'Native Europeans' and European Memories.
The building of a European consciousness among young people.[1]

Beatrice Benocci, Dario Verderame

1. Introduction

Every society owes its cohesion to a shared memory, to a coherent and peaceful narrative of itself, in which crises and conflicts could find their place and where the past legitimizes the present and future projects (Turnaturi 2005: 50). This is the collective memory that moves the community of individuals of nation states. Even though it is not a nation state, since its constitution Europe Union (EU) has sought to promote a European identity and a shared European memory, through a process of transnationalization of ideas and values, to be placed at the basis of the European society. It is interesting to remember that in the past there has been no lack of processes of cultural transnationalization. As some studies recall, the participation of German soldiers and European volunteers in the Italian events of the Risorgimento had given the Italian armies a transnational trait, transforming them into instruments for the circulation of common and shared values (Goehde 2009; Sarlin 2009; Ignace 2009). In the same way, the Italian soldiers who fled in Latin America had contributed to the diffusion of those revolutionary ideas among the local populations. More recently, the two world wars have witnessed the spread of the idea of Europe as the United States of Europe, among soldiers and members of the Resistance. Here the process of transnationalization of ideas, generated and strengthened by the tragedy of the war, transformed a hitherto elitist proposal into a common objective of the peoples of Europe, marking the birth of the first Europeanist movement and the convening of the Hague Conference in 1949.

In the cases mentioned, the sharing of values was reinforced by the condition of armed conflict. It is therefore interesting today to understand whether, on the contrary, in a situation of lasting peace like the one experienced in Europe in the last seventy years, virtuous processes of transnationalization of European founding values have been created and whether, with them, a shared and widely accepted European memory has taken root. Although there is a rich debate on the transnationalization of memory, also from an interdisciplinary point of view (e.g. Eder and Spohn 2005; Passerini 2007; Jarausch and Lindenberger 2007; Mälksoo 2009), there is still little

Beatrice Benocci, University of Salerno, benocci@unisa.it
Dario Verderame, University of Salerno, dverderame@unisa.it

[1] This work is the result of a collaboration between the authors, both in the research and observation phase and in the drafting of the text. Specifically, paragraph 4 (*Inclusiveness of memory, dominant symbols and European common memories*) is to be attributed to both authors; Beatrice Benocci is the author of paragraphs 1 and 5 (*Introduction; Concluding remarks*), Dario Verderame is the author of paragraphs 2 and 3 (*Europe, memory and youth; Method*).

empirical evidence on the dynamics of transnationalization of memory 'from below'[2] – an even more evident lack in relation to young people as a reference category. Our essay aims to help fill this gap.

The generation that is the subject of our research can be defined as "native Europeans", since these individuals were born at the turn of 2004, when the EU assumed its current composition and welcomed almost all European states in the sense of "cradle Europe" that the German Social Democrat Willy Brandt had given it. This generation was born in times of peace and grew up surrounded by parents and grandparents who first and directly experienced the benefits of building the European community. The years of formation of these individuals coincide with the effort made by the EU to create a feeling of belonging to the Union, to strengthen the status of European citizen and, finally, to establish a "place" of European memories, in the complex variants indicated by Sullam (2019). But this is also the generation living in the global village, which has felt the consequences of the so-called Great Financial Crisis, which experienced the most important crisis of the EU project in the aftermath of the rejection of the Treaty establishing a European Constitution. What kind of memory and identity do these young Europeans express? National and European, exclusively national or, on the contrary, are these young people already projected into a globalized, we would say cosmopolitan dimension?

Based on qualitative data, our study aims to investigate an oft-overlooked issue, that is the construction from below of European memories, with specific reference to young people. Our research involved young Italian students, aged between 16 and 19, from the province of Salerno (South Italy). The essay is structured as follows: after explaining the theoretical framework and our research questions, we will present the methods used and the results achieved. Our results show that, although there is more than one obstacle to the development of a European memory, both transnational practices and school education seem to help the rooting of a European memory among young people as the foundation of a possible and future European identity.

2. Europe, memory and youth

The task of analyzing the relationship between (collective) memory and young people, in relation to Europe, appears to be full of difficulties on both a theoretical and an empirical level. With respect to the multiple dimensions involved, our research focuses on three specific areas of interest in relation to the young people interviewed: a) the dialectic between inclusiveness and exclusiveness of memory, and the circumstances that make it problematic; b) the possibility of recognizing oneself in "dominant symbols" that embody a transnational European identity in formation; c) the sedimentation of traces of "European common memories" linked to transnational experiences or messages conveyed by the media.

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[2] Studies on the transnationalization of memory at European level have focused mainly on comparing national cases (e.g. Kraenzle and Mayr 2017) or on examining politics of remembrance 'from above' (e.g. Sierp 2014).

First of all, why would Europe need a "collective memory"? Whatever the visual angle or disciplinary perspective from which it is investigated, memory appears to be intrinsically linked to the identity of an individual or collective actor to whom it provides temporal continuity and symbolic substance. Precisely because of this link, memory has represented the ground on which, since the 1980s, the EU institutions have promoted a "politics of remembrance" in an attempt to establish and cultivate the project of a European identity shared among its citizens, according to a strategy of legitimacy programmed from above (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Calligaro 2015). Further, a normative/ideal tension has animated the efforts of many authoritative scholars who, from different perspectives, have identified in cultural, historical and political memories the specific features of a Europe "united in diversity" of national cultures (e.g. Morin 1987; Namer 1993). Moreover, pragmatic or, *stricto sensu*, sociological motivations linked to the same process of European integration push towards the need to elaborate a continental transnational memory. According to Klaus Eder, Europe needs a collective identity more than any other society, as more than any other society is characterized by 'absence' (Eder 2005). Collective identities, he maintains, are necessary when the Other is absent in the terms used by Anderson (1983). Europe is a society whose structure is characterized by interruptions in social relations much more numerous than in any other type of society (Eder 2005: 204-205). Hence the need to build "imagined ties" that give shape to a European collective identity. However, according to Eder, this alone is not enough. Although there is a logical possibility that a collective identity will form without a shared memory, in the case of Europe this would lead to an unsustainable paradox. Europeans – he notes – are experiencing increasing levels of connection through the single market. Because of the latter, they are "obliged" to ask themselves questions about the identity of the people in front of them and therefore to "communicate their past" (*Ib.*: 218).

Therefore, given the ideal/strategic/practical need for a European collective memory, the difficulty we encounter concerns the usefulness of this concept for heuristic purposes. Its semantic scope, as thematized by Maurice Halbwachs (1924/1992; 1950/1980), who was the first to identify its characters, has as its essential reference a social group in its specificity, homogeneous from a cultural and symbolic point of view, and which bases its temporal continuity on the sharing of a collective memory. Europe can hardly be represented as an aggregate of this kind, at least if we do not want to adopt essentialist constructions (Delanty 1998: 63-64). The identity of Europeans – regardless of how we want to define it: fluid, weak, and so on – has as its defining feature the plurality of belonging and therefore of local memories. "Every collective memory", Halbwachs argued in *La mémoire collective* (1950/1980: 84), "requires the support of a group delimited in space and time". In this way, Halbwachs would have made an unwarranted overlap between "the social" and "the national" (Wieviorka 2001: 172).

One way out of this *impasse* is to rethink the memory of a society as a *public memory,* as suggested by Jedlowski (2005; 2007). In this perspective, while collective memories are typical of *specific groups*, connoted by some identity link, the memory

of a national or supranational society takes on the configuration of a symbolic and communicative *public space*. The concept of a European memory, then, takes on relevance and specificity only if it is thought of as *public memory,* that is, as publicly relevant representations of the past circulating in the *European public sphere*, understood (*à la* Habermas) as a place of comparison and dialogical negotiation between the contents of the collective memories that inhabit the continent. Although public memory favours "mutual recognition and the possibility of expression of different representations of the past", it often runs the risk of being bent, as Jedlowski suggests, to competitive and closing logics that nullify the possibilities of confrontation and dialogue (Jedlowski 2005: 40). Memory is almost by definition a contended ground. However, in the current phase, the multiple European crises of the last decade – which have led to a return of nationalism and the spread of xenophobic and radically identity-driven tendencies among large sections of the European population, including young people – have exacerbated conflicts between divergent interpretations and representations of the past. While the early 2000s seemed to foreshadow a process of cosmopolitanization of memory with a widening of identity references in an inclusive sense (Alexander 2002; Levy and Sznaider 2006), today we are witnessing the spread of "will to memory" which is characterized in a markedly exclusionary sense. Our intention is to analyze in what direction and forms this dialectic between "inclusiveness" and "exclusiveness" of memory (Assmann 2007) involves the young people interviewed, their socialization in mnemonic practices and discourses.

The second thematic area under analysis concerns the symbolic consistency of memories related to Europe. The inclusiveness of particular memories presupposes a reflexive process whose outcome is the recognition of common ground, with one or more points of intersection, always temporally contingent, with respect to which they converge. Using a term of the anthropologist Victor Turner, we define these points of intersection "dominant symbols" (Turner 1967). In the "ritual process", the dominant symbol is that symbol which *condenses* and *unifies* ideas, meanings and phenomena belonging to different fields of social experience and ethical evaluation (*Ib.*: 27-30). The "dominant symbol" can enclose, in a single form, disparate meanings, even in open opposition to each other. Moreover, when it is concretely "acted" within cultural performances, the dominant symbol is not simply functional to the representation of the existing order, it also becomes a tool through which social actors manipulate and transform the relationships in which they are engaged. Are there European memories which, structured reflexively on dominant symbols, condense and unify particular collective memories without erasing them? One can glimpse their formation in relation to the centrality devoted to the commemoration of the Shoah as the symbol of a European identity under construction. Although this centrality is contested – memory is always a disputed entity – especially by Eastern European countries eager to see equal negative value recognized in and ascribed to the crimes committed under Stalinism (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Bottici and Challand 2013: 65-83) –, the Europeanization of the memory of the Shoah, with the establishment of *European Holocaust Memorial*

Day (27 January),[3] represents today a sort of obligatory step in the development of a European citizenship and a transnational model of civic virtues (Challand 2009: 399). The memory of the Shoah finds concrete expression through a plurality of local delineations (national and sub-national) and in this prevails an ineliminable particularistic dimension of collective memories. However, the Memorial Day of 27 January serves as a catalyst and a frame that subsumes the individual commemorative performances and the meanings that local actors attribute to them (Ri.Le.S. 2009). It is important to emphasize the kind of memory in which the commemoration of the Shoah should be inscribed. It is a "self-critical memory". Gérard Namer (1993: 57), in his work which is still being fully rediscovered, stressed that Europe's collective memory can only be thought of as "a *culture of the incessant questioning of the self*". Self-critical memory, Jedlowski argues (2011: 96, *our translation*),

> is the necessary complement to other forms of European memory: in its absence, it is difficult that an identity of Europe as a 'civil' place can be credible, after the manifestations of incivility of which we were the authors.

Above all, on the basis of a distinction that appears to be of fundamental importance, self-critical memory is

> the exact opposite of self-celebrating memory. It is the most uncomfortable memory. It is the one that preserves the memory, so to speak, of one's own 'negative tradition' [...]: not of what one can be proud of, but of what one is ashamed of. And, to tell the truth, it is no longer even exactly the memory of 'traumas': it is the memory of the wrongs that our civilization has been able to inflict (*Ibidem*, *our translation*).

Self-critical memory calls into question the distinction between *internal/external*, *in-group/out-group*, typical of the dynamics of exclusionary memory – in which the responsibility is placed on others (Barazzetti and Leccardi 1997) – as it operates as an internal mechanism within a given community. The "evil" is something internal to the latter, "rather than external, objective" (Rosati 2009: 72). In this perspective, without diminishing the value of the Shoah, other negative memories can also give rise, within the public sphere, to transnational processes of self-critical memory, such as that of colonialism (Jedlowski 2009). Our aim, then, is to analyze whether this reflexive process has any consistency in the young people interviewed and from which "channels" of mnemonic socialization it has been stimulated.

In the third area of our research, we address in a more explicit way the specificity of young people's temporal experience and the existence of "European common memories", as a result of sedimentation in daily life of individual experiences, direct or mediated, linked to Europe. These are memories that do not have a reflexive structure, that is, "common memories" ["*memorie comuni*"] – in the definition given by Jedlowski (1989: 117; 2005) – as "a set of memories that each member of society shares with others merely by virtue of having been exposed to the same media messages". Common

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[3] The European Parliament resolution was adopted on 27 January 2005, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. This date was also adopted in November of the same year by the United Nations for the celebration of the *International Holocaust Remembrance Day*.

memories, the result of people's being daily *spectators* and *consumers*, are not collective memories, that is, memories of a group that is perceived in its specificity, even if they are likely to become such. An increasing number of studies have devoted extensive reflections to the mediality of memory and the divergent effects of information and communication technologies (ICT) in individual and collective mnemonic abilities (e.g. Rampazi and Tota 2005; Erll 2011: 113-143). On one hand, the mass media and ICT extend the set of available stimuli/information/images, disconnecting them from the specificities of the contexts in which they are generated – while the whirlwind flow and immateriality of their products are the reason for their inevitable rapid fall into oblivion. After all, technological acceleration is one of the causes the radical change in temporal experience in the second modernity and has made the very idea of *duration* problematic (Rosa 2003). The space-time compression of the second modernity (Giddens 1990; Bauman 1991) has generated an acceleration of the rhythms of everyday life that not only makes it difficult to sediment the experience in shared cultural practices (Jedlowski 1989) but also makes problematic the connection between past-present-future, that is, the ability of the subjects to build a coherent self (Sennett 1998), to make their own as a resource, and project into the future, a long-term perspective (Rampazi 2007). This is the phenomenon of "presentification", that is, the temporal destructuring and dissolution of historical memory (e.g. Cavalli 1985; Maffesoli 1979), which, although it has such a general scope as to involve both adults and young people (Leccardi 2005: 89), seems to have a greater impact on the young, about whom it seems almost legitimate to speak of a "generation 'without memory'" (Cartocci 1999: 240). However, this does not mean that young people lack the ability to put in place dynamics of control over time, through which to build in the "biographical self" a continuity between past-present-future, in the form of projects of personal growth, continuity of relationships or real "strategies of resistance" and reflexive re-appropriation of time and space (Facchini and Rampazi 2009; Leccardi, Rampazi and Gambardella 2011). In our research, we tried to understand whether, in the accumulation of common memories by the young people interviewed, there are traces of Europe which are consciously reworked in their biography.

3. Method

The research is based on findings from 12 focus groups, with 10 to 12 participants in each, conducted between November 2019 and January 2020 and involving a total of 135 young students between the ages of 15 and 19, from three upper secondary schools in the province of Salerno (South Italy): two high schools and a technical institute.

The choice of the focus group as a research technique is linked to the exploratory character of our study and the particular nature of the research object. The focus group, focusing on dialogical confrontation, is a particularly suitable detection tool in cases where research issue has a nebulous and elusive character – as do the themes of Europe and memory, especially for young people. This technique prompts the participants to

seek clarity within themselves and the formation of a subjective opinions, captured by the researcher in nascent form, in relation to the opinions of the other participants.

The outline of the focus groups was structured according to the type of questions proposed by Krueger (1994: 54-55): *opening questions* for the creation of the group, *introductory questions* to the object study, *transition questions* leading to the key issues, *key questions* and *final questions* for closing and reflection on the topics addressed. The stimuli presented by moderators to the participants concerned the following themes: historical memory and agents of socialization of memory (family, school, peer group, social media); the link between memory and national identity; the discussion on European identity; the mnemonic traces of transnational European experiences conveyed by physical and virtual mobility. In relation to these issues, we asked the participants some key questions concerned: (a) *the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of memory* (we asked the participants to comment on news, actually fabricated, of the imminent construction in the city of Salerno of a monument dedicated to the migrants who disappeared at sea while attempting to reach land in Italy); (b) *dominant symbols of European identity* (we asked the participants to take a position, after verification of their knowledge, on events such as the Shoah and crimes linked to communism and colonialism, as elements which potentially unite the peoples of Europe); (c) *European common memories* (we asked the participants to recount their physical or virtual transnational experiences and what interests these aroused in terms of their knowledge and curiosity about the history of other European peoples). Below we will present a content qualitative analysis of texts produced through the transcription of discussions in the focus groups, mainly in relation to these key questions. Data coding was based on a combination of pre-set codes and open coding. For pre-set codes, we have adopted a common coding sheet, including both basic information (e.g. age and sex of each interviewee, number of times a participant took the floor during the focus group, and so on) and themes (already indicated above; e.g. "inclusiveness/exclusiveness of memory"; "historical memory and agents of socialization of memory: family, school, peer group, social media"; "memory and national identity"; "physical and virtual mobility").

4. Inclusiveness of memory, dominant symbols and European common memories

Among the stimuli presented to the participants in our research, the most divisive was the one related to the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of memory, which represent our first area of investigation. Faced with the possibility of the construction of a monument in the city of Salerno – as actually happened in other Italian cities – dedicated to migrants who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean, the opinions expressed by the young people interviewed were clearly divided, as shown by the dialogue that we report below:[4]

P1(1.F.): I don't see the need, I'm not racist or anything, but I think they had it coming.

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[4] P1(1.F.) indicates: participant number 1, focus group number 1, female.

P2(1.F.): What do you mean, they had it coming to them, dying at sea? Poor guys, they were looking for better conditions!

P1(1.F.): No, it's not that they had it coming, but why not make a monument to those who have improved Salerno, Naples, Rome?

P2(1.F.): Well, I'm not saying no, even for these people.

P1(1.F.): And if you can only build one, what do you do?

P2(1.F.): We make many monuments for historical figures, maybe making a monument for those who died for freedom can serve as an example, also not to underestimate what we have; also, because we [Italians] were the first to expatriate and many did not make it.

P3(1.M.): I don't see the need either. They run away from a situation that does not belong to us ...

P2(1.F.): ... a situation that we have contributed to creating ....

P4(1.F.): Maximum respect for these people, but there are bigger problems. Let them [the politicians] think to something else, to invest this money in things like schools, hospitals!

As argued above, memory is a selective process that takes place in the context of a present imbued with political struggles having as their object the representations of the past. Young people are exposed to such struggles which, also due to the long-term effects of the 2008 crisis, have generated opposing trends (Pendenza and Verderame 2019).

On the one hand, young Europeans seem to have succumbed to nationalistic and Eurosceptical pressures or to openly xenophobic attitudes, for example in relation to the acceptance of refugees. Young Italians show to a large extent an attitude of defense and distrust towards migrants (Bichi *et al.* 2018). It is legitimate to hypothesize that these attitudes are influenced by the Italian political scenario which is highly divisive – in this regard, several interviewees mention, with opposite judgements, the restrictive migration policy promoted by Italian political leader Matteo Salvini – and the circulation through the media of discursive, symbolic and iconographic narratives that dramatize the immigration phenomenon.

On the other hand, the study of youth social movements (e.g. della Porta 2015) has highlighted a new presence of young people on the public scene, guided by values oriented towards tolerance and openness towards the Other, and therefore participating on the basis of opposite and inclusive attitudes. Many of the participants in the research, although not the majority, seem inclined to broaden their identity references towards inclusive social frames of memory. As one participant claims:

P4(8.M.): Today, perhaps it is more important to make a monument for migrants. In Italy there are people who do not accept the fact that there are migrants who need help, such as Salvini, and so maybe a monument made with a realistic imprint and showing the desperation of these people, could make people more aware.

It is interesting to note that for many of the young people who express an exclusionary memory project, that is, contrary to a *"lieu de mémoire"* dedicated to migrants, the alternative is represented by a reference not so much to national memories

as to local ones. The frames of memory intentions are represented by the history and characters of local life, although this does not mean that one has any knowledge of them. Rather, the reference to the local is purely functional to the distinction between *in group/out group*, reproduced in the following dialogue through the stigmatization of the stranger/different or the "normalization" of his/her suffering.

> P1(6.M.): I do not agree with making a monument for migrants. It should be dedicated to a really important person, who has done something for the city of Salerno.
> P2(6.M.): I too would tend to do it for a historical figure from Salerno, even for the things we hear nowadays: that many immigrants come here to Italy, steal, rape, these things here. At this point I would prefer to do it for a character from Salerno.
> P4(6.F.): Perhaps because it is so common that immigrants die at sea, that it would be fairer to make a monument for a figure from Salerno. Not that it's a good thing, but it is so common that it goes unnoticed.

As with the theme of inclusiveness/exclusiveness of memory, our research records conflicting opinions about the possibility of identifying a common European belonging based on negative and self-critical memories such as the memory of the Shoah. This is the second topic investigated.

In general, focus group participants share a vague idea of Europe/European Union, mainly understood as the possibility to travel from one country to another or identified rather with its currency, as a unifying trait. Moreover, especially among young people, conscious adherence to the European project does not imply the presence of cosmopolitan attitudes of openness to diversity (Pendenza and Verderame 2019). As they reflected on the foundations of Europe's values in terms of shared memories, the participants expressed differing opinions on the importance of remembering the Shoah. For some participants it represents a distant event, and as such is overwhelmed by the 'demands of the present'. For others, remembering the Shoah is not so effective because episodes such as those still occur today.

> P2(5.F.): We should not remember [the Shoah] in a superficial way. We should always remember it, not only on January 27th.
> P3(5.F.): It can never be like that, because life goes on, we cannot think about all these things. It's not that we can't think about it, it's that in our life path we are not led to think about the things that happened before.
> P4(5.F.): It's not much to remember. There are concentration camps in China. It didn't help there.[5]

What determines the difference between those who recognize the Shoah as the foundation of European belonging and those who are 'indifferent' or 'sceptical' about it, is above all whether they have dealt with this subject in the course of school learning. In this case, the school, as an agent of mnemonic socialization, plays a decisive role.

> P3(1.F.): It was a very important historical event that destroyed millions of families

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[5] The interviewee refers to a news article produced and read through the social media platform TikTok. See the following article published in the daily newspaper Repubblica (26 November 2019): https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2019/11/26/news (Accessed 15 January, 2020).

and people. I went to Auschwitz with the school. Whether you want to or not, it marks this thing because you imagine yourself in the shoes of those people: 'If I was there, I would have lost everything'. I feel very close to that.

The direct experience, for example through visiting the concentration camps, generated in the participants a "fusing effect", that is, a cultural extension and a psychological identification with the cultural trauma of the Shoah (Alexander 2002). This fusion effect is far from being achieved with regard to other negative memories, such as colonialism or crimes linked to communism. Only a few of the participants have any knowledge of these. Even less those who express a self-critical awareness in this regard, as the foundation of a shared European memory.

> P6(1.F.): I think it is right to remember colonialism, because these crimes still persist. Most of the wars that still exist in Africa are, however, the responsibility of European countries. We Europeans, including us Italians, do not remember this enough, and we continue, although not always, to misbehave and exploit: we Europeans go out to get oil and exploit their poverty. We want more and more and the others have less and less.

In relation to the third area of investigation ('European common memories' among young people), participants were asked to recount their transnational experiences, physical or virtual, and what interests they aroused in terms of knowledge and curiosity about the history of other European peoples. In general, it is worth pointing out that only half of the interviewees have been abroad for study and leisure purposes, a small percentage see their future in an EU country, while the rest wish to live in a non-EU country.

If during the focus groups interviewees showed little or no interest in national or local history, these young people have a different attitude towards the history, customs and traditions of European countries.

> P14(1.M.): If you go to the Louvre and see the paintings there and you don't know who made them, what are you going to do there?
> P7(1.F.): For example, I went to Seville ... of course when you go to a new city you circulate around museums; I go to Amsterdam, I go to see the Anne Frank Museum or the Van Gogh Museum.
> P5(3.M.): Go see what intrigues you about the past. I went to Barcelona; I went to see Van Gogh. I went precisely because I was interested in seeing those places.
> P2(11.M.): When you go to a foreign country you must identify with the country you are going to.
> P6(11.M.): When I went to Lisbon, I also went to the fish market because it is part of their culture.
> P9(12.F.): At least I go abroad, especially to visit the places of the history of that country.

The experience of confrontation with European peers, most of whom they have met during school exchanges and with whom they maintain long-distance relationships, reveals a lively commonality of views and sometimes a feeling of envy towards the way other young Europeans live.

P4(4.F.): We have fun in common, in the sense that by being together we have fun with the same things. There is an interest on both sides in doing the things that others do. There is more openness. But it's clear that the lifestyle, for example in Germany, is more comfortable and better organized than in Italy. We can wait for a bus for two hours; they have one every two minutes.

P3(10.M.): With these guys we find ourselves with dressing, doing the same things.

P5(10.F.): Yes, we feel part of the same group of guys. The differences are always there. After all, you have to experiment.

P8(11.F.): I, for example, have a friend from Poland. I see from what she tells me that they are more open-minded than we are; at the same time, we are the same, in the same boat, or a bit ahead of them.

P5(12.M.): The Italian school is different from the European schools.

As the Eurobarometer data of recent years show, young Italians have taken up the idea of an EU/Europe as an area of exchange and circulation of goods and people (Benocci 2014). Also in our research emerges an idea of closeness between the young Italians interviewed and their European peers, based on a 'common memory' that is formed in 'doing', in the sedimentation of experiences with a transnational and European character. Young people involved in such experiences learn *in the present* the existence of a common lifestyle – the same way of dressing, the same interests and type of entertainment, and so on – which is still far from representing 'a shared memory', but which can represent the hint of a deeper mutual knowledge, especially if these transnational experiences are repeated over time.

The relationship with the European institution is more complex. In general, when young people interviewed think about EU, they refer almost exclusively to some of the member states such as Spain, Germany, France, some Baltic countries, and Belgium. This is the so-called the "Wall in people's heads" at the time identified in the difficulty faced by West German citizens in visiting the five Eastern Laender even long after reunification (Geipel 1993); similarly, still today, many Europeans seem to refer to a purely Western Community Europe. Moreover, these young people have great difficulty in answering the question of what Europe can do for them. Their knowledge and awareness of the economic resources that the EU allocates to Italian schools or to exchange/study programmes are rather scarce. Even an event like Brexit doesn't seem to interest them too much. Only if it is specified to them that they will no longer be able to go to study in England, is a reaction forthcoming.

P5(10.M.): I don't care. But when I think of the millions of boys who wanted to go and study in England, it's a bad thing.

On the basis of the analysis carried out, therefore, it is possible to state that we are faced with a sedimentation of common memories in the form of a "banal Europeanism" (Cram 2001), that is, a 'Europeanity' experienced by these young people as something taken for granted and not in a reflexive way. This feeling of a taken for granted 'Europeanity' also emerges from the so-called 'Moreno Question', which each focus group was asked as a supplementary question: "In the near future, do you see yourself as (1) European only, (2) European and [Italian], (3) [Italian] and

European, or (4) [Italian] only". In this sense it is indicative that the majority of the sample (51%) declared that they feel like an Italian and European citizen.

5. Concluding remarks

From the research emerges a very mixed picture of the relationship between young people and European memories. The contrasts that have emerged in relation to the theme of the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of memory show how exclusionary narratives, linked to the political-social context, are an obstacle to the process of transnationalization of memory with Europe at its centre. While many young people are constricted by these exclusionary narratives, others are open to an inclusive redefinition of their identity references. This represents the first step towards the recognition of common symbols starting from the self-critical memory of the Shoah, which these young people look to as being the – almost unique – element of union of the peoples of Europe. In this process of identity and acquisition of values they are not helped by their families or the community of their peers, or by the traditional media, which for this age group is already obsolete – most of the target group interviewed use *WhatsApp* (which we can describe as a sort of 'ancient village square') and *Instagram*, exclusively, for the circulation of information. The school remains – even if with great difficulty, due to the prevailing method of teaching history (too 'notionistic' and mnemonic) – the locus not only of collective memory, but also of the transmission of knowledge of the community of Europe and of European values. In fact, it is almost exclusively the school that is concerned with perpetuating the memory of the Shoah, a memory which is at the basis of the European society that is being established; and only the school, when it chooses to do so – for example, through cultural excursions – brings young people closer to the European institutions. Although the construction of European memories seems difficult, our research has highlighted the formation of European common memories, starting from transnational physical and/or virtual experiences; these could develop into genuine collective memories, if fostered by a context of renewed European solidarity. The young Italians interviewed recognize themselves in their peers from other European countries, believe they can move to study or live in another European country, and seem potentially open to a process of identification with European founding values although there are narratives and discourses that powerfully push in the opposite direction. In conclusion, although our investigation is not representative of the youth population, neither Italian nor European, the research has highlighted some traits of European memory, as well as the challenges that the EU politics of remembrance are bound to face. This encourages us to continue the research in a comparative form (i.e. North and South Italy or among European countries), also in the light of the latest Eurobarometer survey[6], carried out on the occasion of the European elections, which unexpectedly highlighted the trust that young Europeans place in the European institutions.

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[6] *The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey. Have European Elections entered a new dimension?* – Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament. A Public Opinion Monitoring Study, 2019.

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