

FAMILIES, SCHOOL AND SOCIETY IN SICILY IN THE “LONG CENTURY”: AN OVERVIEW

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Il presente lavoro si propone di offrire un affresco della famiglia siciliana ottocentesca, a partire dai modelli educativi veicolati, attraverso l'utilizzo di una pluralità di fonti documentarie inedite tra cui la corrispondenza dei *pater familias* con le autorità scolastiche e governative sui temi della scuola e dell'istruzione pubblica e di fonti a stampa edite in Sicilia tra il XVIII ed il XIX secolo di carattere strettamente pedagogico.

The present work aims at giving an overview of the XIXth century Sicilian family, starting from the educational models in use, by means of analyzing a variety of miscellaneous sources. Among these, we find the 'pater familias' correspondence to educational or state authorities concerning didactic issues and public instructions, and also written sources of a strictly pedagogical nature edited in Sicily between the XVIIIth and the XIXth century.

Parole chiave: Storia della famiglia, Storia dell'educazione, modelli educativi, Sicilia, XIX secolo.

Key words: *History of family, History of education, educational models, Sicily, XIX century.*

1. Sicily and families between *myths* and *legends*

At the end of the XVIIIth century, various depictions of Sicily were circulating in Europe. More specifically, some descriptions were found in *diaries*, *paintings* and *drawings* made by foreign travelers who visited the island under the influence of the *Grand Tour*¹. However, the attention of such visitors tended to focus more on

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¹ On the *Grand Tour* and on foreign travelers visiting Sicily see: *La Sicilia dei grandi viaggiatori* (1989) (a cura di V. Consolo, F. Paloscia), Abete, Roma; *Viaggiatori in Sicilia nell'età moderna. Paesaggi, uomini e città* (1991) (a cura di E. Giliberti), Ediprint, Siracusa; *Viaggio nel Sud. I. Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia nell'età moderna* (1992) (a cura di E. Kanceff - R. Ramponi), C.I.R.V.I., Ginevra-Siracusa; E. DI CARLO (1940), *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia nella seconda metà del settecento*, Tip. F.lli Corselli, Palermo; S. DI MATTEO (2001), *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia dagli Arabi alla seconda metà del XIX secolo*, 3 voll., ISSPE, Palermo; Id. (2008), *Il Grande Viaggio in Sicilia. Viaggiatori stranieri nell'Isola dagli Arabi ai nostri giorni*, 4 voll., Ed. Arbor, Palermo; M. C. MARTINO (1977), *Viaggiatori inglesi in Sicilia nella prima metà dell'Ottocento*, Edizioni e Ristampa Siciliana (EdRiSi), Palermo; A. MOZZILLO

landscapes, on the harsh nature, on opulence, on folklore and superstitions, and less on Sicilians and their families².

It must be stressed that, as observed by John Dickie, these often superficial and excessively “colorful” narrations resulted in contributing to the development of several stereotypes on Sicily, which gradually resulted into sounding, more in general, as «real condemnations of Southern Italy and its inhabitants»³.

Even during the following years, especially in the period after the Italian unification, there was no lack of an utterly simplified image of Sicily and Sicilian families in *fiction*, *periodical magazines* and *propaganda*, almost always characterised by *paralysis*. For example, one need only think of the family portrait given in one of the most interesting novels by Giovanni Verga, *I Malavoglia*, published in 1881. In *I Malavoglia* the household stands out against an extremely poor context lacking any kind of possible social mobility; this family is tormented by pessimism and bitterly tries to fight and escape their misery, though in vain.

Noble families appear to be paralyzed too, even “genetically”: it is enough to quote the Uzeda family described by Federico De Roberto in *I viceré*. As Dickie emphasizes one more time,

blood and race reveal the eternal sameness of Sicilian society as well as the destiny tormenting each single individual; clearly, Sicily has got feudalism in its blood [and] the social changes following one another are not able to alter the relationship between a gullible mass and a cynical aristocracy⁴.

Many of the XXth century cultural products also surround Southern Italian families with *clichés*. As an example, one might think about Neorealist movies such as

(1978), *La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi*, «Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione», n. 61, pp. 61 e seg.; H. TUZET (1988), *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia nel XVIII secolo*, Sellerio, Palermo.

² According to Helene Tuzet, the opinions of foreign travelers on the Sicilians’ family life were often debatable and rather conflicting. As stated by Brydone, for example, several Sicilian aristocrats had “happy” families where husbands and wives truly loved each other and personally cared for their children’s education. Bartels is of a different opinion and believes that what we can infer from domestic life is only an “appearance” aimed at making a “good impression”. In addition, French painter Jean Houel reports on complex family relationships, as well as “tyrant” fathers who confined their children to specifically designed places such as the castles in Castellammare, Termini and Milazzo in order to «straighten them out». H. TUZET, *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia...*, cit., p. 356. By contrast, the information on families belonging to lower classes and their family life appears to be more consistent. Riedsel, Brydone, Bartels and Jacobi describe the “rural houses” of farmers’ families, in which people slept on the «bare ground» and where children often died prematurely. As Brydone writes: «The sight of these poor people filled me with indignation». *Ibidem*, p. 250.

³ Cfr. R. M. DELLI QUADRI R. M. (2012), *Nel Sud Romantico. Diplomatici e viaggiatori inglesi alla scoperta del Mezzogiorno borbonico*, Guida, Napoli, pp. 38-39. Dickie puts the stress on the insufficiency of good part of conceptualizations and textual representations concerning Sicily – *l’Italy’s greatest problem* – and its inhabitants, as he explains in his well-known work called *Darkest Italy*; as the scholar underlines, Sicily was usually described as «a place of illiteracy, superstition, and magic; of corruption, brigandage, and cannibalism; of pastoral beauty and tranquility admixed with dirt and disease; a cradle of Italian and European civilization that is vaguely, dangerously, alluringly African or Oriental» and sicilians as «friendly people in whom lie dormant the seeds of mafiosità and atavistic violence; a “woman people” who practice an “Arabic” oppression of woman; a pathologically individualistic people [...] ungovernable and slavish». Cfr. J. DICKIE (1999), *Darkest Italy: the nation and stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900*, Macmillan, Basingstoke.

⁴ J. DICKIE (2003), *Stereotipi di Sicilia, in Storia della Sicilia. 2. Dal Seicento a oggi* (a cura di F. Benigno e G. Giarrizzo), Laterza, Roma-Bari, p. 110.

La terra trema, filmed by Luchino Visconti in 1947 where, following the footsteps of *I Malavoglia*, the director highlights or, better, exacerbates the issues connected to the poor working classes. Eventually, they are even deprived of the moral support of their families, which, on the contrary, played a central role in Verga's novel.

In addition, a great number of historical and socio-anthropological publications of complaining nature can be taken into consideration; see for instance the works of Giustino Fortunato (*Il Mezzogiorno e lo Stato italiano*-1911), Umberto Zanotti-Bianco (*Il martirio della scuola in Calabria* -1925; *Inchiesta sulla Basilicata* - 1926; *Tra la perduta gente* - 1959) and Ernesto de Martino (*Sud e Magia* - 1959), as well as the narrative works among which stand out the book of Corrado Alvaro on Calabria (*Gente in Aspromonte* - 1930) and the one of Carlo Levi on the traditions, living standards and daily routine of some small villages in Basilicata (*Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* - 1945).

This is an "activist" literary production where family is one of the issues which is given more attention and that was praised for stimulating further researches, especially in the anthropological and sociological field, the majority of which coming from the United Kingdom. At the same time, those works ended up contributing to the "obstruction" of the analysis on Southern Italian families, as well as to the extension of the usual stereotypes also to the hazy field of social science theories⁵.

As of late, Southern Italian families are starting to be investigated not only in connection, for example, with their «juridical profile» or with the dynamics through which they were outlined, but also with reference to their «emotional and good-consuming bond» which actively relates to social structure.

By means of distancing themselves from national boundaries equatable to the boundaries imposed on research fields, and by conversely encouraging the potential of regional variables, these researches show that Southern Italy is «a totality of several different regions [...]; composed of dissimilar socio-economical and ethnolinguistic areas which do not often coincide with the administrative borders as had been historically defined»⁶. As Giuseppe Galasso remarked, within such a diverse context, family was the protagonist of complex relationship networks and assumes a variety of shapes changing according to the historical period, thus showing the composite nature and intricate layering of Southern Italian society⁷.

Furthermore, these researches prove the need of studying family by means of analyzing new sources. Such necessity had already been felt by Nino Tamassia in a well-known work published back in 1910 called *La famiglia italiana nei secoli decimoquinto e decimosesto*: «in order to overcome the 'domestic threshold' – the author stressed – there is a need of drawing from new sources which are different from the ones regularly used for the analysis of family as an institution».

Therefore, it does not seem inappropriate to put forward a series of reflections on Sicilian family elaborated by means of examining sources which are normally taken into consideration for the history of education and of Southern Italian educational institutions.

⁵ Cfr. L. STONE (1983), *Famiglia, sesso e matrimonio in Inghilterra tra Cinque e Ottocento*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 19.

⁶ G. GALASSO, *Gli studi di storia della famiglia e il Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, in «Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome», 1983, n. 95, pp. 150-159.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

The sources here examined include a variety of written documents ranging from simple *juridical instructions* to more composite collective of papers made of *correspondence, biographies, propaganda* and *books* concerning educational and/or didactical issues which were either directly or incidentally related to families or family members (usually the fathers). Other sources include documents personally edited by the “heads of the family”, such as letters and memoirs as well as written publications addressed to local authorities operating (among other things) in the educational field and related to didactic institutions and/or various didactical and educational points of view.

2. Sicilian families as seen in the *didactical-educational sources*

What picture of modern era Sicilian family arises from the documents concerning the “educational world”?

At the end of the XVIIIth century, the creation of the first popular public schools of reading and writing represents a rather interesting starting point for a reflection on Sicilian family with reference to the society and to the various protagonists of the “educational universe”.

First of all, as proved by the *school records* ranging from the end of the XVIIIth century to Italian Unification, the poor attendance to public schools on the part of children from lower classes leads us to think that in Sicily, school-age kids still actively participated to adult and family life⁸. The household’s needs dictated that children, especially boys – as Pitre stressed in several of his works concerning popular traditions – had to be soon aimed at working⁹.

Still unable to be seen as an *emotional reality*, the most obsessive concern for those families was *bread*, that is satisfying their primary needs.

This problem was still extremely relevant during the second half of the XIXth century, as Ministry of Public Education underlines in 1878 in a speech directed precisely to *families*.

[...] in order to fully understand it [the concern with bread] one should stay together with those [poor] people who has the necessity of getting through the day, overcoming a lot of struggles, enduring some accidental insolent remark or some unpleasant sensation. [...] One should see for himself certain gangly chaps, certain fathers with an endless offspring making a living for next to nothing; certain mothers moving forward with a scrawny child in their arms and several others around their dress, grimy and barefoot! [...] ¹⁰.

In these conditions, education did not have any importance for lower class families. School was not useful, instead it was seen as “dangerous” because it takes the child away from adult society. First pointed out by Philippe Ariès in his timeless

⁸ Cfr. S. AGRESTA, *Infanzia, Lavoro e Scuola*, in S. AGRESTA, C. SINDONI, *Scuole, Maestri e Metodi nella Sicilia borbonica (1817-1860)*, PensaMultimedia, 2012, pp. 95-117.

⁹ Cfr. G. PITRÈ (1913), *La famiglia, la casa, la vita del popolo siciliano*, Reber, Palermo.

¹⁰ N. NASI (1878), *Scuola e famiglia. Discorso letto ricorrendo la premiazione scolastica nel giorno dello statuto dall'avv. N. Nasi*, Tip. di Giov. Modica-Romano, Trapani, pp. 43-44.

“classic” *Fathers and sons*¹¹, and later investigated by several Italian scholars such as Ester De Fort and Giovanni Vigo¹², this issue had already been identified by a good number of Sicilian intellectuals during the first years of the XIXth century. Among them, for instance, we can remember Stefano Termini, the author of an interesting pedagogical work, *Progetto di un Piano di educazione ed istruzione pubblica*, published in 1813 supporting the necessity

of combining [...] education [...] with the ordinary daily activities and vocations destined to children at a young age, in order to make a living [...], [opening schools only] for about two or three hours in the morning, before noon, leaving the rest of the day to the free exercise of one’s own economic duties, so as to avoid the collision with the primary duty which is sustenance¹³.

It must be taken into consideration that in Sicily, within the time frame here examined, farming and most of the production activities concerning handicrafts or the exploitation of natural resources were carried out without the help of any machines, without any changes from the times of the Middle Ages, and was thus bound to human labour. As a consequence, the children of the poorest families, also known as *carusi*, were the “backbone”¹⁴ of certain sites such as “sulphur mines”¹⁵, as declaimed by the

¹¹ «From an emotional point of view – as Ariès puts it – family almost didn’t exist for poor people». P. ARIÈS (2005), *Padri e figli nell’Europa medievale e moderna*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, p. 433.

¹² «Within a society living on the edge of subsistence – as written by Giovanni VIGO – families cannot even do without the meager income deriving from child labour». *Istruzione e sviluppo economico in Italia nei secoli XIX, ILTE*, Torino, 1971, p. 96. «As for the masses already oppressed by an extreme poverty – as Ester DE FORT highlights – [education] was perceived as useless with regard to one’s own work, whose feasibility rested on traditional procedures; furthermore, it was economically unsustainable, since they couldn’t give up on a child labour income that had such a key role in earning a living on the edge of subsistence». *Storia della scuola elementare in Italia: Dall’Unità all’età giolittiana*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1979, p. 17.

¹³ S. TERMINI (1813), *Progetto di un Piano di educazione, ed istruzione pubblica adattato alle odierne circostanze dei Regno della Sicilia il cui autografo è stato presentato al Parlamento del 1813 dal cittadino Stefano Termini*, Tipografia di Francesco Abbate, Palermo, p. 56.

¹⁴ «If one considers how rudimental technology was at that time – as written by M. ROGGERO – one will better understand that the practical skills acquired on-the-job could appear much more important than technical skill, and that increasing the products depended more on the tangible investment than on the intangible one». *L’alfabeto conquistato. Apprendere e insegnare nell’Italia tra Sette e Ottocento*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1999, p. 310.

¹⁵ On sulphur mines see, among other works: AA.VV. (1988), *Economia e società nell’area dello zolfo* (a cura di G. Barone - C. Torrisi), S. Sciascia, Caltanissetta - Roma; G. BAGLIO (1905), *Ricerche sul lavoro e sui lavoratori di Sicilia. Il solfaraio*, Napoli; G. CARUSO-RASÀ (1896), *La questione siciliana degli zolfi*, F.lli Bocca, Torino; N. COLAJANNI (1894), *L’industria dello zolfo in Sicilia*, in «La Riforma Sociale»; dello stesso, *I lavoratori delle zolfare siciliane*, in «La Riforma Sociale», 1894; F. DOTTO SCRIBANI (1858), *Su gl’inconvenienti che si osservano nell’industria dell’estrazione dello zolfo in Sicilia e su i mezzi di ripararvi*, Stamperia G. B. Lorusnaider, Palermo; L. FRANCHETTI-S. SONNINO (1925), *La Sicilia nel 1876. I Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia; II I contadini*, Firenze, Vallecchi; C. GEMMELLARO (1842), *Sulla vera condizione delle miniere in Sicilia*, Catania; A. GIORDANO (1871), *L’igiene dei zolfatai*, Palermo; G. SAVORINI (1881), *Condizioni economiche e morali dei lavoratori delle miniere di zolfo e degli agricoltori della provincia di Girgenti*, Agrigento, Stamperia Provinciale-Commerciale di Salvatore Montes; G. SCHIRÒ (1850), *Stato attuale dell’industria solfifera di Sicilia*, Palermo; F. SQUARZINA (1963), *Produzione e commercio dello zolfo in Sicilia nel secolo XIX*, Torino, Ilte; J. WHITE MARIO (1894), *Le miniere di zolfo in Sicilia*, in «Nuova Antologia», 1894, p. 721 e *I lavoratori delle zolfare*, Firenze.

lines of a popular Sicilian lullaby, *Cantu di lu carusu*, edited at the end of the XIXth century by F. Pulci in a work called *Usi e costumi dei zolfatari in Sicilia*:

*Mamma, nun mi mannati a la pirrera
ca notti e iornu mi pigghiu turrura,
a mala pena scinnu a la pirrera,
s'apri lu tettu e cadinu li mura.
Accussi voli la mala carrera,
farmi pigghiari sempri di paura.*

*Mother, don't send me to the sulphur mine,
for night and day I am afraid,
With difficulty I go down into the mine,
the vault splits open and the walls fall down.
This is what this evil job wants,
for me to be always afraid.*

Some heavy obstacles to the appearance of a modern sense of family are represented by this reality, characterized by job insecurity, economic difficulties in finding a stability for the poorest families, child exploitation for labour purposes together with school abandonment. This latter was denounced by several newspapers of that time, among which «L'Illustrazione Italiana» (Fig. n. 1) sticks out due to its use of the usual exotic and vivid tones aimed at displaying and confirming the existence of an Italy which was *other*.

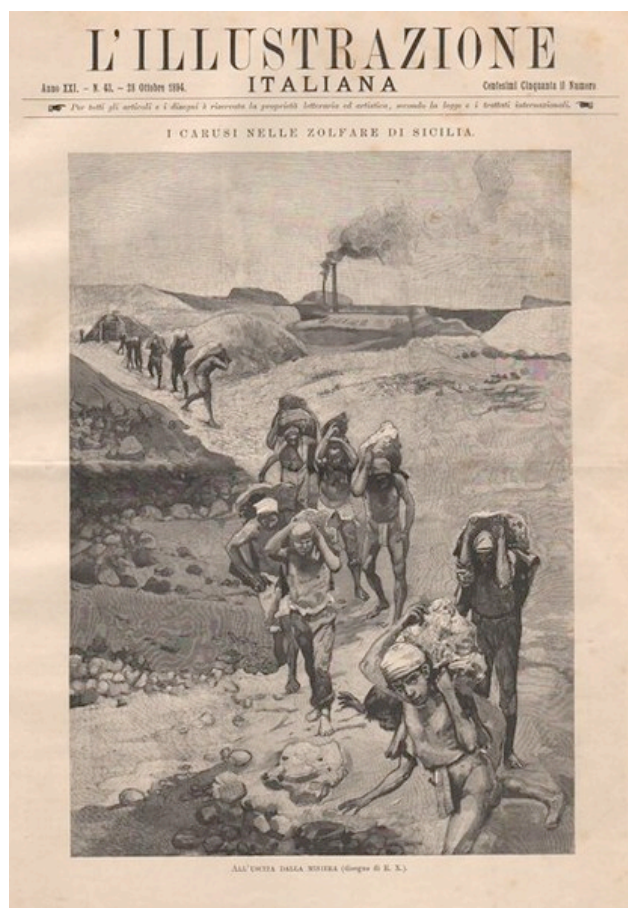


Fig. n. 1 - «L'Illustrazione italiana» (1894)

However, it is wrong to affirm either that during the XIXth century family was not overall susceptible to modifications, or that the situation did not vary from area to area. Besides the material and moral degradation of lower classes, educational sources equally denounce some interesting ideas or actual news, always delimited to specific fields and/or situations. These are some examples, even though the list is far more extended. At the beginning of the XIXth century the institution of a nautical school in Trapani inside the “Chiesa della Luce” on behalf of «fathers from the order of the sailors» denote the tendency of replacing the usual apprenticeship with didactic initiatives. As a consequence, children had the opportunity of receiving a different education, far more complex and articulate as opposed to the limiting

reality offered by small workshops. This chance is even more meaningful if one considers that, in addition to practical workshops, they also created a school of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Another equally remarkable idea was the one proposed by an influential pedagogist, Giovanni Agostino De Cosmi, who stated that it was necessary for «all social components» to be put in the condition of actively participating in the civil and political life of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Such participation – as he wrote in his *Prospetto delle scuole normali di Sicilia* – derived from the concrete possibility of having access to education for the children of both the wealthier families and the poorer ones¹⁶.

His vision found a tangible application. One need only consider the situation of the popular school in Mazzarino which, together with other institutions established on the island starting from 1788, was directed by De Cosmi. As shown by the *school reports and forms* drafted by teachers, the 33 pupils of both classes of the school in 1793 had very different social origins. The careers or professions of their parents were: *gentleman* (n. 9), *butcher* (1), *cropper* (4), *barber* (1), *baker* (1), *lawyer* (5), *farmer* (5), *teacher* (2), *doctor* (1), *tin crafter* (1) and *carpenter* (1)¹⁷.

The educational dynamics show that the situation of families belonging to aristocracy or rising élites seems completely different from the one of the lower class.

As reported by the examined documents, as well as by a few interesting work of Luciana Caminiti, Ida Fazio and Cataldo Naro¹⁸, access to instruction and education was tied to family dynamics aiming at defending the *name, title and holdings* of the family, due either to opportunist reasons or to the supremacy over the other social classes; for the rising élites it was seen as a “tempting” innovation which made it possible to have a greater visibility, more opportunities and a bigger role in society.

To further elaborate on those dynamics, it is sufficient to quote the case of *Collegi di Maria*, educational institutions whose management was entrusted by Cardinal Pietro Marcello Corradini to the *Congregazione delle convittrici della Sacra Famiglia* and which rapidly spread on the island between the XVIIIth century and the first quarter of the XIXth century¹⁹.

Aristocratic families saw in the “formula” proposed by *Collegi di Maria* a “golden” occasion to trigger a series of *patronage* relationships that could be useful in

¹⁶ G. A. DE COSMI, *Prospetto delle scuole normali di Sicilia*, in *Elementi di Filologia italiana e latina*, tomo I, Reale Stamperia, Palermo, p. 168.

¹⁷ AsPa, *Real Segreteria - Incartamenti, Scuole normali di Sicilia (1790-93)*, b. 5248.

¹⁸ Cfr. L. CAMINITI (2005), *Educare per amor di Dio - I collegi di Maria tra Chiesa e Stato*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli; I. FAZIO (1988), *La signora dell'oro. Carità femminile potere e controllo sociale in una comunità siciliana tra Sette e Ottocento*, in L. FERRANTE, M. PALAZZI et al., *Ragnatele di rapporti, Patronage e reti di relazione nella storia delle donne*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino, pp. 80-98; Id (1990), *Istruzione e educazione delle donne nella Sicilia borbonica in Contributi per un bilancio del Regno borbonico*, Fondazione culturale Lauro Chiazzese della Sicilcassa, Palermo, pp. 116-135; C. NARO (1994), *I Collegi di Maria in Sicilia*, in *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, a cura di L. Pazzaglia, La Scuola, Brescia, pp. 891-904.

¹⁹ On Pietro Marcellino Corradini, see: AA.VV. (1993), *Atti del Convegno di studi sulla personalità del cardinale Pier Marcellino Corradini: 10 giugno 1990*, (a cura del Movimento Amici del Cardinale Corradini), Palermo, Casa generalizia delle Suore collegine della Sacra Famiglia; S. BELLIA (1985), *Splendore di una porpora. La carità del Card. P.M. Corradini, fondatore della Congregazione delle Suore Collegine della Sacra Famiglia*, Edizioni Augustinus, Palermo; *Il setino Cardinale Pietro Marcellino Corradini fu vero fondatore di congregazione religiosa*, Roma, 1959; *Studi e documenti corradiniani*, Roma, Poliglotta Vaticana, 1968; *Tabor Collegino. Commento alle Costituzioni Corradiniane*, Roma, 1964.

binding/dominating the different social and cultural components within the community, by means of managing this new kind of institution²⁰.

On the contrary, the rising élites' families see in those new educational opportunities the possibility of broadening their horizons – although more in terms of social or economical development rather than culture – and thus sent their daughters to these colleges as *volandiere* also known as *charter students* in order to study “useful” arts for the composition of the dowry of a bride aspiring to modifying her social position, such as silk and golden needlework.

Starting from the third decade of the XIXth century, this kind of attention towards educational opportunities on the part of middle-class families gradually increased and encouraged the fathers to look for more «modern era appropriate» institutions (boarding schools for girls), thus investing education with a more and more important role. Such attention also proves the fact that “modern family” was gradually starting to spread in Sicily; this family, as in other European countries, was «secluded from the rest of the world, opposing against it the parents-children group» where «all the energy within the group is aimed at the children's social development»²¹.

3. Family and society in Sicily in the correspondence of *pater familias*

It almost seems redundant to emphasize that, however, not every father understands instruction and education's value and potential. In fact, among the sources here examined, there is a significant number of letters certifying the *ignorance*, *mistrust* and a certain *resistance* to education on the part of some of those individuals.

Some eloquent examples are reported as follows.

In 1795, the fathers' disapproval of the diffusion of popular school was so strong that they were constantly complaining about their inefficiency or inherent futility. Always in the same year, despite knowing that normal schools were «useful, and efficient», the Jurors from Caltanissetta sensed that «the opinion, which [...] was diffused among that Public, was split into two parties [...] some people appear to be disgusted by it [...]»²².

In 1817, many parents from Recalmuto «left their children in the hands of ignorance because they did not want to comply to paying teachers»²³.

In 1821, in Marianopoli – where the majority of the citizens had, according to the Intendant of Caltanissetta, a «vicious personality» due to their «independence from legal authorities, [...], irreligiousness, insubordination to laws and love for anarchy» – «fathers did not care to provide their children with an education»²⁴.

By means of exploiting this kind of resistance, the Bourbonic authorities were also forced to reprimand the heads of the family and even issued specific circular letters which were published in each district's newspaper (*Giornali delle Intendenze*).

²⁰ AsPa, *Cpie, Corrispondenza, Affari Generali* - III Rip., b. 108.

²¹ P. ARIÈS (2005), *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, cit., p. 476.

²² ASPA, *Real Segreteria - Incartamenti, Scuole normali di mutuo insegnamento* (1796), b. 5.499.

²³ Report from the Capitano di Giustizia, Francesco Paolo Grillo Borghese to the Presidente of Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione, Racalmuto, 14 lug. 1817. AsPa, *Cpie, Corrispondenza, Affari generali* (1817), III. Rip., b. 109.

²⁴ Report from the Intendant of Caltanissetta to the Prince of Cutò, Marianopoli, 18 luglio 1821. AsPa, *Real Segreteria - Interno, Palermo, Istruzione pubblica, Statistica* (1821), b. 1777.

Your majesty the Prince – as it reads in the *Giornale dell'Intendenza* of Palermo of December 23, 1818 – in the Capital of a Nation [...], it is painful to see that the essential institutions of public teaching are largely neglected. [...] It is necessary that we remove any excuse on the part of indolent fathers to disregard their children's education [...] whichever the future that providence has destined for Sicilian youth²⁵.

Apart from those fathers' position with regards to education, sources show that, during the first years of the XIXth century, *pater familias* are no longer “silent”.

They start being used *to write, to report and to protest*.

Therefore, just like it is happening in the rest of Europe, Sicilian middle-class family gradually ceases to be “subdued”; on the contrary, it becomes more and more “verbal” and it starts “invading correspondence”²⁶.

This is chiefly shown by the countless charges pressed from fathers to the king and the competent authorities operating in the educational field either at a central level – king, viceroy, Reale Deputazione di Studi, Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione – and at a local level – Intendent, Subintendent, Mayors, Bishops, etc.

The content of those charges concerns a number of subjects; fathers complained about the *decay of schools*²⁷, the *absence*²⁸, *abuses*²⁹ and *inadequacy of teachers*³⁰, and the *bad administration on the part of mayors and district councils* entrusted with the school's financial support³¹.

Sometimes, the complaints testify to the presence of a certain *solidarity* not only among the families of the same social class, but also among less affluent families.

For instance, the fathers from Palermo in 1816 lamented the fact that teachers showed a different attitude towards the children belonging to families who were able to pay a monthly tuition and the children coming from less affluent families; the fathers

²⁵ «Giornale dell'Intendenza» di Palermo, 23 dicembre 1818, n. XVII, pp. 160-161.

²⁶ P. ARIÈS (2005), *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, cit., p. 472.

²⁷ «Sire, the Fathers [...] from the city of Modica [...] explain [...] that due to those [...] schools' [...] decay, to the inadequate attentions on the part of teachers [...] and [...] to the abuse of holidays allowed all throughout the year». Fathers' plea to the King, 1810. AsPa, *Cpie, Suppliche* (1810/1817), b. 179.

²⁸ As the teacher from Girgenti wrote in 1825: «I am constantly assailed by fathers whose children have had enough rest due to the suspension of didactic activities from last March until today, because the Mayor does not care about those complaints». Archivio di Stato di Agrigento, *Atti dell'Intendenza*, b. 403.

²⁹ «We, the undersigned, Fathers [...] denounce that the teacher from the above-mentioned school reprinted on his own the majority of the textbooks needed for school [...] imposing on them an exceeding price and forcing us to buy them, and sending pupils away from the institute if we refuse to buy them or choose another edition. We ask the Prince of Malvagna [...] to impose a reasonable price on reprinted books at the expense of the teacher of the above-mentioned Normal Schools, or else to forbid them to be sold in those institutions, due to the unsuccessful approval of this measure by the King [...]». Fathers' plea to the Prince of Malvagna, June 7, 1817. AsPa, *Cpie, Scuole della provincia di Messina* (1827/40), b. 383.

³⁰ «The Fathers from Caltanissetta in Sicily [...] denounce that [the teacher] instead of educating our [...] children [...], he treats them like animals». Plea of the Fathers from Caltanissetta to the King, Caltanissetta, December 15, 1787. AsPa, *Cpie, Affari diversi* (1780/10), b. 93. «[...] the current teacher – as the fathers from Cinisi complain about in 1836 – completely degraded the concept [...] of school». AsPa, *Cpie, Scuole della provincia di Messina* (1827/40), b. 383.

³¹ There are «dismayed Fathers [from Mascali] in seeing their own children perish in idleness because of the capricious suppression of the [...] schools in this city, [...] on the part of the local council [...] at their will [...]». Plea to the King, 22 dic. 1814. AsPa, *Cpie, Suppliche* (1810/17), b. 179.

ask that «they must teach their students the same grammatical notions indiscriminately, and without any [...] preferences»³².

By contrast, even if it was less frequent, some others show a spirit of *competition* with wealthy families. As it can be inferred from this *petition* issued by the fathers from Palermo to the Royal Deputation of Studies at the end of 1815, middle-class family was starting to claim its “own space” and had a thorough knowledge of the regulations issued by public instruction, as well as of what the government was willing to do for their children:

The *pater familias* of this Capital [...] heavily complain that their children weren't admitted to normal Schools this academic year, and it was due to the insufficient capacity of classes, since schools gave priority to the children of noble and wealthy families, thus excluding the children of the petitioners, who here plead for the dismissal of the above-mentioned pupils in order to give priority to the latter who need it more³³.

A greater number of objections can be found among the fathers of élite families, who reported some “unpleasant” cases of turmoil with regards to poor and marginalized children. See, for instance, the relocation of the orphans from Petralia Soprana in the Collegio di Maria in Cefalù in 1820 because of the inhabitability of the building. Such proposal was dismissed due to

the prejudice, deeply rooted in the fathers' minds, of not confusing their legitimate daughters with the orphan girls³⁴

Within the letters sent to educational and state authorities, besides pressing charges, the *pater familias* also showed a *proactive* and *constructive attitude* especially towards the search for tangible solutions to the various issues in the public educational system.

Thus, a series of private tutors started being paid by fathers to teach their children³⁵ and public teachers started being subsidized by additional funds along with their meager state salary, as shown within several reports written in 1817 by judges and addressed to the Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione³⁶.

³² Plea of the Fathers from Palermo to the King. Palermo, 12 luglio 1816. AsPa, *Real Segreteria - Incartamenti, Scuole normali di mutuo insegnamento* (1809/17), b. 5573.

³³ From the Reale Deputazione degli Studi of Palermo to the King of the Kingdom of Sicily. Palermo, 14 dicembre 1815. AsPa, *Cpie, Registro di consulte* (1808), vol. n. 13.

³⁴ Communication written by the Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione at the Intendant of Palermo, May 4, 1820. AsPa, *Cpie, Registro di lettere* (1819/21), I. Rip., vol. 22.

³⁵ In 1817, in Aci Sant'Antonio «there were exclusively [...] private schools of grammar and humane letters directed [...] by certain Teachers subsidized by those fathers [...]». From the Judge to the Commissione di Pubblica Istruzione ed Educazione. AsPa, *Cpie, Corrispondenza, Affari generali* (1817), II. Rip., b. 102.

³⁶ Some examples will be reported as follows. In Piraino, «[...] which is a small village, there is only one [...] school [...] and the [...] teacher [...] besides being paid nine *onze* by the local district, makes the sum of one ducat per month for each pupil, which is paid by their respective fathers [...]» (June 13, 1817). In Piedimonte «there is only one school [...] with one single teacher [...] who is only paid a salary [...], by the Local District [...]. Due to the salary's inadequacy [...] some Fathers contribute by paying the same amount from their own pocket» (June 23, 1817). In S. Pietro di Clarenza there is a «teacher [...] whose municipal salary consists in six *onze* but, since such a scarce salary is not sufficient [...] the affluent Fathers complement the monthly income with their own money» (June 23, 1817). In Montevago

As we read in a letter written by fathers from Agosta in 1826:

the respective Fathers from any social class and condition would rather pay monthly, even though some could still barely make a living, and send their children to private school teachers in spite of being exempt from any tuition in the public schools³⁷.

Hence, families were *less silent* and more *proactive*, but also more *visible*.

Starting from the first half of the XIXth century, it is not rare for educational works and pamphlets aimed at advertising the foundation of new private schools to devote their attention to those families like, for example, the work published by Luigi Colameo in Palermo for the printing house of Domenico Lo Bianco in 1847 called *Ai Padri di famiglia. Trattato di educazione particolare e didascalica dei fanciulle*.

Always during the same period, *families* and *pater familias* were frequently given attention by:

- *teachers*, in their *correspondence* or in the organization of the *end-of-school displays* (however, this attention was often dictated by mere “interests”, especially when certain fathers were also entrusted with the administration and funding of local schools);
- *mayors*, in *letters* and *deliberations*;
- various *authorities operating in the educational field*, in *notices* and *circular letters*.

More and more involved in didactic activities, fathers were sometimes even committed to writing first-hand pedagogical essays or works; this is the case of Baron Ferdinando Malvica who edited two volumes called *Consigli a mia figlia*.

Conclusions

Educational sources, that is the sources concerning school or various pedagogical aspects, represent an interesting opportunity to observe Southern Italian family from a different “point of view”. They offer an innovative, rather complex and often even contradictory portrait of such families.

Certainly unable to explain complex family dynamics, the above-mentioned sources seem to prove that Sicilian family, though the élite one, had an increasingly active and dynamic role within society, just like it was happening elsewhere in Europe.

However, during the XIXth century, the old relationship between Sicilian masters and servants or between the wealthiest and hard-working families and the poorest ones had not been eradicated.

Therefore modern family, encompassing only noblemen, bourgeois and rich artisans or farmers, overlooked the family of Middle Age origins, that is the popular family³⁸, which was the most diffused on the island during the XIXth century. In spite

«there is only one teacher [...]. He has [...] a salary of twenty-four *onze*, half of which is subsidized by our Local Council and half by [...] Fathers». (June 18, 1817). AsPa, *Cpie, Corrispondenza, Affari generali* (1817), II. Rip., bb. 104, 109.

³⁷ AsPa, *Cpie, Corrispondenza, Affari generali* (1817), II. Rip., b. 104

³⁸ Cfr. P. ARIÈS (2005), *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, cit., p. 476.

of the various innovations introduced in the educational field by the Borbon first and by the Savoy after the Unification, this family continued to be cut out from any possibility of changing or morally and culturally growing.

In any case, in the XIXth-century Sicily, family gradually assumed an increasingly central role in the educational field.

This importance, however, was not always connected to virtuous attitudes and, on the contrary, was often characterized more by *flaws* rather than *merits* in common with all the social classes. With regard to this point, it is important to remember the long speech called *Scuola e Famiglia* held in 1878 by young lawyer Nunzio Nasi, school director in the district of Trapani and Minister of Public Instruction under the Zanardelli administration from 1901 to 1903³⁹:

Spirits must be educated, a lot [...]. This task concerns the family. [...] Let's be honest [...] in manifesting painful truths. Family does not generally measure up to its educational mission. Many parents do for their children only the bare minimum as suggested by their instinct, [...] and, [...] they take the past with all its prejudices as an example. How many parents do not overuse their cane, saying to their children: "This is what my father did"? How many parents [...] do not raise their voice, do not gossip, do not curse [...] in the presence of all family members? [...] The ones even guiltier than a lower class mother neglecting her children's education because she's forced to make a living away from home, are certainly those ladies who are unable to take adequate care of their children since they have to attend their vanity table, to pay visits, a whole set of extrafamilial activities to carry out. [...] Among the lower classes I detect an ignorance that justifies, a misery that corrupts; but among the noblemen, ignorance is not excusable when present and, when it's absent, the faults become the flaws that we complain about.

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³⁹ N. NASI (1878), *Scuola e famiglia. Discorso letto ricorrendo la premiazione scolastica nel giorno dello statuto dall'avv. N. Nasi*, cit., p. 13-16.

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