



Adro: the removed humiliation of forty-two children

Francesca Giuliani

Adro, April 2, 2010

We are in Franciacorta, province of Brescia. Shortly before Easter holidays, forty-two children from nursery and elementary school receive an envelope to be delivered to their parents containing a circular letter from the school manager. The letter is addressed to families not in good standing with the payment of the canteen¹.

The text reads verbatim: “The school organization has no possibility and no structural and economic resource to guarantee to the pupils the assistance and above all an alternative meal to that provided by the municipal administration with the school canteen service”. “Solution” proposed: the “children of the arrears”, during mealtimes, “will have to be withdrawn from the school at 12:10 and accompanied by their parents at 14:10 for afternoon classes”. Many of them are foreign citizens.

The circular is, in fact, the result of the report of non-payment made to the mayor by the head of the association that manages the canteen and, of a conflict between the school manager and the Mayor.

The diffusion of the circular immediately arouses the protests of some of the parents involved.

A letter was written by one of the moms to the mayor and the school manager: “My fault? Having paid tuition in February and March with a slight delay. Even if the municipality was on the verge of bankruptcy, I would have expected more attention, prudence and respect before humiliating a ten-year-old girl in front of her teachers and classmates. Since I am a working, separated mother of a family with three children, perhaps it could still happen in

¹ We had already talked about it in our second white paper on racism. Please see: G. Naletto, “La creatività del Comune di Adro”, in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Secondo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Edizioni dell’Asino, Roma 2011, pp. 112-116.



the future that I pay the fee beyond the deadline, due to lack of time. In that case I would like to be notified by mail of the threatened expulsion of my daughter from the school canteen. Of course, I am available to reimburse the Municipality for the cost of the stamp"². "I have always paid, but often late - tells another mother to the newspaper *la Repubblica*³ - it must also be said that in Adro the canteen is paid in advance and they compensate you then if the child does not attend it".

A few months before the decision to send the circular, the Municipality had in fact decided that it was necessary to pay the canteen in advance (on the 10th of the month).

Following the news about the circular, a businessman from Brescia decides to donate 10 thousand euros, so that all children can continue to eat at school and accompanies the gesture with a letter entitled "I'm not in", in which he launches accusations to the entire community of Adro, guilty of not having been in solidarity with those who suffer because of the economic crisis.⁴ In the letter, the entrepreneur denounces the "worrying and growing intolerance towards those who have less", calling himself a voter of the centre right and making harsh accusations against his party, the Northern League.

There many protagonists in this story: the Mayor Danilo Oscar Lancini (Northern League), the author of the circular against children of families who do not pay the school canteen⁵, the forty-two children who risk exclusion from the school canteen, the school institution,

² Please see: "Mensa scolastica, niente pasti ai bimbi delle famiglie morose", 2 aprile 2010, *Bresciaoggi.it*.

³ Please see: "Niente mensa ai figli di chi non paga la retta", *Repubblica.it*, 8 aprile 2010, disponibile qui: https://www.repubblica.it/scuola/2010/04/08/news/niente_mensa_ai_figli_di_chi_non_paga_la_retta-3188930/.

⁴ Please see: "Anonimo benefattore paga la mensa ai bambini di Adro e attacca la politica, polemiche", *Il sole 24ore*, 12 aprile 2010, disponibile qui: <https://st.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Economia%20e%20Lavoro/2010/04/adro-mensa-benefattore.shtml?uuid=6d7894d4-465c-11df-8cc8-9d1c24d094dd>.

⁵ The Mayor in 2006 proposed a "bounty" on the "illegal immigrants" - he preferred to call it a "productivity bonus" - which earned him the "Po Valley Oscar". Then he tried again with the bonus for police raids that would certify overcrowding of a house. Then it was the turn of no to the baby bonus and the contribution for housing to third country nationals (both of which were rejected on July 22 by an order of the Court of Brescia). Please see: "Adro, altro che folklore", *L'Espresso*, 13 settembre 2010, here:

<http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/cronaca/2010/09/13/news/adro-altro-che-folklore-1.44079>.



the parents in compliance and those in default, the Association promoters that manages the service, and the head of the association who will regret having warned the Mayor⁶.

The entrepreneur's donation will be at the centre of the public debate.

Some of the parents of the pupils who have always paid the canteen fees, have in fact expressed their opposition to the gesture: "Since the canteen is not a service - said a mother outside elementary school - it is not compulsory to enter it, while it is compulsory to pay to enter it. And it is certainly not possible to resolve the issue in this way because, in September, it will come up again". "Unfair for those who pay the tuition".⁷

There are, instead, those who defend the benefactor's gesture. In a letter, published on the website bambinioraggiosi.com, it is pointed out, for example, that no one can prevent others from doing charity, just as no one can prevent anyone from accepting it⁸.

Initially, the news of Adro's circular letter is taken up only by the Bresciaoggi.it website, on April 2. Only in the following weeks, the news arrives to national media and, immediately, a distorted narration of the event develops. The media debate shows a disarming dichotomy between the articles on the side of legality, and others on the side of solidarity. One wonders whether the entrepreneur did good or bad to intervene directly with a donation.⁹

⁶ "The fatal error - he admits - was probably mine. I spoke with the mayor about the delay of some payments. But I never thought that what happened would happen". The rest is known. If not that that brawl - which, at this point it is clear, could have been avoided - has opened a whole new game: the management of the canteen." Please see: C. Gubbini, "Adro, piatto molto ricco", *il manifesto*, 12 giugno 2010.

⁷ Please see: "Mamme di Adro contro il donatore: «Ingiusto per chi paga la retta»", *Il Sole 24 ore*, 13 aprile 2010, disponibile qui: <https://st.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Italia/2010/04/mamme-adro-contro-anonimo-benefattore-ingiusto.shtml>.

⁸ Please see: "Adro, caso mensa: lettera aperta a chi critica il benefattore che ha saldato il debito", www.bambinioraggiosi.com.

⁹ "As if the problem really was that of the irreconcilability between the guarantee of the fundamental right to food for children and respect for the rules and not the risk of deresponsibility of public institutions with respect to the difficulties encountered by citizens with low incomes. Absent, with some very rare exceptions, was the start of a reflection on the advisability of not leaving an essential service such as the school canteen and, in particular, of strengthening public policies, especially for the poor, to the users, in the midst of a social and economic crisis that had already had a very strong impact in the northern regions.". Si veda: G. Naletto, "La creatività del Comune di Adrio", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Secondo Libro Bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2011, here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/LIBRO-Bianco.-def.pdf>.



The service dedicated to the case by Tg3 is exemplary: in 3 minutes, it can give voice only to the mothers of children in good standing with the payments, proposing only one point of view: that of indignation against “insolvent” parents.¹⁰

Then, there are those who focus attention on the non-payment, giving authoritative voice to those who “pay regularly”, promoting the actions of the Mayor Danilo Oscar Lancini.¹¹

Especially in the television media, children and families in default remain in the background until April 22, when the television broadcasting “Annozero” is dedicated to “Adro’s case”¹². The journalist Sandro Ruotolo, sent to the town of Brescia, gathers in a room some of the families of the children involved in the case together with the Mayor. On the one hand, the fulfilling mothers, on the other hand, those in default, mostly foreign, with the Mayor lined up with the former.

The journalist brings out the racist background of the choice made by the municipal administration, but especially the violence of intolerance of some Italian parents, lined up against the entrepreneur's donation¹³. For example, Giovanna, one of the Italian mothers, and Samira, a mother of Moroccan nationality, who has lived in Adro for twenty years, have immediately had a heated squabble: the tones are high and aggressive, supported in the hall by a loud cheer and a continuous roar of applause.

What distinguishes the story of the Municipality of Adro, therefore, is “the interaction between institutional racism and social racism”¹⁴.

The episode of Annozero documents the concreteness and violence that racism can assume in everyday life. Dividing “compliant” mothers into a room on the one hand, and “defaulting” mothers on the other, mostly foreign ones, confronting high and aggressive

¹⁰ Please see: “I tg snobbano il benefattore di Adro. Troppo difficile riflettere sulle contraddizioni sociali”, *Dongiorgio.it*, 13 aprile 2010.

¹¹ Please see: “Ha ragione il sindaco leghista: chi non paga non va in mensa”, *Il Giornale*, 8 aprile 2010, here: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/ha-ragione-sindaco-leghista-chi-non-paga-non-va-mensa.html>.

¹² Please see: Sandro Ruotolo da Adro, here: <http://www.rai.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-19235df3-c11c-4bd0-8b3f-5a19dd8bf38a.html#p>.

¹³ Please see: M. Ovadia, “L’Italia si è fermata ad Adro”, *L’Unità*, 24 aprile 2010.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*



tones, excluding from the debate a moderate and careful reflection on the opportunity to strengthen public policies, does nothing but "institutionalize racism".

Almost completely ignored by the media debate is the humiliation suffered by forty-two children: from the circular delivered in the presence of comrades, to the media pillory, to the spectacularization of the story.

The Mayor, for his part, plays an ideological battle for months¹⁵, feeding the polemics and germs of racism, in the absence of a prompt and firm response from national institutions.

Epilogue

After a few months, the political and economic interests linked to the affair emerge.¹⁶ It turns out that, in Adro, the users of the school canteen in arrears were not above the national average and that the Association promoting school activities, which manages the canteen, has no debts. On the contrary, 80 thousand euros in the bank will be left as assets to the school board.

The Association that manages the canteen service, was born in the 70s, when full time was introduced in the school and a group of parents decided to set up an association to manage the canteen independently. Then, over the years, the spirit of participation was lost and the canteen acquired the profile of a private mini enterprise, of which Giuseppina Paganotti was president.

She reported to the Mayor the delay of some payments, admitting that "that scuffle has opened a whole new game: the management of the canteen".¹⁷

After the diffusion of the circular, a petition signed by 203 parents of the school asks for her resignation. So, after various vicissitudes and an appeal to the TAR (the Regional Administrative Court), the canteen service returns to the Municipality.

¹⁵ Please see: C. Gubbini, "Se il razzismo si siede a tavola", *il manifesto*, 15 aprile 2010.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.



On September 2, the Mayor is concerned to announce that the menu will be typically “Po Valley” and that “only those who pay will eat”. On September 13, only a few days later, Lancini returns to the headlines again because the new school complex, named after Gianfranco Miglio, is sprinkled with Northern League symbols. The Sun of the Alps is everywhere: on the school desks, on the garbage bins and on the roof, so much so that the President of the Republic Napolitano and the Education Minister intervene to ask for its removal. In order to remove the symbols of the Sun of the Alps¹⁸, the Mayor of the Northern League was later condemned by the Court of Auditors to pay 10,600 euros.¹⁹

¹⁸ The appeal filed on October 11, 2010 by the Chamber of Labour of Brescia and the FLC CGIL on Suns in the Alps in the school is accepted by the labor judge. On November 29th, the sentence n. 2798 of condemnation of the actions of the Municipality is filed. The sentence is available here: <http://2.flcgil.stgy.it/files/pdf/20101202/sentenza-tribunale-brescia-2798-del-29-novembre-2010-rimozione-simboli-lega-scuola-di-adro.pdf>.

¹⁹ Please see here:

https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/10/24/news/adro_sindaco_e_giunta_condannati_per_il_sole_delle_alpi_nella_scuola-69381498/.