

Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuch- und Bildungsmedienforschung



Luciana Bellatalla / Piergiorgio Genovesi
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(Eds.)

Nation, Nationalism and Schooling in Contemporary Europe

Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuch- und Bildungsmedienforschung

herausgegeben von

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Eva Matthes and Sylvia Schütze

Preface

We are very pleased for many reasons to present the proceedings of the IGsBi webinar on the topic *Nation, Nationalism and Schooling in Contemporary Europe*, which took place at the beginning of Spring 2021 in Parma, organized by Luciana Bellatalla and Piergiovanni Genovesi and in cooperation with SPECIES (International Society of Politics, Education and Comparative Inquiry in European States), SPES (Italian Society of Politics, Education and History) and DUSIC (Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Industries – University of Parma).

Firstly, we managed to complete this project, despite of all the difficulties that arose along our way. The members of our Society remind that the proposal to meet in Italy was approved in Chur in 2019 and the meeting was scheduled in September 2020. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the new year came Corona – and changed a lot of things in our lives. However, we can be glad that we have had such a rapid technical development in the last decades that we could organize an online-conference and could at least hear each other and see our faces over many kilometres and countries. To organize this webinar was very challenging, but our efforts have been rewarded. This book concretely testifies our difficult, but tenacious work.

Secondly, when the subject of the annual meeting was proposed, none of us could suspect what topicality would it take on in a few months. Corona was – and is – quite a challenge for Europe, and the brutal war of Russia against the democratic Ukraine as well.

The question was whether the European Union deserves the name “union”, or whether – in disasters of this magnitude – the nations just would act selfishly, only thinking of their own interests. The question was whether nationalism would spread again – and in the beginning of the Corona crisis, it sadly looked like that. But during the development both of the pandemic and of the war, it has become clear that the idea of European cooperation and solidarity isn’t dead – mutual medical assistance, the joint order of the vaccine, the economic European solidarity package, the support of the Ukraine and the common sanctions against Russia have been encouraging signs of collaborations with and for one another. Of course, we also see that the temptations of nationalism are great – and that some of the European nations have succumbed. But we should learn from this pandemic and from this war that it is only together that we can survive.

We are sure that we have – as one consequence of these crises – to stress the relevance and need of European and international cooperation. First of all, this is a political task. But this understanding must be founded in the educational system, in the curricula and in the educational media – and of course also in the minds and hearts of our teachers! And education should be an instrument of peace to bring us closer together.

In 2018, we had an IGSBi Conference on the topic “Europe and Educational Media” in Bressanone, Italy, the results of which were published in 2019 in a conference volume in our series “Contributions to Historical and Systematic Research on Textbooks and Educational Media”. We learnt a lot about persisted and resuscitated nationalism in educational media, but also about encouraging projects of European and international cooperation and reduction of prejudices. We heard about inspiring possibilities to strengthen the idea of Europe, not least through digital media, although these also bring with them new dangers of indoctrination.

Finally, we are glad that scholars of different European countries contributed to the reflection on this theme that is more urgent than ever and is central to our future and our social, civil, and cultural development. For all and particularly for new generations.

If you look at the topics of our volumes and conferences you can see that we have had a long tradition in IGSBi in dealing with questions of nation, nationalism and Europe and the role which schools and especially educational media play in this complex of themes. Besides the volumes already mentioned, we want to remind of the volumes *Intercultural Understanding and Cultural Integration by Textbooks? The Confrontation with the Foreign*, 2004, and *Concepts of Friends and Enemies in Schoolbooks*, 2010, result of our conference in Belgrade, Serbia, in 2009.

IGSBi is a society for the research on *educational media* – but we are very aware that research on educational media must be imbedded in political, social, economic, and historical contexts – otherwise it would be superficial.

So, we’re glad that besides important specialized textbook studies we’ll also have basic reflections on the conference topic. In this sense, we are grateful to have a conference together with SPECIES, SPES and DUSIC.

Contents

<i>Eva Matthes and Sylvia Schütze</i> Preface	5
--	---

<i>Luciana Bellatalla and Piergiovanni Genovesi</i> Introduction: Nation, Nationalism, and Schooling in Contemporary Europe	9
--	---

Theory

<i>Giovanni Genovesi</i> Building Our Identity: Education and School to Face Uncertainty	25
---	----

<i>Luciana Bellatalla</i> Nation: a Natural Fact or a Cultural Idea?	30
---	----

<i>Pierluca Turnone</i> Education and Globality: Rethinking the Nation from a Paideutic Perspective	38
--	----

<i>Vito Balzano</i> Crisis of Personal Identity in Contemporary Europe: Future Scenarios in Italy in the Third Millennium	47
---	----

Textbooks and Didactical Media

<i>Werner Wiater</i> Patriotic Poetry in Elementary School Textbooks at the End of the 19 th Century. Did the School at That Time Contribute to the Spread of Nationalism in Germany?	61
---	----

<i>Fabrizio Solieri</i> A Lyceum from the Risorgimento to the Post-First World War Era. Nation, Nationalism and Homeland in Books, Textbooks and Student Publications	70
--	----

<i>Ekaterina Romashina</i> The Image of the Capital as a Metaphor for National Identity: Russian Primers from 1900 to 1925	84
--	----

Jan Van Wiele

‘Nations’, ‘Nationalism’ and ‘Nation Building’ in Belgian National History
Textbooks for Catholic and State Secondary Education (1910–1960) 93

Simone Marsi

Fascist Traces in Italian Literature Textbooks 109

Stefano Campagna

National History and Cinema in Fascist Primary School:
Reconstructing the Reception of Two Historical Films
through Children’s Writings 124

Piergiovanni Genovesi

“A Lively Feeling of Human Brotherhood That Goes beyond the Narrow Limits
of Nationalism Should Dominate”.
Nationalism, War, Peace, Europe: Themes in Transition in Italian School Primers
in the Aftermath of the Second World War (1945–1957)..... 138

Sabrina Schmitz-Zerres

Future Narrations in History Textbooks of the German Democratic Republic
and the Federal Republic of Germany as Forms of Nation Building 156

Stefania Carioli

National Identity, Memory and Historical Culture:
Risks and Opportunities of the Internet 167

Karl Porges and Ian Stewart

The “Jena Declaration”: German Pedagogical Responsibilities 180

Authors / Autori / Autor*innen 195

Introduction: Nation, Nationalism, and Schooling in Contemporary Europe

1 A historical overview

During the 19th century and up to the middle of the 20th century, the theme of national identity – and even more so of the absolute primacy of the nation – was firmly at the center of the educational projects of European states, and this was certainly true in the Italian case.

Moreover, schools had been one of the fundamental instruments in the processes of *nation building* and, subsequently, in the establishment of nationalist perspectives, being used as a place of transmission *par excellence* of narratives aimed at legitimising the primacy of the nation, whether historically or ethnically based.

In both cases, we are dealing with positions capable of fuelling profound distortions, not least on a historiographical level (Genovesi, 2009a), albeit with no insignificant differences between them. One may think of the racist implications structurally linked to the biological-ethnocentric perspective, thus refuted by Ernest Renan – supporter of a historical-volunteer position – in his famous 1882 lecture *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* [What is a nation?]: “The truth is that there is no such thing as a pure race and that to base politics on ethnic analysis is to base it on a chimera. The noblest countries, England, France, Italy are those whose blood is mixed to a greater extent” (Renan, 2004, p. 10).²

A significant undermining of the absolute primacy of the nation, and especially of its structural aggressive charge, emerged in the aftermath of the Great War, albeit within a context of contradictory dynamics.

On the one hand, this was the moment, on a geopolitical level, of the full affirmation of the role of the nation-state and of the “principle of nationality” on the ruins of the order which the Restoration had given to Europe one hundred years earlier on the tables of the Congress of Vienna – something which happened partly without being an issue of the victors and to which the fall of the multinational empires, the choice of “playing the Wilsonian card against the Bolshevik card” (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 155) and, already during the conflict, the recourse by the warring powers to the choice of “arousing the only vaguely national susceptibilities of the minorities of the opposing camp to transform them into

¹ In this introduction, which was organized by both, Piergiovanni Genovesi is the author of paragraph 1: A historical overview, and Luciana Bellatalla the author of paragraph 2: Educational theory and civic awareness.

² All translations from Italian into English by L.B. and P.G.

separatist ambitions capable of weakening them militarily” (Hermet, 1997, p. 198), had contributed.

However, amidst the ruins of the conflict, a widespread desire to reduce the scope of national sovereignty, to fight against the drifts of nationalism, took on a new consistency. In this context, the desire to avoid further conflicts moved in the direction of supporting concrete prospects for cooperation, both in an international and in a European perspective.

In particular, many shared the idea that in order to proceed in this direction, it was first necessary to oppose those educational abuses, those hammering nationalistic propagandas aimed at arousing a deep hatred for the enemy and a chauvinistic love for one’s own country. That propaganda which, as in the case of the young German students whom Erich Maria Remarque in 1929 presents to us in *Im Westen nichts Neues* [All Quiet on the Western Front], had actively contributed to the decision of so many young people, “who left the same schoolroom to go to war” (Remarque, 1965, p. 9). And thus it was for the whole of European youth.

After the conflict, therefore, particular attention was paid to the idea of building the foundations for a lasting peace in schools.

The declared intention of purging schools, and *first* and *foremost* school textbooks, of the dross of nationalism, which had found a particularly active breeding ground in classrooms, animated, for example, the request made by the report *La Révision des Manueles Scolaire* and presented by the “Institut International de Cooperation Intellectuelle” (Genovesi, 2009b; Verga, 2004).

Specifically, the demand was for a revision of schoolbooks through the international elaboration of a single concept of peace for textbooks in all countries in order to effectively combat the nationalism found in them.

There was a lot of historiographical naivety in this project (Genovesi, 2009b), but – it must be said – there was also a genuine desire to sweep the poison of nationalism out of the classroom.

On a political level, these impulses converged in the project of the League of Nations, which is, not without contradictions and ambiguities, “a system of alliances, a guarantor of peace, a negotiating instrument or a prototype of federation” (Mazower, 2018, p. 74). It proposed itself, at least in the perspective of the “idealists”, as a balance against the risks of nationalist drifts, thanks to the enhancement of the principle of international cooperation, a future guarantee of peace against all wars.

In the early post-war years, among the prospects of overcoming nationalistic logic, the idea of a European union also took on an unprecedented prospect of political concretisation. However, this idea was not new: Amos Comenius (Avanzini, 2016), Immanuel Kant (1795), Carlo Cattaneo (1849) and Victor Hugo (1867), to name but a few, had given explicit form to projects of this kind (Coudenhove-Kalergi, 1997); Cattaneo, for example, ended his work on the insurrection in Milan in the previous year by stating that “we will have true peace when we have the United States of Europe [li Stati Uniti d’Europa]” (Cattaneo, 1849, p. 306).

Up to this point however, these cases had in fact remained at the level of theoretical formulation, the subject of more or less widespread popularity, but without any concrete prospect of practical implementation.

The case of the Pan-European project proposed in the early 1920s (the *Pan-European* manifesto came out in 1923) by Count Richard Coudenhove Kalergi is different.

This project – which undoubtedly found a strong impetus from the widespread desire after the great war to identify strategies to prevent Europe from being torn apart again on the battlefields – unlike the cases mentioned above, was able for some years to catalyse, in an unprecedented way, a widespread and concrete interest on the part of many political leaders of Europe at the time (Mammarella & Cacace, 2001). This was also a consequence of an accentuated desire to express geopolitical concreteness.

By the end of the 1920s, however, all these attempts, political and educational, broke on the rocks of the economic crisis and the authoritarian turn, which soon deeply involved Europe and the whole world – and Italy in particular with the rise of the fascistic regime – by creating a climate suitable for a new season of nationalism around the exaltation of the state as a natural community of blood, the only barrier against external dangers, aimed at the martial affirmation of its own destiny.

There was no shortage of voices warning of the risks of such a nationalistic degeneration: in 1935, for example, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, in *The Crisis of Civilisation* [original title: *In de schaduw van morgen*], warned of the danger of the dissolution of civilisation, pointing out that the world was no longer able to withstand modern war, to which a renewed nationalism was inexorably pushing (Huizinga, 1938).

However, these were isolated voices, often far from the ears of the rulers, but also from the ears of the population, reassured in their economic fears by calls for supremacy and national strength, and above all, far from the ears of the students, familiarised every day at school with words and images celebrating splendid millenary traditions, innate supremacies of lineage and destinies (Genovesi, 2020).

After the Second World War, nationalism seemed definitively defeated under the even more devastating moral and material rubble it had generated.

And in this context, the supranational perspective of a European union also gained new political substance.

Indeed, when the war was still raging, in the forced isolation of political exile imposed on them by the fascist regime, Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi drew up the so-called *Ventotene Manifesto* (actual title: *Per un'Europa libera e unita. Progetto d'un manifesto*) [For a Free and United Europe. A Project for a Manifesto] against nationalism and in favor of the creation of United States of Europe – free and democratic Europe to oppose the Nazi-fascist project of an “Anti-Europe”, of a European “new order” built on totalitarian subjugation (Cuzzi, 2020), and to oppose the nation state which had made nationalism its nature, and therefore

“[t]he nation is no longer considered the historical product of coexistence among men who, following a lengthy process, have achieved a greater harmony in their customs and aspiration and view their state as the most effective way of organizing collective life within the context of all human society” (Spinelli & Rossi, p. 12).

The authors of the *Manifesto* were not, therefore, condemning the nation state *a priori*, but rather acknowledging its leading role as a factor in progress during the 19th century:

“The ideology of national independence was a powerful incentive to progress. It helped replace petty parochialism with a widespread sense of solidarity against foreign oppression. It removed many of the obstacles that hampered the free movement of people and goods. It brought the institutions and systems of the more advanced populations to the less developed, within the borders of each new state” (Spinelli & Rossi, p. 10).

Instead, we could say, it is a “historical” condemnation of what the nation state had become when it rejected every attempt to hold together the idea of nationality with that of liberty, equality and humanity, as for example Giuseppe Mazzini, a central figure in the Italian Risorgimento and promoter of the *Giovine Europa* [Young Europe] had tried to do. In his *Act of Brotherhood* (1834) he expressed his belief, “in equality, and in the Brotherhood of men, in equality, and in the Brotherhood of Peoples” – in short, a sort of balancing act between the particular/national and universal dimensions.

However, as Federico Chabod observed – again with the war in progress, in the academic year 1943/44 – in the first half of the 19th century, if

“the nation had been affirmed in indissoluble connection with freedom and humanity [...] this trinity was soon broken. The ever more accentuated shift of the constitutive values of the nation, of the ‘will’ and of ‘conscience’ into an a priori, fixed and immutable, of a forcedly ethnic character; the rise of the various nationalisms [...] all this led, rapidly, to the exasperation of the national sense and to its distancing from any other, European-humanitarian sentiment” (Chabod, 1961, p. 89).

Without these balances, and unable to put a stop to the action of intrinsic dynamics (Banti, 2011), the idea of nationality had degenerated: “This ideology” – the *Manifesto* reads – “bore within it the seeds of capitalist imperialism that our generation has seen grow and grow, leading to totalitarian states and the outbreak of world wars” (Spinelli & Rossi, p. 11–12).

Faced with this situation, the possibility of a new, free and just world was therefore entrusted to the construction of a European supranational body, which, at this point, would not only coordinate, but also replace the existing national states. On the educational level, this meant for the Ventotene internees that schools should no longer be the place where “children are trained from the very earliest age to handle weapons and to hate foreigners” (Spinelli & Rossi, p. 14).

At the end of the war, as already mentioned, the educational and political condemnation of nationalism was apparently unanimous and the European perspective, if not in the terms indicated by the *Ventotene Manifesto*, was attractive to European governments themselves, or at least to that part of continental Europe *roughly* between the Iron Curtain in the East and the Iberian dictatorships in the West.

In this connection, it is worth recalling that the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950 – the founding text of the European unification process, which is usually attributed a purely economic nature – opens with an explicit call for peace and a purely ethical claim: “the contribution which an organized and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations”.

For its part, post-war historical reflection has been increasingly interested in the topic of the nation, in the dynamics of the processes of nationalization of the masses (Mosse, 1975), in the question of the historical and artificial genesis of national identities, and consequently in the dangers, *primarily* educational, that derive from proposing such constructions as natural and absolute, even if “their origins are not lost in the mists of time, in the obscure and heroic ages described by the opening chapters of national histories” (Thiesse, 2001, p. 7).

In particular, around the latter aspect, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* and Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* came out in 1983.

In fact, after the Second World War, nationalism did not disappear from the international political scene: one may think of the role it assumed in the so-called Third World, in an anti-colonialist perspective (Snyder, 1970).

But, beyond what happened in relation to the decolonization process, the vitality of nationalistic themes can also be seen in Europe itself, where the catastrophe of the Second World War, first, and the fear of communism with the start of the Cold War season, later, had contributed to rethinking national rivalries and seeking new collaborations.

In fact, there was no shortage of influential claims about the need to put national interests at the forefront, even in an exaggerated way, dismissing, in De Gaulle's words, the prospect of European federation in terms of "*apatride* construction" (De Gaulle, 1970, p. 161).

More widely, words and images from the nationalist past, perhaps behind formal readjustments, have retained full citizenship especially in school textbooks of a long post-war period.

In the late 1960s, it could be noted that

"modernization has led to a healthy elimination of cultural barriers between peoples and yet, paradoxically, the educational process continues to emphasize national history, national traditions, national heroes, the flag and the glory of the motherland. On the one hand, the peoples of the earth are growing closer together in terms of cultural expression; on the other, they remain separated by the wedge formed by an institutionalized cultural heritage" (Snyder, 1970, p. 24).

If, however, the ideological struggle centered on the two blocs which characterized the age of the Cold War contributed to strongly circumscribing the political space of nationalism, the fall of the Wall has opened up new spaces both for the role of the nation – also by virtue of its ability to propose itself as a security area, a zone of solidarity against the actual raging of a highly aggressive and disruptive globalization – and for the phenomena of micro-nationalism and neo-nationalism.

A resurgence of nationalism has also been favored by the fact of interpreting feelings of fear, linked to phenomena such as mass immigration and international terrorism (Berti et al., 2020), as well as by the ability to intercept nostalgic sentiments which, by idealizing a past considered better than the present and more reassuring than the future, pushes "citizens and governments to seek comfort in an era in which national borders were still rigid, a pro-globalization era in which each state was in theory master of its own destiny" (Campanella & Dassù, 2020, pp. 6–7) – paths facilitated, in advanced democracies, by the fact that, having abandoned the more aggressive traits, they often relied on more "banal", normalized, and reassuring forms of transmission (Billig, 1995).

The state of persistent economic crisis, which began in the early years of the 2000s, then actively contributed to a renewed political prominence of strategies proposing forms of national entrenchment against the dangers of the outside world, recovering among other things the simultaneously dangerous and reassuring myths of ancestral communities of blood and destiny; perspectives which have ended up identifying an external danger even in the process of European unification, which as a resource has increasingly found itself the target of harsh "national" accusations; also helping to strengthen the idea of Europe as

a “fortress” for active defense against external dangers, rather than as an essential stage in establishing universal peace.

These are dynamics which are destined to dangerously involve European educational systems, as a quick online survey of the current situation reveals: from the recurrent news of renewed nationalistic pride found in school textbooks in Hungary (De Gregorio, 2019; Esteri, 2020) and Poland (Tarquini, 2019), and therefore within the European Union itself, to the launch of “patriotic education” and military programmes in Russia (Baldovin, 2017) and Ukraine (Ferrigo, 2018), and to the new spaces for requests for national narratives built around uncritical millenary continuities. Consider, for the latter, the *querelle* triggered in September 2016 by President Nicolas Sarkozy’s statement: “*nos ancêtres sont gaulois*” [our ancestors are Gauls], which was commented on the pages of *Le Monde* as follows:

“a phrase that testifies to an imaginary vision of history, close to what historians call the ‘national novel’, this partly reinvented history of France in order to create a cultural, geographical and ethnic continuity of the French people, its language and its territory over time, when France is, in fact, the fruit of multiple recompositions” (Morin, 2016).

And looking outside Europe, a renewed centrality for a “patriotic-military education” with a marked nationalistic stamp can be found widely from realities of full relevance in the world geopolitical chessboard: from Trump’s United States (Ansa, 2020) to Xi Jinping’s China (Redazione, 2021), Erdogan’s Turkey (Scherle & Heinrich, 2017), Bolsonaro’s Brazil (Freda, 2019; Cionci, 2019), etc.

These dynamics have to be borne in mind, moreover, at a time when there is a widespread and growing demand for more space at school for civic education. In Italy, for example, in August 2019, law no. 92 was enacted, which establishes cross-curricular teaching of civic education in the first and second cycles of education, based on the principle that it “contributes to forming responsible and active citizens and to promoting full and informed participation in the civic, cultural and social life of the community, while respecting rules, rights and duties”.

It is well, then, to consider with adequate awareness how much the catchy wording of “civic education” can also lend itself as a label for processes of uncritical adaptation to existing reality, for processes structurally compatible with nationalism: this is what happens, for example, when the perspective of the formation of the citizen from a “national” and autarchic perspective takes over from that of the more general formation of man as part of humanity.

2 Educational theory and civic awareness

Since ancient times, the ideas about education, its meaning, and its role in raising young people have been in a close relation with ethics and politics.

In the past, to be educated meant to become a *good* man, which is to stay respectful of laws, religious belief, civil customs, and fellows. The meaning is not quite different at present, even if – it must be said – the involved concepts (law, shared civil values, customs, and citizenship), on the ground of their historical complexity, have radically changed. Nevertheless, the general conceptual framework seems unchanged.

On a closer inspection, however, one element has radically changed: in ancient times, perhaps with the exception of Plato and his utopian republic, education aimed to build up men (obviously the masculine is a must) in relation to their social positions. Therefore, the civil consciousness did not imply national identity, too: civil rights and politic responsibilities were reserved for the few (the *élites*, the kings, and their advisers), whereas common people were subjected to rulers' decisions.

Taxes, wars, and famines were considered as hailstorms. The pride of belonging to a nation or to a culture was not implied in the educational project. If anything, it included the awareness to belong to a social class: this implied, on the one side, resignation for poor people and, on the other, pride and arrogance for noble and powerful men.

Therefore, it is interesting to ask when and why the idea of civil consciousness, regardless of the individual conditions of birth and wealth, became a relevant factor both in educational theory and educational practice. This history begins at the dawn of contemporary age and culture, in the midst of the eighteenth century.

The question is complex, for the transition from an individual-centered education to a kind of educational theory and practice, engaged in the construction of shared civil and civic values, is caused by four cultural and political factors:

- a. from a cultural point of view, the hegemony of the philosophy of Enlightenment: the *philosophes* required the connection of knowledge, ethical virtues, and political power (see, e.g., Rousseau, 1750) and, particularly, claimed freedom of thought and action for all human beings³;
- b. from a political point of view, the French revolution, thanks to which civil rights became an interesting topic of discussion, even if refused, and the *citoyens* replaced the *subjects*;
- c. the complex figure of Napoleon, who, at the same time, caused the spread and the decline of revolutionary ideals all around Europe; for our issue, his military campaigns must be particularly stressed;
- d. finally, from a socio-cultural point of view, the establishment of a public and secular school system, ruled by the state: the first level should have been compulsory (and with free admittance) for all, boys and girls, inhabitants in the towns and in the countryside.

³ E.g., *Du Contrat social* (1762) by Rousseau and his concept of *volonté générale*, aiming at common good and interest and requiring citizens' direct engagement on the one hand and, on the other, Kant's essay *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung* (1784), with the famous definition: "Die Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit", according to which all human beings must be educated to be autonomous.

The impact of these four elements (and above all of their interrelations) on educational theory and practice was not homogeneous, especially when we think of the conception of nation and of its positive and negative implications.

Referring to this specific matter, Napoleon played the leading role. His political choices and, above all, his military campaigns produced disillusionments also in the people who, at the beginning of the revolutionary process, had been fascinated by its keywords and hoped for a social palingenesis. I refer to a musician like Beethoven⁴, a poet like the Italian Ugo Foscolo (Genovesi, 2015) and the philosophers Fichte and Hegel, with the exception of Kant (who died in 1804).⁵

In the educational field, we can refer especially to Johann H. Pestalozzi, whose efforts are in a close relation with Napoleon's political acting.⁶ Also, Pestalozzi, even if he held onto his educational ideals in relation to the reform project of Enlightenment for all of his life – as can be shown by his work *Lienhard und Gertrud* (1781) and his correspondence with many contemporary rulers –, he began to follow different paths.

In this complex context, where politics, education, culture and *Weltanschauungen* interact, referring to the educational field, just from the beginning of the nineteenth century, a contradiction arises between the theoretical perspective and the practical activities: the first is the prerogative of intellectuals and philosophers, whereas the rulers are responsible of the second.

This contradictory situation may lead in three directions.

The first refers to the situation of the school system. Napoleon stressed, with his reform project, those needs of centralization, already expressed in eighteenth century reformism: school should be secular, uniform and ruled by the State. After the fall of Napoleon, the process of Restoration was deleterious for educational problems, because an attempt was made to bring the cultural and social conditions back to the situation prior to the French Revolution. This attempt did not succeed everywhere. In Italy, for example, with the exception of Piedmont (ruled by Savoy dynasty) and the regions of Lombardy and Veneto (under Austrian subjection), illiteracy triumphed, and the inferior classes were left to their fate of ignorance and misery.

However, even where a school system was organized, school activities and functions were means to acquire consent and obedience by the people, once again regarded as subjects and not as citizens, as testified by schoolbooks, reading books and the teachers, whose professional training was not always and everywhere solid and up to date. As Genovesi

⁴ The story of Symphony 5 in E flat major by Beethoven is well-known: its first title was “Bonaparte” with an ostensible dedication, but, even if the interpretations are conflicting, when Napoleon pronounced himself emperor, the definitive title became “Eroica”, to celebrate all great men.

⁵ Hegel, though considering the French revolution as a necessary step, was disgusted by the excesses of the Reign of Terror (see *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Hegel, 1837/1822–1831), and finally, Fichte wrote *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808) with an evident anti-Napoleonic orientation.

⁶ In 1798, when the French army invaded the Swiss village of Stans, and many children lost their families, the government recruited Pestalozzi to take charge of an orphanage: he organized the new institution as a school, not only as a place for homeless refugees. In Switzerland, Napoleon caused political changes and endangered the existence of Pestalozzi's institute. When a national deputation was sent to Paris to meet Napoleon, Pestalozzi was elected as a member of this deputation. This journey and, perhaps, the intellectual influence of Fichte, contributed to detach Pestalozzi from his enthusiasm for French ideals: he did not enjoy his time in Paris, above all because he understood that Napoleon had no interest in his work. In any case, in 1799, at the beginning of summer, when the French army – defeated by the Austrians – came back to Stans and needed space for the troops, Pestalozzi's school was commandeered and his experience in Stans ended.

wrote in his *Storia della scuola in Italia dal Settecento ad oggi* (2021), the school system was considered as an *instrumentum regni*. This implies that, referring to the debate of nation and nationalism, schoolbooks, teachers, and curricula were obliged to conform to the slogans of governments and to the hegemonic culture of a period.

Fichte's political perspective or Mazzini's essays in defense of Italian national unity (Mazzini, 2009) were correlated with a general cosmopolitan and humanitarian perspective.⁷ In cases like these, education was the center of political proposals: the purpose was to educate individuals for brotherhood and respect for all mankind, even if starting from their culture and history.

Considering my examples, Fichte found an interpreter of his theories in Pestalozzi and in his plan of education and schooling for children and people of the working classes. In 1840, Mazzini opened a school for Italian immigrants (children practically forced into begging by British criminals and adult workers) in Hatton Garden in London: the admittance was free, and the explicit goal was to fight against illiteracy, but with an ethical orientation (Finelli, 1999; Pruneri, 2019).

Unfortunately, starting from the beginning of the new century, these messages of brotherhood were misinterpreted from a nationalistic point of view. Therefore, intellectuals like Fichte and Mazzini, who were the heirs of enlightenment cosmopolitanism in a new cultural and socio-political context, were recruited to the ranks of nationalists and their work was exploited also at school level so to shape the young generation's minds.

Describing Mazzini's ideas and revolutionary activities, Italian schoolbooks rarely mentioned his republican faith since the end of the eighteenth century (perhaps in deference to the king in office) and neglected the events of his school in Hatton Garden, while praising him as a patriot and a nationalist.

These misinterpretations lasted until the end of WWII: they define the second direction in the relations between the idea of nation and education. On the first level, the school was the center of political engagement. On the second level, the school was only one of the elements at stake: the idea of nationalism had to be spread everywhere and by whatever means. Minds and consciences must be convinced and conquered.

The third direction refers to educational theory, when mankind is placed at the center of the context.

I have intentionally put this aspect at the end of my argumentation, because

- in the field of education, it is undoubtedly the most relevant and interesting;
- in relation with educational practice, and then, in the intersection between educational ideas and political rules, it is the most meaningful.

In a theoretical perspective, we can start from Kant: generally speaking, the whole Kantian philosophical system is educationally oriented (Bellatalla & Genovesi 2016; Kant, 2009). But his work *Über Pädagogik* (1803), though neglected by scholars and sometimes even considered spurious, supports our topics.

Kant is clear just from the *Introduction*: a human being is the only being in the world who needs to be educated. Moreover: he *must* (*muß*, in the original) be educated, not only because he, at his birth, is unable to survive by himself, but also and above all, at his birth,

⁷ It is interesting to note that while Fichte complained about Napoleon's imperialistic politics and emphasized the German *Geist*, some essays were published on the meaning of Europe and European culture (Novalis, 1799; Saint Simon, 1814). And Claude-Henri de Saint Simon was one of Mazzini's ideal reference points.

he *is* not yet *human*. He is a weaker animal than the others: “Disziplin und oder Zucht ändert die Tierheit in die Menschenheit um”. Summing up, only education can transform a newborn “animal” into a human being and its original wildness into rational attitude and, therefore, into moral habits.

Consequently, the equivalence of reason and morality, as a peculiar character of human being, is not a prerogative of a particular group of individuals, but is a characteristic of the whole mankind. Even if every nation has its culture and its particular habits, as Kant writes in his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798), the qualities of human beings are and must be the same everywhere. We can conclude that, in this perspective, nations, with their culture and their traditions, are legitimate, whereas nationalism, as an idea of natural supremacy, starkly contrasts with the concept of education, as a process of intellectual, moral, and social improvement of individuals.

Kant traces the way to the history of education and educational theory: nearly all philosophers or thinkers or scientists of education after Kant accept the idea of the unity of human beings.

Consequently, we can say that throughout the nineteenth century, educational thinkers did not but deepen the Kantian definition of education as a process of improvement of the human being and of a passage from the natural condition to the cultural and social one: this idea allows to think of education as the process of acquiring a second nature, whose characteristics are respect for moral law and for other human beings, love of freedom, and autonomous approach to the world. These ideas met the Rousseauian thesis of the natural goodness or, at least, of an endless perfectibility of human beings: only on this ground educational projects could be justified and understood.

Governors disliked the appeal of freedom and unity of mankind: in 1851, for example, the Prussian government, continuing to crack down all new ideas, banned Fröbel’s *Kindergarten*, accused to propagate atheism and socialist doctrines.

The Kantian and Rousseauian legacies⁸ were variously interpreted and articulated, but never disavowed.

Herbart focused on teachers’ professional training so to ensure success to an articulated didactical and moral project; Fröbel devoted himself to childcare; Tolstoj founded a libertarian school for the children of his peasants in his estate at Jasnaja Poljana, with the aim of making them literate and free from the constraints of the Power.

These ideas spread around the world: in Italy, many Kindergartens were opened, thanks to the economic efforts of private individuals (mainly women); schools in Mazzini’s style were established in Italy, the USA and South America; in the USA, Pestalozzi, Herbart and Fröbel found a lot of admirers, supporters and imitators;⁹ and, finally, in Europe many educationists broke new ground, starting from these theoretical suggestions and inaugurating the period of the so-called *éducation nouvelle*, *new schools* or *Reformpädagogik*.

⁸ Some of these thinkers were, directly or indirectly, connectable to Kant and his philosophy. For example, Herbart was one of Fichte’s students at the University of Jena and developed his philosophy in a close dialogue with Kant’s ideas; and Fröbel, near to Pestalozzi, was influenced by Schelling’s philosophy, which was a discussion on and a revision of the Kantian perspective.

⁹ Let us quote Bronson Alcott, a philosopher, a reformer and the father of the famous writer Louisa May, Horace Mann, and the Colonel Francis Parker, without neglecting several associations (generally of women) supporting the new trend of American schooling (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, and, in a general reconstruction, Peterson, 2010).

Summing up, politics are more engaged than educational ideas to define civil consciousness, whereas for philosophers and educationists the ethical dimension of the human existence is considered the *conditio sine qua non* for every relationship among individuals and therefore also of their civic spirit. As I have already emphasized in these pages, nationalism is not justified by an educational perspective. And, in the same perspective, to belong to a national culture and history is merely accidental.

Therefore, in spite of different interpretations and practical articulations, all these theoretical approaches share a common point of view. As Rousseau said in 1762:

“Qu’on destine mon élève à l’épée, à l’église, au barreau, peu m’importe. Avant la vocation des parens *la nature l’appelle à la vie humaine. Vivre est le métier que je lui veux apprendre. En sortant de mes mains il ne sera j’en conviens, ni magistrat, ni soldat, ni prêtre; il sera premièrement homme; tout ce qu’un homme doit être, il saura l’être au besoin tout aussi bien que qui que ce soit, & la fortune aura beau le faire changer de place il sera toujours à la sienne*” (Rousseau, 2022/1762, pp. 23–24 ; accentuation by the author).

This thesis culminates in Dewey’s philosophy of education. Born in 1859, he is however an intellectual of the new century: his thoughts, his civil engagement (see Pullman strike, Sacco and Vanzetti legal case, Trotsky trial) and lifelong personal interests testify his vision of the world and of the moral and civil duties of men and women.

Even if he agreed on the definition of education as an endless process of human improvement, on the ground of his logical, moral and gnoseological theories, he found a closer link between education and democracy. His educational theory implies that an educated individual cannot be but autonomous, defender of freedom, brotherhood, social justice, and human equality. No prejudice, no disrespect, no segregation, no arrogance, and no violence are justified for such an individual. No exception is admitted if democracy

“is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, *is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity*” (Dewey, 1916, p. 101; accentuation by the author).

Twenty years later, he wrote the same concept:

“Democracy is much broader than a special political form [...] The political and governmental phase of democracy is a means, the best means so far found, for realizing ends in the wide domain of human relationships and the development of human personality” (Dewey, 1937, p. 457).

The general implication of Kant’s definition of education, then, becomes explicit: the development and improvement of individuals and social groups are interrelated; to exclude only one member of the community from this interrelation is a violation of the educational principle and a threat to social life.

All the educational theories in the past century met this requirement. I think, first of all, those from the Deweyan cultural milieu, from Angelo Patri to William Heard Kilpatrick; but I think also of educationists as Célestin Freinet and Paulo Freire, who worked at the service of the lower classes or destitute people; or of Maria Montessori, one of the first to pay attention to disabled children in an educational way, and not only from a medical perspective (Bellatalla & Genovesi, 2006).

And I might mention other thinkers or educationalists, known and less known, who have poured and are pouring out their energies in the name of the same principle. It is the recent history of our field of research.

It is evident that there is a gap to be filled. In conclusion, surveying the history of ideas against the background of political history, a gap comes out, between educational ideas and *Realpolitik*.

Unfortunately, the gap becomes deeper and deeper as ideology becomes the ruling criterium of politics: as Dewey sustained in 1934 in his paper *Education and the Social Order*, when ideology is overbearing, an open or planning society becomes planned; the lobbies are arbiters of the events; propaganda is continuous so to weaken the autonomy of people's judgements.

Education vs. propaganda means utopia vs. ideology: education aims at the future and, as I said, at an endless improvement of intellectual conditions of mankind, whereas ideology fears the future and the unknown dimension. Education releases individuals' energies, whereas ideology enslaves them to prejudices and irrationality. This is particularly evident in the discussions about nationalism and the ideas of suprematism and segregation which it implies.

The hope is that this gap can be filled: but it is difficult to say when. For today, the voice of education seems very faint.

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During the 19th century, up to the middle of the 20th century, the theme of national identity – and even more so of the absolute primacy of the nation – was firmly at the center of the educational projects of European states. Moreover, schools had and have been one of the fundamental instruments in the processes of nation building and, subsequently, in the establishment of nationalist perspectives, being used as a place of transmission of narratives aimed at legitimising the primacy of the nation, whether historically or ethnically based. A significant undermining of the absolute primacy of the nation emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. A widespread desire to reduce the scope of national sovereignty, to fight against the drifts of nationalism, took on a new consistency. The ideological struggle centered on the two blocs, which characterized the age of the Cold War, contributed to strongly circumscribing the political space of nationalism, but the fall of the Wall has opened up new spaces both for the role of the nation and for the phenomena of micro-nationalism and neo-nationalism.

Scholars of different European countries contributed to the reflection on the interrelation of nation(alism) and schooling with a special focus on educational media. This reflection is more urgent than ever and is central to our future and our social, civil, and cultural development.

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