book that «in order to remove it from the ephemeral life of the newspapers and preserve it as a noble example of virile education» included the memory «of the acts of valor performed by the Balilla and Avanguardisti in the short period from May 1927 to today». In total, there are about 161 «heroic events» involving 181 Balilla and Avanguardists, to whom we must add another 60 names of youths who distinguished themselves during major disasters for their «heroic sacrifice» and their commitment to the community. The ultimate purpose of the publication, which was reissued several times until the fall of Fascism, was to highlight, «independently of any official recognition», the «heroic value of the actions that the Presidency of the Opera deems the result of the admiration and of the example given by all the very young Black-shirts». Through an in-depth analysis of the short yet accurate reports of «heroic actions» in the publication, an analysis of the language used and the study of the type of “virtuous actions” selected, exalted and celebrated, Roberto Sani’s work highlights how the celebration of the myth of “heroic youth”, forged by the youth organizations of the regime according to the principles of Mussolini’s ideology (virile education, boldness, love for sacrifice, no fear of danger, etc.) represents a fundamental chapter in the broader project of creating the new fascist man, or rather an attempt to promote – through the memory and celebration of the “heroic youth” through the school channel and that of the associations – a civil and political education of young Italian generations integrally inspired by Mussolini’s ideology.

Keywords: history of education; public memory; fascism; propaganda; childhood; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***School Jubilees as an Opportunity for the Implementation of New Instruments of Memory Building: the Case of the 150 Years of Scuola Magistrale in Locarno (Switzerland)***

Wolfgang Sahlfeld

University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (Switzerland)

The paper describes and discusses the initiatives for an academic jubilee in Switzerland. The Teacher education school of the Italian-speaking Canton Ticino was founded in 1873, that is 150 years ago. It became a university for teacher education (now called DFA-SUPSI) in 2002, and one of the interesting questions is whether this interruption in the school’s tradition is or not still a problem. The envisaged initiatives are the result of a process-oriented approach which is partly the result of the idea

of Public history. That's why I refer to the *Manifesto della Public History of Education* as an interpretative framework for the description and discussion of our project.

Keywords: public history of education; school jubilees; teacher education; Switzerland.

### ***The Public Representation of Schools in Philately***

Fabio Targhetta

University of Macerata (Italy)

This work aims to investigate the contribution of philately to the public representation of school and key figures of the pedagogical and educational world. In particular, eighteen commemorative or celebratory stamps issued by the Italian Republic from 1954 to 2001 will be reviewed. The main purpose is to study not only the possible effects on the collective imagination, but also the official reasons that motivated the production of philatelic artifacts. The major sources will be the decrees published in the «Gazzetta Ufficiale» (Official Gazette) from which all the formal elements can be identified (size, value, colour, circulation, subject represented, text and series), and above all the «Bollettini illustrativi» (Illustrative Bulletins). These last sources – in lengthy texts signed by illustrious personalities (from the Minister of Education to eminent figures in culture and pedagogy, including the principals of the schools celebrated) – report the official reasons that inspired the creation of the stamp. By analysing the text it will be possible to see the gap between history and memories and the political nature of some biographical “re-interpretations”. I refer, for example, to the commemorative stamp on occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Giovanni Gentile, issued in 1991, or the commemorative stamps of historical schools designed to magnify – together with the role played by these institutions at local and national level – the commitment historically made by the Italian State in the field of education. Until now, the philatelic sources were largely neglected by historical-educational studies, but if properly investigated they can open interesting and never-seen-before opportunities to understand the public representation of history, and in particular of the school and educational past.

Keywords: stamps; public memory; school; pedagogues; education.

### ***Ambrosian School Memories. Milan City Council's Construction of Its Own Glorious Educational Tradition from the Italian Unification through the Aftermath of World War II***

Carla Ghizzoni

Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan (Italy)

This essay approaches the study of memory by drawing on the local dimension of historical-educational research to investigate the construction and layering of Italian school memories. Specifically, it documents the efforts of Milan City Council to publicize the objectively impressive outcomes of its education policies (especially in the domain of elementary education) over the period spanning Italian Unification and the Second World War. Key to the focus of inquiry is Milan's public use of its educational past, both to reinforce a sense of identity among the various participants in school communities and the population at large and to endorse the key role of the City Council in education provision.

Keywords: history of education; local history; educational tradition; Milan; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Representations of Disability in the Great Turin Exhibitions at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1884-1911)***

Maria Cristina Morandini

University of Turin (Italy)

Many and diverse were the institutions for the disabled that took part in the great Turin exhibitions

at the turn of the twentieth century. The official documents and the press coverage of the day portray disability as confined to the domain of charity or welfare, in keeping with both the policies of the liberal State and with the pitying and pious sentiment that typically informed attitudes to persons with disabilities. In the context of the exhibitions, the institutions for the deaf and dumb, blind, rickety and mentally retarded themselves de-emphasized their educational dimension, prioritizing helping their charges to successfully integrate into society.

Keywords: disability; universal exhibitions; charity; professional domain; handicrafts.

***Procession to the “Honorable Son”: Memory and Representations in the Funeral Rites of Felipe Tiago Gomes (Brasília/DF and Picuí/PB – Brazil, 1996/2011)***

Ariane dos Reis Duarte

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)

Estela Denise Schütz Brito

University of Vale Do Rio Dos Sinos (Brazil)

This study stems from a broader survey and aims to investigate the procedures adopted in relation to conducting the funerals of Felipe Tiago Gomes, founder of the educational supporter *Comunidade Nacional de Escolas da Comunidade/CNEC*. The character received two large funerals. The first one, on the occasion of his death in 1996, in the city of Brasília-DF, with the presence of authorities and honors granted to heads of state. The second one, in 2010, in the hometown of the deceased, Picuí-PB, when his remains were transferred, resulting in an event that mobilized the local population in order to receive their “honorable son”. We infer that both events occurred in an attempt to keep the name of the character and his legacy alive, following a process of appropriation regarding the honoree.

Keywords: social memory; funeral; Felipe Tiago Gomes; appropriation.

***Metamorphosis of School Memory: the Case of Adelfo Grosso between Individual, Collective and Public Memory***

Mirella D’Ascenzo

University of Bologna (Italy)

Within the framework of international studies on school memories, in this contribution I will focus attention on the school memory of Adelfo Grosso, director of the Normal School (*Scuola Normale*) in Bologna after the Unification of Italy, in honour of whom a stone plaque was erected and a primary school named in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both still present in the city today. Following first-hand research based on previously unexplored archive materials and printed sources, the passage from the individual to the collective, and thereafter the public memory of Adelfo Grosso will be traced, aiming to outline the metamorphosis of the object of memory as well as the representation of schools and teachers within the complex game of school memory, among light and oblivion.

Keywords: history of education; school memories; public memory; Adelfo Grosso; Italy.

***A Monument in Memory of the Teachers***

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Austro-Hungary brought great changes to the countries that were under its administration. Thus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which remained outside European currents after the Ottoman rule, began its new path and soon witnessed new approaches to education, culture, and other important areas for the country’s development. Teachers came from other parts of the Monarchy to share their experiences

and knowledge with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They lived the torment and toil of the people they found and they were encouraged by their approach to open up and reveal their hearts and warmth. The lives of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian people were the motives of poets, writers, painters, and other artists, most of whom also worked as teachers. One such expert was the teacher and poet Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević, who did not live long in BiH but left a rich work and remained in the memory of his comrades and ordinary people who still visit his grave in Sarajevo's St. Joseph Cemetery, where he and his wife rests in peace. This memorial was one of the few that was partly sponsored by the then Government. Teachers' tombs are of the great importance for the collective memory. They also revealed the transformations of the social image of teachers in cultural history in relation to various political and cultural contexts. However, working with students, teachers build monuments to themselves that are not immediately visible, but over time they are very evident and reveal the intellectual wealth of the individual as well as his commitment to the common good. Therefore, in this text I will present the process of creation and realization of the idea for the erection of a monument to these individuals who left a significant mark in the history of BiH and were kept in collective memory until today.

Keywords: teachers; commemoration; collective memories; monuments; government.

### ***Obituaries to Teachers on the Pages of Periodicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century***

Oleksandr Mikhno

Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine (Ukraine)

The article presents statistical, factual, and bibliographic information on obituaries of Ukrainian educators on the pages of periodicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are stored in the funds of the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine. Based on the historical and chronological approach, the main trends in the writing and publication of obituaries in Soviet pedagogical journals of the 1920s-1980s have been identified. The application of the decolonial approach to the analysis of the Soviet-era obituary on the example of the obituary of Vasyl Sukhomlynskyi (1918-1970) has been demonstrated. It has been noted that obituaries of the period of 1920s-1980s in the context of decolonization and decommunization of Ukrainian humanities are an important source of the history of Ukrainian education, in particular pedagogical biographical studies.

Keywords: obituary; pedagogical journal; Ukrainian educators; biography; history of education.

### ***Medals, Diplomas and Lifetime Allowances. Honours as a Form of Promotion for a Public Policy of School Memory***

Alberto Barausse

University of Molise (Italy)

The contribution aims to focus on the origins and development of public school memory based on the awarding of honours. The awarding of honours was an increasingly widespread practice during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This practice was associated with the awarding of insignia with a strong symbolic value such as medals, diplomas or cash prizes. The essay aims to explore the heuristic potential and methodological issues related to the analysis of the different forms of school honours produced in the post-unification decades, from ministerial ones to those granted on the occasion of events, both local and national, as a tribute or celebration, or as an award to pupils or teachers. Finally, the text analyses the experience of some institutions or companies producing decorations, true "memory factories", a fundamental prerequisite for the widespread diffusion of "memory practices".

Keywords: public memory of school; medals and diplomas; schooling processes; Italy; 19<sup>th</sup> century; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***“Minor Educators”? Traces of the Public Memory of the School, between the Official History of Education and the Community’s History. The Case of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913)***

Marta Brunelli

University of Macerata (Italy)

The paper explores how the public and collective celebration and commemoration of educators, whom official historiography has often considered “minor figures”, has contributed to the construction of the identity of local communities. To this end, an exploratory investigation has been carried out to find out how many and what forms the public and collective memory of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913) took within the community of Ripatransone, a small center in the Marche Region, in which the educator was born and carried out his educational work. The first results evidenced that this figure has remained alive to this day and, although considered a minor educator by official educational historiography, the rootedness of Consorti in the collective imagination of his community is still able to testify how significant was the role he played between the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. In addition, the research has brought to attention a series of new forms of public memory of the school, like commemorative souvenir-postcards as well as collective commemorations in the Web 3.0, that deserve to be investigated further by research.

Keywords: public memory of school; minor educators; postcards; web 3.0; Emidio Consorti.

***Meritorious Experts of Physical Education: the Obituaries of the Gymnasiarchs in the Liberal Age***

Domenico Francesco Antonio Elia

«Aldo Moro» University of Bari (Italy)

The present contribution aims at re-enacting the memory of the masters of gymnastics consulting as sources the obituaries published on printed bulletins edited by the federations and associations in the Liberal Age. The investigation aims to enhance the value of the historical source of obituaries originating from the common public practice of commemorating the school past in the press. The relevance of this source derives from the fact that individual and collective memory indivisibly merge in the press. Therefore, the author reconstructs the masterly profiles of the gymnasiarchs that acted during the challenging period of institutionalisation of gymnastics in Italian schools to point out the early features of the figure of gymnastics teachers.

Keywords: obituaries; memory; gymnastics; school; Italy.

**SECTION *The “Sites of School Memory”***

***How Can History of Education Research Improve the Valorisation of the Educational Heritage in Museums and Vice Versa?***

Marc Depaepe

University of Leuven (Belgium) / University of Latvia at Riga (Latvia)

As a historian of education I want to explore in this paper possible avenues for rapprochement and cooperation between cultural-historical research about education on the one hand and the museum and heritage sector on the other. Initially, I had the idea to examine in the first place the developments of both fields in order to identify possible similarities and differences, after which I would in the second place come to the essence of how both could reinforce and improve each other – a thesis that I would



illustrate finally on the basis of the study of the school desk, the icon of the school patrimony. But, as I already have published on all these three items very recently, I decided to approach the same subject differently. Instead of repeating what I have already written elsewhere, I start here from my personal experiences, first in the context of school museums, and then from some recent encounters in the context of popularising my scientific research, both in the heritage sector and in the world of pedagogical training outside the university. Apparently, there too, it is beginning to become clear what one is missing by abolishing and/or neglecting the historical reflex. But the whole issue will be how there people will eventually deal with the pedagogical past again in a meaningful way. Cooperation with scientific historical cultural research on education seems to me to be necessary in this regard. Which does not prevent historical education researchers from learning a lot from those practitioners in the field as well. Therefore, a team-based approach might well be the egg of Columbus...

Keywords: history of education; educational heritage; school museum; popularization.

***Between School Memory and Historical-Educational Heritage: the Library of the “Giacomo Leopardi” National Boarding School in Macerata***

Anna Ascenzi, Elisabetta Patrizi  
University of Macerata (Italy)

School libraries, long confused with popular libraries, are part of the cultural heritage of a country and represent repositories of school memories that are still little known and valued. Yet, together with the school archives, they offer precious opportunities to explore the educational canons applied within actual school realities and to deepen the application of national pedagogical paradigms and their evolution over time in specific educational contexts.

This contribution intends to explore the dual interpretative value of the school library both as a “cultural asset” to be known and safeguarded, and as a “place of memory” to be interrogated in relation to the implications connected with school life, focusing on the analysis of the “Giacomo Leopardi” boarding school library of Macerata.

Founded in May 1915, the school library in question is of a considerable size (over 2.000 items) and is valuable one of its kind not only because it comes from a prestigious school with a long tradition that arose in the immediate post-unification period, but also because it has not been dismembered, and therefore allows you to travel through different historical periods.

In this study, this school library is investigated taking into account various elements: title (to appreciate the composition of the library with respect to the literary genres represented); author (to evaluate the classic authors, of manuals, of best sellers of children’s literature present); typographical data (to detect the chronological location and the most present publishers); extra-textual elements (to explore the different forms of interaction between reader and text). The qualitative analysis will be combined with the quantitative one (expressed in percentage terms), in order to highlight the peculiarities of a case study that appears representative of the enormous heuristic potential of school libraries, both as sources for school memory and as an expression of a historical-educational heritage worthy of being protected and valued.

Keywords: school library; places of memory; cultural heritage of school; school manuals; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***The Story of a School Too Good to Be a School: the Collegio di Savoia in Turin***

Paolo Bianchini  
University of Turin (Italy)

Built between 1679 and 1687 under the patronage of Maria Giovanna Battista of Savoy Nemours, the *Collegio di Savoia* in Turin has represented, since its very beginning, one of the most awaited and

controversial buildings in the new capital of the Duchy of Savoy. The essay examines the history of the Jesuit boarding school, focusing on the architectural and urban aspects, and using it as a case study to reconstruct the beginnings of the scholastic policy of the Duchy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It will therefore focus both on the educational purposes of this enterprise and on the material and representative functions that the grandiose school building has performed over the centuries.

Keywords: history of school building; boarding school; Jesuits; modern history; *Collegio di Savoia*.

### ***Restoring Memories of an Old School in Museums and Open-Air Museums in Poland***

Agnieszka Wiczorek

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland)

The aim of this article is to present one of the concepts of restoring memories of an old school in the form of reconstructed school rooms. In Poland, such undertakings are pursued in museums and ethnographic museums and in open-air museums. The reconstructions of both school buildings, classrooms modelled on existing educational institutions as well as a teacher's apartment and principal's office were analysed. In this article, attention was paid to characteristic teaching aids, both repetitive objects such as benches, boards, school aids as well as those constituting a unique element of equipment for a given community, including school certificates, textbooks and regional alphabet.

Keywords: memory; school; open-air museum; classroom; Poland.

### ***Corporate History in the Education Business***

Sergi Moll Bagur, Francisca Comas Rubí

University of the Balearic Islands (Spain)

The aim of this research study is to analyse the use of corporate history in the field of education, specifically, in private religious schools. To do so, it focuses on a prestigious school with a long history: Sant Francesc de Sales School (Ciutadella, Minorca, Spain). During the research process, an analysis was made of different components and products of this corporate history, developed and disseminated by the centre during the Spanish post-war period (1939-1945). The results of the analysis, triangulated with other sources such as verbal accounts, offer an insight into how the school's corporate history helped to legitimize it as a prestigious education centre and to build a collective memory with goals that were more commercial than educational.

Keywords: private school; religious orders; corporate history; memories of school; Franco regime.

### ***Studying to Survive: the Representation of the Waldensian School through the Beckwith Museums***

Francesca Davida Pizzigoni

University of Turin (Italy)

The population of Waldensian religion in Italy is just over 25.000 but, in a few kilometers within three Piedmonts valleys, there are five reconstructions of the classrooms built by Charles Beckwith from the first half of the Nineteenth Century. In all evidence the school, and in particular the representation of the Beckwith's school, takes on a symbolic value for the Waldensian population, of which features and meanings we can investigate through the study of the representation of citizens of today and what they make of this school of the past. What image do they intend to restore today of this unique experience that has been able to bring education in every small mountain village and whose range of action lasted from 1829 until 1971? To be able to read, in particular, for the Waldensian population is the very heart of their religion, in which direct and personal access to Bible reading is provided, and

at the same time reading and writing were the only way in the past to escape isolation and to survive persecution, maintaining the ties with foreign countries: is the school representation of today able to give back the meaning of this “study to survive”? Through the study of the Beckwith museums, in relation to diaries of teachers kept at the *Archivio della Tavola Valdese* and with the current testimonies of representatives of the Waldensian community, the contribution aims to deepen the public memory of their school system that the Waldensian community intends to celebrate.

Keywords: classroom-museum; identity; representation; Waldensian; Beckwith.

***The Fame of the First Girls' High School in Paris: the Birth of a Co-Constructed Collective Memory***

Sabria Benzarti

Institute of Historical Research of the North in Lille (France)

First high school for young girls in Paris built in the wake of the *Loi Camille Sée*, Fénelon High School had to be the model of female high schools. It turned into the elaboration and the implementation of strategies aiming at seducing families while providing them with a setting and strictness in keeping with their precepts.

To do so, the school reports of former students are a transgenerational indicator of both collective and public representations conveyed by the Institution and more specifically by its representatives. Examining its content and its evolution through administrative files and records of former students will enable us to recount the outlines of feminine school experience since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Keywords: female education; secondary education; France; 19<sup>th</sup> century; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***Building the Local History Curriculum in Rural Portugal: between Local Developments and Global Understandings***

Ana Isabel Madeira

University of Lisbon (Portugal)

“Rescued Memories, (Re)Constructed Identities” Project sought to build a memory of education and schooling in the Portuguese rural area of Pinhal Interior Sul, by gathering oral and written testimonies and identifying the (im)material heritage of local education. We sought to build a local history curriculum through the enactment of communities of practice. As such, we departed from the MRIR website project platform as a Public History repository and a pedagogical tool for the constitution of communities of practice. This approach was based on the establishment of a network of institutions and professionals that share a cultural identity, common learning environments and similar educational requirements.

Keywords: public history; local history curriculum; rural schools; learning communities; communities of practice.

***Colegio Mayor Universitario “Casa do Brasil” (1962): a Place between Stories and Memories***

Tatiane De Freitas Ermel

University of Valladolid (Spain)

This study focuses on the history of the international movement of higher education students and professors, which is organized at school residences, and especially on the case of *Colegio Mayor Universitario Casa do Brasil* (Madrid/Spain). We put forth a dialogue between the concepts of *place of memory* (P. Nora), memory and forgetting (P. Ricoeur) and the historical-educational heritage from a

transnational perspective. This historical-documentary research particularly analyzes annual reports and works published on *Casa do Brasil* since its inception. As an educational space outside of the university, for the past six decades *Casa do Brasil* has held for countless activities that contribute to the formation, socialization and culture at the *colegios mayores* in Spain, and is thus a landmark where people of many nationalities approach Brazilian culture in Spain.

Keywords: history of education; university residences; *Colegio Mayor*; student exchange.



# Abstracts of the contributions to the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume

## *The School and Its Many Pasts: Collective Memories of School*

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani

### **SECTION *The Representation of School between Press, Literature and Collective Imaginary***

#### ***Iconographical Sources and History of Italian Schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries***

Lorenzo Cantatore, Luca Silvestri  
Roma Tre University (Italy)

Over recent decades, from the starting point of the studies of Philippe Ariès, the iconographical sources have acquired a significant place in the work of education historians, casting doubt on the exclusive authority of the written sources. Visual representations of formal education (school) and informal education (the family) are now an indispensable subject of research which was pioneered, in Italy, by Mario Alighiero Manacorda. From this perspective, historians are increasingly in need of specific skills and interdisciplinary dialogue. For the history of school, there is work (Demetrio Cosola, Leo Lionni) that highlights details and revealing insights into ideals, stereotypes, material contexts and educational experiences of great research value.

Keywords: history of school; iconography; Demetrio Cosola; Leo Lionni; Mario Alighiero Manacorda.

#### ***Between History and Memory: The School Souvenir Portrait in Spain***

Francisca Comas Rubí  
University of the Balearic Islands (Spain)

School souvenir portraits, with stereotypical iconography, have become the iconic representation par excellence of the school history in Spain, and are used from the present to both evoke school memory and disseminate the school history in exhibitions, documentaries, book covers, blogs, and all sorts of products of academic history as well as public history. Based on different collections of photographs of this type taken above all during the Franco regime, but also in later decades, and even in present-day recreations of these portraits, offered here is a reflection on the complex relationship between image, history, and school memory.

Keywords: school souvenir portrait; school memory; school history; public history of education.

***Female Teachers in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The Teacher Training Schools in Literary Narratives and Archive Papers: Destiny or Emancipation?***

Carmela Covato

Roma Tre University (Italy)

In enquiring into the relationship between the expansion of schooling in post-unification Italy and the survival of gender and social class-based pre-established and asymmetrical social destinies, the intention of this paper is to examine the literary sources on the *scuola normale* set up by the Casati Law of 1859 to train male and female teachers, but which rapidly became almost exclusively female. In literary fiction and educational practice, as emerges from the archive sources and autobiographical accounts, the conflict between historic prejudices and new aspirations in the experiences of mainly lower middle-class girls training to be teachers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries hovered between destiny and emancipation.

Keywords: normal school; literature; female teachers; gender; history.

***The “Excellent Head Teacher” in Professional Manuals***

Giuseppe Zago

University of Padua (Italy)

The essay reconstructs some representations of the figure of the “ideal head teacher” as proposed in the main training manuals for this profession. The time span considered goes from the 1890s to the end of the 1960s, i.e., from the moment in which the figure of the primary school head teacher was legally recognised in Italy until the dawn of its professional transformation in the 1970s.

Keywords: head teacher; primary school; history of education; school management; educational training manuals.

***Portrayals of the Head Teacher in Forty Years of the Journal “Scuola Italiana Moderna” (1946-1985)***

Carla Callegari

University of Padua (Italy)

This essay is the result of research on the portrayals of the head teacher in the journal «Scuola Italiana Moderna». Taking as its starting point a quantitative analysis aimed at identifying articles dedicated to the head teacher and the managerial role, it moves on to a qualitative analysis in order to understand what the head teacher's real role was, and above all the intended portrayal of that role. The relationship between gender difference and professionalism is also examined, bearing in mind that the number of female head teachers was much lower than that of their male colleagues. The research explored the collective memory of these female school workers in relation to that of their male colleagues, and the representation that was intended to be conveyed of them to the journal's subscribers.

Keywords: «Scuola Italiana Moderna»; head teachers; school managers; collective memory; obituaries.

***A Memoir of How Italian Secondary Schools Changed in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Birth and Development of a Concept of Innovation and Experimentation in the Private Papers of the Principal Tranquillo Bertamini***

Giordana Merlo

University of Padua (Italy)

The purpose of present contribution is to investigate, through individual school memory, the birth



and development of an idea for innovation and experimentation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tranquillo Bertamini is the figure around which the period of renewal is reconstructed, from the end of the Second World War to the implementation of the experimentation at the “G.B. Brocchi” high school in Bassano del Grappa (North-Eastern Italy), where he was principal. The main sources for our research were his private records preserved at the Museum of Education in Padua, including personal correspondence, and drafts for speeches, printed contributions, reform projects, and reflections on important aspects of education theory. Private and no private papers for represent the school memory of a complex period of transformation, through the real experience of one of its protagonists.

Keywords: history of secondary school; educational experiments; Project 80; Erminio Filippin; Giovanni Gozzer.

***Portraits of Headmasters and Headmistresses. How is School Authority Depicted in Children's Literature?***

Marnie Campagnaro  
University of Padua (Italy)

Stories about school adventures or settings are deeply intertwined with the history of children's literature and constitute a significant legacy. Research into such stories generally pays considerable attention to portraits of teachers, the teaching process, its social, cultural and political implications and the moral values of schooling. However, little attention has been paid to the representation of school authority and of principals, headmasters and headmistresses. This study aims to fill this gap. It focuses on classic children's stories published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, comparing recurring representational characteristics of headmasters and headmistresses. A gender bias emerges when school power and authority is embodied by a woman.

Keywords: headmaster/headmistress; history of children's literature; authority; role model; gender bias.

***Illustrations and Cartoonists in the Collodi Conflict Context. Childhood at School and School-Less Childhood***

Milena Bernardi  
University of Bologna (Italy)

This essay reflects on depictions of school and forms of schoollessness in the illustrations of the illustrators Mazzanti and Chiostri for Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Paradigmatic visual sources interpreting late 19<sup>th</sup> century school images, these illustrations took part in the historical backdrop to Collodi's inner conflict, with his ambivalence about school and preference for an adventurous childhood suffusing the poetics of his novel and being enhanced by the cartoonists' art. These marginal artists illustrated Collodi's school books in the visual complexity of an underlying imagery in which three childhood figures stand out: school children, adventurous children and poor, school-less children. Pinocchio, his companions, Lampwick and school-less children.

Keywords: illustration; Pinocchio; childhood; conflict; school.

***Dystopian Schools between Reality and Narrative Fiction***

Anna Antoniazzi  
University of Genoa (Italy)

The imposing educational-training apparatus established in Italy during the Fascist period showed, in a disconcerting and dramatic way, that school is not a “protected” and “safe place”, but, on the

contrary, it is a very effective means of control and propaganda of one's ideas. Borrowing this awareness from the dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Science Fiction Literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century shows that there is a close relationship between dystopian thinking and educational institutions that transmit its models. The protagonists of dystopian novels often decide not to conform themselves to the proposed educational models and to subvert the rules imposed by political regimes.

Keywords: dystopian novels; educational models; storytelling; young adult literature; divergent thinking.

***Memories of Students and Yearbooks: the Religious Schools in Spain Twentieth Century***

Irati Amunarriz Iruretagoiena, Pauli Davila Balsera, Luis María Naya Garmendia

University of the Basque Country (Spain)

Religious schools in Spain during the contemporary period have not been a privileged object of educational historiography, even if their study has been gaining more interest recently. The aim of this paper is to highlight the value of yearbooks as a new source for the study of this type of school. To this end, we analyse the limits that they may have as a document that can be used as a primary source in the historical construction of this type of schools by contrasting the content of the yearbooks with the oral testimonies obtained through in-depth interviews with groups of former students. We conclude that the fact that this documentary source allows us to carry out the history of the school representation that this type of school has tried to disseminate is reason enough to incorporate these documents into the field of the History of Education.

Keywords: yearbooks; religion; private school; Spain.

***The Recovered Memory of the Students of Bordeaux***

Marguerite Figeac-Monthus

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Through the reviews of alumni or student associations and the directories of high schools (public/private education) and the University of Bordeaux, the aim is to identify from 1886 to 1930, all the elements that contribute to a feeling of belonging and to examine how they were able to allow the building of an identity while being today most often forgotten by the educational community. Thus, these documents, for which the governance of institutions does not always see the benefit of conservation, allow phenomena to be analyzed and better understood. They constitute, in a way, the database of a recovered memory. Three axes will be addressed: a source reflecting political and societal issues; write, remember, build community of belonging; the recovered memory of a lost identity.

Keywords: memory; identity; high schools; public education; yearbooks.

***Notes on School Photographs as Material Objects and Social Objects***

Tiziana Serena

University of Florence (Italy)

This paper presents a reflection on the analysis of photographic sources. It explores the advantages of using methodologies that consider photographs not only as flat images but rather as a material objects and social objects. The paper discusses the themes of the agency of pictures and their materiality in the field of school photography. Themes relating to identity and memory construction processes are highlighted, as are the ways in which the interpreters of school photographs are involved over time in relation to feeling.

Keywords: visual memory of school; history of photography; social object; materiality; feeling.

## SECTION *The Representation of School in Mass Media*

### ***“Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini”: a Biopic That Blends Memory, Interpretation and Reality***

Simonetta Polenghi

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In 2007 the TV movie *Maria Montessori. Una vita per i bambini* (Maria Montessori. A life for children) was broadcast in Italy, becoming one of the most watched films of the year. It is a biopic of Montessori, covering her life from her entry to the Faculty of Medicine in Rome in 1893 up to 1934, when she left Italy. The movie concentrates on her love story with Montesano, her relationship with her son Mario, and the creation of the *Casa dei Bambini* in Rome. Although some parts are historically accurate or plausible, others are fictional or incorrect. The movie was also broadcast in France and the Czech Republic, and the DVD was then dubbed in German and subtitled in Spanish on YouTube. This paper aims to explore the memory held of Montessori internationally, by analysing audience reactions.

Keywords: Montessori; biopic; history of education; collective memory; cinema; television.

### ***The Diverse Representations of Women Secondary Teachers in Selected Italian Films from the Past Fifty Years. A Case Study***

Evelina Scaglia, Alessandra Mazzini

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From the Seventies to nowadays, the figure of the female secondary school teacher has been the object of numerous filmic representations in Italy, making it a particularly original case study within the line of inquiry that examines the “collective school memories” communicated through audiovisual media. The analysis of some significant Italian filmic sources is aimed at identifying the intrinsic dimensions of school settings and the educational practices adopted therein, to answer three research questions: what imaginary surrounding the woman high school teacher is communicated; do these memories reflect the actual conditions in the secondary schools of the period and if so in what way; what are the main thoughts, expectations, or doubts elicited in viewers.

Keywords: collective school memory; cinema; woman teacher; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century; 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca: Trajectories of Memory from the Literary Text to Filmic Mediations***

Sabrina Fava

Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan (Italy)

This research analyses the changes that involved *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca*, written and illustrated between 1907 and 1908 by Vamba (pen name for Luigi Bertelli) in the children's magazine «Il Giornalino della Domenica». The story became a film directed by Sergio Tofano in 1943, then adapted for TV between 1964 and 1965 by Lina Wertmüller for RAI and revised in a new format in the children's magazine «Corriere dei Piccoli» (1964-1965). The rewriting process of the text describes how the imaginary and the collective memory has been constructed and how the new elements introduced have modified the interpretation of the past and the representation of school and of the relations between pupils and teachers.

Keywords: school memory; children's magazines; cinema; television; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***The Image of the Female Elementary School Teacher in the Works of Edmondo De Amicis across Literary and Visual Sources***

Ilaria Mattioni

University of Turin (Italy)

To investigate whether and how the collective imaginary surrounding women elementary schoolteachers changed over the twentieth century, I analyse cinematic, TV, and cartoon adaptations of literary works by De Amicis. What elements of collective memory concerning the image of the female elementary teacher survived beyond the nineteenth century? And what, vice versa, was modified to suit the sensibilities of twentieth century viewers? In the ongoing trade-off between change and resistance to change, representations of the schoolmistress appear to retain their hold over the popular imagination.

Keywords: teacher; collective school memory; filmic sources; Italy; Edmondo De Amicis.

***Collective and Public School Memory: the Case of Professor Kosta Vujić***

Aleksandra Ilić Rajković, Đurđa Maksimović

University of Belgrade (Serbia)

“Professor Kosta Vujić’s Hat” is a story based on real events and personalities, adapted into a film, book, and television series, recounting the adventures of a class of high school graduates and their teacher. The paper’s introductory section presents our analysis’s theoretical and methodological framework. In the first part, we explore the historical facts and individual school memories associated with Vujić and his era. Subsequently, we analyse and interpret the collective memory constructed and popularised by the book and films, situating our discussion within the critical theses of post-critical pedagogy.

Keywords: collective school memory; history of education; cinema; book-to-film adaptation.

***The Janitor on Screen. A Proposed Study of the School Imaginary in Twentieth-Century Italy***

Paolo Alfieri

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The silence that surrounds the figure of the janitor in educational historiography may be filled by drawing on filmic sources that allow us to analyse the place of janitors in the construction of collective school memories, especially in terms of their contribution to students’ informal education and their peculiar role within the school system. In this essay, I apply the most recent methodological criteria for the historiographical examination of cinematographic material to the only Italian film that features a janitor as its main character, going on to suggest starting points for future research on representations of the janitor, particularly in relation to key socio-economic, political-educational, and cultural factors in the history of Italian schooling across the twentieth century.

Keywords: collective school memories; janitor; filmic sources; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***Images of School Inclusion: Education for Persons with Disabilities in 1970s Italy across Big and Small Screens***

Anna Debè

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In the 1970s, a complex process of integration of students with disabilities took place within the Italian school system. A limited number of audiovisual productions for cinema and television have focused on this controversial phase, namely two documentary-style films (*La bicicletta* [*The bicycle*] by

L. Comencini and *I "diversi"* [*The "different"*] by V. De Seta, released in 1970 and 1978 respectively) and two drama films (*Rosso come il cielo* [*Red like the sky*] by C. Bortone, 2007, and *La classe degli asini* [*The class of dunces*] by A. Porporati, 2016). These productions are analyzed here within the historical-educational paradigm of research into school memories, with a view to comparing how they recorded contemporary reality or re-evoked and revisited an earlier historical phase.

Keywords: collective school memories; disability; filmic sources; Italy; 1970s.

### ***The Traditional Jewish School and Its Many Pasts: History and Memories***

Yehuda Bitty

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This article explored the historiographical sources of the Eastern European traditional Jewish school known as the *Heder* through literary accounts, memoirs, photographs, and folk songs. It differentiated between the historical core of these documents and the imaginary constructs behind them. Rather than dismissing the historical image in favor of historical reality, this approach views the historical image as a reality in itself, which acts as a repository of human perceptions, values, and meanings. A considerable part of this the article was devoted to methodological issues related to the analysis of historical documents.

Keywords: Heder; Jewish education; methodology; historical image; culture.

### ***School as Seen by the Radio (1945-1975)***

Luca Bravi

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In Italy, the first distance learning experiments involved Italian radio, when Benito Mussolini expressed the need for each school to have its own "listening point". From 1934, the Rural Radio Authority started its transmissions for schools. Radio played a role not only in fascist propaganda, but also in the wider social history of our country's education. In the post-war period, an innovative experiment took place in the form of *La radio per le scuole* (Radio for schools), a broadcast that integrated classroom activity and was structured as a cultural experience to be constructed both remotely and in person, in relation to art, music and theatre. The advent of television then changed the role of radio in the cultural and educational context in our country.

Keywords: radio; radio for schools; distance learning; social history of education; Rai.

### ***Cinema in Greece during the Interwar Period under the Lens of History of Education***

Panagiotis Kimourtzis

University of the Aegean (Greece)

The article discusses the reasons why films were not used for educational purposes in the case of Greece during the interwar period. It attempts to show the first, however mostly hostile, debate about cinema and its pedagogic use in the historical and social frame of the time. It also attempts to present the first – sometimes direct, others indirect – voices of some inspired advocates of the film and its educational value in a deeply conservative society.

Keywords: educational practices; educational reforms; cinema; youth morality.

***Resist! Italy's Teachers and Students in the Face of Neoliberalism in Education***

Gianfranco Bandini

University of Florence (Italy)

In the last twenty years, Italy's school system has undergone reforms and legislative changes that can largely be traced back to neoliberalism. The political debate and in part also the cultural one looked at education in a new light, giving public opinion a new narrative on education, based on individual merit and competition between schools. Listening to the voices of teachers and students means bringing to light the aspirations, widely shared and consolidated, of the progressive pedagogy and emancipation that is currently on the fringes of government action and the prevailing culture. Between active resistance and indifference, we are discovering an educational community that wants to be heard and included in the decisions that necessarily involve it.

Keywords: neoliberalism; oral history; school reform; collective imaginary; progressive education.

***The Role of Secondary Grammar School Traditions in Hungary under Communism***

Beatrix Vincze

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The study aims to present, through the recollections of teachers and students at a small-town high school in Hungary, one of the traditional student day events that for decades taught thousands of students the rules of multiparty democracy within the framework of the one-party system. The essence of the "Reversed Day" was that students nominated a student director and conducted a regular election campaign, delivering speeches for the elections. The one-day student government was an exceptional opportunity to tutor students about democracy, take responsibility, organise, and lead programs. The case study reconstructs student traditions and analysis school documents and memories. The research aims to answer how a student tradition could influence young people's political and civic knowledge.

Keywords: school rituals; school memory; education; communism; collective identity.

# Abstracts of the contributions to the 4<sup>th</sup> volume

## *The School and Its Many Pasts: Individual Memories of School*

edited by Juri Meda and Roberto Sani

***School Life and Teachers' Diaries. Echoes of the Gentile Reform in the Archivio Didattico Lombardo Radice Diaries: Educational Theories and Educational Practice***

Francesca Borruso

Roma Tre University (Italy)

School diaries written by teachers are extraordinarily important documents in historical education research as they are capable of getting down into the subsoil of educational life, its everyday dimension and listening to the voices of those directly involved in it. The aim of this paper is to analyse the teaching diaries contained in the Archivio Didattico Lombardo Radice at MuSEd (Roma Tre University), with a view to retracing some of the educational practices brought into primary schools, especially rural ones, with the implementation of the Gentile Reform. I will seek to outline themes, issues and emerging difficulties by means of these teachers' diaries, enquiring into the relationship between theory and practice in educational life.

Keywords: school diaries; teachers; autobiographical narratives; Gentile Reform.

***Albino Bernardini and the Representation of Italian School***

Andrea Marrone

University of Cagliari (Italy)

Albino Bernardini was one of the most important authors who collaborated to change the collective representation of the Italian school in the second half of the twentieth century. He published a series of school memoirs in which he recounted his experiences. Bernardini deconstructed the idyllic narrative of education, documenting dramas, injustices, and violence with extreme realism. At the same time, the memoirs of his own teaching activity were aimed at promoting a revolutionary teacher "icon", oriented to the principles of "activism", hostile to social discrimination and authoritarianism. This contribution aims to investigate the new image of teacher and school promoted in Bernardini's work and the spreading of them, highlighting the multiple directions of its diffusion.

Keywords: history of education; school memory; teaching; school violence; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century.



***Teaching in Post World War Two Italy: Anachronism and Change in Autobiographical and Literary Narratives***

Chiara Meta

Roma Tre University (Italy)

This paper explores depictions of teachers' social role in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The difficulties involved in identifying significant memories of school life in autobiographical narratives notwithstanding, I have decided to focus most of my attention on the literary sources. A further decision involved restricting the field of enquiry to women's narratives while not neglecting significant accounts from men, and shining an especial spotlight on lower and upper secondary school teachers. This is designed to bring out a *longue durée* phenomenon consisting of a constant alternation between demands for emancipation and the survival of the internal and external constraints which made the development of a new professional and social identity for teachers so fraught with difficulty.

Keywords: teachers; schooling; literary memories; autobiographies; Italy; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***Chronicles about School Life between Intimate Diaries and Educational Documentation***

Lucia Paciaroni

University of Macerata (Italy)

This contribution intends to investigate the historiographical relevance on the space reserved for the chronicle about school life in school registers, where teachers had to write down news, data and facts relating to school life. Through the analysis of the chronicles by Giovanni Lucaroni, a teacher at the primary school of Mogliano, in the province of Macerata, from 1910 to 1956, we intend to demonstrate how these sources can be useful in decrypting that "black box of schooling" to which educational historiography has repeatedly referred in recent years. In fact, in these chronicles, the teacher did not punctually reported only what was prescribed by legislation, but he shared personal observations and comments about his pupils and matters relating to school.

Keywords: school memories; school archives; teachers' archives; 20<sup>th</sup> century; Italy.

***The "Brilliant" School of Elena Ferrante***

Monica Galfré

University of Florence (Italy)

This essay looks at how Elena Ferrante's novel *L'amica geniale* (My Brilliant Friend), one of the greatest literary successes of recent times, tells the story of Italy in the postwar period, a time that seemingly encapsulates the great hopes and disappointments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, partly because of the roles of education and culture as tools for redemption. By going beyond a methodological discourse, this study compares the historical narrative with another type of conversation about the past, examining any points of convergence, contrast or complementarity in the knowledge that nothing is so ambiguous as the relationship between history and literature.

Keywords: literature; history; school; 20<sup>th</sup> century; Italy.

***Restless and Longlasting Cuore. Readings of a Classic between Text and Images***

Susanna Barsotti, Chiara Lepri

Roma Tre University (Italy)

*Cuore* by Edmondo De Amicis is a classic of children's literature that cannot be ignored if we want to investigate the idea of school as conveyed by novels for young people. What is needed is an

analysis of the work at its deepest level to bring out the literary dimension, by means of which the image of school was channelled via the three narrative registers into which *Cuore* is divided (school diary, monthly stories, letters from family members). School – *Cuore*'s real main character – is not seen simply as an institution but as the driving force behind education, as also emerges from the iconography around which the novel develops. It is also by analysing this, sometimes coherently with the original work, other times satirically, that the idea of school can be outlined. In this sense *Cuore* is, in fact, an enduring and restless classic whose formal and symbolic meanings have been redefined in its various republications. From this, it is possible to observe not only the changes which have taken place in Italy's cultural and educational priorities but also the impact the novel has had on the popular image of education in the minds of generations of Italians over one hundred years.

Keywords: Cuore; Edmondo De Amicis; school; memory; imaginary.

***Here Starts "Penelope's Web". Education and Social Prejudices as Seen in Women-Teachers' Diaries in Greece (1800-1920)***

Polly Thanailaki

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In her diary, Eleni Boukouvala, a Greek woman -inspector of girls' elementary schools, expressed her satisfaction because at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century many girls' schools of secondary level of education had been operating all over the country. However, Boukouvala noted that there still existed a lot of social prejudices regarding the presence of women-teachers in the remote, rural areas of the country. In the present study, the diary of Frances Hill, wife of the American protestant missionary John Hill, is also explored in which her plans for disseminating female education in Greece and for training women-schoolteachers are studied.

Keywords: women-teachers; diaries; Greek schools.

***Using School Memory to Get to Know "Frontier Realities". Angelina Lo Dico: Teacher in the Land of Basilicata***

Vittoria Bosna

«Aldo Moro» University of Bari (Italy)

Increasing attention is being paid by educational historians and educational institutions to "life stories and school memories". These are strands of real value for a careful reconstruction of aspects of everyday life in our country.

In this study I specifically analysed a life story, that of the teacher Angelina Lo Dico (born in Marianopoli, in the province of Caltanissetta, on 8 April 1900) who moved to Basilicata to be a teacher in 1921. From a methodological point of view, I analysed the precarious state of education in the Land of Basilicata; secondly, I analysed Lo Dico's work in the small village of Pisticci. For these reasons, I used archive material and testimonies taken from school registers.

Keywords: education; school; teacher; religion; memory.

***Teachers in Transit: Memories of Doings and Knowledge from a Transnational Viewpoint (1882-1914)***

Terciane Ângela Luchese

University of Caxias do Sul (Brazil)

Claudia Panizzolo

Federal University of São Paulo (Brazil)

Between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an intense process of immigrants entering Brazil brought about changes, among which were ethnic schools constituted by the language used and the ways in which they operated routinely. The objective is to understand this movement, as well as the knowledge and memories involving the practices constructed by teachers who e/immigrated from Italy and worked in schools, many of which had ethnic marks. In the luggage of these teachers, a diversity of cultural practices was transported and confronted with the various ways of living in the places where they settled. We conducted a historical document analysis based on an empirical corpus composed of laws, photographs, newspapers, interviews and letters. Teachers' stories, between what was learned in Italy and what was reinvented in Brazil.

Keywords: memories; teachers; school; transnational history; emigration; immigration.

***School Memories from Croatia: Autobiographies of Mijat Stojanović and Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac***

Vlasta Švoger, Zrinko Novosel

Croatian Institute of History in Zagreb (Croatia)

This paper analyses school memories of two prominent Croatian intellectuals: teacher and school inspector M. Stojanović and publicist I. I. Tkalac. The analysis is based on their published autobiographies. The autobiography by Tkalac is titled *Youth Memories from Croatia* (Leipzig 1894). Stojanović edited for print his autobiography *Adventures and Misadventures of my Life* (published in 2015). They describe their formal and informal education. Stojanović described the situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century primary school system in Croatia from a double perspective – that of a pupil and of a teacher. Tkalac wrote critically about his secondary school days. Their evaluations of the situation in the Croatian school system largely corresponded with observations noted in other types of sources.

Keywords: school memory; autobiographies; Mijat Stojanović; Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac; Croatia; 19<sup>th</sup> century.

***A Common Narrative? Civics Teachers of the German Democratic Republic between Memory and Identity***

Jascha Hook

University of Kaiserslautern-Landau (Germany)

This article draws upon the memories of former civics teachers of the GDR to examine not only what happened at school but also to reconstruct their counter-memories, which can be seen as an attempt to affect the collective memories of East Germany's controversial school past from within. The reconstruction of their life narratives shows how their memories of civics and the GDR school are influenced by both the past they experienced and the current discourses surrounding the GDR school. The memories of civics outlined in this way run between the poles of authenticity and scientificity while suggesting that even the early teaching staff of the ideological core subject may have been more diverse than commonly assumed.

Keywords: teacher's school memories; GDR; civics courses; life narratives; biographical research.

***Memories of Teachers and School Inspectors in Post-War Greece. Visions of the Past and Interpretations in the Present***

Despina Karakatsani, Pavlina Nikolopoulou

University of Peloponnese (Greece)

This contribution presents and analyses the oral testimonies of five teachers that took their first steps as young teachers in the 1950s to rise in the educational hierarchy and serve as school officers a few years later. We attempt to look into how teachers selected to serve this very role in the post-civil war state form, maintain, employ and communicate the memory of the 1950s school; what they choose to recall and what they consign to oblivion. We further seek to explore how their memories interact with later representations of school life, impacting their interpretation of the events and re-signifying their past experiences according to the dictates of their present individual, social and national identity. Apart from the oral testimonies, our contribution draws on contemporary pedagogical journals, in an attempt to study how the image of the post-civil war school these journals suggest is at odds with the image constructed and reconstructed in the memories of our informants.

Keywords: oral testimonies; memories; school teachers; post-war period; Greece.

***Daily Notes in Diaries: Traces of Teaching in Personal Archives (Porto Alegre/BR, 1995-2014)***

Dóris Bittencourt Almeida

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)

The article explores regularities and dissonances in the paths of a university professor, having as documentary corpus nineteen personal diaries, which are understood as ego-documents. The examination of these materials enabled conducting an exercise of perception of the subtleties of the existence of this woman, professor, researcher, mother and daughter, through her notes on these writing supports.

Keywords: history of education; diaries; ego-documents; school; memory.

***“With Faith and Knowledge, All Can Be Overcome”: Memories of an Orphanage and of Vocational Education for Abandoned Children (Porto Alegre/RS – 1947 to 1955)***

Luciane Sgarbi S. Grazziotin

University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Brazil)

This study concerns the analysis of an institution that has been taking children in and working as shelter and school for orphans in the city of Porto Alegre since 1895. The institution known as “Pão dos Pobres de Santo Antônio” has been discussed in other studies that dealt, mostly, with the history and social role of the charity work. The investigation I present is methodologically based on Oral History and Document Analysis of Personal Archives. The time frame concerns the years between 1947 and 1955 and is related to the life of one of the residents of the orphanage and his representations about the space as a place of living, studying and training for work. Mister Barbosa’s recollections bring forth the dimensions of affection and gratitude for the opportunity of, in his words, “becoming someone”, which is related, especially, to the learning of a trade.

Keywords: school memory; oral history; orphanage; vocational education; 19<sup>th</sup> century.

***Narrating the School of the Past and the Future. A Preliminary Analysis of the “Educational Memories on Video” (MEV) Database***

Stefano Oliviero

University of Florence (Italy)

This paper aims to explore the impact of stereotypical school narratives, conveyed by collective memories, on individual memories. Prejudices and stereotypes that are difficult to uproot. In particular, I will examine some recurring themes and opinions in the public debate around school issues, and then compare them with the memories and imagery that emerge from the testimonies of ordinary people

collected in the *Memorie Educative in Video – MEV* (Educational Memories on Video) database, edited by the University of Florence research unit and hosted on the portal [www.memoriascolastica.it](http://www.memoriascolastica.it). This paper will thus also be an opportunity to describe, albeit briefly, the MEV database.

Keywords: teacher; video testimonies; oral history; school memory; stereotypes.

***Educational Policy in Greece and Educational Discourse throughout 1963-1965: Male and Female Student Memories***

Evangelia Kalerante, Georgios Tzartzas

University of Western Macedonia (Greece)

This study focuses on the education policy of the period 1963-1965, emphasizing the political discourse and the emerging educational intentions of that period. This specific period is representative of movement actions and a relevant promotion of democratic requests for a short period in the 1960s. Their social experiences are particularly explored both in the university and social space, hosting the conflict between democratic and conservative educational discourse. At the same time, an attempt is made to showcase the education policy of that time in direct correlation with both the left wing and scientific institutes' political intentions. The scientific institutes, through the aid of research and communication with the scientific community in Europe and the U.S.A. enhance the democratic discourse in a different form of education and society.

Keywords: education policy; student memories; social experience; educational discourse; Greece; 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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#### ABSTRACTS

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## The School and Its Many Pasts

History is not memory; both, however, affect the way we perceive the past. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on memory in order to critically analyze shared narratives of the past and their implications. Memory studies not only allow us to expand our knowledge about the past, but also help us to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense. These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed to better understand the school and its many pasts.

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