

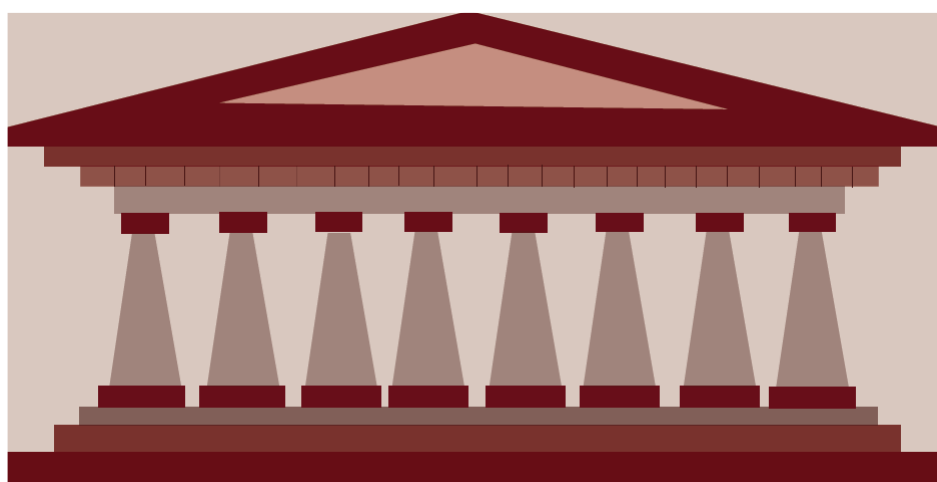
Athens Journal of History

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 12, Issue 4

Published by the Athens Institute

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October 2026

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The current issue is the fourth of the twelfth volume of the *Athens Journal of History (AJHIS)*, published by the published by the [History Unit](#) of Athens Institute.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute



Athens Institute for Education and Research

A World Association of Academics and Researchers

25th Annual International Conference on History & Archaeology: From Ancient to Modern, 31 May & 1-5 June 2027, Athens, Greece

The [History Unit](#) of ATINER, will hold its **25th Annual International Conference on History & Archaeology: From Ancient to Modern 31 May & 1-5 June 2027, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of History](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together scholars and students of all areas of history, archaeology and other related disciplines. You may participate as a stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2027/FORM-HIS.doc>).

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Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **3 November 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **3 May 2027**

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€
Details can be found at: <https://www.atiner.gr/fees>



Athens Institute for Education and Research
A World Association of Academics and Researchers

20th Annual International Conference on Literature
31 May & 1-5 June 2027 2026

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Important Dates

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- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **3 May 2027**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Stamos Metzidakis**, Head, [Literature Research Unit](#), ATINER & Emeritus Professor of French and Comparative Literature, Washington University in Saint Louis, USA.

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- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

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Keeping Holocaust History Alive

By Cayo Gamber*

This paper focuses on the role of the twinned constituencies and twinned efforts of keeping Holocaust history alive by making the voices of survivors, the narrators of the “history from below,” available to current and future audiences. As this paper clarifies, the fate of Holocaust history is complicated by two compelling questions:

- *How are testimonies being preserved currently and what steps will be taken to make them available via current/future technologies?*
- *In what ways are institutions making their repositories available currently and what plans do they have to continue to make them available, and, in particular, more widely available to generations to come?*

There is an anxious undercurrent in the efforts being made by current archives and museums that with the dying of the survivors, the relevance of this history also is dying. In order to keep Holocaust history alive, archives and museums are actively seeking ways to capture new audiences through ever-emerging technologies. The effort to stay current involves everything from battling systemic obsolescence, such as outdated software or hardware, to engaging with technological advancements that, over time, may fail to attract responsive, new audiences.

The Mandate for Survivors to Remember and Record and for a Willing Audience to Be Found

Today firsthand testimony holds a central place in Holocaust research and education. However, that was not always the case. Historians did not initially embrace what Tony Kushner called “history from below.” As Kushner explains, history from below is derived from evidence offered by ordinary people, by those who experienced the Shoah firsthand, but who often were not formally educated or members of the social elite.¹ We have come to prize Holocaust history from

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1. For a sustained discussion of history from below, see: Kushner's *Anglo-Jewry since 1066: Place, Locality and Memory*. E.P. Thompson also is credited with popularizing this term in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); he argued that the working class were not passive victims of history but active creators of their own history. What distinguishes Kushner's use of “history from below” is his recognition that survivors' voices have become the dominant narrative; their accounts now define what we have come to know as the Holocaust. Kushner himself was instrumental in pioneering this focus on personal testimony. In 1989, when Kushner stated teaching one of the first extended courses on the Holocaust, he determined that “the major focus in our classes [would be] the Jewish and other victims with the emphasis on *ordinary people*. We studied their experiences and responses through a variety of ‘ego documents,’ including diaries,

below because the individual oral histories not only humanize this history, but, as Yad Vashem explains, personal testimony highlights the magnitude of the atrocity by focusing on the singularity of each individual who suffered and/or who died. As Yad Vashem's queries and their answer to those questions reveal their emphasis is on the singularity of each individual who was persecuted:

How should we tell this story? What should we focus on? What are the resources we can use to bring it to life? We should not see the Holocaust as the murder of six million anonymous Jews, but we should understand, rather, that *six million times during the Holocaust an individual Jew with a name and a face was murdered*. (qtd. in "Echoes & Reflections" n. pag., emphasis added)

The singularity of each survivor's account has long been prized and sought after. In the 1980s major oral history projects surged in order to record survivor accounts. This surge was due, in large part, to the concern that the voices of survivors would be lost to us with passage of time.

These efforts to record the voices of survivors also were driven by the survivors' sense of duty to transmit history. In his "Preface to the New Translation" of *Night*, Elie Wiesel poignantly observes: "For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory" (n. pag.). In addition to arguing that the survivor must not deprive future generations of their accounts, Wiesel also notes that these survivors require willing audiences who will become custodians of this collective memory. In a similar vein, Henry Greenspan remarks, for survivors, "[w]hatever the specific motives in retelling – to remember the dead, to warn the living, to indict the killers, to document the crime – every act of recounting, really by definition, is *premised on the possibility of responsive listeners*" (49; emphasis added).²

This paper focuses on the role of these twinned constituencies and twinned efforts: the survivors who are the narrators of the history from below and the listeners who are called upon to become witnesses from below for those who were persecuted and those who were murdered.

letters, memoirs and finally oral histories which were beginning to be collected in the UK from the small Holocaust survivor community" ("On Listening" 604-605; emphasis added).

2. I would add, in addition to the four motivations Greenspan identifies, initially, one of the most urgent reasons for offering testimony was to help survivors locate missing family and friends. In response to that need, in the 1950s Yad Vashem initiated the *Pages of Testimony* project which was comprised of 800,000 short biographies within a few short years of its launch. Today, 2.8 million names have been entered into a central database that now forms the widely searched *Pages of Testimony* testimonial project which identifies individual victims and offers their biographies.

**The Precarity of Testimony:
Storing, Preserving, Archiving, Cataloguing, Indexing, Accessing**

Illustration 1. David Boder and his Model-50 Wire Recorder, 1946, Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology



In 1946, armed with a Model-50 Wire Recorder, 200 spools of carbon-steel wire, and assortment of converters and transformers, David Boder, a professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology, traveled to Europe to ask survivors of the Holocaust to tell their personal stories.

The fate of Boder's work is illustrative.

Three years after collecting 130 interviews, Boder published eight of his recorded interviews, verbatim, in *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (1949). After its publication, the book did not receive a great deal of attention, nor were the remaining 122 interviews Boder had conducted widely sought after. In fact, the whereabouts of the original wire spools recorded in Europe currently are unknown. Fortunately, Boder had created copies of the interviews. In 1967, a portion of Boder's archives were gifted to the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Akron in Ohio. That portion included 48 of Boder's wire spools. However, as Jessica Wapner reports, the testimonies lay dormant given that the University did not have the technology to play them. As she explains, "the wire recorders that Boder had used were obsolete and none of the wire recorders in the Cummings Center collection

were compatible with his spools" (Wapner n. pag.).³ Audio specialists in the Cummings Center "decided to take on the task" of making the collection available (Wapner n. pag.). "They bought a nonfunctional wire recorder on eBay and used the chassis, which holds the wire reels, as a foundation for a new machine they built" in order first to listen to and then to reformat the interviews into digital recordings (Wapner n. pag.).⁴

This account is revealing on a number of levels. First, Boder's project marks the first effort to create audio recordings of survivors' voices. These audio recordings capture the immediacy and authenticity of each individual's effort to recall events and to put those recollections into words. It also is noteworthy that Boder capitalized on the fact that his wire recorder was, at the time, state-of-the-art technology. In "The 1946 Holocaust Interviews: David Boder's Intermedia Project in the Digital Age," Frank Mehring astutely observes,

the wire recorder functioned as an effective tool of advertisement for Boder's interview project. He used the recording device to gain attention by showcasing the power of his technological apparatus. For the people who had been in camps for years, *the device had a magical quality*, and in order to persuade them to meet with him and tell him their stories, Boder staged little demonstrations in which he recorded and then played back the material to great effect: "I would meet a colony of DPs in a particular shelter house for lunch or dinner. After the meal I would ask them to sing and, with their knowledge, I recorded the songs. When I played these back, *the wonder of hearing their own voices recorded was boundless. Then I would explain my project and ask for volunteers.*"⁵ Boder knew that the media

3. Other copies first were deposited with the National Institute of Mental Health and subsequently were held by the Library of Congress. In order to address the then-current technology, the Library of Congress transferred the spools to tape. However, the set they maintained was incomplete as eleven spools were believed to be missing. In 1998, this surviving set of taped interviews moved, yet again, to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

4. And the story of potential mishaps with Boder's collection continues! There was one wire spool referenced in his work but not found in the various Boder collections. In 2007, the spool long presumed lost was found by chance at the University of Akron. Archivists found the missing spool in a tin box that mistakenly had been inventoried as "Heroville Songs." The label on the box actually said "Henonville Songs," and were determined to be the collection of songs Boder recorded from refugees at the Henonville Displaced Persons Camp in France. (See: Enders, Jon. "Dr. Boder and the Missing Songs." *Cummings Center Blog*, 2 September 2016, <https://centerhistorypsychology.wordpress.com/2016/09/02/dr-boder-and-the-missing-songs/>.)

5. At the end of the paper, I will be arguing that there are risks in using technology to attract new audiences to engage with the Holocaust when the technology entices by being entertaining. In the case of Boder's effort to attract audiences there is something fitting in that they were taken with the magical quality of hearing their own voices played back to them. The spectacle itself is their own voices – the voices from below that subsequently constructed the history of the Shoah.

device functioned as an attraction that he could channel into active participation for his interview project. (145-146; emphasis added)⁶

While Boder captured the wonder of their own voices, this account also reveals how complex it has been to make individual testimonies – especially those born analogue – available. The eight accounts Boder transcribed in *I Did Not Interview the Dead* did not find a wide audience. Moreover, while carbon-steel wire was state-of-the-art, making 200 spools of tape available to a larger audience was not an easy task. Efforts to catalogue and store the taped interviews – whether the 200 spools of carbon-steel wire or the remastered tapes of the interviews – proved to be precarious given how quickly “state-of-the-art” technologies become obsolete and then lie dormant.

In the case of Boder, however, the researcher will discover the truly rare good fortune that this particular collection of testimony currently is available online: digitized, indexed, and delivered by Voices of the Holocaust at the Illinois Institute of Technology (<http://voices.iit.edu/>). In “Digitizing Holocaust Memories,” Jeffrey Shandler notes:

[t]he website sorts the interviews by various criteria, including the language and location of the interview and the gender, religion, and wartime experiences of the respective interviewee. In addition, the site facilitates the use of these recordings, *which are not of the clearest sound quality*, with transcriptions, translations, and annotations, plus background information on Boder and his project. (27; emphasis added)

While the sound quality may be compromised, on the whole, the fate of Boder’s collection has been fortuitous. That said, Boder’s collection of testimonies raises important questions about the fragility and future of survivor testimony. Those questions include the following:

- How are testimonies being preserved currently and what steps will be taken to make them available via current/future technologies?
- In what ways are institutions making their repositories available currently and what plans do they have to continue to make them available, and, in particular, more widely available to generations to come?⁷

6. Not only did Boder record Jewish displaced persons singing in order to create a sense of wonder, Bret Werb, a musicologist at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, notes that to begin interviews, one of Boder’s methodologies was to ask interviewees to sing, “just to loosen people up” (qtd. in Wapner n. pag.).

7. There are other questions that should be addressed as well:

- What work is being done, now, to respond to the many ways archival practices have evolved?
- How are the individual stories inventoried and indexed? In particular, how have metadata schemas and the multiplicity of digital formats been engaged?

These are questions I hope to entertain; however, they are not in the scope of this paper.

We are now in what is being termed the post-witness era. The fact that eyewitnesses themselves no longer will be able to tell their stories in person is regarded as a crisis point as evidenced by Paul F. M. J. Verschure and Sytse Wierenga's charge that "we should ask whether the prolongation of a witness-centric paradigm has a future in the absence of the actual witness?" (333).⁸ This crisis point, however, may have more to do with concerns about historical relevance.

Conclusion: Keeping Holocaust Memory Alive by Engendering Ongoing Relevance

There is an anxious undercurrent in the efforts being made by current archives and museums that with the dying of the survivors, the relevance of this history also is dying. In order to keep Holocaust history alive, archives and museums are actively seeking ways to capture new audiences through ever-emerging technologies. The effort to stay current involves everything from battling systemic obsolescence, such as outdated software or hardware, to engaging with technological advancements meant to attract responsive, new audiences.

According to Beth Kean, Chief Executive of the Holocaust Museum Los Angeles (HMLA), "We know we're at the point now where young people, when they come to the museum, think, 'Oh, this is ancient history.' We have to get their attention the minute they walk off the bus and make sure they understand why they're here. We need to make this history relevant and accessible to them and teach it to them on a level that they understand" (qtd. in Rottenberg).⁹ Kean's description captures a sense

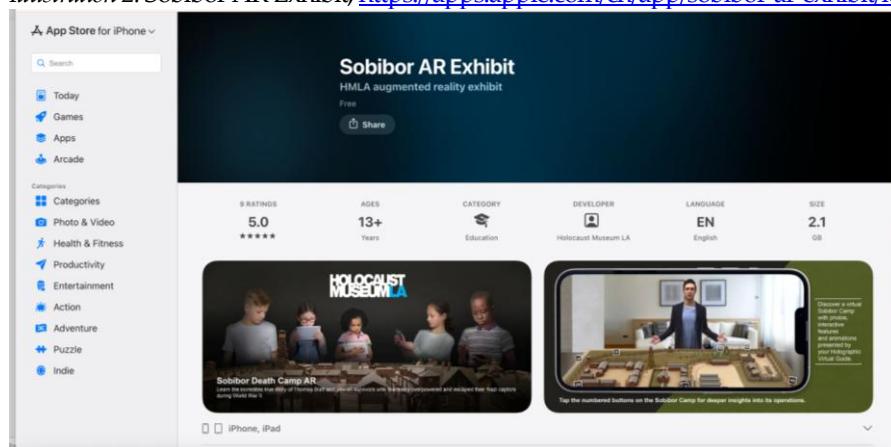
8. There is an unexamined conceit here that in-person interactions with survivors were widely available geographically and over the five-plus decades that followed the end of the war. In actual fact, interactions with survivor testimony, more often than not, was made possible by engaging with collections of oral-history testimony – from reading written personal accounts to listening to oral interviews with survivors – rather than from personal interactions with survivors. Our collective memory of the Holocaust, as Elie Wiesel asserts, has been defined by survivor testimony, testimony, as Tony Kushner argues, from ordinary people who radically changed how we have come to "know" history. That being said, it is worth noting, our engagement with survivor testimony has been derived, for the most part, by engaging with a wide variety of media – from accounts in print to those born analogue on wire recordings, magnetic audio tapes, analogue video tape, and film – rather than engaging with survivors in person.

9. Kean is speaking specifically about the Sobibor Augmented Reality (AR) exhibit. The App, available for free download in Apple's app store, allows users to interact with a 3D model of Sobibor, with actor Ben Feldman serving as a holographic guide providing historical context and encouraging deeper exploration of the camp's layout and daily life. The app centers on the story of Polish survivor Thomas Blatt, who escaped from Sobibor during a famous 1943 uprising and created a detailed map from memory, including key locations such as the barracks, guard towers, gas chambers and mass graves. (Rottenberg n. pag.)

of urgency: we must capture their attention immediately; if we fail to do so they will not regard this history as meaningful. However, there is a danger that to capture “their attention the minute they walk off the bus,” the complex, difficult, demanding, traumatic history of the Holocaust is made entertaining. And perhaps, more to the fact, if visitors do not find engagement with this difficult history easily accessible, then they will disengage. When it comes to addressing younger/future generations, their attention spans are, as Kean’s remark makes clear, a primary point of concern. Current studies indicate that our attention spans – and the attention span of the youth – are decreasing. As Gloria Mark’s research reveals our screen-time attention spans have been shrinking. According to her research, in 2004, the average attention span was 150 seconds, by 2012, it was 75 seconds, and since 2018, the average now is 40 seconds (Mark qtd. in Mills n. pag.). The allure of screen time now is being faulted with decreasing our attention spans and our ability to sustain focus. As a result, the very technology we are using to capture attention, also is being faulted for decreasing attention. In particular, there are pervasive concerns about the ability of children and youth to sustain the focus needed for deep, slow, and abstract learning given their reliance on technologies that provide instant answers and instant gratification as well as constantly calling for them to switch focus.

Since their introduction in 2015, I have been writing about the promise of the Dimensions in Testimony (DiT) interactive recordings with Holocaust survivors. The DiT project integrates advanced filming techniques and artificial intelligence to create interactive recordings of individual survivors. Visitors would interact with the recordings by asking questions in their own words and would receive real-time responses from the recording. The recording’s system uses natural language processing (NLP) to transform a visitor’s spoken question into search terms that are matched with the most appropriate pre-recorded video response which is played back instantly. In order to create the DiT recordings, each survivor was recorded over a week-long period and asked well over 1000 questions. The resulting recording makes the survivor available to visitors as a two-

Illustration 2. Sobibor AR Exhibit, <https://apps.apple.com/cn/app/sobibor-ar-exhibit/id6450016178>

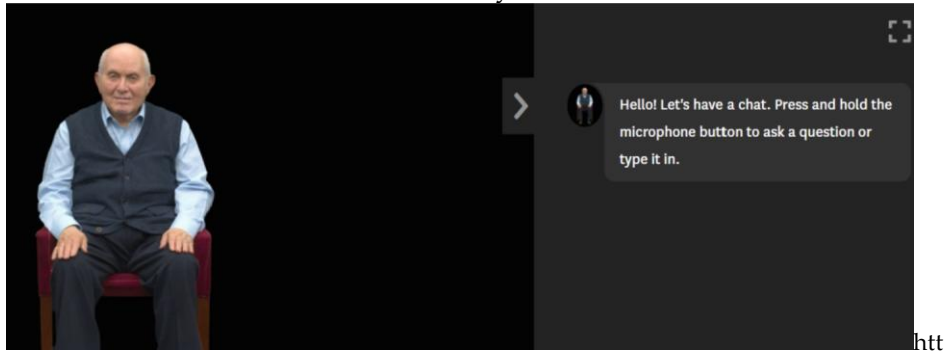


Screenshot by author, 13 March 2026

dimensional figure on screen whose embodied interaction is meant to simulate a conversation between survivor and visitor.¹⁰

Initially, the recordings were available in a selective group of museums and memorial sites; however, due to closing both Holocaust museums and schools as a result of the pandemic, IWitness and Dimensions in Testimony teamed up to make interacting with the recordings available virtually. As a result, today, “[t]eaching with testimony is now more immediate and effective than ever before” (“USC Shoah Foundation Offers”).

Illustration 3. Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter



https://iowitness.usc.edu/dit/pinchas, Screenshot by Author, 18 March 2026

In particular, IWitness and DiT developed “A Conversation with Pinchas Gutter,” in order to introduce students to a recording of Gutter, a Holocaust survivor. In the course of a one-hour activity, using their computers, students are introduced to Pinchas’ interactive biography. Students also “learn the techniques for having a conversation with a survivor and how to construct questions appropriately to elicit personal, historical, and universal thematic responses. By the end of this activity, students choose a creative expression to share what they have learned from Pinchas Gutter” (Grossberg n.pag.).

Similar to the encounter students would have with Pinchas in a museum setting, middle- and high-school students who engage with Pinchas¹¹ “experience a learning environment in which he answers questions as if he was in the room with them. For Stephen Smith,¹² the producer of the DiT recordings, it is the interpersonal interactivity – the conversation between the visitor and the recording – that makes the interaction successful. As he explains, “It’s about you. It’s about what you want to know.... And that is where the deepest learning takes place” (Smith, “What Is” n. pag.). Initially when I learned about student-lead interactions with the recordings, I wondered if students might “game” the recording

10. A more apt description would be an interview.

11. Gutter was 83 at the time of the interview.

12. Stephen D. Smith is the Executive Director Emeritus of the USC Shoah Foundation and a pioneer in using interactive technology – in particular these DiT interactive testimonies – to preserve Holocaust history.

– e.g., by asking the recording irrelevant or inappropriate questions. During a conference presentation when he was asked about this very concern, Stephen Smith was both humorous and adamant in his answer. He noted that in reviewing all of the early interactions with the recordings, there was no evidence of “fifteen year olds fooling around with the technology;” he added that the ones the reviewers actually needed to watch out for were “Holocaust historians and techies” (Smith, “Interactive Video” n. pag.).

While younger users may not game the recording, Neta Alexander observes that to create a productive exchange between “a user and an algorithm,” the engagement requires “not only verbal fluency, but also a degree of media literacy and historical knowledge. For this process to be productive, the person posing the question must be familiar with historical facts such as the names of concentration camps, the Nazi ideology, or the progression of World War II” (Alexander 63). It was for this reason that IWitness and DiT developed “A Conversation with Pinchas Gutter” in order to prepare younger visitors with background information that would facilitate the conversation/interview they subsequently initiate, on their own, with Gutter’s holographic recording. Wolf Kaiser worries that when there is a disjuncture between the question asked and the answer given “there is the risk that students who are interested in getting new insights can be demotivated by the ill-fitting answers they receive” (Kaiser 84).

Adept researchers are prepared for disjuncture, disconnection, and disappointment. In fact, it is unexpected findings, lack of findings, and contradictory findings that often become the driving force of sustained research. That said, Kaiser’s concerns are apt. Our engagements with online technology often are grounded by instant results. The most common example would be that we open Google, type in a question, and receive immediate results – results we often accept without undue questioning. Thus, even if students “learn the techniques for having a conversation with a survivor and how to construct questions appropriately to elicit personal, historical, and universal thematic responses,” if Pinchas’ pre-recorded responses fail to answer the questions they ask or if their questions do not produce results, their on-screen 40-second attention spans may tire quickly if their questions are not matched with ready responses.

The promise of these recordings is to keep Holocaust history alive. According to Stephen Smith, given that each survivor recording is “not linked to a platform, or a particular software or a particular gadget,” the survivor recordings will have the ability to emerge through all sorts of different ways as technology develops. What it means is, whether in a museum, or in an institution of learning, or at home, you’re going to be able to interact with Holocaust survivors for generations to come” (qtd. in Grossberg n. pag.). One reader, with whom I shared an early draft of this paper, was horrified by Smith collapsing the distinction between actual survivors and “technological interactions.” I take her concern to heart. However, survivors’ long-term efforts to provide testimony – in its many media/forms – has been fueled by their desire to allow current and future generations “to interact with Holocaust survivors.” Survivors yearn for permanence when they record their individual

histories in their own voices. The survivors who participated in the DiT project, on the whole, had very little understanding of the technology that was going to be used to keep their testimonies “alive.” They participated because they believed in the promise of this project. They are similar to the individuals who agreed to be part of Boder’s efforts to record the experiences of survivors in the immediate aftermath of war. Those individuals were persuaded, in part, by the magic of hearing their own voices played back to them from a spool of tape. Those who gave testimony did so not only to establish a historical record, they did so for posterity, for a future audience who is continually being redefined by the technologies available to us today.

In 1998, James Young noted that audio-visual taping of testimony shaped our understanding of Holocaust history. As he stated: “[w]hat is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form” (*Writing and Rewriting* 1). There are multiple texts – created by emergent technologies – now giving the events of the Holocaust form. Those texts remained indebted to the voices of the witnesses. That said, there will be an ongoing precarity in transmitting the collective memory of the Holocaust through technology given that technology always is threatened by its own obsolescence and given that the very technology we rely upon to capture our attention may be decreasing our attention. There also will be the ongoing precarity of time, the precarity of a time when audiences may no longer regard the Holocaust as a living history.

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Embodied Performance Through the *Indita* Ballad of the US Southwest Borderlands

By Carmella Scorcio Pacheco*

In this study, I conduct an ethnography of embodied performance through two feminine-voiced ballads of Territorial New Mexico known as “La finada Paula Ángel” which recounts the only legal hanging of a woman in Territorial New Mexico and “La indita de Juliana Ortega,” narrating the account of a young child who was married against her will. I interview singer-songwriter Lara Manzanares, musician-ethnomusicologist Brenda M. Romero, and literary folklorist Enrique R. Lamadrid, who perform the ballads to show how embodied performance recovers, reclaims, and revitalizes histories that have been omitted from the dominant historical record. Multi-modal experiences are integrated for listening to the recordings of the ballads cited. The study reveals how embodied cultural expressions have the potential to both process and heal traumatic histories through cultural agency. How are the performers grappling with difficult borderland histories through their embodied performances? Given that many of these histories are not often learned through the public education system, how does the first-person narrative voice influence the performers’ understanding of their own histories? How are they channeling traumatic cultural memory through embodied performance?

Keywords: Performance, Music, Women, Mexican American, Borderlands

Introduction

In the recent editorial opinion piece entitled, “The Global Struggle for Equality for Women and Girls” author Joseph Chamie addresses the complexity to achieving women’s equality:

Achieving women’s equality requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes ensuring their basic human rights, enforcing legal protections against discrimination and violence, ensuring equal pay, education access, economic empowerment, and opportunities, promoting women in leadership roles, dismantling misogynistic stereotypes, advancing inclusive policies, supporting women-led institutions, and encouraging shared domestic responsibility.¹

In this study, I connect Chamie’s notions of women’s inequality with embodied performance through an ethnography of predominantly female-led performers. Through the embodiment and what singer-songwriter Lara Manzanares speaks to as

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1. See Chamie, Joseph, ““The Global Struggle for Equality for Women and Girls,” 2026.

“honoring the suffering” of traumatic women’s histories, this study contributes to a multi-pronged approach towards women’s equality. Through performance, it is what musician-ethnomusicologist Brenda M. Romero recognizes as an important part of processing and relating communal trauma. In this study, I show how embodied performance has the capacity to confront notions of patriarchal-induced trauma and colonization as the struggle for women equality continues on both a global and local level.

According to the United Nations, “On average, 137 women and girls were killed every day in 2024 by someone in their own family” (6). Furthermore, “Latin America is home to 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, with Mexico being one of them” (Díaz, 2021; Datta, 2026). “Across Mexico, approximately 10 women and girls are killed every day and are forgotten, perpetuating a cycle of impunity” (Datta, 2026). Across the border from Mexico, in New Mexico eleven women disappeared in the Albuquerque area, later to be found buried at a new construction site. Chicana studies scholar Bernadine Hernández notes this disappearance is directly tied to the women being victims of gendered, racial, and sexual violence as they were all portrayed within these confines by the local police department.² The campaign, Indigenous Women Rising notes that Indigenous women within the US have had “disproportionately high rates of domestic violence and sexual assault on reservations and...limited capability...to prosecute non-native offenders” (Lorenzo, 2023). When addressing imposter (“pretendian”) syndrome in professional academic roles at the University of Colorado, Boulder; Brenda M. Romero notes that many *women* in the professoriate suffer from this condition (2025, 79). She states, “the canon has never accepted women on the same par as men” and that this condition has been long instilled in the dichotomy of suppressing women in terms of equating sounds of women and children to non-European people and the sounds of males to culture, intelligent minds, and European music (Romero 2025, 79; Ellingson 1992b, 113). Such data establishes systemic and structural vulnerabilities of women from the past to the current day, regardless of class status.

In addition to the examples mentioned above, the recovery of Mexican American women’s voices and histories is also difficult to locate in the US official history (Roybal, 5). For example, when investigating child marriage in New Mexico during the 1800s, church and state records account for a portion of reported marriages, yet the narratives and voices of such accounts are often missing, accounting for measurable proof of patriarchal pressures through erasure.³ Evident in the data, patriarchal practices of violence and women’s suppression transcend nation-states and continue in the US Southwest borderlands.

2. Hernández mentions that the local Albuquerque Police department publicly portrayed the women as non-white, from a lower social class, and as prostitutes and sex workers involved in drugs (2022:1).

3. Research shows a large disparity between marital age differences during the nineteenth century. In his seminal work, *When Jesus Came The Corn Mothers Went Away*, Ramón Gutiérrez finds that between 1674-1848, males married predominantly

In this study, I focus on performance-based practices that resist the very realities the above data quantifies. I concentrate on the relationship between embodied acts of historical trauma endured by Mexican American women in New Mexico—*nuevomexicanas*—and the ways in which these acts challenge notions of patriarchy and colonialism. In effect, I show how performance works through complicated histories of violence as a form of empowered cultural agency and as a form of healing.

The Southwest Chicana feminist borderlands scholar Gloria Anzaldúa described the border as "*una herida abierta*" (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds (25). She states,

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.⁴

Within this interstitial space of the US Southwest borderlands sits present-day New Mexico as seen in Figure 1. Next to it in Figure 2 is a map of the Republic of Mexico prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 in which the US annexed over half of Mexico after the brutal and bloody US-Mexican War which lasted one year, nine months, and eight days (May 13, 1846 – February 2, 1848). As a result, Mexico ceded 55% of its Northern Territory including present-day California, Nevada, Utah, as well as parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. The U.S bought these territories from Mexico for \$15 million and agreed to assume \$3.25 million in debts owed by Mexico to US citizens. It also agreed to honor the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty regarding Mexican land grant contracts, however it has been estimated that four out of every five land grant holders lost their land after the US dishonored this agreement, totaling to over three million acres lost from traditional heirs.⁵ With the end of the US-Mexican War, New Mexico became a Territory of the United States and held this territorial status for over sixty years until it became a state in the Union in 1912.

younger women and girls throughout different age ranges. Males between ages 40-62 often married much younger females for greater reproduction capabilities. See Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away*, 1991: p. 278.

4. Anzaldúa, p. 25.

5. See the US General Accounting Office report at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/a157/551.html>. See also Hispano Commercial Club of Las Vegas Report housed with the University of Houston Digital History https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.fm?smtID=3&psid=569. For a recent report on land loss after the US-Mexican War, see María Mondragón-Valdez's "Borderlands or Land of Borders: A Review of the Uplands of the San Luís Valley," *Greenfire Times*, November-December (2025: 12-14).

Figure 1. Present-day New Mexico



*Image by Google Maps

Figure 2. Mexico prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo/US-Mexican War (in yellow)



*Image by History Colorado

<https://www.historycolorado.org/media/9141>

Throughout New Mexico's colonized history as a US Territory to the present day, social injustices grew rampant with many tragic consequences faced by *nuevomexicanas*. From expressing tragic histories such as the only legal execution of a woman in Territorial New Mexico in 1861 to the enslavement of women and children in the borderlands, these are some examples in which performance-based cultural expressions serve as a means of grappling with such dire circumstances. In New Mexico, as in many other underrepresented regions of the US Southwest

borderlands; the teachings and practices of local histories, languages, and cultures are often omitted from public learning spaces and from the US official history. New Mexico was encased in what scholar Mary Luise Pratt terms as a contact zone: a “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”⁶ Within a confluence of cultures, languages, and worldviews; oral tradition and performance art flourished as an outlet to voice social injustices.

One performance-based oral tradition known in the region is the highly poetic and stylized folk ballad known as the *indita*.⁷ Functioning as a means of memorializing those who have passed in often horrific manners, as noted by Brenda M. Romero, *indita* ballads transpose the moral economy of the community while they come to terms with such tragedies and often serve as a means of closure. Like the popular Mexican ballad form of the *corrido*, *inditas* follow a similar poetic structure. Each verse is typically four octosyllabic lines with assonant (vowel) rhyming in the second and fourth lines. Unlike the *corrido*, however, *inditas* are primarily composed in the first person, allowing performers to fully embody the protagonists. This example shows both the rhyme scheme and the first-person narrative voice:

Eran tantos **mis** trabajos
y tanto **mi** padecer,
que no **tenía** libertad
ni aun para poder comer.

My labors were so many
and so much my suffering,
that I was not at liberty
even to eat.⁸

The following are ethnographic accounts of embodied performance through two feminine-voiced *indita* ballads of Territorial New Mexico known as “La finada Paula Ángel” which recounts the only legal hanging of a woman in Territorial New Mexico and “La indita de Juliana Ortega,” narrating the account of a young child who was married against her will. I interview singer-songwriter Lara Manzanares, musician-ethnomusicologist Brenda M. Romero, and literary folklorist Enrique R. Lamadrid who perform the ballads to show how embodied performance functions as a means to recover, reclaim, and revitalize histories that have been omitted from the official historical record. Through a discussion of their embodied performances, I show how these embodied cultural expressions have the potential to help process and heal traumatic histories through cultural agency. I question, how are the performers grappling with the difficult borderland histories through their embodied performances? Given that many of these histories are not often learned

6. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*. p. 6.

7. For more information regarding the *indita* as a genre see, Romero, Brenda. “The Indita Genre of New Mexico,” 2002.

8. La indita de Juliana Ortega.

through the public education system, how does the first-person voice influence the performers' understanding of their own histories? In addition, how are their renditions and their creations of *indita* ballads changing over time through embodied performances? In effect, how are they reimagining a collective cultural memory within the New Mexico borderlands?

To answer these questions, the article proceeds as follows. I start with a literature review of US Southwest borderlands scholarship, performance theory, and ballad scholarship. Specifically, I draw on recent scholarship at the juncture of performance studies, borderlands studies (including borderlands performance), Chicana feminism, and critical Latinx pedagogies to highlight how embodied acts of transfer in the performances of "La finada Paula Ángel" and "La indita de Juliana Ortega" serve as culturally sustaining practices within the US Southwest borderlands. This is followed by a section on methodology outlining the interview questions for each participant. Each *indita*, "La finada Paula Ángel" and "La indita de Juliana Ortega," has two sections. Each section contains an introduction to the ballad, an audio component for readers to listen to the performed recordings, and interview excerpts with Manzanares, Romero, and Lamadrid. This is then followed by a discussion on cultural agency through embodied performance.

Literature Review

Central to this work are ethnographic accounts highlighting how embodied performers render resilient acts of agency, offering a path for traumatic histories and residual cultural modalities to be embraced as forms of healing.⁹ Women singers demonstrate the importance of embodied performance in which the physical body and narrative voicing function as corporeal acts of both resistance *and* empowerment. The fundamental theoretical frameworks for this study resemble Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's "theories in the flesh," in which case I inquire upon the specific ways the physical body is weaponized against oppression through mechanisms of resistance (1981).

Border Thinking and Performance Studies

With inspiration from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Walter D. Mignolo posits "border thinking" as that which "requires dwelling in the border" to experience the existential notions of a border epistemology (xv-xvi). In line with Mignolo's *aesthetic* political project of *embodying* practices and consciousness through the senses, this ethnographic project challenges coloniality by illuminating

9. Appropriate for this study, residual culture encapsulates the 'residue' or past cultural expressions which continue to occur in the present and may be seen as ways to relate to and/or resist the dominant culture. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (1980: 40-42).

borderlands dwellers and their embodied experiences of bringing the past to the present. It resembles what historian and performance studies scholar Katherine Johnson terms as *kinaesthetic imagination*, in which performers participate in “recreating an historical culture for [...] the present” (15). Theatre scholar Freddie Rokem notes, “...when performing histories, actors become witnesses of a past resurrected in the present” (xii, 2). Yet, in this case the performers are not only witnessing the past—they are re-living and re-creating the past through embodied performance. Historical re-enactments and social memory expressed through embodied and performance-based practices have been documented (Connerton, 1989; Roach, 1996; Rokem, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Schneider, 2011; Johnson, 2015). In addition, these practices are notable in borderlands scholarship (Rivera-Servera and Young, 2010; and Aldama, Sandoval, and García, 2012; Otero and Martínez Rivera, 2024) amongst others.

Social memory, as demonstrated in this study, is woven into corporeal acts of resistance through the first-person narrative voicing and the use of *yo*, or “I.” Validating the trauma that exists through the personal and highly intimate, performers of this study practice what borderlands scholars Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García term as “emancipatory aesthetics.”¹⁰ Liberated forms in which culture becomes performance translates to cultural agency and empowerment of borderlands dwellers. Framed within this border logic, this research is grounded in Chicana feminism. Citing Aida Hurtado,

Unlike other feminisms, Chicana feminisms have an added emphasis on Mexican and Chicana/o cultures and histories, the importance of the Spanish language, and the examination of structural variables that affect power and privilege.¹¹

The ballads used for this study are performed primarily by *nuevomexicanas*, are about *nuevomexicanas*, and are shared in the vernacular *nuevomexicana* language. Their performances function as what performance studies scholar Diana Taylor deems as an *episteme*—“a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis” (xvi). Building on Taylor’s work, I illuminate how embodied performance embraces learning and transmitting knowledge through border thinking. How are performers processing historical trauma through the ballads they re-enact? Given the highly tragic histories the ballads retell, how is the use of *yo*, or “I” resonating with the performers? How does it challenge notions of coloniality into one of empowerment through the body, through the voice?

10. See Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García’s edited edition, *US Latina and Latino in the Borderlands* (2012). Additional borderlands and Latinx scholarship continue to stress the importance of emancipatory methodologies stemming from Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) and seen in Solimar Otero and Minzti Auanda Martínez-Rivera’s edited edition of *Theorizing Folklore from the Margins* (2024).

11. Hurtado, Aída. *Intersectional Chicana Feminisms: Sitios Y Lenguas*, (2020): 8.

Culturally Sustaining and Embodied Pedagogies

Scholars Django Paris and H. Samy Alim assert the importance of decolonizing education by *centering* underrepresented experiences, histories, languages, and communities through culturally sustaining pedagogies (2017). In this study, I center embodied performance as a culturally sustaining pedagogical framework for making the invisible visible. Exploring further, I show how this framework establishes what Chicana scholars G. Reyes et. al (2023) term as “embodied pedagogies of care” (EPC) and what interdisciplinary scholar Cassie Cobos terms as “embodied storying” by conducting ethnographies of performers (2012).¹² Collaborative relationships with the artists are prioritized in this study through EPC as “interactions, the sharing of personalized experiences, and relationship building as pedagogy” (471). “Embodied storying” furthers the desire to combat marginalization through the (re)telling of stories as the artists continually do so each time the ballads are performed (40).

Ethnographies of Performance in New Mexico

Scholarship dedicated to dramatic folk performances within New Mexico show how festival traditions reenact histories of violence and colonialism. From the mock-battle drama of the *Moros y Cristianos* which recounts battles of Islamic and Christian wars of Spain,¹³ to the ritual folk dance performances of the *danza de los Matachines*¹⁴ depicting Indigenous and Hispano syncretism, and dramatic performances of children held captive in the drama *Los Comanches*;¹⁵ each of these dramatic performances not only revisit histories of trauma through social memory, but through their embodiment, histories are relived and memorialized.

Rather than solely incorporating ethnographic observations, I focus on the corporeal acts of performance through embodiment and through the voices of the performers. This study functions as both an ethnography of performance *and* performers. Performance ethnography works to show “how culture is done in the body” (Jones, 7). Extended further, I incorporate ethnographies of performers through ethnographic interviews enabling a border thinking methodology of

12. G. Reyes et al (2023) propose EPC for historically marginalized Latino students.

13. See Garcia, David F. “Moros y Cristianos: Intangible Cultural Exchange along the Camino Real.” (2007).

14. See Harris, Max. “The Return of Moctezuma: Oaxaca’s “Danza de la Pluma” and New Mexico’s “Danza de los Matachines.”” *TDR* (1988-) 41, no. 1 (1997): 106-134. See also Romero, Brenda M., and Phillip B. Gonzales. “La Danza Matachines as New Mexican Heritage.” *Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano creativity, ritual, and memory* (2007): 61-84. See also Romero, Brenda Mae. *The Matachines music and dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcalde, New Mexico: contexts and meanings*. Doctoral diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1993. See also Rodriguez, Sylvia, *The Matachines Dance: A Ritual Dance of the Indian Pueblos and Mexican/ Hispano Communities*. Sunstone Press, 2009.

15. See Lamadrid, E. R. (2003). *Hermanitos Comanchitos*. UNM Press.

collaboration with the performers themselves. This brief ethnography of interviews illuminates not only the embodied performances, but it also sheds light on *how* the performers blend regional and underrepresented pasts while challenging notions of coloniality and patriarchy in the present.

Methodology

The following sections introduce and contextualize the ballads, “La finada Paula Ángel” and “La indita de Juliana Ortega” followed by a discussion and review of interviews conducted with performers of the ballads, Lara Manzanares (LM), Brenda M. Romero (BMR), and Enrique R. Lamadrid. Singers have recited the ballads in professional recordings and have performed them for the public. Central questions and excerpts of the interviews are then highlighted and discussed. Questions selected are essential in connecting the reclamation of violent histories through performance as a means of processing traumatic histories through corporeal notions of cultural agency. Key questions include:

- Had you previously known about the specific protagonist prior to being asked to perform the ballad? If not, what was this learning process like?
- How did it make you feel to sing the ballad the first person? Did you feel you came to know the protagonist in some way by embodying the protagonist?
- Is it important, in your opinion, that we as *nuevomexicanas* go to these difficult places to learn these histories?
- What are your hopes for the future in terms of her story, her ballad, her performance?
- Do you believe performance can serve as a form of healing in any way?

To fully capture the collective history embedded in the ballads and their performances, this study prioritizes ethnographic interviews with an analysis of the somatic, gendered, and embodied reality of the performance itself. By analyzing both the physical and gendered mechanics of the performances, noted within each interview, this paper treats the act of singing as an embodiment of cultural memory, in which historical survival is actively corporealized. I will now introduce the first ballad, *la finada de Paula Ángel* followed by a discussion with performer and vocalist, Lara Manzanares.

Introduction to “La finada Paula Ángel”

“La finada Paula Ángel,” or The Late Paula Ángel, recounts the tragic legal hanging of a *nuevomexicana* during Territorial New Mexico in the mid-1800s. Several versions exist of what exactly happened. One version is that Ángel, affectionately known as Pablita, was perhaps around the age of nineteen years old at the time when she lured her lover Miguel Martín into meeting her.¹⁶ Ángel, upset with his unrequited love, embraced Martín for the last time and killed him. There are other versions of what transpired that day, but what is certain is that Ángel was sentenced to death by hanging after the *all-male* jury convicted her of first-degree murder on March 26, 1861, in the northern New Mexico town of Las Vegas.

As part of her sentence, Ángel remained in the local jail house for a month leading up to her execution. Former New Mexico State Historian Robert Tórrez located the original execution warrant inside the Huntington Library in California. The warrant confirmed that her execution took place one month after her sentence, validating the folklore that the trial was heavily influenced and rushed by local authorities (Tórrez, 131-140). Oral tradition notes that the Sheriff, Antonio Abad Herrera taunted Ángel each day at the jail house letting her know just how many days she had left. On the day of her execution, she was taken to a cottonwood tree outside of the town. The Sheriff hung her, yet he failed to tie her hands. She struggled to break loose while those witnessing the scene protested and demanded her to be released. The Sheriff was adamant to finish the execution as the sentence stated that she be “hung by the neck until dead” between “ten o’clock in the forenoon and four o’clock in the afternoon” (Armijo 2012: 317).¹⁷ Ángel was executed and died on April 26, 1861. Her ballad, “La finada Paula Ángel” was most likely created during her sentence or soon after her execution as a means for her family and community members to make sense of such a horrific episode.

“La finada Paula Ángel” was originally composed by Paula Ángel’s cousin, Juan Ángel and is included in Aurelio Espinosa’s *Romancero*

16. One hundred years after Ángel’s execution, her account was retold by former New Mexico district court Judge, Luis E. Armijo and published by Ernie Thwaites in the *New Mexican* in 1961. Armijo, whose grandmother witnessed the execution and had recounted the narrative to him, then transmitted the narrative to Thwaites and to Armijo’s granddaughter—former New Mexico district court Judge, Christina Armijo. Christina Armijo also worked to explain the legal dynamics in Ángel’s case, *The Territory of New Mexico versus Paula Angel*. See Armijo, M. Christina. “Territory of New Mexico vs. Paula Angel: One Woman’s Tragic Journey through Territorial Justice in 1861,” *New Mexico Law Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2012. See also Thwaites, Ernie. “Bizarre Frontier Hanging Recalled,” *New Mexican*. April 28, 1961. Thwaites article was later republished in Peter Hertzog’s *Legal Hangings* (Santa Fe: Press of the Territorian, 1966), p. 7-9.

17. Here, Armijo presents the court docket of Angel’s sentence.

Nuevomejicano (1915). Composed in the first person, Ángel's voice is heard throughout the ballad. She repents for her actions, warns others not to fall into the same fate as her, and offers her farewell wishes. Within a predominantly Catholic community, Ángel laments her fate to the Virgen de Guadalupe, Santo Niño de Atocha, Madre de los Dolores (the Mother of Sorrows) amongst others. The original version is extensive with thirty-eight verses. The ballad spread from community to community and became one of the best known *inditas* in New Mexico. Over time, variants of the ballad became shorter while still maintaining key features including Ángel's actions, her reason for her actions, her lament, and her *despedida* or farewell as seen in these verses from a more recent variant:

2. El Maldito me insistió
hacer tan grande avería,
el Maldito me insistió
hacer tan grande avería.

2. The Evil one insisted
that I cause such great danger,
the Evil one insisted
that I cause such great danger.

5. A muerte me sentenciaron
porque maté a Miguelito,
a muerte me sentenciaron
porque maté a Miguelito.

5. They sentenced me to death
because I killed Miguelito,
They sentenced me to death
because I killed Miguelito.

9. Adiós mis dos hermanitos
échenme la bendición,
Adiós mis dos hermanitos
échenme la bendición.

9. Good-bye my two little brothers
give me your blessing,
good-bye my two little brothers
give me your blessings.

These verses are from a variant performed by singer Julia Jaramillo and recorded in 1986. Sung a *capella* without any musical accompaniment, [readers may listen to her here](#). More recently, renowned New Mexican singer-song writer Lara Manzanares, along with New Mexico roots group, Lone Piñón, created their own rendition of "La finada Paula Ángel." Utilizing the same lyrics as Jaramillo, this rendition has the same number of verses, yet striking differences are heard through Manzanares' vocals as well as musical accompaniment with Lone Piñón. [Readers may listen to this version here](#).

Each version is performed in the first-person narrative voice with the singers mediating the ballad while embodying Paula Ángel. Yet, each version offers the listener a different experience. From the raw and intimate qualities noticed in the *a capella* version, to hopeful melodies and dancing rhythms in the second, profound changes are noticed, rendering different meanings felt somatically depending on the modality performed and embodied. Manzanares sings in the traditional New Mexican Spanish dialect as we can see with the use of *tuvites* in the sixth

verse as she laments her condition as *una hija desgraciada*¹⁸ (a disgraced and unfortunate daughter):

6. Madre mía pa' que tuvites
una hija tan desgraciada,
madre mía pa' que tuvites
una hija tan desgraciada.

6. Mother of mine, why did you have
such an unfortunate daughter,
Mother of mine, why did you have
such an unfortunate daughter.

Ethnomusicologist Jesús Ramos-Kittrell notes how metaphor in aural poetics “points to a politics of recognition in terms of the discourses of taste and feeling through which people establish claims of belonging” (72).¹⁹ Manzanares channels her claims of belonging. By utilizing the traditional New Mexican Spanish of the area, Manzanares celebrates the vernacular as she shares it and as she also belongs to it. Listeners may also claim their belonging by participating, feeling, and processing the musical narrative somatically.

Interview with Lara Manzanares

During the interview with Manzanares, key topics that resonated throughout the conversation included her connection to the protagonist, Paula Ángel; the effect of the first-person narrative voice, her metaphor for vocalizing and embodying Ángel, and how this history reverberates with the importance of processing traumatic histories through performance. Although “La finada Paula Ángel” spread amongst various communities of northern New Mexico, Manzanares’ experience of not having been exposed to Ángel’s history is not uncommon for many *nuevomexicanos* learning about the Territorial history of New Mexico. Yet, when I (abbreviation CS below) asked Manzanares (LM) about what it was like to learn about Ángel through the ballad, she had a deep connection:

CS

What was it like for the first time to learn about this woman through this ballad?

LM

It was fascinating. First of all, because it was written in her voice. It felt very personal...and very painful. In kind of a cool way, though.

18. *Desgraciada* in traditional New Mexican Spanish carried much more weight than its English translation and can be referred to as one of the most deplorable conditions possible.

19. Ramos-Kittrell explains that aural poetics was introduced by anthropologist Alex Chávez “to point to a relational process between writer and reader which renders the former visible upon aural perception by the latter” — (or which renders the writer visible by the aural perception of the reader). I extend this notion to not only the writer, but also to the performer. See Ramos-Kittrell (2024).

You know, it's like when you open up a box that's in your grandma's closet and you find all these old photos of people that you know you're related to them and you can sort of feel their presence in a way, but you've never actually laid eyes on them before. But when you see the photos, there's just this feeling in your body and your heart that's like, that's me. Connection. It's there and you're actually feeling through it for the first time in a way, but actually that's been there...It felt like she was present in a way.

"That's me." Manzanares felt a presence, Ángel's presence. She related to her and felt a profound connection that had been there, deep inside. Shantel Martinez and Kelly Medina-López's notion of 'Border Indigenous Logic' relates spectral borderland's stories as those which are submerged "deep in the bones" (8). Similarly, Manzanares exhumes a presence that had been with her all along. It was just now that it began to take shape. Similar to Reyes' notion of "embodied pedagogies of care" and Lilia Bartolomé's concept of *cariño* (2008) which carries greater weight than its literal translation of "care" to denote a personal connection with historical and cultural significance (Bernal et. al., 2006), Manzanares identifies with the findings. As she relates them to a treasure of photos found in the closet of one's grandma, great care must be taken into account so as to not tarnish or tear them, but to keep them in the best shape possible so that others can also feel that connection that has always been there. Although there is pain there, it resurfaces to take shape and to share.

"It was written in her voice." Part of the connection and presence felt by Manzanares is also due in part to the narrative voicing in the ballad. Manzanares explains:

CS

How did it feel to sing in the first person? What did you feel...what was that like?

LM

It just felt right. It just felt like something locked into place. Like there was a need.

Other times, [in] corridos...they talk about someone else. This person did [this] and that person did that. And so, for those, some of the first songs that I learned to sing were corridos, like El corrido de Juanito, [el corrido de] Rosita Alvérez, both of which are corridos about women getting shot at a dance.

And both of them are painful, but in both of those, it sets the scene and it's like you're watching a movie. It's like you're seeing the scene.

But [with] Paula Ángel [it] was like, oh, here we are.

I can feel myself saying these things...The way she recounts things in the song is...in a very intimate kind of way.

Manzanares, who has performed both *corridos* and *inditas*, relates the setting of the scene largely due to the first-person narrative voicing. Unlike solely performing,

Manzanares *embodies* Ángel largely due to first-person narrative voicing as she intimately channels Ángel's remorse and lament throughout the ballad.

When performing the ballad, Manzanares relates her vocals with the metaphor of riding a horse and shouting out the vocals. She connects this to her upbringing in a rural northern New Mexican community, where it's often common to communicate with greater intensity. In this case, Manzanares' vocal performance insinuates the urgent need for others to know Ángel's story. As though she is saying, "Listen up, this is important, you need to hear me." She states:

...it's like I'm on horseback riding side saddle, which is weird because I never ride side saddle...And being like, wow, trailed along somewhere. Because, I mean, that really resonates with [Pablita] in a way—her journey; but she didn't really have control of the outcome.

Manzanares' embodied performance takes shape as she is swept into the act of riding the horse through the wind. In "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity," African Studies scholar Joni L. Jones writes, "if people are genuinely interested in understanding culture, they must put aspects of that culture on and into their bodies" (7). As Manzanares channels her experience into her performance, she empowers Pablita Ángel as *she* is on the horse saying, *my* story matters—I am important and *I* need to share this with you. Manzanares' embodiment of Pablita challenges the official historical record given that her story was not recorded by local newspapers of the time and given that the complete records of her court trial remain obscure. In this way, Ángel rides the horse, letting everyone know her story while further tying herself to Manzanares. After all, Manzanares mentions how she felt like she already knew Pablita, even before she was introduced to her ballad:

CS

Do you feel like you came to know...Pablita [more through the ballad]?

LM

That's the weird thing. I felt like I already knew her.

It was like, "hi." Oh, here we are. Like, this [is] going to happen.

We have to do [this] right now and we're going to do it.

Manzanares continues:

...there was sadness...and grief in the song itself and the suffering...And this... feeling of not having control. It all felt very familiar. Just based on my own experience as a human being.

Sadness...but there was also joy. Like the joy you get from singing [and] voicing that history.

...feeling really sort of intense, not necessarily me, but there's a feeling of joy and laughter and like, hey, here I am. Like you're doing a good thing by sharing it. [It] felt like she was happy, sort of. Even though the tale is so difficult.

"Joy from voicing that history." Throughout the conversation, she made it clear about how this work is both needed and necessary. It is deeply tied to recovering, confronting, voicing, and healing from traumatic histories as in the case of Paula Ángel. We discussed this at the end of our conversation:

CS

Do you think that by doing this is, can it serve as a form of healing in any way?

LM

Yes. I think that it can just by bringing attention to it. And [by] establishing an emotional connection to our antepasados.²⁰ Whether they're related by blood or not...antepasados in general. All those people. And...honoring the suffering that they went through. Without having to dwell on it too much in a way. I think allowing ourselves to really feel that emotion is a really important part of the healing instead of denying it.

A crucial element in embodying "La finada Paula Ángel" is "honoring the suffering" of Paula Ángel which is relevant to so many other forgotten and omitted women. Performers continue to recover such traumatic histories through embodied performance. Manzanares enables what Aldama, Sandoval, and García (2012) call an emancipatory aesthetics by exposing Ángel and her tragedy to others. As such, she transmits cultural agency while humanizing Ángel. Ángel is not silenced; she continues to exist with an urgency in the collective consciousness.

La indita de Juliana Ortega

Nearly ten years prior to the execution of Paula Ángel, in the year 1850, a young girl by the name of Juliana Ortega was married against her will in New Mexico. She was ten years old. Her ballad, "La indita de Juliana Ortega" was only recently recovered from the New Mexico State Collections and Archives by Senior Archivist, Samuel Sisneros. In her ballad Ortega describes her tragic situation:

*Fui desposada muy niña
sin saber mi voluntad
por mi madre fui casada
antes de cumplir la edad (2)*

*When I was a small child I was married
without me knowing and without my consent
by my father I was married off
before I was old enough. (2)*

*Eran tantos mis trabajos
y tanto mi padecer,*

*My labors were so many
and so much my suffering,*

20. Antepasados are ancestors.

*que no tenía libertad
ni aun para poder comer. (6)*

*that I was not at liberty
even to eat. (6)*

She pleads and fights for a divorce in court. Divorce is granted only on the condition that she strip her clothes off as they were not her property:

*Ya llegamos Alburquerque,
llegué a la tierra de vos,
donde tuve libertad
por la voluntad de Dios. (16)*

*We got to Alburquerque,
I arrived on your land,
where I was freed
by the will of God. (16)*

*Cuando salí de la Corte
a cien varas caminar,
me salieron acreedores
para hacerme desnudar. (17)*

*When I left the Court
walking a hundred yards,
[my husband's] creditors appeared
to strip me bare. (17)*

*La ropa que traía puesta
no era de mi propiedad,
pues me traían a favores
con toda sagacidad. (18)*

*The clothes I wore
did not belong to me,
well, in their shrewdness
they humiliated me. (18)*

She begs all mothers not to marry their children until they are old enough. Ultimately, she renounces marriage altogether:

*Y ruego a todas las madres
que vivan con caridad,
que no casen a sus niñas
antes de cumplir la edad. (25)*

*I plead to all the mothers
who have love in your hearts
do not marry off your young daughters
before womanhood (25)*

*Ya con esta me despido,
mi historia es bastante larga,
renuncio los matrimonios
por la vida tan amarga. (26)*

*With this I say farewell
my story is quite long
I renounce marriage
for the bitter life I have lived. (26)*

“La indita de Juliana Ortega” has been recently performed by Brenda M. Romero and literary folklorist Enrique R. Lamadrid with the musical tune composed by culture bearer David García and is featured in the recently released audio CD *Café y Atole* (2022). [Readers are encouraged to listen to it here.](#)

Interviews with Brenda M. Romero and Enrique R. Lamadrid

From confronting patriarchy to relating the performance of “La indita de Juliana Ortega” to familial and regional tales of child marriage, these are just some of the most compelling topics covered while interviewing Romero and

Lamadrid. From the start of the interview, Romero relates Juliana Ortega's story with her own awareness of child marriage in the region:

I was already aware of the fact that women were married off at a very young age because my grandmother was only 13 [when she married, and] my Tía [Aunt] was only 13...my Tía was married to a man much older than her. I think he was 29 when she was 13.

Romero, having been born and raised in New Mexico to a long ancestry of multi-generational *nuevomexicanos*, not only expressed her familial upbringing at the time, but also related it to the normalization of traditional gender roles:

I'm trying to think...to what extent I might have embodied her experience.

I've had other experiences...my Tía...married [a] man 29 years older than her, they stayed together.

They had 13 children. And she died before him. He lived to be 104, and she died at 79, I think.

And so, you have to expect that the women were so bound by these traditions, in a way.

With a normalization of such traditional patriarchal order, the experience of learning about Juliana Ortega was not an uncommon one. In the seminal work, *When Jesus Came The Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico (1500-1846)*, Ramón Gutiérrez finds empirical evidence for nuptial agreements, with particular focus on the eighteenth century. He states, "A young nuptial guaranteed a high level of fertility and a quick reproduction of the area's population" (274). The reproduction model functioned within the agrarian labor society of New Mexico which persisted until the twentieth century with modernization. Yet, what was most striking for Romero was the ability to fight for and achieve a divorce:

The fact that Juliana was able to get a divorce made her very interesting to me...as a person, ...as a woman, and as a performer, because I had no idea.

Romero reflects on this uncommon practice within the northern New Mexico community of Lydon where she was raised:

My Tía Candelaria, my Aunt Candy, who is really not my Tía, but she functioned as our Tía through our childhood—she got the first divorce in Lyden...she got a divorce from my Uncle Joe...In any case, the women, they would see her coming and they would, they'd do this cross thing that people do...with their fingers.

And that was the very first time that I ever learned about a woman getting a divorce. And she suffered from...she was punished by the community, by the women. Maybe many of them who had stayed in terrible relationships.

Romero's recollection of the first divorce in her community entailed a community-wide response. Customary was the role of women to subside with their spouse. When the community norm of a woman divorcing her husband occurred, a cross-like sign was made with the thumb and the index finger to warn others of this deviant behavior and to protect themselves from what may have been viewed as a sin. Women who deviated from the patriarchal norm were, in this case, branded. In other cases of deviant behavior of *nuevomexicanas*, women may have even been perceived as *brujas*, or witches.²¹ In either case, women who did not follow the cultural norm were punished, as Romero states. They were encouraged to stay married, especially if they had children:

I think that my mother got so upset with my dad once early on when they only had two kids that she went to see an attorney to get a divorce.

I once asked my mother why she didn't get a divorce. She said it was because she would have lost the children. In those days the men owned the women and the children.

So in a way....what I'm hearing is that these experiences, even though this is a very traumatic experience when we think about [Juliana Ortega]. It's also not that uncommon to relate her experience to so many others that were prevalent.

Not only was the woman subjected to ostracization from her own community for going against traditional norms, but she was also subjected to a system of patriarchal order in which the male divorcee would have custody of the children.

Community practices and norms are so deeply entrenched that dire consequences such as losing one's children are evident. Such is the case in the captivating performance art by scholar, actress and artist, Rosalía Pacheco. In her performance of the tale, *La Llorona*, Pacheco shows how the community has the ultimate power in the fate of the female protagonist, known as la Llorona. In her tale of *La Llorona* performed by Pacheco, a man goes against his father's wishes and marries a woman of a lower social class and they have two children. Once his father finds out about the situation, he orders his son to take the kids and to banish the woman from the community. As the husband tells this to his wife, she weeps and weeps without realizing that her kids, not yet taken away, fall into the river. Since she is weeping so heavily, she does not hear their cries for help. Like Romero's recounting of a possible divorce between her parents in which the father would take the children away from their mother, Pacheco also portrays the patriarchal norms that take precedent in the community. *La Llorona* continues to weep for her children throughout the years.²²

21. See Scorcia, Carmella, 2016.

22. Often, the Mexican tale of *La llorona* is depicted as a native woman marrying a Spaniard who has an affair. Although they have children, in her rage, the woman takes the children and drowns them. The tale is often related to the Indigenous woman, *La Malinche*

In the case of “La indita de Juliana Ortega,” Romero speaks to the difference between singing the ballad as a duet with a male colleague and how the dynamic was different in comparison to singing it alone:

CS:

Through the act of singing this story in her narrative voice, did you feel like you came to know her better, or other stories similar to her?

BMR:

If I hadn't been singing with a man...I might have been able to put more feeling into the way I sang it...I might have put more emotion into [it as] if I was singing her. But a duet is more focused on singing together.

Had Romero been able to perform the piece as a solo, the emotional charge and conveyance would have affected the embodied performance. In fact, she sings another *indita* ballad, “La cautiva Marcelina” as a solo. With similar resonances, “La cautiva Marcelina” is about the abduction of Marcelina after having watched the killing of her siblings, her father, and her children. It is a tale of cross-cultural relationships most likely between Hispano and Indigenous groups at the time. Some have hypothesized her abduction by Comanches.. Narrated in the first person, she expresses her lament for all her family members and for the unwillingness and ineptitude to ever love again:

*La cautiva Marcelina
cuando llegó a los cerritos,
cuando llegó a los cerritos
volteó la cara llorando,
—Mataron a mis hijitos,
mataron a mis hijitos.*

*When Marcelina the captive
arrived at the little hills,
arrived at the little hills,
she looked back crying,
—They killed my little children,
they killed my little children.*

*Por eso ya no quiero
en el mundo más amar
De mi querida patria
me van a retirar*

*For this, in this world,
I am unable to love anymore
They are taking me away
Of my beloved homeland²³*

Readers may listen to Romero's version of “[La cautiva Marcelina](#)” [here](#).

Notable differences between “La indita de Juliana Ortega” (JO) and “La cautiva Marcelina” (LCM) include structural components of the narrative form and musicality reflecting the emotional inflection embodied and felt through the performance. Where LCM begins the narration from the third person, JO

who was the translator and interpreter for the Spanish colonizer of Mexico, Hernán Cortés. The tale often associates her weeping as a loss of the Indigenous culture. It is often recounted as a cautionary tale for children to stay away from running water of the rivers and irrigation systems known as *acequias*.

23. Author's translation.

begins with the first-person narrative voice creating differences in delivery *and* embodiment. Juliana's narrative voice introduces the listener to her intimate story, functioning as a musical testimonio.²⁴ The emotional intonation funnels through the narrative voicing of JO while in LCM the emotional intonation is complicated with the attractive melody, but with a horrific narrative. This emotional agency builds through the solo performance of LCM with silence and interludes allowing the listener to pause through lamenting features in the retelling. On the other hand, the emotional inflection of JO is also felt through the accompaniment of a male performer.

While interviewing the male performer, Enrique R. Lamadrid, he offered a conciliatory perspective and stated:

This is the kind of story that with a male voice in it, carries healing qualities. It does not condone male superiority so common in those days which often denoted ownership of women.

In this recording, I subordinated my role to Ms. Romero by singing harmony as she was the lead singer of the ballad. This complementary role was an act of contrition, making the healing more complete.

This is the sympathetic male voice that shares in the remorse and atonement of what happened to Juliana.

Resonant of Carl Jung's psychological archetypes of Animus, the unconscious masculine energy of a woman, and Anima, the unconscious feminine energy of a man, this accompaniment works in tandem with the goal of Individuation—a conscious awareness of a balanced whole.²⁵ Feminine and masculine are embodied as one. The conciliatory voice of a male counterpart adds an empowering message that the process and recognition of the need to heal is shared. The embodied struggle for women's and girl's rights is enacted by both genders. Echoing bell hooks' *Feminism is for Everybody*, she mentions, "...I believe that if [men] knew more about feminism they would no longer fear it, for they would find in feminist movement the hope of their own release from the bondage of patriarchy" (ix). Lamadrid's participation fulfills both the psychological notion of encasing both the feminine and masculine traits in one and Johnson's *kinaesthetic imagination* that recreates "an historical culture for [...] the present" (15). In this way, residual cultural forms are embodied in the present to challenge patriarchy by both woman and man.

Returning to the interview with Romero, she funnels her own experience of the marginalization of women within the confines of patriarchal order into her performances. In this way, she exercises cultural agency as having the potential to heal:

24. See Scorcia Pacheco, Carmella (2023) p. 127.

25. See Jung, C. G (1969).

CS

How is it, even though that this is so traumatic, how can your performances function as forms of healing?

BMR

Well, I think just telling the story and making these stories, you know, teaching these stories in classrooms, that it's just part of the struggle of women's equality.

"Just telling the story." Making these stories known lends itself to greater discussions surrounding these difficult histories. English studies scholar Jonathan Wilson relates the importance of bringing participants into traumatic histories to enable them to feel and to process them, and then to act (224). The act of embodying trauma illuminates collective generational trauma amongst women. It enables the struggle towards women's equality—one rooted in recognizing how women's struggles can transform into a memory and ultimately an embodiment of resilience. Author Samantha Ellis' recent memoir, *Always Carry Salt: A Memoir of Preserving Language and Culture* (2026) speaks to the importance of recognizing and sharing generational trauma of Judeo-Iraqi populations. In a recent interview with Ellis, she mentions that in transmitting historical trauma, it makes visible what has been historically erased which not only heals but also empowers those who tell the story and those who come to understand the strength of survival and resilience.²⁶ Like Paula Ángel's obscurity in the official record, Juliana Ortega's official history remains to be told. Unlike Pablita, however, Juliana Ortega's ballad did not enter the oral tradition and only recently was her ballad recovered from the archives.²⁷ Indeed, "just telling the story" is an act of making the invisible, visible.

Conclusion: Cultural Agency and Redemption

Throughout this dialogue, several common themes resonate between interviewees including the performer's subjective empowerment, community-level collective memory-work, and political challenges to hegemonic historiography, language justice, and patriarchal practices. Subjective empowerment eclipses the need and urgency both Manzanares and Romero expressed. Both agreed that more work needs to be done surrounding the education of these histories, especially given the state of women's rights in the world and the struggles that continue. Both contribute to reimagining a collective cultural history through the channeling of their experiences and their connections that are rooted in the region providing for both

26. See Ellis, Samantha's interview, Ball State Public Media, NPR, The Facing Project Season 8; January 31, 2026: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6L35UIaLrQ&list=PLb294dtN1KEFOYlsAahmWagMIzw4jCfDk&t=1344s>. Accessed on August 20, 2026.

27. Thanks to Senior Archivist, Samuel Sisneros who recovered the ballad from the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives.

empowerment *and* healing. Moreover, healing becomes complete with the conciliatory male performance as an act of contrition, exemplifying how both female and male challenge patriarchal hegemony. Such community-level collective memory work calls for revisiting trauma and transmitting their own experiences into their performances as a process of redemption. When speaking about trauma and performance protest, Diana Taylor mentions:

Its efficacy depends on its ability to provoke recognition and reaction in the here and now rather than rely on past recollection. It insists on physical presence: one can participate only by *being there*. Its only hope for survival...is that they catch on; others will continue the practice.²⁸

With the vast oral traditions of the area, New Mexico, as with many other areas in the US Southwest borderlands, continues to face political challenges with maintaining its language of Spanish as a practiced heritage language.²⁹ This is seen with strong assimilation efforts coupled with intergenerational traumatic experiences of using Spanish in public spaces³⁰ and changes to language requirements at local universities.³¹ Yet, through embodied performance in the heritage language of Spanish, performers are able to revitalize, maintain, and share the language, thus taking an active role in one's cultural agency as a culturally sustaining practice. Taylor eloquently emphasizes, "we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices" (xvi).

Ultimately, this study shows how a border thinking methodology grounded in ethnographic interviews reveals just how crucial embodied performance of historically underrepresented narratives work to both heal and empower the artists who perform them. Primarily, the intersection of cultural agency and redemption within these interviews finds its expression through corporeal acts of resistance. Paula Ángel's historical erasure was enacted through a brutal, physical execution designed to silence her body permanently. Juliana Ortega's historical erasure was only recently recovered through the narrative text that did not make it into oral tradition. Yet, through the reclamation of embodied performance, both Pablita and Juliana exist in the collective cultural memory through the narrative voicing and the use of "yo" or *I*, stating their

28. See Taylor (2003: 188).

29. I define heritage language learner as one who has a personal connection with the language of their community and/or heritage.

30. See MacGregor-Mendoza, Patricia, pp. 355-367.

31. I mention in my dissertation that some universities are changing their language requirements to requiring only one semester of a language other than English. In an area where the Spanish heritage language is undergoing a shift to English and language loss is already rampant, these measures only exacerbate it, and it becomes especially detrimental to heritage language learners of the region. See Scorcia Pacheco, Carmella, *Feminine-Voiced Balladry of New Mexico* (2023: 25).

case, making themselves known and distinguishing the performance into one of embodiment. Through this project, embodied performance of “La finada Paula Ángel” and “La indita de Juliana Ortega” is cultural agency. Performers and participants are encased within the ballad tradition that hold vital lifelines into the US Southwest borderlands of New Mexico.

Future Studies

For future study, an ethnographic analysis geared at receiving participant and audience feedback of “La finada Paula Ángel,” “La indita de Juliana Ortega,” and “La cautiva Marcelina” will be valuable to show somatic resonances. The study will invite active participants to process the musicality and textuality of the pieces sensorially which will contribute to a greater understanding of how *nuevomexicana* histories are collectively reimagined.

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Between Rupture and Continuity: The System of Care and Education for Deaf Children in Slovenia between 1945 and 1950¹

By Dunja Dobaja*

The following contribution examines the development of the system of care and education for deaf children in Slovenia in the early years after World War II and places the issue within the broader Yugoslav context. It ascertains that, at the level of the republics, certain ambiguities existed regarding the division of jurisdiction among the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, and Health in relation to the education and schooling of children with special needs. Therefore, the Ministries in question highlighted numerous obstacles to the development of institutions for deaf children and other children with special needs. The Slovenian authorities attributed the problems to a lack of information from the federal Ministries. The latter, on the other hand, believed that issues with the post-war organisation of special education stemmed from inadequate organisation inherited from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Another problem was the shortage of professionally qualified teaching staff, which the authorities sought to address by establishing special education departments at teacher training colleges. The present contribution establishes that the vital foundations of the general system of care and education for deaf children and children with sensory impairments in Slovenia were already laid during the interwar period. Although the post-war communist regime emphasised a break with the pre-war arrangements and the construction of a new system, the development of special education between 1945 and 1950 was largely grounded in the continuity of institutions, personnel, and professional practices from the pre-war period.

Keywords: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, education, deaf children, school for deaf children

Introduction

To date, the system of care and education for children with sensory disabilities in Slovenia has received limited attention in historical research. This contribution is based on the research into the system of care and education for deaf children in Slovenia during the interwar period (1919–1940), when the crucial institutional and professional foundations for its further development after 1945 were laid. The study's findings simultaneously

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1. The research was conducted within the framework of project J6-50189, The System of Care and Education for Children with Sensory Disabilities in the First and Second Yugoslav State, and research programme no. P6-0280, Economic, Social and Environmental History, both funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) from the state budget of the Republic of Slovenia

shed light on the broader development of the system of care and education for children with sensory disabilities in Slovenia. Before and after World War II, Slovenia's development occurred within the framework of the Yugoslav state. The first Yugoslavia was a monarchy, whereas the second was a socialist state led by the Communist Party. In 2023, we undertook an interdisciplinary research project at the Institute of Contemporary History titled *Sistemi skrbi in izobraževanja senzorno oviranih otrok v prvi in drugi jugoslovanski državi* (*Care and Education Systems for Children with Sensory Impairments in the First and Second Yugoslav States*, J6-50289), which examines the development of care and education systems for children with sensory impairments from 1919 to 1991. The project is funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS), and the research team comprises experts from Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. The project is scheduled for completion in September 2026.

The development of the system of care and education for deaf children in the first and second Yugoslavia has rarely been addressed in international historiography. Existing research generally focuses on Western European and North American cases or on broader social policy and disability issues in socialist countries, whereas the history of education for deaf children in the first and second Yugoslavia remains under-researched. At this point, we should mention Paul Stubbs, author of *Socialist Inequalities and Discontent in Yugoslav Socialism*, who notes that many post-war reforms in Yugoslavia were shaped by the intersection of the socialist state's ideological goals and the continuity of pre-war institutional structures (Stubbs, 2016).

This contribution focuses on the first five years after World War II in Slovenia, when the new authorities sought to reshape the school system on new ideological and organisational foundations and move it away from pre-war models. Nevertheless, numerous elements of continuity were retained during its transformation. During the first five years after the end of World War II, the education system generally stagnated relative to the pre-war period, owing to its subordination to the ideological and political views of the ruling Communist Party (Gabrič, 1991). As in other areas of society, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia sought to reduce disparities among the individual republics and to create as unified an educational system as possible. The goal of this policy was to standardise the organisation of the education system, curricula, ideological content, and educational standards, thereby contributing to the creation of a common Yugoslav socialist space. The goal was to bring the more developed and less developed parts of the country into line with common standards, which, however, were not based on the actual average of the existing systems but rather on a politically conceived vision of a unified Yugoslav society and its educational system. In the more developed parts of Yugoslavia, which included Slovenia, this policy led to setbacks in the development of the education system. For Slovenia, which had already implemented an eight-year elementary school system before the war, the introduction of compulsory seven-year schooling in 1946 represented a step backwards relative to the school system's previous level of development (Gabrič, 2009). In contrast, the 1950–51 school

year – which, chronologically, falls outside the scope of this article – marked a significant turning point in the development of post-war education, with the introduction of compulsory eight-year schooling and the establishment of a comprehensive school system. Thus, it was possible to overcome numerous organisational problems and frequent policy shifts characteristic of the second half of the 1940s, during which the communist regime also restructured the education system for children with sensory disabilities. In this regard, the need to move away from the pre-war models was often emphasised, yet in practice, many pre-war institutions, professional guidelines, and organisational solutions were retained after the war.

During the interwar period, segregated education and schooling enabled the provision of specialised educational services for children with sensory disabilities, tailored to their needs, thereby facilitating their integration into society by helping them learn a trade, find employment, and become financially independent. During the interwar period, this was the ultimate goal of the educational institutions for children with sensory disabilities, including those who were deaf. Such an attitude towards deaf children, as well as those with sensory impairments in general, persisted after World War II: the emphasis was on their integration into society. However, the development of a positive social attitude towards these children became increasingly pronounced, as the post-war government prioritised care for vulnerable individuals, including children with special needs. However, tendencies towards spatial segregation – i.e., relocating institutions for children with special needs to the periphery – persisted. The medical model for treating children with special needs remained dominant, while the treatment of people with special needs was medicalised. This meant that disability was viewed as a pathological condition requiring constant treatment, correction, or elimination (Rembis et al., 2018). The concept of disability emphasises that although physical, sensory, and intellectual impairments can limit individuals in their daily activities, actual barriers arise only when they encounter an exclusionary environment (Zaviršek, 2014).

During the interwar period, it was clear that institutions for the education of children with sensory disabilities were educational institutions. However, due to the circumstances (most students came from socially disadvantaged families), they had also informally become social institutions. Shortly after World War II, this was no longer self-evident. Because of their condition, children with sensory disabilities were automatically deemed to be in need of social assistance. On 25 June 1945, Vilma Kralj, a provisional delegate of the Institute for Blind Children, wrote to the Ministry of Education, objecting to such negative connotations and clearly stating that the Institute was first and foremost a genuine educational institution, not a shelter (AS 231, container 37, 1945).

Even after World War II, the oral method continued to dominate deaf children's education. Since this contribution does not address the history of methods in special education for the deaf, it does not analyse them in greater detail. However, it is worth noting that the oldest method of teaching the deaf was the use of sign language. Following the International Congress on Education of the Deaf, held in Milan in 1880, the oral method became the prevailing

approach. The Congress adopted a resolution in favour of the oral method of teaching the deaf, on the grounds that the sign language method isolated the deaf from hearing society and turned them into a separate group. It took a long time for sign language to be officially recognised as the first and independent language of the deaf community. In the early 1980s, Sweden became the first country in the world to officially recognise sign language as the deaf community's primary and independent language. Other countries, including Slovenia, followed suit. In 1988, the administration of the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing recognised the need for sign language and embraced the idea of incorporating Slovenian Sign Language into deaf education. It was not until 2010, at the 21st Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf, that all the resolutions of the Milan Congress were rejected and a public apology was issued for the ban on sign language in deaf education (Rezar, 2023).

Literature Review

Research into disability (in Slovenia, the older term "invalidity" is no longer socially acceptable) as a historical, social, and cultural phenomenon intensified in the 1980s with the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of disability studies. This field of research shifted the concept of disability/handicaps from an exclusively medical framework to a broader social and cultural context, highlighting the impact of social structures, institutional practices, and power relations on the life experiences of people with disabilities. The fundamental premise of this approach was the distinction between physical or sensory impairment and disability, with the latter understood as a socially constructed category. In Slovenia, one of the most important authors in disability studies is Darja Zaviršek (2014), who emphasises the connections among physical differences, individuals' everyday experiences, the social environment, and power relations. Her work is based on the social model of disability, which underlines that disability is not merely the result of an individual's physical or sensory characteristics, but primarily the result of societal barriers and processes of exclusion.

Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen have made significant contributions to the international development of disability history. Their seminal work, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (2018), is one of the most comprehensive overviews of the field's development. It treats disability as a key category for understanding identity, citizenship, community, and social norms. The authors point out that the history of disability cannot be confined solely to the history of institutions, treatment, or care for people with disabilities, but must be understood as the history of the life experiences of people with disabilities and of their position in society. Susan Burch, Michael Rembis, Paul K. Longmore, and Lauri Umansky have also made significant

contributions to the development of disability history. In their work *The New Disability History* (2001), Longmore and Umansky laid the foundations for contemporary historical research on disability, while in the collection *Disability Histories* (2014), Burch and Rembis emphasised the importance of incorporating issues of gender, race, class, and cultural context into disability research. Kim E. Nielsen is also particularly important because she treats disability as an independent historical-analytical category. In her view, research on disability offers a better understanding of the processes of social exclusion, identity formation, and the workings of power mechanisms across different historical periods.

The issue of childhood disability is a significant area of research in contemporary anthropology and sociology. Hart and Boyden (2019) classify disability as one of the key factors in social differentiation, comparable to gender, social class, and ethnicity. Wickenden (2019) underlines that disability is not a direct consequence of physical or sensory differences, but rather the result of processes of social labelling, exclusion, and the construction of otherness. In psychological research, Susan Goldin-Meadow (2006) and Oliver Sacks (2006) are especially noteworthy. Goldin-Meadow has shown that deaf children spontaneously develop complex systems of understanding even without formal exposure to sign language. Sacks, on the other hand, in his research on blindness, highlighted the brain's plasticity and the vital role of the social environment in shaping individuals' perceptual experiences.

In the Slovenian context, the works of the Slavacist, pedagogue, and teacher of the deaf Bogo Jakopič, who systematically researched the history of deaf education in Slovenia, are fundamental. His most notable works include *Gluhonemnica v Ljubljani (1900–1945) / The Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute (1900–1945)* (1972); *Zgodovina učnih načrtov in programov šol za gluhe na Slovenskem / The History of Curricula and Programmes at Schools for the Deaf in Slovenia* (1979); *Pota do besede / Paths to Language* (1986); and *Oris zgodovine vzgoje in izobraževanja gluhih v svetu / An Outline of the History of Education for the Deaf Abroad* (1998). His works are a crucial source for understanding the development of special education for the deaf in Slovenia. Meanwhile, Minka Skaberne, a teacher of the blind, played a pivotal role in the history of education for the blind and the visually impaired. As early as 1919, she published *Skrb za slepce / Care for the Blind*; while in 1920, she wrote the article *Vzgoja slepcev / Education of the Blind*. Both works serve as fundamental sources for studying the beginnings of organised care for the blind in Slovenia. Her work is complemented by a publication by Marija Golob and her associates, *Pot k svetlobi / The Path to Light* (1989), marking the 80th anniversary of the Institute for Blind Children and Youth, and by the book *Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino: zgodovinski oris 1919–1989 / Institute for Blind and Partially Sighted Children: A Historical Overview, 1919–1989* (1989).

Literature from the interwar period and the post-World War II era – roughly up to the 1980s – offers insight into the educational process for children with sensory disabilities. It views segregated education as a means of support and a path to independent living, and thus to societal integration. The

authors of these works are teachers of the deaf, special education teachers, social pedagogues, defectologists, and sociologists. Initially, historiography did not examine this issue, but this has changed somewhat in recent years. Children with special needs are the primary research focus of the historian Dunja Dobaja. She focuses primarily on the system of care and education for deaf children in Slovenia during the interwar period and World War II. She published the results of her research in the scientific monograph *Za blagor mater in otrok. Zaščita mater in otrok v letih 1919–1941 / For the Good of Mothers and Children: The Protection of Mothers and Children between 1919 and 1941* (2018) and in the scientific monograph *Gluhi in svet: med odrinjenostjo in vključenostjo / The Deaf and the World: Between Marginalisation and Inclusion* (2024), in which she highlighted the school for deaf children in Ljubljana – the so-called Institute for the Deaf-Mute – which served as the central Slovenian institution for the education and schooling of deaf children. Founded in 1900, largely through the legacy of Dean Ignacij Holzapfel, the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute enabled deaf children from Carniola to receive an education in Slovenian instead of attending Austrian institutions where instruction was provided in a foreign language. Despite the legal framework introduced after 1929, only about 40% of deaf children in the Drava Banate attended special schools, while the Institute, the only institution of its kind in Slovenia, could not accommodate all applicants because of limited capacity and insufficient funding for expansion. Most pupils came from socially disadvantaged families and had become deaf later in life due to poor living conditions and untreated illnesses. With support from the Support Association for Deaf and Mute Youth, the Institute provided education, vocational training, healthcare and material assistance, while promoting social integration and combating prejudice through public awareness activities. After World War II, compulsory elementary education for children with special needs further expanded access to education for deaf children.

The question of the educational and schooling process for the blind and visually impaired in Slovenia during the interwar period, World War II, and the post-war period is the research focus of the historian Mojca Šorn, who, together with Dunja Dobaja, presented research findings on the system of care and education for children with sensory disabilities in Slovenia in the paper *Institutional Education of Blind, Deaf, and Speech-Disabled Children in Slovenia until World War II. Wychowanie w Rodzinie* (2018).

In the Yugoslav context, the seminal work on the treatment of people with special needs in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia is Ljubomir Petrović's scientific monograph *Nevidljivi geto. Invalidi u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941 / The Invisible Ghetto. The Disabled in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1918–1941* (2007). His research shows that inadequate legislation, economic underdevelopment, limited social welfare provision and widespread prejudice shaped their social position. Social welfare policies focused primarily on disabled war veterans, while

other groups remained largely marginalised. Disability was frequently associated with reduced working capacity, reinforcing social exclusion and inequality.

Dunja Dobaja has also conceived the aforementioned project, titled *Care and Education Systems for Children with Sensory Impairments in the First and Second Yugoslav States*, which is being carried out at the Institute of Contemporary History. Together with external collaborators, the project team members wrote several scientific articles that were published in the special issue of the journal *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino / Contributions to Contemporary History* 65/1 (2025), titled *Decoding the Historical Patterns*, and in the scientific monograph *Education and Employment of Individuals with Sensory Disabilities in the First and Second Yugoslavia (1919–1991)* (2026), which was published as part of the Institute of Contemporary History's *Vpogledi/Perspicacités* collection. The special issue examined education and schooling systems for children with sensory disabilities from the end of World War I to Slovenia's independence in 1991, focusing on their changing forms and content, their relationship to broader social developments and their impact on the lives and social position of their beneficiaries. It traced the shift from segregation, which was dominant during the interwar period, towards integration after World War II, asking how this paradigm shift was connected to broader social structures and reflected in life outcomes. The accompanying monograph further examines education, employment and the social status of people with sensory disabilities in the former Yugoslavia. It shows that progress was uneven and constrained by social norms, institutional practices and persistent stereotypes, while inclusion resulted not only from legislative changes but also from broader social transformations and the efforts of individuals and institutions.

The development of legislation and educational policies in Slovenia after World War II was analysed by the pedagogue and historian Staša Ivanec in her article *Otroci in mladostniki z motnjami v telesnem in duševnem razvoju v pravnih dokumentih v Sloveniji (1958–1980) / Children and Adolescents with Physical and Mental Disabilities in Slovene Legal Documents (1958–1980)* (2013). The author found that the Slovenian special education system was based on the idea of adapted education and vocational training for children with special needs. Subsequent integration processes in Slovenia were analysed by the pedagogue Majda Schmidt in her article *Zaznavanje integracije/inkluzije v osnovni šoli / Detection of Integration/Inclusion in Primary School* (2006); by the special education teacher Angelca Žerovnik in the research report *Vzgoja in izobraževanje otrok z motnjami v telesnem in duševnem razvoju v procesu integracije / Education and Schooling of Children with Physical and Mental Disabilities in the Process of Integration* (1983); and by the pedagogue and psychologist Vinko Skalar in his article *Integracija in kurikularna prenova / Integration and Curricular Reform* (1997). In their works, these authors emphasised the importance of social integration as an essential prerequisite for the successful inclusion of children with special needs in the wider social environment.

A review of the literature shows that disability research has long focused primarily on the institutional histories of special education and social welfare, while

the life experiences of people with sensory disabilities – and of people with special needs in general – have remained underexplored. Therefore, contemporary approaches to the histories of disability and childhood provide an important methodological starting point for exploring the relationship among social policies, educational practices, and individuals' subjective experiences across different historical periods.

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative historical approach to examine the development of the system of care and education for deaf children in Slovenia during the first five years after World War II (1945–1950). This period was selected because it represents a formative phase in which the new Yugoslav authorities reorganised the education system and established new institutional, administrative, and professional arrangements. The analysis focuses on Slovenia while situating these developments within the broader political, administrative, and ideological framework of Yugoslavia.

The research is based primarily on archival sources, supplemented by legislation, official documents, and relevant scientific literature. Particular attention was paid to archival materials produced by Slovenian and Yugoslav authorities responsible for education, social welfare, and healthcare, as well as to documents concerning institutions for children with sensory disabilities. These sources provide insight into the organisation of the system, the division of responsibilities among different authorities, institutional capacity, professional staffing and training, educational and vocational provision, and official policies concerning pre-war institutions and practices.

The historical-critical method was used to assess the provenance, purpose, authorship, and historical context of the sources. Particular attention was paid to the distinction between normative provisions and their implementation in practice. Legislation and official policy documents were therefore analysed alongside archival correspondence, institutional reports, and other contemporary records. This approach also made it possible to identify continuities with the pre-war system alongside the organisational and ideological changes introduced after 1945.

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify and interpret recurring themes in the sources. The analysis focused on five main areas: administrative organisation, institutional capacity, educational and vocational provision, professional staffing and training, and cooperation among the Yugoslav republics. Particular attention was also given to the relationship between educational and social welfare functions, the role of vocational education, and the integration of deaf people into society and the workforce.

The study further applies institutional and comparative historical approaches. At the institutional level, it examines the transformation of existing institutions and the establishment of new organisational arrangements after 1945. At the comparative level, developments in Slovenia are examined within the broader Yugoslav framework,

enabling comparison between federal policies and their implementation at the republican level. The analysis also considers cooperation and the exchange of professional knowledge and personnel among the Yugoslav republics.

A central analytical focus is the relationship between continuity and change. The study examines the extent to which post-war administrative, ideological, and organisational changes transformed existing institutional and professional practices, as well as the ways in which pre-war institutions, professional experience, and educational practices continued to shape the emerging system. The study therefore approaches 1945 not simply as a complete institutional rupture, but as a period of transformation in which new ideological and organisational principles interacted with established institutional and professional structures.

The combination of historical source criticism, qualitative content analysis, and institutional and comparative historical approaches enables the study to examine how the post-war system of care and education for deaf children was reorganised in Slovenia and how this process was shaped by the interaction between federal policies, republican authorities, existing institutions, and professional practices.

Results

The analysis identified five main areas of change in the system of care and education for deaf children in Slovenia between 1945 and 1950: administrative organisation, institutional capacity, educational and vocational provision, professional staffing and training, and cooperation among the Yugoslav republics.

The first area of change concerned administrative organisation. In the first post-war years, administrative responsibility for institutions serving children with sensory disabilities was not clearly defined. In 1945, the Ministry of Social policy asked the Ministry of Education to clarify whether the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute should be regarded as an educational or social welfare institution. Federal authorities subsequently established a division of responsibilities under which institutions for children with sensory disabilities were placed under the Ministries of Education, while institutions for children and young people with severe physical or intellectual disabilities were assigned to social welfare authorities. Institutions primarily concerned with healthcare, treatment, and rehabilitation were placed under the Ministries of Health. The Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute consequently remained within the educational sector.

The second area of change concerned institutional capacity. Existing institutional capacity was insufficient to accommodate the number of deaf children considered eligible for education. In 1947, 144 pupils were enrolled at the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute, although its capacity was approximately 50 pupils. Approximately 500 school-age deaf children were recorded in Slovenia, of whom around 300 were considered capable of attending school. The Ministry of Education therefore planned a new institution with a capacity of approximately 360 pupils. Until its construction, the

existing Institute was to remain in operation. Archival records also document the allocation of part of the Institute's land for the construction of a healthcare facility, as well as discussions concerning the future use of its premises.

The third area of change concerned educational and vocational provision. The Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute continued to provide general education and vocational preparation during the first post-war years. At the same time, the sources document the introduction of organised youth and socio-political activities. Pupils participated in Pioneer and youth organisations, while the Institute's youth organisation published the wall newspaper *Stenčas*. During the 1946–1947 school year, the organisation was reported to have ranked second among youth organisations in Ljubljana. Participation in wider post-war mobilisation was also documented. Eight deaf pupils took part in a voluntary work action during the construction of the Šamac–Sarajevo railway line. On 20 May 1947, a Youth Work Brigade of Deaf People was established, comprising 90 participants from different parts of Yugoslavia. Teachers at the Institute organised lectures, discussions, and visits to industrial facilities.

Vocational education was expanded in 1946 through the establishment of a secondary vocational school at the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute, approved by the Ministry of Industry. The available documentation identifies vocational training as an important component of educational provision for deaf young people and records its incorporation into the post-war educational framework.

The fourth area of change concerned professional staffing and training. A shortage of professionally qualified teachers was also identified as a significant organisational issue. In 1947, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of Slovenia requested federal guidelines for establishing a Department of Defectology at the Ljubljana Teacher Training College. The proposed framework included a specialised curriculum, professional training requirements, and requirements for professional examinations. The federal authorities subsequently worked on a common curriculum for Departments of Defectology at teacher training colleges in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade.

Enrolment in the Ljubljana programme remained below the planned level. Nine candidates applied for training as specialist teachers for deaf pupils, representing approximately 60% of the planned enrolment. Eleven candidates applied for training in the education of children with intellectual disabilities, while two applied for training in the education of children with physical disabilities. The Ministry of Education consequently requested that the ministries of other Yugoslav republics submit additional candidates for training in Ljubljana.

The staffing situation at the Ljubljana Institute also changed during the period examined. In 1947, the Institute employed 12 specialist teachers and eight student teachers, in addition to the principal. By the end of 1948, the number of specialist teachers had increased to 24. The sources also show that several members of the teaching staff had already worked at the Institute before 1945.

The fifth area of change concerned cooperation among the Yugoslav republics. Staffing shortages were also reported in other Yugoslav republics. In 1947, the Ministry of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded approximately 1,233 deaf

children, while the school for deaf children in Sarajevo could accommodate only 42 pupils. The school employed one specialist teacher and four student teachers who were still completing their professional training. Following a request for additional professional support, the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute assigned the specialist teacher Zdravko Omerza to the Sarajevo school. The Ministry of Education subsequently requested cooperation from other Yugoslav republics in providing additional candidates for specialist teacher training in Ljubljana.

Overall, the findings identify changes in five main areas of the system of care and education for deaf children during the first post-war years: administrative organisation, institutional capacity, educational and vocational provision, professional staffing and training, and cooperation among the Yugoslav republics. At the same time, the sources demonstrate considerable continuity with the pre-war period, including the continued operation of the Ljubljana Institute, the presence of teaching staff with pre-war experience, and the continuation of established forms of educational and vocational work alongside newly introduced administrative arrangements, professional training structures, and socio-political activities.

Discussion

Traces of the Past in a New Country

The end of World War II in 1945 marked a major step towards the emancipation of the Slovenian language and culture. In the new Yugoslav state, culture and education were the areas in which the federal units (republics) were granted the greatest autonomy (Gabrič, 2009). After assuming power at the end of World War II, the Communist Party of Slovenia, within the framework of the Yugoslav political system, gradually aligned the education system with its ideological and political goals. In the early post-war years, the new government focused primarily on the political and economic transformation of society, while it had not yet established a clearly defined long-term development strategy for culture and education. The early post-war period was therefore characterised primarily by efforts to resolve the immediate organisational and staffing challenges arising from the nationalisation of educational institutions, as well as by the gradual establishment of a new educational system. It was accompanied by numerous improvised measures and frequent reorganisations, while a comprehensive and systematic framework for individual areas of education was developed gradually.

In an article titled *Smernice sodobnega pedagoškega dela / Guidelines for Modern Pedagogical Work*, published in the first issue of the post-war teachers' journal *Popotnik* (Schmidt, 1945/46), Vlado Schmidt, a member of the School Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia, explained the new educational guidelines to the Slovenian pedagogical staff. The Ministry of Education asked the Slovenian teachers' councils to discuss the article at teachers' conferences and to report on it to their superiors. Before its publication, the article

was reviewed by the School Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia at its meeting on 28 December 1945, thereby representing the official position of the new authorities (Gabrič, 1991). The article is relevant to research on special education and the education of deaf children primarily because it reveals the ideological framework underpinning the school reforms after 1945. It shows that the new communist regime rejected many pre-war educational practices as “reactionary” and sought to establish a unified socialist school system. In light of the above, attempts to reorganise education for children with sensory disabilities are understandable, even though many pre-war institutional and professional models remained unchanged in practice.

After World War II, the school for the deaf – known as the Institute for the Deaf-Mute – and the Institute for Blind Children in Ljubljana faced issues with jurisdiction and space. On 26 June 1945, the Head of the Minister’s Office at the Ministry of Social Policy addressed a query to the Ministry of Education regarding the jurisdiction over the Institute for the Deaf-Mute – specifically, whether it fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education as an educational institution or under the Ministry of Social Affairs as an institution for those “in need of social assistance”. The relevant Ministries failed to resolve the question of whether schools for children with sensory disabilities were educational or social institutions (Dobaja, 2022). The Committee for Schools and Science of the Government of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia explained the lack of clarity over jurisdictions in Slovenia and other Yugoslav republics by pointing to shortcomings in the previous system, which had allegedly failed to clearly delineate the jurisdictions of the Ministries of Social Welfare, Health, and Education. To resolve the situation that had arisen, the Committee drew up a plan to divide responsibilities among the relevant ministries of the individual republics, according to which institutions for children with sensory disabilities fell under the Ministry of Education’s jurisdiction. On the other hand, institutions for children and young people with physical disabilities who were unable to acquire vocational skills and enter the workforce, as well as those for children and youth with severe intellectual disabilities, fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health was responsible for all children’s and youth institutions primarily intended for healthcare, treatment, and rehabilitation (AJ 315, container 21, 1946).

The lack of clarity regarding jurisdiction indicates that the post-war communist government had not yet developed a clearly defined approach to the care of children with sensory disabilities. Discussions about whether institutions for people with sensory disabilities should fall under the jurisdiction of educational, social, or health authorities reflect the interplay among pedagogical, social, and medical perspectives on disability. The final decision to place schools for children with sensory disabilities under the jurisdiction of the republics’ Ministries of Education marked a significant step towards integrating them into the education system. At the same time, the

debate revealed the organisational uncertainty of the early post-war years and the dependence of the republics' authorities on federal guidelines for shaping the special education system.

The division of responsibilities between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs was not merely administrative; it also reflected prevailing conceptions about the capabilities of specific groups of children with special needs. While deaf and blind children were considered capable of receiving education and vocational training and were therefore placed under the jurisdiction of educational authorities, children with more severe physical and intellectual disabilities were predominantly regarded as subjects of social welfare. This arrangement indicates that the right to education was largely tied to an individual's expected future capacity to work and participate in society, reflecting the continued dominance of the medical model of disability in the early post-war years.

The end of World War II did not mean that efforts to segregate deaf and blind children would end. The general hospital, located in the immediate vicinity of the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute, resumed its pre-war efforts to acquire the Institute's premises. Marjan Ahčin, who was Slovenia's Minister of Health at the time, supported the general hospital's efforts and urged the Slovenian Ministry of Education to resolve the issue of relocating the Institute. He proposed relocating it to the outskirts of Ljubljana, away from the city centre (Dobaja, 2022). His proposal can be understood in the context of spatial segregation. The Institute for Blind Children was also subject to a trend towards spatial segregation, but its director, Bogomira Dobovšek, prevented this by appealing to Lidija Šentjurs, then Minister of Education and Culture of Slovenia (Dobaja, 2022). Ultimately, both Institutes remained in Ljubljana, attesting to the prevalence of constructive expert arguments based on the view that, for the successful education and schooling of children with sensory impairments, a physical presence in Slovenia's capital was essential, as all the major cultural and educational institutions were located there.

As noted at the beginning of this discussion, the individual federal units (republics) enjoyed a degree of independence from federal authorities in the field of education. This may also have been the reason for inadequate federal oversight of certain segments of the education system. This can be illustrated by the example of the general hospital in Ljubljana, which sought to expand at the expense of the nearby school for deaf children. In 1947, the Yugoslav Association of the Deaf informed the Committee for Social Welfare of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia of the Slovenian Ministry of Education's intention to demolish the Institute for the Deaf-Mute. This Committee informed the Committee for Schools and Science of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia about this matter, and the latter requested an explanation from the Slovenian Ministry of Education. Lora Kernc, Lidija Šentjurs's Deputy Minister of Education, gave a clear explanation. While it was true that the Ministry of Education had ceded

part of the land belonging to the Institute for the Deaf-Mute to construct a new clinic for the Institute for Social Insurance, it simultaneously drew up plans to build a new school for deaf children with a capacity of 360, which was significantly more than the old school (which had a capacity of only about 50 children). She emphasised that, until the new facility was built, the children would remain in the old building (AJ 315, container 21, 1947). According to data from 1947, 144 pupils were enrolled at the Institute for the Deaf-Mute, far exceeding its actual capacity. In Slovenia, 300 of approximately 500 school-age deaf children were capable of attending school. For this reason, the Ministry of Education decided to build a larger new institution (AJ 315, container 21, 1947).

The case of the alleged demolition of the Institute for the Deaf-Mute reveals several features of the post-war development of the system of care and education for children with sensory disabilities. On the one hand, it points to limited information flow between the republics and the federal authorities, as well as to the republics' relative autonomy in regulating educational matters. On the other hand, it highlights the vital role of organisations of people with special needs, which were able to draw attention to the decisions of the republics' authorities through federal channels. At the same time, the example shows that the post-war authorities regarded the education of deaf children as a vital part of social and educational policy, as evidenced by the plans to build a new institution with significantly greater capacity than the pre-war one. Therefore, the dispute did not signal a decline in the importance of education for deaf children, but rather reflected tensions between the post-war state's various development priorities and the organisational difficulties of implementing them.

Attitude towards Deaf Children in the New State

In addition to post-war reconstruction, one of the key tasks of the communist authorities was to care for vulnerable people. Among children and adolescents, the groups most at risk primarily included orphans, socially and morally endangered children,² the blind, the deaf, the physically disabled, and children with intellectual disabilities. During their formative years, everyone should have access to education and basic necessities (food, clothing, footwear, and healthcare). Foster parents or institutions cared for those whose parents were unable to fulfil this role (Vehar, 2018). This policy shift implied a strengthening of the state's role in social welfare and education, which had largely relied on a combination of state support and charitable initiatives during the interwar period. In its annual budgets, the pre-war central government allocated funds to various educational, social, and health institutions.

2. The term "morally endangered children" referred to children whose parents were alcoholics, prostitutes, violent individuals, criminals, or politically controversial figures (Vehar, 2018).

Each received a share, but generally not enough to meet their needs. Financial resources were always insufficient, so the individual institutions under consideration, including the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute, relied on charitable organisations and on their own ability to manage the funds they had raised. Before the war, the Institute admitted far more children than it could accommodate because it sought to ensure that as many children and young people as possible received an education, learned a trade, and became financially independent. Theoretically, the 1930 Education Act (Official Gazette, 1930) allowed deaf children to attend school. However, not all deaf school-age children could attend because there was insufficient space at the Institute for the Deaf-Mute, the only school for the deaf in Slovenia during the pre-war period (for more information, see Dobaja, 2024). Mirko Dermelj, formerly the Institute's director, described the school's situation in the pre-war period as follows:

It is understandable that, following the pivotal year of 1918, we were all delighted with the newly established Yugoslavia, which we expected to bring us freedom, progress, and a better life. However, those hopes did not come true for us. The capitalist leaders did not satisfy the masses, and they were unwilling to address even the most pressing social issues, such as the plight of the deaf. Our Institute was becoming increasingly crowded, yet we received no help from anywhere. On their own initiative, the teaching staff and administration strove to improve our pupils' education and the training of future teachers, while the authorities at the time showed no understanding for the Institute and offered neither the facility nor the students any support or protection beyond the mandatory maintenance. The authorities did not address any issues affecting the deaf, such as education, let alone their employment and inclusion in the various workshops. The struggle to keep the Institute open was difficult, and the situation for the deaf after they finished school was dire as well. (Dermelj, 1950)

The quote reflects a typical post-war interpretation of the interwar period, which portrayed the pre-war state as socially insensitive and uninterested in people with special needs. Therefore, the text should be read as a combination of an account of the Institute's actual problems and an ideologically coloured interpretation of the past. It highlights the significant structural problems faced by deaf people after completing their education, particularly the absence of a systematic approach to vocational training, employment, and social integration. At the same time, it shows that the administration of the Institute for the Deaf-Mute largely regarded the school's development as the result of its own professional initiative, which was an important factor in understanding the development of special education in Slovenia during the interwar period.

The goals of educational work at the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute in the new Yugoslav state were similar to those of the interwar period – namely, to provide basic education that would enable the deaf to participate in society and lead independent lives. In keeping with the spirit of the new era, the communist authorities also emphasised the importance of socio-political education, which aimed to familiarise children with the achievements

of the liberation struggle and the ideological principles of socialist society. The authorities also expected social engagement even from pupils at the Institute. This means that younger students were active in the so-called Pioneer children's organisation, while older students took part in the youth organisation. The members of the youth organisation held weekly meetings and wrote articles for a youth newspaper titled "*Stenčas*",³ which served as a relevant medium for cultural expression, information sharing, and student involvement in the school's community life. According to the authorities, their efforts were very successful, as the youth organisation at the Institute for the Deaf-Mute ranked second among all youth organisations in Ljubljana during the 1946–47 school year. Eight deaf students also participated in a volunteer work action during the construction of the Šamac–Sarajevo railway line (AJ 315, container 21, 1947). On 20 May 1947, the Youth Work Brigade of the Deaf was formed, comprising 90 deaf people from across Yugoslavia. The brigade in question participated in the construction of the Šamac–Sarajevo railway line and was successful in its work. As part of this work action, the deaf learned about the importance of collective work and life. Despite difficult working conditions, a lack of resources, and adverse weather, they strove to fulfil their duties and prove that they were no less capable than their hearing peers (Vukotić, 1954).

Railway construction was a central symbol of post-war reconstruction and the socialist mobilisation of youth. The inclusion of deaf people in such work projects reflected the authorities' efforts to integrate them into collective labour and to foster a sense of belonging to the broader Yugoslav community. In this regard, it was emphasised that, despite their sensory impairment, deaf people were able to participate on an equal footing in tasks integral to the construction of the new state. The post-war system retained the pre-war goal of integrating the deaf into society, but placed it within the new ideological framework of the socialist state. While vocational training and economic independence for the deaf were the primary focus in the pre-war period, after 1945, their integration into collective forms of work and sociopolitical education also became an important focus.

The post-war authorities also expected teachers at the Institute for the Deaf-Mute to be socially and politically active. Their role was not limited to teaching; it also included educating students in line with the values of the emerging socialist society. Most teachers came from the pre-war system. The available sources do not provide sufficient information about their attitude towards the new post-war authorities to draw reliable conclusions. The sources indicate only that, during World War II, both the teachers and the students at the Institute were victims of the occupying forces. Four teachers were interned in the occupiers' camps.

3. The term "*Stenčas*" is an abbreviation for "*stenski časopis*" ("wall newspaper"), a widely used means of disseminating information and conducting educational and ideological work in Yugoslav schools, youth organisations, and institutions. The students made use of it to publish various news items, articles, and reports on events, achievements, holidays, and more.

Several former pupils of the Institute – three men and one woman – were killed during the armed struggle against the occupiers (Dermelj, 1950). Based on this limited information, we can only conclude that some teachers and pupils of the Institute participated in the resistance movement during World War II, which played a crucial role in shaping the new Yugoslav state after the war. However, we cannot draw conclusions about their ideological affiliations or their activities regarding the ideological education of students after the war.

Considering the education system in Yugoslavia as a whole, we find that the ideological orientation of a large portion of the teaching staff was not to the liking of the new communist authorities, since the existing teaching staff had, for the most part, been educated in the former states (Austria-Hungary, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and the Kingdom of Italy). The new government saw the key to achieving more ideologically appropriate results in education in a different approach by the teaching staff to educational problems – namely, the ideological transformation of the existing staff and the training of new, politically reliable personnel (Gabrič, 1991).

Meanwhile, at the Institute for the Deaf-Mute, teachers familiarised students with the achievements of post-war reconstruction and modernisation through lectures, direct conversations, and organised tours of industrial facilities, which, in this context, symbolised economic progress and the successes of the communist system. Therefore, teachers played a vital role in shaping young people's social and political consciousness (AJ 315, container 21, 1947). One of the main goals of post-war education and training was to develop a workforce whose moral character, professional knowledge, and practical skills would meet the needs of socialist society and its economy. Particular emphasis was placed on vocational training and on the integration of youth into production processes. Educational institutions were supposed to prepare young people for independent work and enable them to acquire the qualifications needed to pursue skilled, semi-skilled, or auxiliary occupations in the economy. In 1946, in this context, a secondary vocational school was established at the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute – a project championed primarily by the school's principal at the time, Mirko Dermelj. The Ministry of Industry approved the school's establishment, which, as noted in the report on the school's opening, "demonstrated the people's government's concern for the working class, which includes all deaf and mute people" (Dobaja, 2022).

The establishment of a secondary vocational school at the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute in 1946 reflected the post-war authorities' efforts to provide vocational training and to integrate the deaf into the workforce. The report from the school's opening ceremony indicates that the authorities regarded the deaf as part of the workforce, expecting them to contribute to the development of socialist society through the acquired vocational skills. The school thus represented a continuation of pre-war efforts to provide vocational training for

the deaf, while also integrating them into the ideological framework of post-war society, in which work was regarded as one of the fundamental social values.

The Shortage of qualified Teachers

The shortage of professionally qualified teaching staff in special schools was not merely a post-war problem. As early as the interwar period, experts in special education had noted a shortage of qualified personnel (Dobaja, 2024). The post-war efforts to establish departments of defectology⁴ at teacher training colleges represented a continuation of earlier efforts to address a problem that had already been identified. In 1947, Lidija Šentjunc, Minister of Education of the People's Republic of Slovenia, called on the Committee for Education and Science of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia to provide general guidelines for establishing a Defectology Department at the Ljubljana Teacher Training College, which had been founded that same year. In addition, she requested an outline of the special education programme's curriculum, sample guidelines, and a list of subjects required for the professional examination. To ensure the quality of education for future teachers, she proposed that the committees of the republics' Ministries of Education carefully review the defectology framework curriculum and submit their recommendations to the federal Ministry of Education. Based on the proposals collected, the Committee for Education and Science of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was tasked with developing a curriculum for defectology departments at teacher training colleges in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade (AJ 315, container 21, 1947). The republics without teacher training colleges sent their candidates to study in those that had them. In this context, Lora Kernc, Deputy Minister of Education, called on the Committee for Education and Science of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia to remind the ministries of education of the other republics to submit their lists of candidates for study in Ljubljana by 15 September 1947. The appeal was prompted by unsatisfactory enrolment in the Defectology Department in Ljubljana, as by 1 September 1947, only part-time students had enrolled – that is, those who were employed and unable to attend regular classes because of professional or other obligations. According to estimates from the Ministry of Education, the number of enrolled students was too low. Nine candidates applied for the position of specialised teacher for the deaf, representing approximately 60% of the projected enrolment; eleven candidates applied for the position of teacher for children with intellectual disabilities; and only two candidates applied for the position of

4. The term from the period under consideration is used. The modern term is special and rehabilitation pedagogy.

teacher of children with physical disabilities, with total enrolment reaching approximately 65% of the planned quota (AJ 315, container 21, 1947).

Archival records show that the shortage of professionally qualified staff was one of the crucial developmental issues in post-war special education. At the same time, it reveals the efforts of federal and republics' authorities to systematically regulate the training of special education teachers and to standardise professional standards throughout Yugoslavia. However, the modest enrolment in the newly established special education department in Ljubljana indicates a disconnect between post-war education policy plans and the system's actual staffing capacity. At the same time, this example confirms continuity with the pre-war period, as it addressed a problem that experts had already highlighted during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The shortage of professionally qualified staff was not only characteristic of Slovenia but also of the other Yugoslav republics. This is illustrated by the example of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, according to data from the republic's Ministry of Education, had 1,233 deaf children (AJ 315, container 21, 1947). Because of a teacher shortage, the school for deaf children in Sarajevo could admit only 42 children. It had a single specialist teacher and four student teachers on their teaching practicum, who had not yet met the requirements to teach independently. Because of staffing shortages, student teachers nevertheless taught independently. Therefore, the Assistant to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina requested that the Committee for Education and Science of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia assign an additional specialist teacher for the 1947–48 school year to support the professional training of student teachers, enabling them to teach independently. Professional assistance was provided by the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute, which assigned Zdravko Omerza (AJ 315, container 21, 1947), a specialist teacher, to the school for the deaf in Sarajevo. According to data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of Slovenia for 1947, in addition to the principal, the Institute employed 12 specialist teachers and 8 student teachers (AJ 315, container 21, 1947). In 1948, the number of specialist teaching staff gradually increased, reaching 24 by the end of that year (AS 231, container 98, 1948).

This example illustrates the vital role of cooperation among the republics in resolving staffing issues. The assignment of teacher Zdravko Omerza from the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute to the Sarajevo school shows that the post-war special education system developed as a Yugoslav forum for the exchange of professional knowledge and personnel. In this process, Slovenia played an important role in providing professional support to less developed republics, thanks to its long tradition of educating the deaf and its more developed institutional network. Some pre-war institutions, including the Ljubljana Institute for the Deaf-Mute, served as pillars of professional continuity after 1945. Thanks

to their experience, they contributed to the establishment and professional development of special schools across other parts of Yugoslavia.

Conclusions

The study of the system of care and education for deaf children in Slovenia from 1945 to 1950 shows that post-war developments cannot be understood merely as a break with the pre-war period. Although the new communist government emphasised the need to establish a new social and educational system and took a critical view of the legacy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it relied heavily on the existing institutions, professional staff, and pedagogical practices in organising special education. The analysis of archival sources has shown that the development of the system was hampered by numerous organisational problems, including ambiguities over the division of responsibilities among the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, and Health, as well as a shortage of professionally qualified teaching staff. These issues were addressed through cooperation between the authorities of the individual republics and the Yugoslav federation – a process that revealed discrepancies between the post-war authorities' normative plans and the practical feasibility of implementing them. At the same time, the study confirms that the key foundations of the system for the care and education of deaf children in Slovenia were laid as early as the interwar period. The post-war system thus represented a combination of continuity and change – continuity at the levels of institutions, personnel, and expertise, while changes occurred at the level of the organisational structure of the system of care and education for deaf children and its ideological positioning within the framework of socialist society. It was precisely the interplay between these two processes, discontinuity and continuity, that had a profound impact on the system in Slovenia in the first years after World War II.

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Lessons in Nationhood: Power, Gender, and Schooling in Post-Unification Southern Italy

By Francesco Domenico Vitale*

This paper expands on research presented at the 13th Annual International Conference on Humanities & Arts in a Global World, analyzing the relationship between state power, ideology, and public education in post-Unification Southern Italy. Focusing on the former province of Terra d'Otranto, it examines an area marked by illiteracy, economic backwardness, and clerical influence. Based on extensive bibliographic and archival sources—official correspondence, ministerial circulars, school regulations, and inspection reports—the study reconstructs both the legislative framework and its local implementation, revealing tensions between reform and reality. The paper investigates how the newly unified state sought to centralize, secularize, and standardize education through the Casati (1859) and Coppino (1877) laws, introducing compulsory schooling and reducing Church control. Yet, poor funding and municipal responsibility led to uneven application. A key focus is the rivalry between state schools and unauthorized religious institutions, especially those run by female congregations such as the Daughters of Charity. Promoting domestic and devotional education, these schools contrasted with the state's civic and national aims. Ultimately, the study shows that education in Terra d'Otranto became a contested arena where state authority, local culture, and gender norms intersected—anticipating dynamics later intensified under Fascism.

Introduction

The Italian unification of 1861 represented not only a political and territorial process but, above all, a complex cultural and identity-building enterprise. The newly founded national state, charged with the mission of “making Italians,” identified the school as a privileged instrument for shaping a shared civic consciousness, transmitting the values of liberal patriotism, and consolidating the idea of belonging to a unified nation. However, this ambitious project of building national consensus clashed with a deeply unequal reality, marked by economic and cultural divides between North and South, as well as by a rigid patriarchal conception of social roles.

In Southern Italy, a territory long dominated by the Bourbon dynasty, the post-unification school system became a field of tension between modernity and tradition, between state secularism and clerical resistance, between egalitarian aspirations and the persistence of a social order grounded in female subordination. The Bourbon school system itself epitomized this inequality, while widespread poverty further delayed—or even prevented—the implementation of essential public literacy initiatives. The educational laws enacted during the first decades of unified Italy — from the Casati Law (1859) to the Coppino Law (1877) — introduced seemingly progressive principles

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such as free and compulsory elementary education, yet delegated their enforcement to municipalities, thereby exacerbating territorial disparities. In the agrarian and impoverished South, lacking both adequate infrastructure and an educated middle class, mass literacy remained a distant and scarcely attainable goal.

Within this context, the question of female education acquired an emblematic significance. While new legislation formally acknowledged the right of girls to education, school curricula and ministerial directives continued to promote a subordinate educational model, aimed at forming “good mothers and housewives” rather than conscious citizens. The separation of sexes in schools, the introduction of “*lavori donneschi*” (needlework) as a compulsory subject, and the exclusion of female teachers from political responsibility all contributed to perpetuating a patriarchal educational order which, beneath the appearance of liberal modernity, reproduced ancient forms of domination—further reinforced in the South by deep-rooted superstition and traditionalism.

This article therefore examines the impact of educational reforms within the nascent post-unification state, focusing in particular on the difficulties surrounding their implementation in the South, and more specifically in the former province of Terra d’Otranto—a now-defunct historical region encompassing today’s provinces of Taranto, Brindisi, and Lecce. Through the analysis of archival sources — ministerial circulars, examination records, inspection reports, and administrative correspondence — emerges the image of a school system which, despite presenting itself as a laboratory of citizenship, lacked both the strength and the will to dismantle entrenched moral and professional boundaries between men and women, between citizens and subjects, between North and South.

These disparities, exacerbated by weak legislation and reforms that were never consistently applied—since they failed to account for the endemic conditions inherited from the various pre-unification states—resulted in a severe delay in the literacy of both adults and children. Consequently, the formation of modern citizens was hindered, paving the way for the dictatorship that would later define Italy in the 1920s.

At the Origins of the Italian School System: The Casati Law and the Question of Female Education

The process of Italian unification — slow and arduous — culminated on March 17, 1861, when King Victor Emmanuel II proclaimed the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy. With regard to the state of public education in the newly unified nation, a circular issued by Luigi Settembrini, Inspector General of Studies, on June 10, 1861, offers a picture that was anything but encouraging:

“I feel it my duty to say a few serious words to the newly formed municipalities concerning primary education. And first of all, here is the current condition of our country. Localities where, according to the former law, instruction was to be provided —

that is, towns and villages taken together — number 3,094; localities lacking any form of instruction number 1,084, of which 920 lack education for girls and 91 for boys”.¹

This stark report reveals the alarming state of illiteracy that characterized post-unification Italy and underscores the urgent need for a coherent national educational policy capable of addressing both geographic and gender disparities.

The authorities were fully aware of the gravity of this situation: “Each of us knows, and by simply looking around can see, the vile and miserable condition of popular education; each of us says and repeats that it is not a matter of reforming it, for it does not exist at all, but of creating it. Everyone desires it, awaits it, even demands it; and it seems an eternity before we see schools established with good teachers instructing hundreds of boys and girls, teaching them to read, write, count, and learn other necessary and useful notions. Everyone feels that popular schools are the foundation of liberty, and that wherever the people cannot read, whatever form of government may exist, they are always slaves, and freedom is always in danger.”² This impassioned appeal — a lucid acknowledgment of the country’s educational backwardness — captures the urgency that animated the first post-unification debates on schooling. Education was thus conceived not merely as a moral or intellectual duty, but as the indispensable foundation of civic freedom and national progress.

To worsen this already dire situation, one must not overlook the reactionary and patriarchal attitudes that underestimated both the importance and the urgency of establishing an adequate system of female education—one not confined merely to the learning of sewing and embroidery. The newly unified State inherited its framework for compulsory education for children of both sexes from a law already in force in the Kingdom of Sardinia, a law that proved far from effective in addressing the plague of illiteracy in the nascent Kingdom of Italy. This law was the Casati Law, enacted in 1859.

The law of November 13, 1859, No. 3725—bearing the name of Gabrio Casati, then Minister of Education of the Kingdom of Piedmont—constitutes the *de facto* birth certificate of the Italian educational system. Through this law, the government sought to address a series of urgent and immediate problems which would soon become, by extension, the very challenges of the newly unified Kingdom of Italy, namely: 1) to unify an extremely fragmented state school system; 2) to remove the Catholic Church’s hegemony over education and instruction; 3) to create a middle class, almost entirely absent at the time, in order to establish a bureaucratic, administrative, military, and ideological elite³.

1. Archivio di Stato di Brindisi ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 12, b. 1, fasc. 1. “Archivio di Brindisi” corresponds to: “Archives of the Municipality of Brindisi”, and “Archivio Storico del Comune di Brindisi” corresponds to: “Historical Archives of the Municipality of Brindisi”.

2. *Ibidem*.

3. Cf. G. Natale, *La Scuola in Italia, dal 1859 ai decreti delegati*, Mazzotta, Milano, 1975, pp.13-18.

With the Casati Law, a clear distinction was established between the various levels of education, both higher and elementary, which can be summarized in four main divisions: 1) Higher Education – This was provided in the universities and was organized into five faculties: Theology, Law, Medicine, Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences, and Philosophy and Letters. Its primary objective was to train the new ruling class of the Kingdom. 2) Secondary Education – This was divided into two branches: classical and technical. The classical branch comprised two levels: a five-year ginnasio (junior high school) followed by a three-year liceo (senior high school). The technical branch was also divided into two levels, each lasting three years: the technical school (free of charge) and the technical institute. 3) Normal School (Scuola Normale) – This institution was responsible for training male and female teachers and had a three-year curriculum. The first two years qualified graduates to teach in the lower elementary grades, while completion of the full three-year course granted qualification to teach in the upper elementary grades. 4) Elementary Education – This was free of charge and divided into two levels, lower and upper, each lasting two years. In the lower level, which was compulsory, students were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious instruction. The upper level introduced basic notions of geography, national history, and physical and natural sciences⁴. Essentially, as F. V. Lombardi observes, “*the fundamental principles of the law, insofar as elementary education was concerned, were essentially two:*

- a. *elementary education is free of charge and is provided by the State through the municipalities;*
- b. *attendance at this school is compulsory, but limited to the lower level.”*⁵

School Curricula

The Casati Law thus appeared, at least on paper, to be at the forefront of European educational reform, insofar as it established both the obligation and gratuitousness of attendance. However, it placed the burden of administration and maintenance entirely on the individual municipalities of the Kingdom, without verifying whether they possessed the means to fulfill such duties. This structural flaw led, in practice, to widespread non-compliance with the law.

A noteworthy aspect of the new educational system of the Kingdom of Italy was the persistence of gender-based distinctions within both school curricula and institutions—though to a considerably lesser extent than under the former Bourbon regime. In fact, only one formal distinction in curricula based on sex remained, as

4. Ivi, pp.18-20.

5. F.V. Lombardi, *I Programmi per la Scuola Elementare dal 1860 al 1985*, La Scuola, Brescia, 1987, cit. p. 8.

stated in Article 315 of the Casati Law: "To the subjects mentioned above shall be added, in the upper boys' schools, the elementary notions of geometry and linear drawing; in the girls' schools, needlework."⁶

To this programmatic distinction was added a possible physical separation between pupils based on sex, through the establishment of male and female schools, in which even the teachers were divided accordingly: men taught boys and women taught girls. The so-called "unified schools," that is, mixed schools, were rare, reflecting a society that remained deeply sexualized and rigidly divided along gender lines.

In unified Italy, the realms of "knowing" and "doing" failed to intertwine and to provide a form of education capable of holding these two competencies together. This integration proved even more difficult in the female sphere: it was inconceivable to propose an education for the future women of Italy that would exclude the "specialization of a craft", confining them to simple workshops and thereby denying them access to both general and specialized cultural instruction⁷; Indeed, it was the ministerial directives themselves that stated as much: "For the greater number of women, intellectual culture must have as its almost sole purpose domestic life, and the acquisition of those forms of knowledge required for the proper management of the household, of which they are to be both the support and the ornament."⁸

With regard to the school curricula, these were outlined class by class and, within each class, subject by subject. In terms of content, the programs were divided into three main subjects: Religion, Italian Language, and Arithmetic. In the upper elementary sections, a fourth subject, Reading, was added, which encompassed all the other subjects listed in Article 315 of the Casati Law⁹.

When presenting, at first, a general overview of the elementary curriculum, particular importance was assigned to the Italian language. In the years immediately following the Casati Law, very few teachers were able to speak Italian correctly. For this reason — as Lombardi notes — "with regard to teaching methods, reference was made essentially to the models used for the teaching of Latin, that is, from grammar to language, rather than from language to grammar."¹⁰ In short, for the Italian language, the didactic approach to be followed was that of imitation, whereas for Mathematics, in the first two grades, instruction was limited to oral and written calculations up to 100. In the second grade, pupils progressed to division with two-

6. Cf. G. Natale, *La Scuola in Italia...*, pp. 18-20.

7. Cf. S. Soldani, *L'educazione delle donne; Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1989.

8. This directive can be found in the guidelines concerning the implementation of the curricula, issued by Royal Decree of 15 September 1860, under the section titled "Female Schools" [*Scuole femminili*].

9. Cf. F.V. Lombardi, *I Programmi per la Scuola Elementare dal 1860 al 1985...*, pp. 10-12.

10. Ivi, cit. pp. 10-11.

digit divisors; in the third, to complete mastery of division; and in the fourth, to the study of proportions and the rule of three¹¹.

Focusing on the teaching of Religion, instruction began with catechism lessons on the principal mysteries of the faith in the lower grades, progressing in the subsequent classes to the Diocesan Catechism and to narratives from the Old and New Testaments¹². The teaching of Religion was provided by the teachers and was held in particular esteem by the clergy, as evidenced by a letter addressed to the Mayor of Brindisi on July 3, 1884: "Having completed the task entrusted to me by Your Honour to attend the religion examinations given by the pupils of these elementary schools, I am pleased to express my satisfaction with the manner in which this most important subject of the educational programme was carried out during the past school year. [...] In stating this, and knowing how deeply the moral and educational instruction of the youth of our homeland lies at your heart, I take the liberty of urging you to remain ever vigilant so that religious instruction may continue in the future to form part of that patrimony of conscience imparted in our schools"¹³.

The curricula for the first-year elementary classes, both lower and upper sections, as stipulated in the Regulations of 15 September 1860, are reproduced below¹⁴:

First Grade – Lower Section	First Grade – Upper Section
<i>Religion.</i> Oral catechism lessons on the principal mysteries of the faith, delivered by the teacher.	<i>Religion.</i> Catechism lessons on the principal mysteries of the faith; very brief stories from Sacred History corresponding to the aforementioned catechism lessons.
<i>Italian Language.</i> Graded exercises in syllabication; explanation of the words read; formation of letters, syllables, and words through imitation; writing of dictated words composed of simple syllables.	<i>Italian Language.</i> Graded exercises in syllabication and fluent reading from the textbook; explanation of vocabulary and of the sentences contained therein; writing through imitation; progressive dictation exercises; practical rules of orthography.
<i>Arithmetic.</i> Numeration, mental addition and subtraction up to 20; recognition and formation of Arabic numerals.	<i>Arithmetic.</i> Mental calculation exercises involving the four basic operations; written exercises in numeration, addition, and subtraction up to 100; memory exercises.

Although the school curricula did not take the sex of the pupils into account — thereby eliminating the severe distinctions that had previously

11. Ivi, p. 11.

12. *Ibidem*.

13. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 4, b.1, fasc. 1. letter signed by Fr. Taliento and addressed to the Mayor of Brindisi, dated 3 July 1884.

14. For the complete list of ministerial curricula, see F.V. Lombardi, *I Programmi delle Scuole elementari dal 1860 al 1985...* pp. 17-20.

characterized children's education in the various states of the peninsula, including, as we have seen, the Bourbon Kingdom — a rigid differentiation of social roles between males and females nevertheless remained firmly in place, imposed by a patriarchal society with the approval of the State.

Technical and mathematical subjects, for instance, were always to be related to domestic roles: "Similarly, in arithmetic, instead of examples wholly unrelated to women's occupations, preference should be given to those referring to cases of domestic economy, to expenses, to ordinary tasks and matters pertaining to household life. For this reason, it is not advisable to dwell too much on notions of geometry, but rather to be content with clear and easily learned definitions and with the simplest applications of the principles of the science to familiar objects, and above all, to drawing."¹⁵; the subject standardized by the Casati Law for girls — "needlework" — effectively helped to shape a State-driven society of a patriarchal and sexualized character.

The Needle and the Pen: Female Education in Post-Unification Italy

As already noted, Article 315 of the Casati Law listed a series of sub-subjects to be taught to pupils, among which were "needlework". What kind of skills were expected from the future mothers of Italy? No official directives in this regard can be found either in the circulars related to the curricula to be taught or in the ministerial guidelines. However, by examining the minutes of elementary school final examinations dated 1904 and 1905, it is possible to gain an idea of what these activities entailed, since they include a description of the tests the female pupils had to perform in their needlework examination.

Each young candidate was required to demonstrate mastery of the following sewing techniques: 1) basting stitch (*impuntura*); 2) running stitch (*punto filza*); 3) overcast stitch (*punto sopraggitto*); 4) hemstitch (*orlo a giorno*); 5) stem stitch (*punto ad erba*); 6) buttonhole stitch (*occhiello*)¹⁶.

It is worth noting that, although the right and duty of women to be educated had by then been formally recognized by law, the prejudices and impositions typical of patriarchal society nevertheless persisted. In fact, in the section "*General Instructions*" concerning the implementation of the curricula approved by the Royal Decree of 1860, under the heading "*Female Schools*," one reads: "Although the Law has made no distinction between the curricula of female and male schools, and therefore the quality and distribution of the subjects to be taught are

15. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 4, b.1, fasc. 1

16. Archivio Storico di Lecce (ASL), *Orfanotrofio San Francesco (poi Istituto Margherita di Savoia)*, Busta 112, Fascicolo 872. "Esami di licenza". Archivio Storico di Lecce corresponds to: "Archives of the Municipality of Lecce".

the same, particular attention should nevertheless be paid to the special direction that girls require, so that instruction may be entirely suited to their condition.”

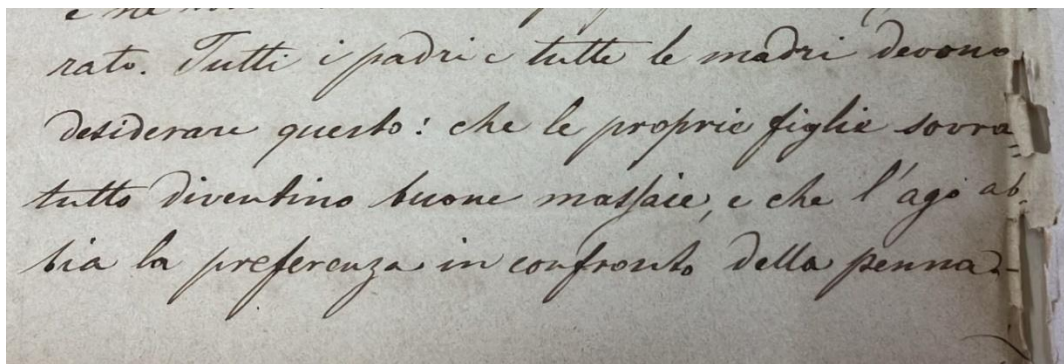
There thus emerged a decidedly paradoxical reality, in which the Italian State, despite its modern and secular inspiration, formally committed itself to lifting women out of ignorance while at the same time reserving for them a predetermined destiny.

A demonstration of the foresight and modern spirit of the newly founded Italian State can be found in a circular issued by the Delegate for Public Education in Apulia, a certain Rachelli, who, in the months immediately following the creation of the Kingdom of Italy, emphasized the State’s new commitment to education: “Italy will be neither powerful nor at peace if the people do not come to know themselves and do not exercise their rights with full awareness. Therefore, to spread Elementary Schools throughout these provinces shall be our foremost concern (...) Nor, in this pursuit of the public good, should we forget about women. Let schools for them also be opened, everywhere; and let those foolish prejudices, born of servitude, finally fall—those which condemn the angel of the family to ignorance and exclude her from the true benefits of civil life”¹⁷.

Nevertheless, a male-dominated and patriarchal policy continued to persist in Italy over time, as evidenced by a report written by De Leo, Director of the *Ginnasio* of Brindisi, to the city’s mayor, Filomeno Consiglio, dated 31 March 1878. In it, he wrote: “In transmitting to Your Most Illustrious Honour the summary tables of the semi-annual examinations, I feel it my duty to add only a few considerations, rather than dwell on a detailed and minute account of the progress of the male and female elementary schools which I have the honour to oversee (...) As for the girls’ schools (...) Although these institutions deserve praise for their literary instruction, it seems to me that they leave something to be desired with regard to needlework. Yet even this deficiency could be easily remedied if the lady teachers, at the beginning of the school year, were to meet, discuss their curricula, and divide proportionally, for each grade, the instruction to be provided, and if, at the final examinations, a rigorous evaluation were carried out. In this way, this branch of instruction would proceed in perfect order, and I am certain that progress would be assured. Every father and every mother should desire above all that their daughters become good housewives, and that the needle take precedence over the pen”¹⁸.

17. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 6, b.1, fasc. 1.

18. *Ibidem*.



Source: ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 6, b.1, fasc. 1.

Moreover, as Professor Simonelli reports in her book *“L’educazione delle donne”* (*“The Education of Women”*), an inspector from the Ministry of Public Education, writing toward the end of the nineteenth century after inspecting no fewer than 291 female institutions in central Italy — including charitable schools (*Opere pie*) — stated that: “The working-class woman understands by ‘school’ nothing other than the place where work and religious practices are taught with the greatest attention, caring little for study, which she so mistakenly considers superfluous and almost a waste of time”¹⁹. In short: “the needle had by then established itself as the privileged medium and the almost obligatory counterpart of the alphabet in all its possible forms. Elementary, teacher training, and normal schools; technical and vocational institutes; conservatories and colleges, boarding schools and seminaries, shelters and orphanages, almshouses and charitable institutions of every kind — all presented themselves in the eyes of the public as united in a <<bundle of lace, white embroidery, silk and gold needlework pressed behind glass display cases>>”²⁰.

From Servitude to Education: The School as a Laboratory of Citizenship

With the Casati Law, the Italian State launched a battle against illiteracy. The determination to combat this scourge was not merely a moral imperative but rather an authentic effort to promote the development of productive capitalism throughout the country. The South, being almost exclusively agricultural in nature, failed to grasp the importance and urgency of this transformation; consequently, economic development there progressed much more slowly than in the North.

As Massimo d’Azeglio famously declared, *“Having made Italy, we must now make the Italians.”* For this reason, the State pursued policies aimed at forming a middle

19. S. Soldani, *Il Libro e la Matassa, scuole per “Lavori Donneschi” nell’Italia da Costruire*, in S. Soldani, *L’educazione delle donne; Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell’Italia dell’Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1989, cit. p. 88.

20. Ivi, p. 110.

class, with the specific goal of creating future administrative and managerial figures for the productive sectors and the circulation of goods, relying on the newly established and innovative State school system to achieve this end²¹.

The Inspector of Public Education in Terra d'Otranto, Giambattista Macerella, wrote on 18 December 1862 words that were both new and significant for a former Bourbon subject: "The son of the people is, above all, our son. The virtues that strengthen the family must live in our schools; religious sentiments, and the ideas of national independence, liberty, order, respect for persons and for property, and all the other virtues that make a citizen worthy of living in a free country, must find their foundation and their beginning in our schools"²²; It will not go unnoticed that, for the first time, a layman had been appointed to a role which for centuries had belonged exclusively to the religious sphere.

What, then, were the conditions that the Italian Government faced in the aftermath of unification with regard to the illiteracy of its subjects? The table below summarizes the illiteracy rates in Italy in the year of unification and during the following ten years.

ILLITERATES PER 100 INHABITANTS AGED SIX YEARS AND OVER

YEARS	1861	1871
North	67,0	61,9
South	87,1	84,2
Italy	74,7	68,8

Source: SVIMEZ, *Un secolo di statistiche italiane: Nord e Sud*, Roma, in G.Natale, *La scuola in Italia dal 1859 ai decreti delegati*, 1975, p.29.

In particular, in the province of Terra d'Otranto, illiteracy affected nearly 92% of women and 85% of men²³.

As for the qualifications required of teachers, under the Bourbon Kingdom the education and instruction of children were an exclusive prerogative of the clergy, since popular education was considered part of their pastoral duties. Moreover, it goes without saying that instruction was reserved almost entirely for boys. The Kingdom of Italy, by contrast, brought a genuine wave of modernity to the educational sector, introducing a series of entirely new requirements and procedures into the stagnant political landscape of the South.

The first changes concerning the qualifications required of teachers were announced by the Prefect and President of the School Council, Murgia, who, through the posting of public notices, referred to Articles 29 and 30 of the Law-Decree of January 7, 1861, according to which: "Private elementary teachers are required to possess the same qualifications demanded of public school teachers,

21. Cf. G. Natale, *La scuola in Italia...*, pp 28-29.

22. ASBR, *ASCBR*, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 8, b.1, fasc. 3.

23. AA. VV, *Figlie, spose, madri, Testimonianze di vita quotidiana. Brindisi, 1860-1915*, Soroptimist International Club, Brindisi, 1990, cit. p. 53.

namely, the certificate of professional competence and the certificate of good moral and political conduct"²⁴; it is worth noting not only the opening of the teaching profession to the secular world, but also the requirement of a formal qualification for teaching, regardless of one's personal condition. Furthermore, it is interesting to observe that good religious conduct, once an indispensable criterion for teachers under the Bourbon regime, had now become entirely irrelevant for the new instructors. However, in the unified State, teachers were required to present a certificate of good political conduct, whereas female teachers were exempt from this obligation, since women were excluded from the right to vote—a condition that would persist throughout the duration of the monarchy²⁵.

Schools Without Walls: The Crisis of School Infrastructure in Post-Unification Southern Italy

"It is now up to the Municipality to do its part — and it is the principal part — for primary education belongs entirely to the Municipality. [...] You will say to me: *And the funds? How can we pay even the minimum — five hundred francs a year for each teacher?* And I reply: *You must find the funds yourselves.* When you are firmly convinced that education is the true guarantee of liberty and of Italy's future; when you truly desire this sacred and necessary goal, you will also find the means to achieve it. If it is impossible to impose a new municipal tax (which, in such a grave case, would nonetheless be justified), one can at least save and cut expenses from less necessary items.

The Law states that if a municipality is truly poor, the Province, and even the State, will contribute to the expenses for primary instruction; but if you rely on the funds that the Province or the State may provide, you will have popular education only very late, and very little of it. [...] You who are well-off citizens and who love your homeland — if your municipality is poor, join together, collect a few ducats each month, enough to pay at least a schoolmaster and a schoolmistress, who will educate not only the children of the poor, but your own children as well. Instead of spending money on festivals, fireworks, illuminations, and other village vanities, perform a deed more pleasing to God and more blessed by men: spend that money on education, found a school. Let one of you provide a couple of rooms, another supply some wood, and the blacksmith will make the benches on which his own children will sit; whoever can, let him give some money, or grain, or legumes — whatever he can. Every stone is useful for the building; every offering is welcome. When there is love of country, great things can indeed be achieved with small means. [...] Poor municipalities must not believe that, because they lack money, they are exempt from obligation:

24. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 10, b.1, fasc. 1.

25. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 6, b.1, fasc. 1.

their duty is all the greater, and it is a moral obligation. They must therefore strive, as best and as soon as they can, to bring to the people this blessing of schools”²⁶; This circular by the Inspector General of Studies, Luigi Settembrini, issued only a few months after Italian unification, shows how the State, in practice, placed the urgent responsibility for children’s literacy entirely on the municipalities of the Kingdom — municipalities that, especially in the South, relied on an agricultural economy for their survival.

The Casati Law, in fact, established that elementary schools were to be managed by the municipalities, thereby imposing on them considerable responsibilities and financial burdens. To give this imposition a more acceptable appearance, it was presented by the authorities as a natural consequence of the newly acquired municipal freedom. Indeed, in a circular issued by Governor Torre on October 30, 1861, addressed to all the mayors of the Province of Terra d’Otranto, he declared: “Now that the Municipality has fortunately become free and autonomous, it must, with its own means and willingly in cooperation with the wise ordinances of the government, respond to the demands of the civilization of the present age by putting popular education into effect”²⁷.

In reality, this proved to be a heavy burden for Italian municipalities, especially for those that were small and predominantly rural, as they were unable to find the necessary funds to maintain a public school. In this regard, the Historical Archive of the Municipality of Brindisi contains numerous, almost desperate letters from local administrators to higher state authorities, requesting aid and subsidies.

One such example is a letter from Engelberto Dionisi, then Mayor of Brindisi, to the Minister of Public Education, dated 9 July 1891, which clearly highlights the dire state of the municipal finances: “This Administration, always respectful of the provisions of the Higher Authority, did not oppose the new school classification based on the 1881 census (...) As a result, since it became necessary to establish additional classes due to the considerable number of pupils attending the schools, the Municipality (...) was urged to provide for them (...) The annual expenditure borne by the Municipality for primary education amounts to a total of £33,000.00, without taking into account the expenses required for the maintenance of the Kindergarten, which weighs on the budget for an annual sum of £2,500.00. These sums represent only the expenses for the teaching staff, while for the purchase of school furniture, the Municipality has spent, in just two years, the not insignificant amount of £2,000.00 (...) In the light of this situation (...) the undersigned respectfully appeals to Your Excellency to grant an annual subsidy, not only to enable regular compliance with the obligation of compulsory education — to which this Administration devotes its utmost care — but also to help cover the

26. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 12, b. 1, fasc. 1.

27. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 6, b.1, fasc. 1.

additional expenses incurred by the Municipality due to the increase in the salaries of elementary teachers”²⁸.

Southern Italy lacked adequate facilities to accommodate schoolchildren, and this did not appear to be regarded as a national problem requiring urgent attention. In fact, in the two most important public works laws enacted during the first forty years of the Kingdom of Italy — the Law of 20 March 1865 (the *Comprehensive Plan for Public Works*) and the Law of 25 June 1882 (concerning *hydraulic and road works*) — no provisions whatsoever were made for school construction.²⁹

For this category of expenditure, it was necessary to wait until the Law of 18 July 1878 to see the first government intervention. Under this measure, the State granted low-interest loans to municipalities for the construction of school buildings. However, over the following ten years, only 23 million lire were utilized, and only by the wealthier municipalities³⁰.

In order to understand whether and to what extent the State considered the construction of school buildings a matter of urgency, the following table presents the public expenditure on education — expressed in lire — for the period from 1862 to 1914, broken down by State, Municipalities, and Provinces.

State			Municipality			Province		
Expenditure on Education	Total Expenditure	% Education Expenditure as a Share of Total Expenditure	Expenditure on Education	Total Expenditure	% Education Expenditure as a Share of Total Expenditure	Expenditure on Education	Total Expenditure	% Education Expenditure as a Share of Total Expenditure
1862: 11,5	906	1,27	1863: 15,9	144,1	11,03	1866: 3	47,3	6,34
1900-01: 54,0	1552	3,48	1899: 80,1	467,8	17,12	1899: 5,8	97,1	5,97
1913-14: 152	2501	6,07	1912: 220,9	959,8	23,02	1913: 8,2	164,5	4,98

Source: G. Natale, *La Scuola in Italia...*, cit. p. 33.

From this table it is clear that State expenditure on education was decidedly limited, although it tended to increase steadily over time. It should not be forgotten that local authorities bore the most immediate costs of public education up to the early twentieth century, when there was a constant rise in State investment. For example, while in 1925 public expenditure on education accounted for 63.7% of total investments, ten years later, in 1935, the State's share of education spending had reached 74.6%³¹.

The first to suffer from the lack of funding for public educational facilities were women. In fact, the Royal Inspector for Primary Education in the Province of Terra d'Otranto wrote to the Mayor of the city of Brindisi: “With great surprise, the undersigned has learned that in this Municipality the public girls' schools have not yet reopened. If this is indeed the case, Your Most Illustrious Honour

28. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 11, b.1, fasc. 2.

29. Cf. G. Natale, *La Scuola in Italia...*, cit. pp. 31-32.

30. *Ibidem*.

31. *Ibidem*.

is kindly requested to (...) indicate the reason"³². The Mayor's reply was terse: "In response to Your Honour's note referenced in the margin, I have the honour to inform you that the public girls' primary schools in this Municipality have not yet been able to open, due to the lack of suitable premises"³³. A definitive accommodation for the girls in the former convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli would not be achieved until the end of the First World War. In the meantime, the pupils were repeatedly relocated and had to change premises several times: first to the former convent of Santa Chiara, then to Palazzo Roncella, Casa De Marzo, and finally to the former Scuole Pie.³⁴ Numerous rental contracts were drawn up for the various premises to be used as elementary schools³⁵.

The Coppino Law and Compulsory Schooling: Between Citizenship and Discipline

The Casati Law remained unchanged for nearly two decades, until the fall of the Historical Right on 18 March 1876. With the Historical Left coming to power, the process of industrialisation in the country — particularly in Northern Italy — intensified. Industrialisation required a productive and autonomous workforce, capable of reading, writing, and doing arithmetic. This led to a desire to reform the existing law on children's education, prompting the liberal Left to approve a new law on education on 15 July 1877, which took the name of the then Minister of Public Education, Michele Coppino³⁶.

There were many innovations compared to the previous law. First of all, the new measure reinforced the principle of free elementary education, extending the school cycle to five years, of which three were compulsory, and introducing in Article 4 a monetary fine for heads of families who failed to send their children to school. The law stated: "The fine shall be 50 *centesimi*, but after having been applied unsuccessfully twice, it may be increased to 3 lire, and from 3 to 6 lire, up to a maximum of 10 lire, depending on continued noncompliance."

It was the Mayor's duty to ascertain any such violation. There was no shortage of paradoxes, among which perhaps the most interesting was the creation of an assistance fund for the most diligent pupils, into which were to flow the sums collected from parents who failed to comply with their obligations. Thus, the monetary penalties effectively turned into a kind of tax on the poorest families, used

32. ASBR, *ASCB*R, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 6, b.1, fasc. 1.

33. *Ibidem*.

34. AA. VV, *Figlie, spose, madri ...*, cit. p. 53.

35. ASBR, *ASCB*R, sez. VI, cat. 5, cl. 13, b. 1, fasc. 3, 13, 16, 17, 18, 24. There are numerous private contracts between the Municipality of Brindisi and various citizens for the rental of premises to be used as elementary schools.

36. Cfr. G. Natale, *La Scuola in Italia...*, cit. pp. 43-44.

to finance the studies of the children of wealthier families, who were, of course, the most regular and diligent students.

An interesting innovation introduced by the Coppino Law was the addition of two new subjects: gymnastics and civic education. However, schools often lacked suitable facilities, and gymnastics lessons were conducted inside the classrooms, which were frequently in deplorable condition. Confirming this is an end-of-year report by a teacher, Mr Ruggiero, who, under the heading "*Educational Gymnastics*," wrote: "Instruction in this subject, made compulsory by the law of 7 July 1878, was never neglected during the school year; each teacher instructed, as best as he could, his pupils in educational gymnastics exercises between the desks, and also in other bodyweight exercises in accordance with the curriculum. However, since the school premises were too cramped and the desks unsuitable for such exercises — which in boys' schools are also intended to begin preparing young pupils for military service — the boys were taken, every Wednesday, to the parade ground [...] In the girls' schools, very little gymnastics could be done, due to the poor condition of the premises and desks, which, as Your Most Illustrious Honour knows, are in even worse condition than those in the boys' schools; and during the afternoon hours, while engaging in needlework exercises, the older girls also practised choral singing, performing short and devout poems, while the younger ones practiced mental arithmetic"³⁷.

From Mr Ruggiero's words, it is clear that the gymnastics lessons of the time had little in common with modern Physical Education. They were, in fact, military exercises taught to pupils beginning in secondary schools, as established by Law No. 4442 of 7 July 1878, Article 2: "The teaching of gymnastics in male secondary, ordinary, and teacher-training schools shall also have the aim of preparing young men for military service. The Minister of Public Education and the Minister of War shall jointly determine the exercises and successive levels of gymnastic instruction, in accordance with the age and physical development of the youths."

Even girls were to receive gymnastics lessons, but with significant differences: "In female schools of every order and grade," gymnastics "shall have an exclusively educational character and shall be regulated by special provisions."

How, then, were these "gymnastics" lessons actually conducted? This can be inferred from a letter dated 8 April 1882, in which Mr Bonavincini, a headteacher, wrote: "The pupils of the 3rd and 4th grades, as well as several from the 2nd, on Wednesdays and Fridays of each week, had, have, and shall continue to have two gymnastics lessons, each one hour long and held outside the classroom; in addition, they took part in military marches together with the students of the Secondary Schools; they were provided, like the latter, with gaiters and military caps, so as to adopt that bearing so befitting the ancient and present-day pride of the Italians"³⁸.

37. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 4, b.1, fasc. 1, annual report written by the Director of the elementary schools, teacher Ruggiero, dated 28 July 1884.

38ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 4, b.1, fasc. 3.

Many cities lacked a sufficient number of teachers to fulfil the obligation of elementary education reaffirmed by the new Coppino Law. Indeed, in a circular of the Provincial School Council, dated 7 October 1878, several details are reported, including the number of missing teachers for each municipality in the former Province of Terra d'Otranto: "The Law of 15 July 1877 on compulsory education was immediately implemented in 76 of the 130 municipalities of the Province during the school year 1877–78. These 76 municipalities, since October 1877, have already met the conditions required by Article 9 regarding the number of elementary teachers necessary for implementation. Of the remaining 54, some took steps to appoint new teachers from the very first months of the aforementioned school year, and the government promptly assisted them with special subsidies; others made new teacher appointments during the course of the year, effective from the beginning of the upcoming school year; finally, there are about 25 municipalities which, despite repeated solicitations from the school office, have not yet made any new appointments. At present, the municipalities still lacking the required number of elementary teachers for the enforcement of compulsory education are only 34, and they are listed below, together with the number of teachers missing in each municipality to reach the total required by law, as recorded in the new classification":³⁹

1. Brindisi	4	10. Veglie	2	19. Specchia	2	28. Grottaglie	2
2. Carovigno	1	11. Alezio	1	20. Calimera	1	29. Laterza	1
3. Ceglie	4	12. Casarano	1	21. Campi	1	30. Martina	9
4. Erchie	1	13. Nardò	2	22. Corigliano	1	31. Massafra	3
5. Francavilla	6	14. Parabita	1	23. Leverano	1	32. Pulsano	1
6. Mesagne	3	15. Poggiardo	1	24. S. Cesareo	1	33. Sava	1
7. Ostuni	8	16. Presicce	1	25. Surbo	1	34. Taranto	5
8. Salice	1	17. Racale	1	26. Uggiano	1		
9. Torre S. Susanna	1	18. Ruffano	1	27. Fragagnano	1		

In fact, a circular issued a year earlier had already classified the various municipalities of the district according to the number of schools to be opened in proportion to their population, the number of teachers appointed in male and female schools, and those still to be appointed. The 1878 circular added: "In view of these factual data, the Provincial School Council, in its session of 18 September, in accordance with the provisions contained in Articles 5 and 6 of the Regulation of 19 October 1877, resolved to invite the 34 municipalities concerned to take the necessary measures so that, by the year 1879, all lower-grade schools mandated by the aforementioned Law of 15 July 1877 would be established, so that the same law might be considered implemented in all the municipalities of the Province no later than the beginning of the 1879–80 school year"⁴⁰.

39. ASBR, ASCBR, sez. VI, cat. 9, cl. 2, b.1, fasc. 1.

40. *Ibidem*.

This is yet another clear demonstration of how the State was completely indifferent to the severe financial difficulties faced by the municipal administrations of Southern Italy and imposed on them burdens they were unable to meet.

Conclusion

The analysis of education in post-unification Southern Italy reveals how the project of constructing the Italian nation was grounded in a twofold dimension: a political one, aimed at consolidating the authority of the new State, and a cultural one, directed toward shaping citizens who were obedient, morally disciplined, and conscious of their role within the social order. In this process, education became a crucial instrument for legitimising central power, entrusted with the task of “making Italians” through the dissemination of a common language, ethic, and national imagination.

However, the path toward literacy and modernisation proved uneven and contradictory. The implementation of the Casati and Coppino Laws, though asserting the principles of free and compulsory education, placed a heavy burden on Southern municipalities, which lacked the necessary resources. The result was a fragile school system — often devoid of adequate buildings, qualified teachers, and teaching materials. The South thus remained on the margins of Italy’s civic and cultural formation, marked by extremely high rates of illiteracy and by a continuing economic and political dependency.

From a gender perspective, female education strikingly exemplified the gap between emancipatory ideals and normative reality. The school for girls, conceived as a place of domestic virtue and Christian morality within a secular State, in fact became the main mechanism through which liberal Italy reproduced patriarchal hierarchies, turning the female figure into a symbol of purity and submission. The needle and the pen—a recurring metaphor of female education—embodied the tension between culture and labour, between literacy and subordination, between the right to know and the duty to serve.

To revisit that period today is to recognise that the construction of Italian citizenship also passed through the management of knowledge and the body, of authority and dependence. The “*lessons in nationhood*” taught in the classrooms of the South were both lessons in identity and exclusion, revealing the complexity of an Italy which, even as it sought unity, continued to reproduce its own inequalities.

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