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AWAKENING THE CONSCIENCE OF THE OPPRESSED THROUGH EDUCATION IN THE WRITINGS AND ACTIVITY OF LORENZO MILANI (1923–1967)

Budzenie świadomości uciśnionych poprzez edukację w pismach i działalności Lorenzo Milaniego (1923–1967)

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to outline the social thought and educational work of the Italian teacher and educator Don Lorenzo Milani (1923–1967). His ideas and activities anticipated the trends of the emancipatory and critical pedagogy of Freire and Bourdieu.

The authors of the article use the historical method, analysing the writings of Milani, whose critical edition was published in 2017. Previous researchers have not had the opportunity to know the entire production of this pedagogue and priest known in Italy and to reconstruct his ideas in their historical and biographical context.

The authors established that Milani, before and independently of Paolo Freire, perceived the division of society into oppressors and oppressed. The liberation of the latter had to take place through education, awakening their subjectivity and awareness of their social situation. The tool for this was to provide them with access to speech (learning to read, write, and discuss), thanks to which they would have the opportunity to critically reflect on the surrounding reality.

The article presents Milani's biography, thus exposing his social analysis and his innovative educational activities undertaken at the schools he founded: in Calenzano and Barbiana. In particular, Barbiana was a full-time school, open 365 days a year, designed to bridge the cultural gap between its poor students and the children of the rich. In Barbiana students read the newspaper together, met specialists in various fields of knowledge, and dedicated themselves to the collective writing of texts. Milani spent all his time with his pupils, reading, studying, and discussing with them.

Milani's emancipatory ideas and actions were not a remedy for Italy's inequalities at the time, and they cannot be so in the contemporary globalised world, where social ties are fragmenting and economic

differences are increasing. However, it is worth mentioning the figure of the Italian educator as an example of a commitment to disadvantaged social groups. Today these include employees exploited by their employers, groups marginalised from social life due to age, race, gender, and political beliefs, powerless people, who live in a culture of silence, and finally, people who are subjected to cultural imperialism. If, thanks to education, today's oppressed learn – as Lorenzo Milani wanted – critical and creative thinking, effective communication, and satisfying relationships, their destiny and level of participation in social life will improve.

Keywords: Lorenzo Milani, social discrimination, oppression, emancipatory pedagogy, critical pedagogy.

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie myśli społecznej i działalności edukacyjnej włoskiego nauczyciela i pedagoga Don Lorenzo Milaniego (1923–1967). Jego idee i działania wyprzedziły nurty pedagogiki emancypacyjnej i krytycznej Paolo Freirego i Pierre'a Bourdieu.

Autorzy artykułu, posługując się metodą historyczną, analizują pisma Milaniego, których krytyczne wydanie ukazało się w 2017 roku. Wcześniejsi badacze nie mieli okazji zapoznać się z całością twórczości tego znanego we Włoszech pedagoga i księdza oraz zrekonstruowania jej kontekstu historycznego i biograficznego.

Autorzy artykułu zauważyli, że Milani – wcześniej niż Paolo Freire i niezależnie od niego – dostrzegał podział społeczeństwa na ciemiężycieli i uciśnionych. Wyzwolenie tych drugich miało się dokonać poprzez edukację, rozbudzanie w nich podmiotowości i świadomości własnej sytuacji społecznej. Narzędziem do tego miało być zapewnienie im dostępu do języka (nauka czytania, pisania i dyskutowania), dzięki któremu mogliby krytycznie reflektować nad otaczającą ich rzeczywistością.

W artykule przedstawiono biografię Milaniego, z akcentem na jego analizy społeczne i nowatorskie działania edukacyjne w założonych przez niego szkołach w Calenzano i Barbiana. Interesująca jest zwłaszcza ta druga jako szkoła całodzienna, otwarta przez 365 dni w roku, zaprojektowana z myślą o wypełnieniu luki kulturowej między uczniami z rodzin biednych i bogatych. W Barbiana uczniowie czytali wspólnie gazety, spotykali się ze specjalistami z różnych dziedzin i praktykowali wspólne pisanie tekstów. Milani spędzał z nimi całe dnie, czytając, ucząc się wraz z nimi i dyskutując.

Emancypacyjne idee i działania Milaniego były pomyślane jako remedium na nierówności społeczne ówczesnych Włoch, dlatego nie mogą być kopiowane we współczesnym zglobalizowanym świecie, w którym następuje coraz większy rozpad więzi społecznych i pogłębiają się różnice ekonomiczne. Postać włoskiego pedagoga zasługuje jednak na przywołanie jako przykład zaangażowania na rzecz defaworyzowanych grup społecznych. Współcześni uciśnieni – to pracownicy wyzyskiwani przez pracodawców, grupy społeczne marginalizowane ze względu na wiek, rasę, płeć, przekonania polityczne, osoby pozbawione prawa głosu, ofiary kulturowych imperializmów. Jeśli oni wszyscy nauczą się dzięki odpowiedniej edukacji – jak chciał tego Lorenzo Milani – krytycznego i twórczego myślenia, skutecznej komunikacji i nawiązywania satysfakcjonujących relacji społecznych, to poprawi się ich sytuacja i poziom uczestnictwa w życiu społecznym.

Słowa kluczowe: Lorenzo Milani, dyskryminacja, opresja społeczna, pedagogika emancypacyjna, pedagogika krytyczna.

Introduction

May 2023 saw the passing of one hundred years since the birth of Lorenzo Milani, a well-known Italian educator who dedicated his entire life to educating the oppressed. He is the forerunner of critical pedagogy attentive to theory and its implementation in the field, anticipating both Paulo Freire (Cristofanelli, 2017; Mayo, 2011) and Pierre Bourdieu. Milani founded two schools aimed solely at the children of peasants and

workers to give them an education that could free them from the oppressive social system in which they lived. Don Milani was undoubtedly a fascinating figure who prompted us to delve deeper into his thinking to seek new answers to society's current problems in his social discourse.

The literature on Lorenzo Milani is very extensive (mainly in Italian), though it should be noted that most of the published texts are of a popular rather than a scientific nature. The best contributions were presented at conferences organised to study the work and thoughts of this distinguished Italian educator. Four interesting conferences were held in the 1980s (in Florence in April 1980, in Palermo in May 1982, in Milan in March 1983, and in Calenzano in December of 1988). Even if the first three dealt above all with Milani's relationship with the religious context of his time (similarly like the conference held in 2007 in Macerata), special attention deserves the intervention of Antonio Michelin Salomon in Palermo, who was among the first to grasp the importance of Milan's analysis of society and the role of the school in maintaining social inequality (Michelin Salomon, 1983). The same Michelin Salomon (2011), as well as Passaseo (2011), during the study day held at the University of Messina on May 10, 2011, related Milani's thought to the importance of pedagogy in today's Italian school.

In the area of English, the articles of Peter Mayo are significant (for example: 2015) – perceives Lorenzo Milani as an important representative of the critical approach to education. He compares Milani with Paolo Freire, showing both the relevance of the two of them and the indications they provide for a critically and sociologically engaged pedagogy, aimed at promoting social justice. In 2014, Peter Mayo together with Federico Batini and Alessio Surian published an important book, titled 'Lorenzo Milani, the School of Barbiana and the Struggle for Social Justice', in which they show Milani's contribution to critical pedagogy and to better critical education. They underline that his priority was to promote autonomy and critical thinking. They also pay attention to the convergences between Milani's writings and those of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu concerning the school and bourgeois 'cultural capital'.

The figure of Don Milani is also attracting interest in Poland, where Anna Agnieszka Carleo paid attention to the emancipatory nature of his educational activity (2013a) and noted that according to Don Milani, all people who need liberation from ignorance should be educated, regardless of their age (2013b). The result will be their independence, the ability to cope with the surrounding reality, the fight for their rights, and active participation in the development of culture. In 2015, Nguyễn Duy Khang, who wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Gdansk, portrayed the characteristics of a good teacher through his 'Letter to a Teacher' – the work of Lorenzo Milani and the eight boys of 'Barbiana' – from an Asian perspective. In 2022, Tom-

maso Lo Monte published an article (to which reference is made for further bibliography) in which he proposed to solve some of the problems of today's Italian schools with the help of Milani's ideas, in particular, he highlighted the responsibility of teachers, unique potential agents of change in the school status quo.

This article, compared to the previous ones, uses the recent critical edition of Milani's works as a source (Milani, 2017a, 2017b) and differs from previous studies in that it intends above all to highlight the social analysis within Milani's thought, leaving out other topics such as the primacy of conscience and the analysis of the Italian school system. The latter topics are undoubtedly important, but they speak more to the Italian reality than to the international one. In particular, the centenary of Milani's birth is a precious opportunity that prompts us to look in his work for some possible answers to today's social problems, given that his figure is well known in Italian academic circles, even if often in a superficial and misleading way.

In our research, we have used the biographical method in its specific version, which is the method of personal documents. These documents were mainly direct (primary) sources, providing immediate data on Milani. We have analysed all of his writings, especially the letters that have only been made available in a critical edition since 2017 (one-third of which are unpublished) (Milani, 2017). We have also used indirect sources, i.e., the testimonies of people who knew Milani and collaborated with him (Pecorini, 2011; Corradi, 2012; Gesualdi, 2016). Furthermore, the text by Mario Lancisi (Lancisi, 2017) was invaluable for understanding the educational institutions organised by Don Milani in Calenzano and Barbiana. In analysing the content of personal documents, we have referred to the subjective perspective of their author, making his point of view the basis for constructing theoretical generalisations. We paid attention to the words used by Milani, sentences, and longer fragments of statements to recognise the characteristics of the sender of the message, as well as what he wants to communicate, what he communicates, for what purpose, and with what effect (Dymarczyk, 2011). In presenting Milani's biography we have limited ourselves to the salient moments of his life, also marked by his educational activity.

In this article, after a brief biography of Milani which highlights his social commitment, we will present his analysis of society structured according to a pyramid scheme where Milani himself places oppressed and oppressors. In the second part, we will address the decisive role of education in freeing the oppressed. Finally, we will conclude by asking ourselves some questions regarding the topicality of Milanese social thought.

Lorenzo Milani, a life dedicated to the oppressed

It is important to underline that Milani did not receive a university education; he is a *sui generis* sociologist and pedagogist. His theory is based above all on his own experience as a priest, teacher, and educator; therefore, it is necessary to present some aspects of his life before examining his thoughts to better understand his analysis of society and his proposals in the pedagogical field.

Lorenzo Milani comes from a cultured, rich, and agnostic family of the bourgeoisie, a world from which he distanced himself at the age of twenty when he converted to Catholicism and chose to live as a priest (Gesualdi 2016, p. 33, 234–235; Milani 2017b, p. 929–930). He has never frequented ecclesiastical groups, parishes, or circles of the Catholic tradition in general, so he interprets the evangelical message literally: we must first of all take care of the poor. He soon understood that the primary need of the poor is to master the Italian language, that allows them to understand that God is on their side. Thus, he commits himself throughout his life to educating the poorest children and young people, i.e., those from peasant and working-class families: the oppressed he will deal with in his writings.

His first assignment, leaving out a very brief period in Montespertoli, was that of chaplain of the church of San Donato in Calenzano, a small town near Florence, where he remained from 1947 until 1954 (Milani 2017b, p. 102, 104–106, 322–323; Pecorini, 2011, p. 400). In Calenzano, Milani learned about the daily life of the workers and peasants, the real conditions in which they live, the constant difficulties, and the stubborn resignation; collects detailed information on the living conditions of parishioners, processes statistics, analyses data, denounces social inequalities and proposes its solution. His research, analyses, and proposals were published years later (1958) under the title *Esperienze Pastorali* (Milani, 2017a, p. 5–682), his first book and in some respects the only one (the next was published under the imprint of the School of Barbiana).

His working method is very simple. First of all, he collects information on the people and cultural contexts in which he works, identifies the needs, and then acts by building a suitable pedagogical path *hic et nunc*, so that theory and practice become a hendiadys whose elements are interdependent. Milani therefore dedicated his short life to educating the poor. It is an education intended as a tool for liberation from the oppressive system in which they live without realizing it. This idea might seem like an abstract utopia, but it is not, because Milani himself carried out his idea by establishing the school of Calenzano (and later also that of Barbiana), a working-class village near Florence where he organized an evening Folk School popular with the area's young workers (Milani, 2017b, p. 177).

The most interesting aspect of the Calenzano evening school were the weekly meetings with experts in various fields, an activity that the students continued even

after Milani's departure. The young workers thus gathered to learn to think, to analyze the society in which they live, and to learn the tools with which to fight for social justice. And in Milani's school, the main instrument of struggle is always the word (*la parola*), because critical thinking derives from the possession of the 'word' (*la parola*, of course, refers to language as the skill to communicate adequately and effectively). Of course, he does not just teach. When he sees that housing is needed, he organizes a self-managed cooperative to build houses to give them to the poorest people (Milani, 2017b, p. 167–168).

After seven years of work in Calenzano, Milani is transferred, indeed exiled, to St. Andrew's Church in Barbiana, a village of a few houses scattered among the mountains, where there is neither electricity nor running water. Even knowing that it is an ecclesial punishment for his commitment to the poor, Milani faces the new challenge with a serene heart; the day after his arrival he immediately decides that he will spend the rest of his life there in the mountains, so he buys himself a place in the cemetery next to the church (Milani, 2017a, p. CIV).

In Barbiana, he finds even poorer and more marginalized people than the people of Calenzano: the mountain farmers. He gets to know them, as he has already done with the workers of Calenzano, thus continuing his commitment to the poor. However, different people and contexts require different actions. If in Calenzano the evening school was the answer to the needs of the local youth, in Barbiana the same institution only works for a few weeks. The reality of Barbiana is profoundly different from Calenzano, it is not even a village, it is rather a church lost in the mountains, the only meeting place for peasant families. There are no 'workers' here; the peasants work hard from dawn to dusk and the only hope for the future is to emigrate to the city, or the plains. The young peasants go to bed early in the evening, they certainly cannot gather in an evening folk school like the one in Calenzano. Therefore, Milani created a school for all the local children and teenagers in Barbiana. They are the offspring of peasants that the state school has rejected, considering them unworthy of receiving an adequate education. At first, Milani starts with six children, but the number of students grows over the years. Known as the Scuola di Barbiana, it runs ten to twelve hours a day, every day of the year including Sundays (Milani, 2017b, p. 327–328, 765–766).

Milani realizes that what the peasants lack is their inability to read and write, exactly that which the young workers of Calenzano lacked. Milani's social analysis is, therefore, the same; what changes is its implementation in the field. Here in Barbiana the small farmers study from morning to night, they take their exams at the end of the year at a public school to obtain a qualification recognized by the state (Milani, 2017b, p. 507, 508, 510, 512–513). But the method is certainly not that of the Italian state school. In Barbiana there are no evaluations, everyone studies together and the goal is to learn first of all the use of the written and spoken language and thus develop critical thinking. The study is cooperative, those who know more teach the

others, and everyone is a master and student. This method closely resembles Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1965): the role of peers, as well as that of the older students compared to the younger ones, allows the children of the Barbiana school to grow together by helping each other in overcoming difficulties.

Milani and his students learn the Italian language by reading the newspaper together every day, discovering new words that the little mountain inhabitants do not know, dwelling on etymologies, playing with grammar, and listening to foreign language courses on records. The important thing is not only how they study, but also what they deal with. The true pedagogy of the Barbiana School is summarized by Milani with the motto 'I Care', written in large letters in English on the wall of the poor room in which they spend their days; it's the exact opposite of the fascist motto: 'I could not care less' (Milani, 2017a, p. 942).

Milani teaches kids that they must be interested in the world around them and to understand it they must know the language so that they can discuss on an equal footing with the bourgeoisie. In 'Letter to a Teacher', one of his students wrote: 'I learned that the problem of others is the same as mine. To get out of it all together is the policy. To get out of it alone is avarice' (Milani, 2017a, p. 693).

At the school of Barbiana, you do not study for yourself, but for others. You do not tackle a new topic if everyone has not understood the previous subject. No one is asked questions about the lessons, there are no grades, there are no fails. This method might seem easy, the selfishness of every student is a sneaky temptation, but in reality, in fact, during the exam period the older kids would like to have more time to study instead of following the younger ones, or those in difficulty, but they cannot do it because in Barbiana you do not study for grades or exams, you study to help others (Milani, 2017a, p. 693).

In the Barbiana school, there are also many 'cultural artifacts'. Their use is closely linked to Vygotsky's ZPD. These artifacts are often books or records, but also include instruments built by the children themselves, such as an astrolabe to study the position of celestial bodies, or sets constructed to present theatrical plays.

Milani will always continue his commitment to give adequate education to the poor, despite the long illness that will accompany him until his death on June 26, 1967. He is buried in the Barbiana cemetery.

> As it is written on the tomb, he remained Prior of Barbiana: 'Father Lorenzo Milani born on 23/5/1923 died on 26/6/1967 PRIOR OF BARBIANA SINCE 1954'. As an act of love, we have made him remain, Prior to nothing, in Barbiana forever. That nothing that he made flourish and bear fruit, taking care of others. And this is the real secret of Barbiana. (Gesualdi, 2016, p. 238)

Main ideas of Don Milani's social thought: the social pyramid, the oppressors and the oppressed

Notwithstanding its brevity, from Milani's biography we understand how well he knows the life and problems of peasant and working-class families, having spent his entire adult life amongst them. His social analysis starts from the 'bottom', from the real life of the poor, to then arrive at a general description valid for the whole (of Italian) society.

On this subject, between 1963 and 1964, together with his students, Milani wrote an unsent letter (recently published for the first time in the critical edition: Milani, 2017b, p. 995–1001) to explain the term 'bourgeois' to a class of peers they had met months before. In the letter emerges a picture of Italian society made up of a pyramid at the top of which are the oppressors, i.e., the bourgeoisie who have taken the place previously held by the nobles, 'Their power is based on the wealth of money and education. That is, they have the money and they also know how to spend it in the best way to maintain their power' (Milani, 2017b, p. 997).

Instead, the poor are the oppressed who in theory should fight against this system of exploitation, but in reality, find themselves immersed in the bourgeois social system and therefore try to climb to the top fighting amongst themselves instead of against the oppressors:

> Imagine society as a pyramid. The base is largely made up of the illiterate. Those who are oppressed by all and oppress no one. The top is made by those very rich few who hold the reins. They oppress everyone and are oppressed by no one. All the others, i.e., the great majority, are each at the same time oppressed and oppressors. A worker who becomes a team leader remains oppressed by the foreman even if he has become an oppressor of the other workers and so on. (Milani, 2017b, p. 1000)

The bourgeoisie control the industries and therefore the country's economy, but they also control the oppressed:

> This organization is so rich that it can, for example, finance certain political parties, bribe deputies, or trade unionists [...]. But most of its effort is to negatively influence the education of the poor so that they are unable to use their two great achievements: the vote and the strike. (Milani, 2017b, p. 997)

The bourgeois control the media so they can manipulate the news and 'teach people to be indifferent to political and trade union issues [...] directing people's attention to artificial problems that have nothing to do with politics, such as the homeland or the defense of the country's borders' (Milani, 2017b, p. 997–998).

To control the oppressed, the bourgeois also uses 'fashions' and 'entertainment' that distance the poor from studying and from the very idea of education. These 'fads' are above all football and television. In his latest book, 'Letter to a Teacher', referring to Gianni (a name that is synonymous with the poor) Milani writes:

> In the village, all fashions weigh on him except the good ones. Those who do not accept them isolate themselves. It would take courage that he cannot have, so young, uneducated, and not helped by anyone. Nor from his father who falls for it too. Nor from the parish priest who sells games at the ACLI [Christian Associations of Italian Workers] bar. Nor by the Communists who sell games at the People's House. They compete to see who drags him lower. [...] They hid from him that 12–15 years is the right age to learn how to use the language effectively. The years 15–21 are best used in trade unions and parties. (Milani, 2017b, p. 736–737)

If these tools are not enough to distance the oppressed from the union and politics, in this case, the mirage of consumerist well-being intervenes which deceives the poor (Milani 2017b, 998), 'consumerism and fashion will create never-ending needs and that they will destroy, in human beings, any ideal, or religious sentiment' (Batini, Mayo, Surian, 2014, p. 61).

If the oppressors are at the top of the social pyramid, the rest of society is made up of the oppressed. But the difference between bourgeois oppressors and oppressed peasants/workers is not given only by the wealth possessed or by the power that this wealth generates:

> The poverty of the poor is not measured by bread, house, or heat. It is measured by the degree of culture and … on the social function. […] The distinction into social classes cannot therefore be made on the taxable land registry, but on cultural values (Milani, 2017a p. 234).

In an article (partially published in 1956 and now available in its entirety in the critical edition: Milani, 2017a, p. 1007–1014) Milani explains that this difference in 'education' is not due to the simple possession of notions: the oppressed have different knowledge, not worse, than those of the oppressors. The latter 'know the dinosaur and the puma, but they cannot distinguish a male rabbit from a female' (Milani, 2017a, p. 1009). Furthermore, the bourgeois know how to use the faucet and which direction to turn; they are used to recognizing the colours of traffic lights, but the farmers know the life of the woods, the plants, and the animals (Milani, 2017a, p. 1010). There is therefore no quantitative difference between the culture of the oppressed and that of the oppressors, yet the oppressor always manages to dialectically defeat the oppressed and the latter always finds himself defeated in the face of the problems that bourgeois society places before him (Milani, 2017a, p. 1010–1011).

It would seem that an ontological hierarchy of knowledge could exist, but Milani clearly states that this

> hierarchy does not exist. Knowledge is always noble [...]. I am therefore sure that the difference [...] is not in the quantity or quality of the treasure locked up inside the mind and heart, but in something that is on the threshold between inside and outside, rather it is the threshold itself: the language (Milani, 2017a, p. 1011)

or rather

> The mastering the language. The goal is to accurately understand the words spoken by other people to grasp their deepest meaning and precise boundaries, and to use spoken language proficiently to express effortlessly and without betraying the infinite riches that the mind contains (Milani, 2017a, p. 1011).

The bourgeoisie speaks to each other as equals, it does not matter whether they are lawyers, doctors, or engineers, they will always be able to discuss non-specialist topics because they possess the language tool, because they dominate the world, because they have a store of homogeneous knowledge from which the oppressed are excluded (Milani, 2017a, p. 1012).

Education as a means to awaken the oppressed

According to Milani, therefore, society is divided into oppressed and oppressors, and the former are unable to realize the oppressive system because they are unable to develop a critical reflection that allows them to change the social rules imposed by the bourgeoisie. This is an analysis that recalls what Paulo Freire would write years later (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1976), as Peter Mayo has already underlined (Mayo, 2011).

The only tool to undermine this oppressive system, or rather to help the oppressed free themselves, is the power of education – an education that enables the oppressed to achieve proficiency in language, understood as a means to comprehend the reality that surrounds them and thus critically engage with it. The oppressed contain within themselves treasures that they cannot express.

Thanks to a school dedicated to them, Milani manages to teach his students that the society in which they live is not immutable, but is made up of individuals who can change the rules and laws if they are unjust. We must therefore respect the rules and laws when they are right, 'that is, when they are the strength of the weak' (Milani, 2017a, p. 944). On the other hand, it is the duty of the oppressed to fight against unjust laws 'that is, when they sanction the abuse of power by the strong' (Milani, 2017a, p. 944); as Paolo Landi, one of his students from Barbiana, recently recalled, this will be one of the most precious tools that Milani left to his students (Landi, 2020).

Conclusions

The social categories identified by Milani more than fifty years ago no longer exist today, or at least they do not exist as in the past. Today it would be anachronistic to talk about 'proletarians', Milani himself rarely uses this term in his writings (only a couple of times during a meeting with some educational directors (Milani, 2017a, p. 1159–1182). Peasants and workers still exist, what they lack is a class identity like the one they had during the last century.

However, the oppressed continue to exist, even if it is difficult to identify them in a single social class. Today these include employees exploited by their employers,

groups marginalized from social life due to age, race, gender, and political beliefs, powerless people, who live in a culture of silence, and finally, people who are subjected to cultural imperialism. There is also the oppressive system described by Milani, a system from which today's oppressed do not even have the possibility of emancipating themselves because they do not have a model of social class to propose as an alternative to the financial-capitalist domination of the upper classes. In its continuous metamorphosis, the upper class has maintained control of society by changing the economic instruments that allow it to exercise supremacy over those who do not belong to the narrow elite of the richest.

Despite this gloomy picture, once again Milani can give us a perspective so as not to lose hope for a better future, a hope that unfortunately now seems to have faded in Italy. The solution, which is not easy, is always to give education to everyone, an education understood in the Milanese way as the tool for critically inserting oneself into society. A critical participation that allows the oppressed, coming from any social category, to propose a fairer model of society based not on competition as an end in itself, but on improving the quality of life for everyone, because 'human rights must apply to every human being, otherwise they must be called privileges' (Gino Strada). Nowadays, when, thanks to the development of modern technologies, knowledge is available everywhere, at any time of day or night, and provided by competent teachers who populate the Internet, the traditional school is losing more and more importance. Despite this, it remains an important learning and socializing place for millions of children and young people. If the rulers of the Western world want the development of a society of dialogue, mutual respect, and trust, then they should make every effort to ensure that the traditional school teaches – as Don Milani wanted – critical and creative thinking, as well as effective communication and effective interactions.

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