

Italian Youth and the Learning of History: Cultural Resistances and Pedagogical Perspectives

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Abstract

Sociologists who have recently been interested in the condition of youth have emphasized the function that the relationship with history has in the construction of social identities of young people. This article, using analytical concepts and categories common to sociologists of action, analyses the relationship of Italian youth with history and particularly of the youth living in the regions of southern Italy. The author highlights the link between the learning of history and the construction of youth identities, focusing on the function of different collective national and regional memories in the formation of a critical historical consciousness. The methods and educational strategies through which one may seek to encourage young people's critical learning of history outline the salient elements of innovative pedagogies of history and trace working assumptions to think about educational policies in relation to the multiple and heterogeneous processes of development of contemporary societies.

Keywords: Young people, pedagogies of history, learning contexts, collective memory.

1. Introduction

Ricolfi and Sciolla in 1989 argued that the biggest difference between the youth of that time and those in their twenties in the early 70's consisted in the difficulty new generations had in establishing a relationship with tradition (Ricolfi, Sciolla 1989). Scalfari in 1999, reflecting on the condition of young Italians, placed emphasis on the role that the removal of history and the refusal to transmit the past and its values theorized and practised by the youth of the post-1968 protest movement played in the construction of their social identity (Scalfari 1999).

The issue of the relationship of today's youth with history does not seem to be an Italian problem alone. Galland already in 1984, studying the trend of young French people to live essentially in the present, drew attention to the difficult relationship that links young people to previous generations while at the same time allowing them to project themselves into the future (Galland 1984).

Socio-historical facts linked to the blurring of ideologies, no less than the progressive legitimation of the market economy and the transformation of the means of communication are likely to have contributed in changing young European's relationship with history from the early 70s to the present day¹. The general scope of such facts however, must not overshadow some specific national and in some cases sub-national aspects. Indeed, it seems clear that in the general transformations of the relationship that the youth has with its collective history, it is necessary to distinguish the different national influence of specific historical-political variables and socio-political dynamics. Among the historical-political variables here pointed out, merely as an example, are the specific influence of an older history of statehood, the processes of immigration-emigration which various states have witnessed, the efficiency of regionalisms and / or dualisms particularly significant in determining different national identities.

¹ For further insights on the different historical efficiency of ideologies after 1970, please refer to the article by Jean Baechler (2000), "Le retour des ideologies", in *Commentaire*, 91.

Among the social dynamics, one can not avoid thinking of the influence exerted by different family models, by a different structuring of the economic system and, in particular, that of labour, but also, for example, the influence resulting from the presence within the various societies of different religious traditions and church organizations².

From the analysis of the co-existence of more general traits but also of national and regional specificities that seem almost to territorially specify the relationship of the youth with collective memory, emerge the following questions that is here the intention to reflected upon:

- 1) Why does the relationship between the youth and history prove to be important in the formation of the social identities of the youth?
- 2) What are the peculiarities of this relationship in Italy and, in particular, what is its configuration in the southern regions of Italy?
- 3) And finally, through which methods can conscious learning of history be promoted among young people?

This article, making use of studies of sociologists who have recently been interested in the condition of youth, offers a sociological analysis that stands in the tradition of the sociology of action. The research explores the social formation of the learning of history and analyses as a case study, the relationship that Italian youth has with history.

The structure of the article picks up the main questions around which the research revolves; the first part analyses the relationship between the youth and collective memory, focusing on the role that the learning of history plays in the development processes of society. The second part analyses the relationship between Italian youth and history and reconstructs the socio-historical processes that most affect it. On the basis of the analyses developed, the third and final part offers educational strategies that could promote conscious learning of history.

2. Youth and collective memory

Sociologists who have studied the formation of collective memory, such as Halbwachs for example, have well pointed out the centrality of such processes in the transformations of various societies (Halbwachs 1994; 1997). The internal dynamics of these processes, far from being static and holistic images of various social morphologies, highlight some general mechanisms of socialization processes. In particular, it seems that they focus the mechanisms of individualization, those of association in the Simmelian sense of the term, and the relationships that link the former to the latter. Sociologically interesting is the fact that these mechanisms are not intended to assimilate the individual to society, nor are intended to deny the importance that the many different social influences have on individual development.

According to the French sociologist, individuals, in the establishment of their identity, do not exist in an a-historical environment but co-exist in a mutual interaction that runs both on a diachronic plane as well as on a synchronistic level and seems to crystallize itself into specific social representations.

The formation of individual memory occurs, therefore, through the impulse of collective histories which are meaningful for each individual and shared at community level. The moment of community sharing of history by anchoring individuals to society seems fundamental, within it, the subjective validation of the meaning attached inter-subjectively to history appears to be a focal operation through which individuals are not only able to recognize themselves as authors of their story but also to reconstruct the cognitive process to which they have participated. The individual validation of inter-subjective meanings seems to act in the process of individualization-association as a transcendental pattern: on the one hand it allows the individual to learn their own identity in their own specific social dimension, then in their own particularity, on the other, precisely because an experience of specificity and limit, it permits to transcend the particularity and to learn general or social forms of individual existence.

² An analysis of the ambivalent influence of religious traditions in the formation of a historical consciousness of individuals has been the subject of specific works by M. Gauchet since the publication of the book *Le désenchantement du monde* in 1985. Gauchet M. (1985), *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*, Paris, Editions Gallimard. For a discussion of the influence of the relationship between religious traditions, territorial organization of the Catholic Church and the formation of a national identity in Italy, see E. Galli della Loggia, *L'identità italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998.

This cognitive process is a logical scheme that allows the discovery of the *similar distinctiveness of individuals*, to transcend the absoluteness of their individuality and to recover inter-subjectivity as a constitutive dimension of the self and as a limit to one's own self-referentiality. The experiencing of the inter-individual difference not as opposition to identity but as a cognitive-normative root that allows one to think about society in its many historical forms but also in the more general and recurrent traits of its configurations reveals to individuals their political status. If, as M. Gauchet highlights, the political condition expresses the ability of individuals to be aware of the forms of their being together (Gauchet 2005), of conflicts and of their various regulations, such an experience seems important for young people not only because it is part of a period of individual development particularly significant for their social formation but mainly because it appears as a kind of learning opportunity of the ability to transcend their historical specificity and immediacy and critically understand the forms of conflict regulation that shape the society in which they live. This kind of learning is surprising for two aspects: the forms of social participation that it transmits and the innovation potential it conveys.

For if politics is the ability to know and adapt the aims of the various groups that make up a social system to the aims that the whole of society pursues, the *crisis*³ as rational decision-making and as an effort to adapt the aims pursued by the various social groups to more general aims, is a kind of learning of *innovative political participation*.

This conception founds its effectiveness on an aspect not immediately evident, constituted of a kind of realism: political participation to be innovative must proceed from an analysis of reality, it must be anchored and must be derived from the knowledge of reality both in its material as well as symbolic aspects and, more particularly, from a knowledge of the various social morphologies intended as specific historical syntheses between material and cultural elements.

G. Seravalli - explaining innovation as the capacity of unlearning ways of acting and thinking previously considered as valid - permits the understanding of innovative political participation of the youth, that is their capacity to constantly adjust the image that society has of itself, as being their contribution to social change (Seravalli 2006). The learning of an innovative youth participation as an unexpected effect of the relationship of young people with collective history does not seem to be an automatic social mechanism, it refers to multiple contexts and traditions of learning, to collective justifications of the relationship of individuals with their common history. In particular, the learning on behalf of the youth of forms of innovative political participation leads us to reflect on the legitimacy that the analysis of political-economic reality has in certain contexts and on the forms and degree of social inclusion of young people which specific societies legitimize.

3. The youth-collective memory relationship in Italy

B. Badie, reflecting on the formation of states, and critically deepening some concepts already present in the thought of Eisenstadt, has brought to light a symbolic-collective dimension of such processes (Badie, Birnbaum 1979). Collective representations and justifications that structure at the inter-subjective level a given society, those social discourses that it constantly produces about itself, constitute, according to this French sociologist, a kind of epigenetic movement functional to the various state formations. This interpretation offers an explanation of the degree and forms of plausibility of social change and ultimately, links the emergence and structure of democracy to the capacity of the various societies to reflect on their own manner of being.

The Italian state is - as is known - a recent political development in which many different regional histories are gathered. In this section considerations are made on the political and cultural climate that in Italy has historically legitimized the plurality of reflections of Italian society on itself by emphasising three distinct but interrelated themes.

1. Some perverse effects of the southern question.
2. The relationships between national collective memory and regional memories.
3. The influence of a non-realist conception of history.

³ The concept of *crisis* is borrowed from C. Nicolet which in turn draws it directly from Aristotle's Politics. The *crisis* meant as a reasoned decision on common affairs and internal conflicts, in history represents the fundamental dimension of the condition of the Roman citizen. Nicolet C. (1976), *Le métier de citoyen dans la Rome républicaine*, Paris, Gallimard.

3.1 Some perverse effects of the southern question

As highlighted by D. Rivièrè, the North-South dualism in Italy constitutes a founding condition of the organization of the state (Rivièrè 1996). In the perspective of comparative historical sociology, economic and social differences internal to Italy structure and affect the formation of the nation both in historic-geographical terms, that is both for territorial size and for the pre-unification political formations that dualism synthesizes, as well as from the historiographical point of view, that is for the political and cultural climate that the southern issue nurtures and legitimises, within the country as in international relations.

The economic gaps, migratory flows, problems of public order, recurrently mark the social history of post-unitary Italy. To these there overlaps the construction of the image of a south strongly penalized by its own history and "exploited" by the industrial development of the north.

In the analysis of the vast and varied southern literature an effect of uniqueness diffuse in collective political and cultural representations is surprising. As if, beyond, the specificity of the individual views, and various historical periods, emerges, collectively, a single image of the southern question. An image that in contributing to the formation of a common collective memory shows mainly two perverse effects. The first is a sort of historical blurring. As stated by R. Villari it has been difficult in the context of the issue of the south to escape a sort of historical determinism and reformulate the multiple gaps between the north and the south of the country while seeking the historical and social conditions that over time have produced them (Villari 1974). As if the entrenchment of cultural and scientific theories of dependency acted at a collective level reducing the many historical and social differences and instead favoured the construction of a mask that adhering to reality in the end made it uniform. The second perverse effect coincides with a sort of historical-cultural construction of the object of study. The effectiveness of the cultural and political discourse, as noted by Cersosimo and Donzelli, ends up stoking incessantly its own reproduction (Cersosimo, Donzelli 2000). The combination of these two effects reduces and distorts the contribution of the multiple regional histories to the formation of a common history reducing to an *identical* discourse the many regional differences and making the pluralism of political and economic traditions, which Galli della Loggia for example recognizes as the distinctive trait of Italian identity, inefficient (Galli della Loggia 1998). These representations seem common to the whole country; in this perspective, the emergence of a political party like the Northern League seems to be consistent with the cultural difficulties, also spread in the north of Italy, of building a common history of the nation. On the political-economic level, the introduction of regional policy in the EC Treaty, the history of the extraordinary intervention for the south, failures generally recorded in the ability to spend the European Structural Funds in the southern regions of Italy show, despite the differences that characterize these processes, the historical effectiveness of a cultural discourse based on the difficulty of transforming the many regional histories in a common national history.

3.2 The relationships between the national collective memory and regional memories.

The analysis of the relationships between single regional collective memories and the formation of a common history not only reveals the limits of a representation of national history which is not attentive to the many regional differences but it identifies in the local economic history and in the political-economic attention reserved to it one of the causal links that best explains the cultural conditions that have hindered Italy in the formation of a *commonality of destinies* (Weber 1999)⁴. If, as noted by Cavalli, the transition from multiple collective memories to a common national history consists in the ability of individuals to imagine a "We" within the history of which single individuals can redefine themselves, it is interesting to understand how in different Italian regions these collective processes have taken diverse characteristics (Cavalli 1996). The roles that the enhancement of local economic history and local forms of political and economic governance play in the transformation of collective memories in common history is revealed by the analysis of the institutional conditions that favour these processes.

The analysis of two separate state-region relationships like the one between the state and Sardinia and between the state and Sicily exemplifies the different impact that the enhancement of local economic history and local political and economic governance has had on the formation of different regional collective memories.

⁴ Max Weber, (1922), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Mohr, Tubingen; Italian translation *Economia e Società*, Milano, Edizioni Comunità, 1999, citing out of which from Vol. IV, Political Sociology, page 3: "Common political destinies - namely at the forefront of common political struggles for life or for death - establish communities of memories that often act more strongly than the constraints of the cultural, linguistic or racial community."

In Sicily the formation of regional collective memory seems mainly based on the construction of cultural differences and is expressed in relationships of co-dependency between the local and national political classes. The building of institutional relations between the state and the region does not appear to be based on the perception of a local collective memory that can be redefined on a common political-cultural level but, on the contrary, seems based on the instrumental use of local history. A sort of depreciation of local economic traditions realised through missed investments in the traditional economic sectors and lack of innovation in productive and commercial processes contributes to removing youth's planning from the local economic history and at the same time promotes the separation of the regional from the national history. Added to this process is the tendency of the local political elite to stress its own contribution to the formation of the national parliament on the one hand and, on the other, the need to have state-owned economic resources available in order to protect productivity, employment, and the services provided at the local and regional level.

In Sardinia instead one observes, in relation to political governance, the search for a redefinition of the local collective memory based on a kind of *political-economic imitation* of national institutions and manifested in relationships of governmental interdependence already formalized in the regional statute⁵. The enhancement of local economic traditions made by concentrating investments on certain types of economic activities and the establishment of local development systems suitable for associating around unique development projects private companies, banks, educational and training institutions, Chambers of Commerce and local authorities favour, in the youth, the development of a kind of bond between the regional collective memory and the national memory.

The institutional differences noted in the two regional contexts find correspondence in the behaviours and collective beliefs of the youth and in a different capacity to imagine and feel part of a national history.

The different emphasis on the emerging local economic history in the two regions leads, in particular, to question the role of this variable in the formation of a common collective history. On the inter-subjective level, local economic history seems to constitute a logical scheme which on one hand allows individuals to understand the becoming of society, and on the other, allows to reflect on the meaning that one is willing to give it subjectively. This cognitive-pragmatic function seems particularly effective with regards to young people, it should foster understanding of their real opportunities for development. This latter step seems essential to de-construct forms of evaluative and behavioural self-referentiality and establish on a non-instrumental basis the need for relations with others.

3.3 The influence of a non-realist conception of history

The recognition of the cognitive-pragmatic function that regional economic history has in the formation of the nation's history leads to reflect on the diffusion in Italy of a non-realist conception of history. The difficulty of young Italians in planning their own future does not appear in fact separated from the collective plausibility of a-historic imaginations of individual lives; as if the difficulties of the youth to be placed in a historical time were consistent, at an inter-individual level, with the spread of imaginative abilities not anchored to concrete achievements of the lives of the social actors. In this logical perspective, the depreciation of the regional economic history, found in some Italian regions, would indicate the inclination of individuals to develop non-realist visions of their own history. But how does such an inclination originate and, especially how does it spread at the inter-individual level?

By analysing the formation of the Italian legal and administrative culture and, in particular the contribution offered to it by the southern bourgeoisie, S. Cassese has drawn attention to a very special kind of idealism made up of the amplification of the formal and procedural aspects of legal actions and of the organic inclusion of intellectuals within the administration of the state. Wanting to translate in a Weberian way the thought of lawyers one might say that in the formation of the Italian legal and administrative culture, formal rationality has been functional to the formation and defence of class positions and privileges and at the same time has prevented access to material rationality, namely to the recognition of power relationships that affect the various socio-political situations.

⁵ For an analysis of the historical formation of the regional statute of Sardinia, see the article by Soddu F. (1998), "Il Piano di rinascita della Sardegna: gli strumenti istituzionali e il dibattito politico", in L. Berlinguer, Mattone A. (1998), *Storia d'Italia. Le Regioni dall'Unità a Oggi. La Sardegna*, Turin, Einaudi, pp. 995-1035.

If, as stated by N. Bobbio, one of the most significant contributions of Croce's philosophy of history has been to read history as antagonisms of moral forces, or as a conflict of freedom (Bobbio 1997), it is clear how this character is far from the kind of idealism that has characterized the formation of the Italian legal and administrative culture and, in particular, of the south. Croce's philosophy of history seems to require as its own constitutive moment the understanding of the historicity of the categories of knowledge and the reflection on the possibility of their transformation. Conceived in these terms, that is especially as a human reflection on history, Croce's conception of history shows affinity, as pointed out by P. Rossi, with Weberian historicism (Rossi 1988). The analytical knowledge of the existing antagonisms, namely of the freedom afforded to the different social actors, is not only the feature that more prominently relates the conception of history of Croce to that of Weber but also the dimension that allows a questioning of the individual regional and local histories to form a common collective history. The tendency of Italians to be unable to imagine a possible future would then indicate a lack of knowledge of the existing relationships between forces, a lack of reflection on their own categories of knowledge, a lack of clarification of the relationship between thinking author and idea.

According to this reasoning, the enhancement of regional economic history and a realist conception of history reveal a common goal, they help individuals to discover their real historicity, made of possible achievements, of corrections of inter-individual expectations and, ultimately, to the undertaking of planning albeit through its constant redefinition though not its impossibility. The reflection on the importance especially among the youth of a realistic view of history poses numerous questions about its possible learning, on existing teaching and educational projects and on their possible reformulations.

4 *From local collective memories to contexts of learning of a common history*

The themes which have been here considered do not exhaust the character of the political and cultural climate prevalent in Italy over the last fifty years. Only general characters have been dealt with, whose selection is justified only for the specific efficiency of their combination. Sociologically the possible combination of these characters does not appear to be significant for its uniqueness but rather because it outlines a procedural conception of the formation of common collective memories. With an analytical approach one can see on the one hand the many social processes (cultural, institutional, economic) that form the national collective memory and on the other hand, the interaction between them and the individual appropriation of common memories. This interpretation, depending on its own indeterminate character and continuous susceptibility to give rise to the sharing of new stories, allows one to think of multiple processes of *learning of national history*. The reformulation seems appropriate to bring to focus the lack of an a priori determination of history, the role of historical experience as a useful framework for its individual appropriation, and the policy actions that have the potential to restrain and / or encourage specific learnings of common history. If the constitutive characters of the Italian political and cultural climate which have been analysed have generally influenced uncritical learning of common history in Italy, or cognitive processes have failed to activate the research and enhancement of the capacity for individual judgement then it is necessary to reflect on the efficiency of the cognitive mechanisms that have favoured these processes. Inter-subjectivity as cognitive and normative relation that regulates and limits the processes of identification is also the function that allows to transcend the individual particularity and to understand the meaning that others attribute to a common history. The relationship with otherness thus appears as fundamental to understanding the possible learnings of history. The chance to see the other not as identical to oneself, nor as absolutely different, but as a *like* seems to be at the root of the inter-individual possibility of forming a judgement on society which, involving the authors of the judgement, will result in the opportunity to make different judgements on history. The basis of interpersonal relationships founded on the enhancement of inter-individual similarity seems to be the legitimation of general forms of authority. As if the acceptance of the general character of the law were the dimension that allows one to transcend ones own individuality, establish social life and at the same time to understand how it works.

Reconstructing these processes appears useful especially in relation to the possibilities that young people have to learn their identities as historical.

As understood by Halbwachs, if the collective memory and the individual memory support each other, and if the former through places, images, impressions encourages the latter and the latter associates, selects, organizes, invents the resonances of the former then reflecting on the pedagogy of history means reflecting on the legitimacy of the founding authority of different societies and especially on their degree of generality, openness, exclusivity, and in the limit on their self-referential character (Halbwachs 1994).

By founding the formation of a common history on the analysis of relations of authority it is possible to understand the conditions that in Italy and, in particular, in some regions of the south, make the learnings of history less critical. This analytical perspective, however, requires a redefinition of the problem: the real and symbolic places where young people experience relations of authority are transformed into learning contexts of shared history. The family and school are then the first places where young people, learning the general and not self-referential character of authority, learn to transform the collective memories of the group into shared history.

5. Reflections on some pedagogical perspectives

The analysis carried out so far shows that the ability of young people to respect the general rules of living together influences their learning of a common history. Recently, the Italian legislator has paid attention to a particular subject of school education, that of "Citizenship and Constitution". The course has been extended to all schools and has been included among the subjects of the historical area⁶. The parallel between the introduction of the teaching of "Citizenship and Constitution" and what has been developed on the analyses of the contexts in which young people can learn forms of general authority is apparently almost immediate. The definition of "Citizenship and Constitution" assigned to teaching refers both to the opportunity of learning the status of citizens in the classroom, as well as to the importance that knowledge of the constitution, thus of the fundamental law of the state, has for the formation of the identities of the youth. The similarities between the sociological analyses here developed and recently introduced legislation, however, are only apparent. In particular, if how the acceptance of general forms of authority in young people has been rebuilt is one of the dimensions appropriate to establish a historical knowledge of individuality, the realization of this kind of teaching does not seem suitable to trigger similar processes.

Cavalli, in highlighting the limits of this new legislation, has drawn attention to some teaching practices that could increase youth's respect for the rules and, through these, their learning of history (Cavalli 2009). The ideas of Cavalli, rethought according to the different contexts of the learning of history, encourage one to place the teaching of this discipline in a broader discussion relatively to the analysis of those conditions that can enable young people to develop common histories. In particular, it seems useful to reflect on some educational practices aimed at teaching general norms, the analysis of which may lead to new pedagogical perspectives. Educational practices upon which one aims to reflect upon should consider the following three conditions:

- The attention that in the various educational contexts is paid to the intelligibility of the historiographical relation.
- The enhancement of the interdependence between different learning contexts.
- The importance of the explicitation of an intergenerational pact.

5.1 The intelligibility of the historiographical relationship

Sciolla et. al., analysing the processes of socialization of the youth, emphasize the legitimacy in the formations of their social identities of some models and behavioural styles (Sciolla 2006). Such an approach helps to outline different contexts of learning and, above all, it highlights the interdependence between different behavioural styles and their distinct collective legitimacies. In this perspective, the promotion of the learning of general rules not only looks like a collective problem but reveals its focus, which consists in the ability to teach history in the light of a historiographical reference point. P. Salvucci, with regard to the history of philosophy, highlighted the historicizing work implied in the attribution of a thought to a philosopher, "in the thought of, - wrote Salvucci – the "of", requires a violence, a loss of absoluteness and the emergence of a historical relationship" (Salvucci 1993). The historical relationship is consequently not a presentation of the fact but explicitation of the view with which we look at the facts.

In the social construction of Italian collective memory what is generally observed is precisely the widespread lack of a historicization effort that has as its object the formation of a national history. If we limit the scope of analysis to young students and if as reported by Sciolla et. al. they are the more effective cognitive and normative models, filters, this means that in a pedagogical perspective one should urge an entirely political question in the school and family worlds which consists in asking oneself from which point of view one is observing reality, that is as a parent, a teacher and / or an adult reference point.

⁶ The new legislation was introduced by the Legislative Decree n. 137 of 01/09/2008 subsequently converted into Law n. 169 of 30 October 2008.

The pre-condition for promoting learning of general norms by young people is not only then a historiographical work performed on the other by oneself but in a reflection on oneself, on one's own prejudices, on one's own pre-notions and on the many *idées reçues* that make up the family and professional identities of individuals and their contexts of legitimation⁷. Thus defined, the pedagogy of history appears to be a collective reflection on the learning of history and on the play between the reciprocal legitimacies existing between the distinct and various, scientific, cultural and social discourses. A similar interpretation, translated in didactic analysis, allows the reflection on the learning of history and on the learning of generally valid norms to be transformed into the reflection on learning environments and helps, for example, to reformulate in different terms the family-school relationship.

5.2 *The interdependence between the various learning contexts*

The reconstruction of the historical relationship as a clarification of the position and the layout from which history is constructed allows the discovery-consideration of inter-subjectivity and the understanding of the claim of the centrality intrinsic in the positions of others. From a sociological point of view, and in particular, in its application to the relationship between the family and school, the inclination to consider the positions and assessments of others results in the understanding of different legitimizations from those shared in one's own family and / or professional community.

Cavalli, studying the youth of the south, has highlighted school's role as an agency of erosion of self-referentiality integral to some family contexts (Cavalli 1990). The southern school system, considered in the context of this specific social function it assumes, appears to be fundamental for the promotion of that historiographical work necessary to promote youth's learning of common collective histories. The discontinuity between the teachings offered by the school and family models and, ultimately, their antagonism appears the result and confirmation of this logic, which however sinks its specific efficiency not on a closure of the school to the world's self-referentiality but on the contrary on its ability to understand the relationship with the world of the family as one that requires the intelligibility and the reconstruction of reciprocal historical positions. The contrast between the two universes of socialization then becomes acceptable and in the limit desirable when it is placed not as an a priori framework of symbolic definition of the relationship but as a possible result of a *travail social* of which the school, just by virtue of its social role of deconstruction of self-referentiality, especially in the regions of southern Italy, appears to be one of the major actors.

The analysis acquires a higher value if completed on the one hand with the understanding of the reciprocal legitimizations that exist between different life worlds, in the specific especially between the school and family worlds and, on the other, with the understanding of those policy conditions that, in the various national contexts, have, since the 70s, favoured not only specific school and family policies but also the construction of the social functions both of the school and of the family. The enhancement of the interdependence between school and family and, above all, the diachronic analysis of policies to it reserved introduces the issue of joint political responsibility and of the function of an intergenerational pact.

5.3 *The explicitation of an intergenerational pact*

J.M. Berthelot, in the early 80s, analysing the difficulties and in some cases the failure at school of some French students, observed how upstream there was a fragmented and contradictory legitimation of the value of education (Berthelot 1983).

The analysis of the different legitimizations of school education appears useful to the extent that it highlights a play between distinct but complementary responsibilities that refer to a political dimension of the problem. If the early 70s make up a break in the transmission to young people of a collective memory and in developing their capacity to participate in a common history, the capacity of the various governance policies in explicitizing an intergenerational pact designed primarily as responsibility towards future generations, as confidence in their ability to build a better future, seems to be called into question. Similar capabilities seem to sink their roots in a specific type of sharing, in political cultures that are geared towards the promotion of general interests and are regulated by a critical analysis and in the limit by the sanction of decisions that do not aim at the realization of collective interests.

⁷ The terms *idées reçues* and *pre-notions* are taken from R. Boudon. Boudon R. (1990), *L'Art de se Persuader. Des idées fausses fragiles ou douteuses*, Paris, Fayard.

This kind of ability reminds one of the formation of what Tocqueville defines a *self-interest rightly understood*, presupposes the erosion of a conception of politics as a means of defence of particularistic interests and as an encouragement of various clienteles. Such capabilities appear fundamentally innovative as they promote the opportunity of individuals to perform inter-subjective critical knowledge-evaluation work of their own history. The degree of innovation appears however conditioned by the participation of young people in the shaping of society, and in particular on the quality of their inclusion, on the utilities that they can offer to the renewal of the whole of society.

The policy analyses in recent decades which have covered the Italian school system, just like those that have covered the family, do not reveal political responsibilities that recall the concept of self-interest rightly understood of Tocquevillian memory.

La Spina - highlighting the effects of the recent transformations of the national systems of teacher recruitment on the selection of the quality of teaching staff – poses the question not only of the perverse effects of policy actions, but above all of their formation and of the weight that all those particularistic elements that contribute to their definition have in these processes (La Spina 2009).

If these analyses are crossed-checked with those that L. Balbo and P. Di Nicola have developed in recent years on the absence in Italy of appropriate policies to support the development of families, and with the amplification of the protective role that families play with regard to younger generations, it seems obvious how in Italy, at the political but also the scientific and cultural levels, one has renounced to the enhancement of the interdependence of political actions and, above all, to their orientation towards future generations.

From the sociological point of view family policies, policies to reform the school system and labour policies are not so much parts of a single political design but of a common political tension. It does not appear to consist of overlapping responsibilities, nor of responsibilities that in their reciprocal referral eventually cancel each other out, it appears instead formed by separate inter-subjective dispositions to critically rethink the formation of their own history and reinvent social roles that are able to enhance the experience of the father's generations without forgetting to accord trust to the generations of children.

Concluding remarks

The relationship between young Europeans and common collective memories, such as national histories, is a relationship that above and beyond the various state and regional characterizations, appears, from the early 70s, to be more difficult. In the considerations made in this article, moving from some cognitive resistances that are recurrent in the political and cultural climate that has characterized the institutional formation and organization of the Italian state, in the first instance the opportunities of young people to participate in the formation of common collective histories were analysed, then some pedagogical thoughts were formulated that in facilitating the youth in their learning of history could favour the learning of their political conditions.

The analysis of some of the cultural conditions that in Italy characterize the relationship of the youth with the nation's history, such as for example, the territorial homogenization and cultural constructivism favoured by some vulgates of the southern question, the different regional capacities to transform their own political and economic traditions into the formation of common institutions, and finally, the widespread depreciation of a "realist" conception of history, which can proceed from knowledge of one's own and other's material and cultural resources, does not exhaust the recurrence of cultural conditions that in the country makes the relationship of the youth with national history difficult. The combination of causal relationships that emerges between the cultural conditions analysed, far from suggesting a mono-causal configuration or worse still a taxonomic one, outlines the political and cultural scenes which help to understand the difficulties of young people in considering themselves part of national history but mainly highlights systems of joint responsibility. The issue of the learning of history that emerges from the analysis reveals deep political roots, is a matter which affects the effectiveness of democracy and the capacity of the various institutional actors to realize it. The sociological interpretation of pluralistic historical learnings which consists mainly of different individual and institutional opportunities to bring out critical reflections on their own social positions-dispositions reveals some pedagogical perspectives. Among them, the intelligibility of the historiographical relationship, the enhancement of the interdependence between different learning contexts, the development of an intergenerational pact appear to be appropriate perspectives to enhance the social basis that sociological analysis of youth's learning of history reveals.

For a sociologist of public action the interpretive challenge is twofold, on the one hand it consists of the decoding of the possibility of critical reworking of one's own history which is available to the various groups of actors, on the other, in the focusing of some essential aspects constitutive of the founding social contract of the various societies. In this perspective, the awareness of the distinct responsibilities that the main agents of socialization have in helping young people learn not so much a single national history, but more than that the social construction of national history as well as their own ability to rework common histories, represents an analytical key. The reformulation of the problem highlights the need to rethink the social functions of school and family systems, and the ability of public policies to promote what appears to be a kind of institutional reflexivity, a *travail social* made respectively on the opportunities of enhancing youth's participation in society. The analysis of some contexts such as those of southern Italy, today characterized by a resumption of youth emigration as well as youth unemployment rates higher than those recorded in other Italian and European regions, rather than denouncing specific social emergencies, seems useful in bringing out the multi-causality existing between the various structural and cultural conditions and, consequently, in making public action more effective.

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