

The right to punish *vs.* the duty of education in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)

Carmen Petruzzi

University of Foggia, IT

Abstract

The educational models of the 19th century, shaped around the values of the bourgeoisie, embodied inflexible protocols of restricted behaviour and freedom of expression, in the interests of imposing a uniform culture and value system. Included in this were rigid expectations of submission to the father and the ethics of sacrifice. Beginning in the 1970s, with the conception of *schwarze Pädagogik*, researchers studied the works of the 19th-century pedagogues at the forefront of maintaining this adult-centric vision, impossibly at odds with the recognition or defence of the specificity and rights of childhood. The process of changing reference models was gradual and demanded pedagogical reflection that would redeem childhood from the conditioning of fundamentalism, false ideologies, and violence. The current essay provides an in-depth study of the educational authoritarianism, or Black Pedagogy, inherent in the home and school environments of Southern Italy, and the educational advancement initiated in the 1950s to 1970s.

I modelli educativi del XIX secolo, sagomati intorno ai valori della borghesia, incarnavano protocolli inflessibili di comportamento e limitata libertà di espressione nell'interesse di imporre una cultura e un sistema di valori uniformi. Dagli anni Settanta del Novecento si diffondono gli studi di *schwarze pädagogik* che approfondiscono le teorie dei pedagoghi del XIX secolo impegnati a mantenere una visione educativa adultocentrica in contrasto con il riconoscimento o la difesa della specificità e dei diritti dell'infanzia. Il processo di cambiamento dei modelli di riferimento è stato graduale e ha richiesto una riflessione pedagogica per riscattare l'infanzia dai condizionamenti del fondamentalismo, delle false ideologie e della violenza. Il presente saggio fornisce un approfondimento sull'autoritarismo educativo, o pedagogia nera, insito negli ambienti domestici e scolastici dell'Italia meridionale, e sull'avanzamento educativo avviato tra gli anni Cinquanta e Settanta.

Carmen Petruzzi – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

Keywords: Black Pedagogy; educational violence; psychological manipulation; Southern Italian education; 19th and 20th centuries

Parole chiave: pedagogia nera; violenza educativa; manipolazione psicologica; educazione del Sud Italia; secoli XIX e XX

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

1. Introduction

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child is the result of a cultural, scientific, and social investment in childhood that lasted throughout the 20th century, known as the century of the child. Infancy has been at the centre of theorizing and research to the point of becoming one of the characteristic traits of contemporary Western culture. For centuries, the personal and social identity of children was denied in a work of cultural removal whereby the specificities, characteristics, and important function in adulthood were ignored. The scientific community itself contributed to deny the reality of the child as a person, maintaining an adult-centric vision that has prevented us from grasping the specificity and defending the rights.

The child was an “ambiguous” figure to be investigated and his nature was impenetrable. According to society, the child was not already constituted as object of research that could be grasped and studied with immediacy. From the idea of protection to that of caring of, there has been progress in the conquest of rights and cultural and scientific interest. It was precisely the developments of knowledge in the anthropological, psychological, and pedagogical fields that demonstrated the specificity of childhood as a phase of life deserving of its own dignity and recognition. The relativity of the concept of time and its identification in correlation with age was the first discovery of the existence of childhood by Ariès who defines the time of early life as a well-defined moment linked to specific civil norms in a moderate age (1960/1981). The infant is a defenceless and pure living being who needs special care and attention, and its education must be conditioned by the cultural models of the adult. If in the eighteenth century, pedagogy and medicine took a new look at the mind and body of children, the attention to the needs of childhood continued in the nineteenth century, concretizing efforts in the embryonic protection of the right to elementary education to stem above all the phenomena of child labour and illiteracy. The family is the environment where finding the educational declinations of the history of childhood. Rousseau’s natural education is affirmed whereby Emilio, when he is still “devoid of knowledge”, has plenty of time to arrange what is around him in such a way that his first glances are struck by edifying objects. From the very beginning, Rousseau believes that the parent must make himself “worthy of respect”, begin by making himself loved, so that the child will be pleased to please him, and to ensure that the parent’s authority will be sufficient, it must necessarily be founded on esteem and virtue.

Through the spread of industry, economic, and social renewal, a social mobilization took place in the nineteenth century in Western countries. It made more articulate the profile of the bourgeoisie, different in census and traditions, but united by aspirations and social life, as well as by the common feeling of superiority over the people. In a socially fractured context, where tradition and revolution coexisted, education assumed an essential role in perpetuating the technical and socio-political dominance of the bourgeoisie. Education became the key to promoting a balanced and organic society that curbed the social disorder of the lower-class troublemakers, indeed, integrated the people into the cultural values of the ruling bourgeoisie. In the pedagogical pluralism of this century, the strong combination of the trinomial child-man-citizen emerges in the society. The school becomes functional to the new social tasks: education is social training, an action exercised by the adults to conform young to collective norms and values. Alongside the school, the family is the primary and natural educational institution that imparts constrictive, uniform, and rational educational models to the formative project

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

of the good citizen. From the collective imagination of the nineteenth century, there is the idea of the subject should be disciplined and aware of his duties, capable of modelling himself on the norms embodied by the family, including submission to the father, the ethics of sacrifice, the supreme responsibility, the value of work and savings and, finally, the care of property.

In the transition between 19th and 20th centuries, the school model based on the traditional humanistic education enters definitively into crisis. Even the idea of the educational process undergoes an overall transformation. The methodological element becomes dominant and determines the abandonment of all spontaneity. The maximum model in the binomial of surveillance and punishment described by Foucault is affirmed with its main specificity: authoritarian, conformist, and repressive expression.

In Italy, an intense pedagogical-educational activity spanned the entire 19th century, investing the city areas of the central North engaged in the forefront of the process of national unification and leaving the Southern areas under the control of the popular and rural tradition that fortifies the educational models on the example of punishment and violence. At school, as in the family, rigid protocols of behaviour and reduced freedom of expression were required in the name of cultural and value homologation. The history of the relationship between violence and education also intertwines the history of parenting. In a recent article, Carioli (2020) points out that paternal authority was opposed to the interest of the child and that of society itself, degenerating amid tyranny and demoralization. The process of growth of role models and reference was not immediate but led to a careful pedagogical reflection for a new man and woman, redeeming them from the conditioning of false ideologies and fundamentalism, from violence and barbarism of which history has not always been able to do without. In the twentieth century we learn that by educating the child, we educate the man and therefore the entire society. It is not a sudden change in either the Western or the Italian educational tradition, but a slow and local one that runs throughout the twentieth century known as the century of the rediscovery of the child and his rights. Rights for all boys and girls, even those on the margins of society, hidden in rural centres and still tied to the rigid, unchanged and popular values of the Southern Italian peasant tradition.

2. From Black Pedagogy to protection of childhood

Childhood has been one of the grand themes of theorisation in contemporary Western culture, to the point of becoming one of its defining features. For centuries, the personal and social identities of children have been denied in a work of cultural removal, ignoring their specificities, characteristics, and their important functions in future adulthood. Like the child, childhood itself is elusive: «To an extent perhaps greater than any other subject of the social sciences, the child escapes; we must construct childhood anew, and rid ourselves of the prefabricated images we carry within» (Becchi & Julia, 1996, p. IX, *Auth. Transl.*).

Progress has been made from the long period of authoritarianism and violence in education towards the ideas of protection and care, and on the fronts the rights and cultural and scientific interests of the child. Developments in anthropology, psychology and pedagogy have demonstrated the specificity of childhood as a life phase that deserves its own dignity and recognition.

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

In current studies Black Pedagogy represents a label for those “old-fashioned” disciplinary methods based on adults’ power and control over children, that may be still deemed as acceptable to a certain degree in a specific cultural and social context (Florio, Caso & Castelli, 2022).

Katharina Rutschky first coined the term *schwarze Pädagogik* in 1977, in a volume collecting pedagogical texts and fragments of the late-18th century. Rutschky, examining German educational processes, demonstrated the linkages between authority and obedience, which led to the psychodynamic structuring of the child’s personality and their development of self-regulation, in line with the reference society. In contemporary scientific literature, Black Pedagogy refers to the systematic physical or psychological abuse of children, intended to educate them for life in any society or time of the modern era. The designation as abuse is based on the violation of precepts of authority: the excess of parental power; repeated and cyclical violence; generation of a sense of guilt aimed at conditioning the subject; the obligation to *omertà*.

Rutschky outlined the historic view of the necessity of achieving the child’s submission, for elimination of their faults (Strumpell, 1890), such as malice or simple stubbornness (Scheibert, 1883), through a path of iron discipline, at school and home, that would crush the will in favour of pursuing shared social dictates (Heilingbrunner, 1828; Christiani, 1802; Ziller, 1886). The father at home, the headmaster at school, shared the task of breaking down all forms of childish spontaneity and shaping the child’s character in the stamp cultural homogeneity. For the authors cited by Rutschky, it was a given that society demanded protection from the disturbances of youth (Ziller, 1857), and in the war of education against child, as in any war, not only violence would be licit (the rod, recommended without hesitation), but also strategy, cunning, and the ability to deceive. The child must emerge docile and submissive, overcoming their inherent malice. In the child’s earliest years, parents are already responsible preparation in obedience, so that they arrive before the teacher devoid of resistance or withdrawal. Where necessary, in turn, the teacher would not spare the rod. Education, based on the principle of punishment and reward, is directly responsible for the correction of any perversities in the child’s nature. Through the years the child will progress to the state of obedient adult, loyal to society and nation. The issues on which pedagogues, doctors, religious, psychologists particularly focused concerned the sexual sphere, the war on onanism as a distortion of sexuality and the regulation of food and behaviour with peers and adults so education is called directly to correct the perverse nature of the child (Peticari, 2016). The principle of punishment and reward is an important component of the methods of Black Pedagogy which follows the behaviourist stimulus-response type. Of all the authorities mentioned by Rutschky as exemplary of Black Pedagogy, the orthopaedic doctor Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber (1859) was the greatest exponent. His guides were so popular as to be translated in multiple languages and were passed along from generation to generation. Moritz imparted a mode of strict education that was diffused as far as the humblest families, abrogating almost divine power for teacher and parent:

«One of my children had fallen ill when he was one and a half years old, and the sole treatment giving any hope of saving his life, though risky, was feasible only through the absolute submission of the little patient. The treatment was successful, because the child had been accustomed from the beginning to absolute obedience to me, otherwise in all probability, there would have been no hope of saving him» (Schreber in Rutschky, 1977, p. 57).

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

In the 1970s, the psychoanalyst Alice Miller entered into the study of the deleterious effects of Black Pedagogy on the psyche, connecting this pedagogical context with the cycle of intergenerational psychological ties and violence, which continues on, welded into the memories and practices of adults. Educational violence finds nourishment and justification in models of parental advice, creating a pervasive constellation of pedagogical beliefs, very effective in results. Miller showed how paternalistic educational models have endured over time, imparting the attitude that childhood is truly an «unsustainable, shameful, painful, not infrequently monstrous phase, and one always to be ended» (Miller, 1991, p.7). The psychoanalyst develops an intricate analytical paradigm, beginning with the reflections of Rutschky, in support of a theory connecting the Oedipal complex, the patriarchal system (Miller, 1981/2014), and the child's conscious and unconscious dependence on the parents, ultimately expressed in the child's inability to develop their self-security (Miller, 1994/1996). For Miller, education was still a form of control of the oppressed, from which the worst victims – of violence – would go on to become adult perpetrators. In the same years, however, there emerged an educational counterproposal, no longer solely a set of methodologies and techniques, instead characterized by liberating and emancipatory values; no longer aimed at consolidating a system already inherently ill, but instead at developing a vision of the “unprecedentedly possible” (Freire, 1971).

Since the 1970s there has been an anthropological and social transformation, whereby the role of adults has gone from that of supervisor, with authority of punishment, to protector of childhood. Today we recognise the centuries of ignorance and indifference towards the child. We recognise them as persons who belong to themselves, and adults as responsible for helping develop their identity.

3. Pedagogical counterproposals to social violence versus the Italian child

Over the course of the 20th century, the bourgeois and working-class spheres of the West were radically altered by two world wars, then further dissolved in complicated economic skeins and political claims.

Post-war Italy was a country on the frontier, inserted in neo-capitalist economic development, governed under an ideological pluralism that sided with the USA and other Western governments, politically organised according to a Christian-democratic model, yet still characterised by the large and active oppositional presence of the Communist Party. The 1960s and 1970s were the times of great workers' and students' struggles, a period when democracy advanced, and for Italy, of many movements demanding rights, when even secular pedagogy openly supported a militant educational manifesto.

Until the early 1950s, the Catholic model had remained the dominant national reference, «occupying the community educational space, beyond the family» (Gibelli, 2005, p. 32) with a pedagogy that incorporated the anti-communist political stances characteristic of the Catholic sphere. Countering this on the ground was the dissent of rebel educators, such as Lorenzo Milani, fighting the contemporary school system and above all its traditional methods, which blocked the growth of “problematic” students through failing grades and psychological violence.

According to Loparco (2017) despite the prohibition on punishment during Fascism era, in Italian rural classrooms was common managing and disciplining unruly students by strong punishment methods like sticks,

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

‘chickpeas’ or ‘donkey desks’. The children of *contadino* families remained a social scourge, but one still to be punished and retained in social backwardness.

Only in recent years has Milani received the approval of pedagogists as an educational theorist, when at that time his school in Sant’Andrea di Barbiana, a rural fraction of Florence, struggled against Italian tradition and systems in the name of establishing equality. Operating from early morning till night, the Barbiana School welcomed the children of Tuscan peasants, guaranteeing dynamic learning, open to the problems of the world, leaving no one behind. In contrast to the bourgeois arrogance dominating the urban school, confounding the humbler students year after year, these same children launched their invisible battles, through studying.

In 1976, eight students from the Barbiana School published *Letter to a Teacher*, launching their famous *j’accuse* against the teachers at their former traditional schools.

«Dear Madame,

You will not even remember my name. You have disappointed many of us. On the other hand, I have often thought of you, of your colleagues, of the institution you call a school, of the children you “push away”. You push us away into fields and factories and forget us. Shyness. Two years ago, in my first year of high school, you intimidated me. But my shyness has accompanied me all my life. When I was young, I wouldn’t raise my eyes from the ground, I would lean against walls to avoid being seen. At first, I thought it was a disease of mine, or maybe my whole family [...] Still more, the shyness of the poor is an ancient mystery. Not even I, who am part of it, can explain it to you. Perhaps it isn’t cowardice, nor some kind of heroism. It’s just a lack of arrogance» (Milani, 1976, pp. 9-10, *Auth. Transl.*).

For the children of the mountain villager and city workers, destined to never attain minimum acceptable levels, the failing grade was the ultimate instrument of physical and psychological violence. The parent’s own school inexperience and economic realities were the causes of their children’s failure, year after year. Lorenzo Milani promoted an anti-class battle, against the continual selection in favour of the Piero’s of society, and against the Gianni’s. His aim was to set aside class differences, and so the forced consequences of Gianni abandoning school and continuing in the work of his father. Only the bravest returned, each year meeting younger and younger classmates.

«Pierino, son of the doctor, always passes. It’s strange, he’s so young. The psychologists say he should have difficulties. The doctor’s chromosomes must be strong! Pierino found himself in fifth grade at age nine. He’s always gotten ahead among older classmates. He hasn’t really matured, but he’s trained himself to deal with adults. He’s one of those who feels at ease with you. Gianni, on the other hand, has always gone to school with younger children. He’s a bit overbearing with those, but with the adults he doesn’t open his mouth» (Milani, 1976, pp. 48-49, *Auth. Transl.*).

In their letters, the Barbiana boys claim that children are born equal but that at school, this is undone by selection. For the traditional teacher, this is not their responsibility. The obstacles to education should have been removed by the parent, who previous to their own child, had abandoned school on facing the same obstacles, thereby denying them what they might have become.

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

«But Gianni's father went to work for a blacksmith when he was 12 years old and did not even complete the fourth grade [...] And someone who has these drawbacks can't eliminate them. He doesn't even know what kind of rules apply to a child in middle school, how long he has to sit at his desk, whether it is right for him to believe in school, if it's true that studying gives you a headache and, as Gianni reports, "your eyes begin to twitch". If he knew how to teach a child by himself, he wouldn't have sent Gianni to your school. This means it's your responsibility, teacher, to provide for him, with both education and upbringing. These are two aspects of a single aim. If you would guide him, Gianni would cooperate differently, and himself become a better prepared father. For now, his father is the way he is» (Milani, 1976, pp. 62-63, *Auth. Transl.*).

But pedagogy resisted the authentic sense of education in schools, strenuously defending democracy for the benefit of all. The conception of democracy at school, inapplicable, was in fact a reflection of an anti-democratic struggle to retain the evolved status quo. The figure of Aldo Capitini, then, stands out among the ranks of Italian secular pedagogy, given his aims of supporting individual development, towards freedom and autonomy.

Aldo Capitini, beginning from fundamentals of non-violence, presented a pedagogical proposal for liberation from the dialectic of oppression, for construction of spaces of political participation and a fruitful culture of peace, enabling nonviolent management of cultural, social and economic conflicts.

Capitini's reappraisal of childhood takes up the best democratic traditions of development of each one's talents, whereby the teacher «does not work to produce a second instance [the student] equal to himself, but fulfils his task true to the aim, to the cross, because they recognise the qualitative diversity of the second instance» (Capitini, 1951, p. 63).

This perspective of social pedagogy obligates the organisation and animation of a vast network of the grassroots bodies that play an educational role in society: municipal councils, school-family committees, social centres, school boards, university committees, centres of training in non-violence, gatherings for discussion and political training.

According to Capitini, nonviolence must not seek to hide conflict, but instead bring to bear methods based on constructive dialogue, and an orientation which is equally ethical and political. The role of the school is to enact an educational process that in fact counteracts social alienation and creates connections with humanity, forging inseparable links between education and the political action. The "open school" of Capitini is one of encounter and transformation, encouraging alternatives to any unjust status quo, where «young people shall come to know that tyrannies, exploitation, torture, misery, illiteracy still exist in the world, and that there are, and have been, initiatives and forces to remedy and open up liberations that have never yet existed in this world» (Capitini, 1968, p. 291).

Around the same time as the actions of Capitini, Paulo Freire (1976) published *Education: the Practice of Freedom*, a hymn to liberation of both sides from the zero-sum game of oppressed versus oppressor, thereby achieving greater social equity. The classroom plays the transformative role of a social project, where the sense of equality and the educational offer provide the best democratic solutions. The overcoming of violent practices occurs in the community of early education, where until now, punishment has served to rebuild any interrupted hierarchical relationships, and to limit the freedom, the will, the possibilities of the other, putting the other in a condition of suffering and extreme vulnerability, especially when the other is a child.

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

4. The tradition of violence in childhood education of the Italian South

The unification of Italy, in 1870, instead of bringing an equal distribution of wealth, exaggerated the great inequalities of between the rich and industrialised North and the “backward” South. The centuries-long reign of the Bourbons had imposed an involuted and unproductive agriculture, dominated by the indolence of landowners, repressing development and leaving deep social influences, including a great sense of unrest. Without a middle class, what was left was a great imbalance between landowners and peasants. In contemporary Italy, the “Southern question” still refers to the socio-economic differences between the richer, more powerful North and the “backward” South.

«An abyss separated the two classes. On one side we had the nobles and landowners; on the other, the labourers and the contadini [...] But since the first group were absentees (those who owned the land, but did not work it), it was impossible for any exchange between them and the contadini. They (the contadini) were only contributors of labour and taxes, with no participation in local enterprises or interests» (Zingali, 1933, p. 107).

Apart from a few areas privileged with an economy of citrus cultivation, agriculture in the South was rife with the contrasts of underdevelopment. Although officially terminated, feudal relationships survived. Poorly paid and exploited peasants were confined to village dwellings, already subject to unhealthy conditions, and from there descended to distant fields, in valleys subject to malarial infestation, meaning they would cultivate only the crops requiring intervention in the least risky seasons.

Leonard Covello (1887-1982) was an Italian-born American educator, most known as the founder and principal of the first Italian American school in New York, and a community activist. These were just the most obvious traits of a man who forged a new path, different from that normally reserved for the children of immigrants, to write a page of social inclusion in 20th century New York. His thought can best be traced in his autobiographical memoir, *The Heart is the Teacher*, published in 1958, and in *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child*, derived from his 1967 doctoral thesis in the sociology of education. Although published in America, these works are unique in the social-sciences study of the southern Italian child. In both, Covello clearly represents the points of view of both the Italian immigrant and the immigrant in general. In his doctoral thesis, while explaining the modus operandi of the Southern-Italian families who had arrived on the other side of the Atlantic, he illustrated the underlying code of the rural Italian South, the effects of dialect and education at home.

«The peasant code of southern Italy prohibited any kind of external communication [...] Local tradition and folk wisdom found verbal expression in a great series of proverbs spoken in dialect, which would never be used in school. Any school usage of literary Italian, generally completely foreign to the family’s local dialect, was frequently a source of irritation for parents. [...] The domestic education given by the parents was intended to instil a sense of responsibility in the child, as early as possible. And the sense of responsibility in an eight-year-old boy or a seven-year-old girl was not limited to specific requirements in the child’s own affairs and in relationships with all family members, but also implied responsible work, because the child (in consideration of

Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

their age) was also a true worker, who used real tools, like those of the adults except in their dimensions» (Covello, 1967, p. 264).

Any contact with the higher social classes was forbidden, especially among the younger ones who were firmly attached to the reality they belonged to, avoiding any intrusion into the lives of non-patriots like this testimony reported by Covello:

«My parents strictly forbade me to go to the houses of the rich. They never gave me a reason. [...] When we were young we dared to transgress our parents' orders, and during the day we went to those neighbourhoods where the "signorotti" lived. For us kids it was an adventure, because we felt that these people belonged to another world. In later years we went on excursions to their parts of the city to raise ruckus. Whenever Dad heard about this he always promised me a good scolding, but often, beneath his disciplining demeanour, I saw how pleased he was that I would treat the signorotti so rudely» (Covello, 1967, p.90).

The learning model of peasant society was tied to life with the land, and intertwined with oral tradition, superstition, and magic. Lacking external rights, Southern families were structured around internal paternalistic hierarchies, in a system where status and control passed from the most senior male to the other members of the extended family, but where the adult males on the paternal side were clearly the main referents. Family solidarity was the main law, prevailing over the code of the state. The family was organised according to this unwritten law, well-known and applied by all.

Strictly defined, inviolate rules governed every occasion of life for every family member. Transgressing solidarity meant condemnation not only by the family, but also the larger community. Even though Southern-Italian society remains incohesive, social order and stability can still be guaranteed by rules of high moral conduct. «The honour of the individual family, but even more so the traditional model of family life, has made the family an extremely powerful social form» (Covello, 1967, p. 153). Each member is directly responsible for the possible generation of shame overall, arising from their individual behaviour. In this system, early control, and repression of undesired actions on the part of the child achieves community approval. The community distinguishes "good, well-behaved" children from disorderly ones, even beyond the stage of adolescence. Filial dependence continues into adulthood. When the son becomes husband, this does not imply social adultization, since the son remains directly obedient to the father, unless he eventually achieves seniority. Family dependence also continues for adult women, viewed as acquiring wisdom and potentially independence only in the stage of late widowhood.

Children's education does not follow national law, rather the law of family, to the extent of allowing education only to the few viewed as having the head for it. School education has been a means of social uplift only so far as allowing the child to learn to read and sign their name. Intellectual interests played second to material needs, so that school became a childhood meeting place only in the winter months, when the farm workload is less, after the great summer and autumn works of harvesting grain and processing wine, olive oil and tomatoes.

Since even before national unity, farmers have remained Indifferent towards the state: the sole points of references remained the functions of the land and the known environment. In the heart of winter, classroom

conditions became intolerable. The village school generally consisted of a single classroom accommodating students of all ages, with one small window that made reading impossible during the short and overcast days.

«In winter a semblance of warmth filtered through to us from the fireplace and coal fire in a brazier on the platform at the teacher's feet. At set times we would line up, warm our hands and then return to our desks to continue our writing lesson. One of the requirements for school attendance was that each pupil bring one or two pieces of wood to class each day for the firewood was scarce and difficult to obtain» (Covello, 1958, p. 11).

The teacher remained a strict and uncompromising figure, imposing a model of learning based on memorisation. Corporal punishment already existed in the family, and when used against infringements at school served a reinforcing function. Suffering was the norm: «What comes easy is soon forgotten. What causes effort and torment is remembered all the days of life» (Covello, 1958, p. 13).

A recurring expression in education of the peasant class, coinciding with the principles of family control, was that “children must be tamed”. The taming process was supported by three forms of punishment:

- «- Fear of evil spirits: this consisted of instilling an unhealthy fear of evil spirits, constantly conjured in the children's minds by parents and relatives, who would tell frightening stories to create a sense of terror, and secure obedience.
- The curse, or malediction: this form of punishment was invoked on children who failed to comply in any way with family and social duties and responsibilities. These generally followed fixed formulas: “May your blood run in the streets”; “May you be eaten by dogs (or by worms)”; Who disobeys their mother or father, will die like a dog”.
- Corporal punishment: deviation from education was dangerous and unacceptable. Corporal punishment was administered in public, without dissimulation, so that everyone could see and learn the lessons of the well-educated» (Covello, 1967, pp. 270-273).

Peasant education, which for centuries had remained unchanged, met with student protest in 1968, at the same moment as agricultural workers in the more productive parts of Southern Italy protested over rights to employment, the cost of tools, for higher wages and fundamental social rights. Little by little, beginning the decade 1958-1968, a process was set in motion that over 40 years would upset the traditional Italian geographic and economic polarities, social and political hierarchies, and transform individual and collective behaviour and mentality. It was in the early years that Danilo Dolci, sociologist, and activist, having moved to the Sicilian countryside, engaged in a collective experiment with the peasant population, still mired in traditional education and reluctant to open to the new times. Dolci's experiments in collective writing and popular dialogue signalled a rebellion against the pedagogical passivity of the Italian school, still committed to facilitating learning for the rich and punishing the ignorance of the poor.

Dolci recorded the plague of illiteracy, the forms of exploitation and resulting passivity of those without work, their resigned obedience to the powerful, and the corruption of those responsible for governing. His collective experiment in self-education had begun in 1953, when he began meeting regularly with members of the community. He proposed topics of discussion in ethics, morals and current affairs, provoking an awakening of the

critical spirit that had been dulled by decades of daily cares. Sociological qualitative investigation proceeded in a series of villages, for example Trappeto, a small town near Palermo, where Dolci the testimonies of its inhabitants, all families of fishermen:

«Property nothing. The house belongs to the bride's mother: a room measuring 8 metres by 6 with two alcoves. No bathroom. [...] Two beds and a cot. Two blankets. Sheets that need changing, two tables, a wardrobe and a dresser. A dozen plates, glasses and crockery.

The father, a fisherman, is not earning this year. He eats "a pinch of bread when he gets it and pasta in the evening". He attended fourth grade, then his father and mother died, and he stopped. He can read and write. He doesn't read books and newspapers because he doesn't have time.

The child's mother: second grade, "I understand some letters. The accounts not so much. [...] "Are you interested in the news of Italy?" She laughed in a very negative way.

Partying, never. "For me celebration and work are one and the same thing" [...].

Giuseppe, the first of the children, attended second grade: "This year he didn't pass. He was running around the country eating pears. This winter I beat him all the way to school".

Antonino, who is 8 years old, attended first grade and did not pass» (Dolci, 1954, pp. 19-20 *Auth. Transl.*).

Dolci held regular Thursday evening meetings promoting constructive conversation, bringing the marginalised people of peasant the world into communication with Italy and world, but also bringing national attention to the reasons why interventions have had little influence on the role of the South in the greater economy. The absence of viable state administrative structures, communication networks, educational infrastructure, and even sewage systems, became subjects of discussion in encounters such as the one organised in the fraction of Spine Sante in the province of Messina, where the theme was: «What we would like to maintain and develop, and what to change in the life of our area» (Dolci, 1968, p. 102). Ciccio's reflections provide an example of the perceived importance of completing school, to emerge from the traditions and segregated confines of the local community and enter into the culture of the majority:

«Ciccio: For the moment I don't know how to answer on the subject. About the changes, there are many things. First of all, the reform of the school, to oblige boys, both rich and poor, to at least start school, and up to the sixth grade, so that tomorrow a young man can have culture, can at least read a few books and be in touch with the progress of things... And also, with regard to the education of children, they must grow up educated, intelligent... Of course this way the problems would be more difficult for the government, because when people are a little more intelligent, the governments suffer [...] Change this order of social education [...] More than anything else try to raise the youth up, so that tomorrow these young people... even a declaration of love to a girl, this shouldn't be like it is today in secret and then tomorrow there's the consequences» (Dolci, 1968, pp. 102-103, *Auth. Transl.*).

The hopes of Ciccio reveal a world of injustice and violence, transferred from the adult generation to the younger one, and experienced from birth as the sole reference. Dolci's work reveals an Italy engaged in a dual-speed economic recovery, with the South and its people left barely in first gear: in mechanisms of systemic

cultural and family violence for which the children above all are left behind, still unsuccessfully attempting to solve the same problems of maladjustment as their parents.

5. A challenge for education

History teaches us that the deeper, more widespread, and greater the violence, the more the victims will be our children. In the Italian South, the fatigue from attempted emancipation processes, as well as the fear of potential effects from freedoms, are translated into the continuing protection of traditions and the insistence on rigid upbringing, skipping growth processes and immediately shifting the child into adulthood.

Childhood, historically betrayed and then rediscovered during the 20th century, will always be vulnerable since it always remains at the mercy of the environment of growth and development.

The poison of *schwarze Pädagogik* continues to course through all our 21st century societies, changing its aspect but remaining a universal problem. Since the 1980s in the rest of Europe, and in Southern Italy, the advancements in economic well-being have certainly enabled the promotion of children's rights. Also, important have been the recent intergovernmental actions for the abolition of violence against children (Council of Europe, 2010). But these advancements also continue to reveal the strong connections between family histories and education. The terrible aspect of transgenerational dynamics is that they can only be by the adult generation, who must finally recognise the physical and psychological violence in their family relationships, and then break the chain.

References

- Ariés, P. (1981). *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*. Laterza (*L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien regime*. Plon, 1960).
- Becchi, E., Julia, D. (Eds.) (1996). *Storia dell'infanzia*. Laterza.
- Benelli, C. (2015). *Danilo Dolci tra maieutica ed emancipazione. Memoria a più voci*. ETS.
- Blasche, B.H. (1828). *Handbuch der Erziehungswissenschaft oder Ideen und Materialien zum Beruf einer neuen, durchgängig wissenschaftlichen Erziehungs- und Unterrichtslehre*. Gießen.
- Capitini, A. (1951). *L'atto di educare*. La Nuova Italia.
- Capitini, A. (1968). *Educazione aperta*. La Nuova Italia.
- Carioli, S. (2020). Historical legacies and use of corporal punishment of children in the home, in Italy. *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 16(1), 25-42.
- Christiani, C. (1802). *Neue Beiträge zur Veredlung der Menschheit, hrsg. aus dem Erziehungsinstitut bei Kopenhagen*. Kopenhagen.
- Covello, L. (1958). *The Heart is the Teacher*. McGraw-Hill.
- Covello, L. (1967). *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child. A study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America*. Brill.
- De Martino, E. (1962). *Magia e civiltà. Un'antologia critica fondamentale per lo studio del concetto di magia nella civiltà occidentale*. Garzanti.
- Dolci, D. (1954). *Fare presto (e bene) perché si muore*. Torino.
- Dolci, D. (1968). *Inventare il futuro*. Laterza.
- Florio, E., Caso, L. & Castelli, I. (2022). Detrimental educational practices deemed as culturally acceptable: Adultcentrism and Black Pedagogy in Italian primary schools. *Social Psychology of Education* 25, 313-347.
- Gibelli, A. (2005). *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò*. Einaudi.
- Heiligbrunner, A. (1878-79). *Die Schulgesetze in H. Gräfe. Deutsche Volksschule oder die Bürger- und Landschulen nach der Gesamtheit ihrer Verhältnisse*. Jena.
- Loparco, F. (2017). Former teachers' and pupils' autobiographical accounts of punishment in Italian rural primary schools during Fascism. *History of Education*, 46(5), 618-630.
- Milani, L. (1976). *Lettera a una professoressa*. Libreria editrice fiorentina.
- Miller, A. (1991), *La fiducia tradita. Violenze e ipocrisie dell'educazione*. Garzanti (*Abbruch der Schweigemauer*, Hoffman & Campe Verlag, 1990).
- Miller, A. (1996), *Il dramma del bambino dotato e la ricerca del vero Sé*. Bollati Boringhieri (*Das Drama des begabten Kindes und die Suche nach dem wahren Selbst: eine Um – und Fortschreibung*, Suhrkamp Verlag 1994).
- Carmen Petrucci – *The right to punish vs. the duty of education, in rural Southern Italy: From Black Pedagogy to the educational counterproposal (1955-1975)*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/14727>

- Miller, A. (2014), *Il bambino inascoltato. Realtà infantile e dogma psicoanalitico*. Bollati Boringhieri (*Du sollst nicht merken. Variationen über das Paradies-Thema*, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).
- Perticari, P. (Ed.) (2016). *Katharina Rutschky. Pedagogia nera. Fonti storiche dell'educazione civile*. Mimesis.
- Ruthscky K. (Ed.) (2016). *Pedagogia nera. Fonti storiche dell'educazione civile*. In P. Perticari (Ed.), *Katharina Rutschky. Pedagogia nera. Fonti storiche dell'educazione civile*. Mimesis (*Schwarze Pädagogik. Quellen zur Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung*, Ullstein 1977).
- Scheibert, C.G. (1883). *Ratschläge für Erziehung der Volksjugend in Haus und Schule*. Leipzig.
- Schreber, D.G. (1895). *Die Kallipädie oder Erziehung zur Schönheit durch naturgetreue und gleichmäßige Förderung normaler Körperbildung, lebensstüchtiger Gesundheit und geistiger Veredelung und insbesondere durch möglichste Beutzung spezieller Erziehungsmittel. Für Eltern, Erzieher und Lehrer*. Leipzig.
- Strümpell, L. (1890). *Die pädagogische Pathologie oder die Lehre von den Fehlern der Kinder, Leibniz, Versuch einer Grundlegung*. Leibniz.
- Ziller, T. (1857). *Die Regierung der Kinder. Für gebildete Eltern, Lehrer und Studierende*. Leipzig.
- Ziller, T. (1886). *Materialien zur speziellen Pädagogik, d.i. des »Leipziger Seminarbuches«*, Dresden.
- Zingali, G. (1933). *Liberalismo e fascismo nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia*. Fratelli Treves.

Carmen Petruzzi is Ph.D in Pedagogical Studies. Her research concerns educational methods in Southern Italy, migration studies. Recently she is delving into the history of educational processes of Italian emigrants in New York City. She is research fellow at the University of Foggia.

Contact: carmen.petruzzi@unifg.it